

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME FIFTEEN, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2006



*Alumni House, St. Cloud State University,
formerly home of Dr. Claude Lewis*

THE AMERICAN VILLAGE IN A GLOBAL SETTING CONFERENCE

2005 saw two conferences with a focus on Sinclair Lewis: the Sinclair Lewis Conference held in Sauk Centre in July 2005 and the American Village in a Global Setting: An Interdisciplinary Conference, subtitled "Honoring the Contributions of Sinclair Lewis to Midwest and American Culture and Celebrating the Friendship between Sinclair Lewis and Ida K. Compton" held in St. Cloud in October 2005.

This second conference took place about twenty years after the Sinclair Lewis Centennial Conference that was also hosted by St. Cloud State University. The 1985 conference was held in February to coincide with Lewis's birthday and was striking for how frigid it was. Conference goers attended a dinner at the Palmer House in Sauk Centre, but most forswore the walk down the original Main Street since the warmest temperature that day was still below zero.

The 2005 conference, since it was held in the fall when it is lovely and not nearly as cold, provided a number of interesting opportunities for scholars to talk about Sinclair Lewis and the idea of the village on a more global scale.

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NEW SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY BOARD ELECTED

In the recent elections for the Sinclair Lewis Society Board of Directors, Frederick Betz, Professor Emeritus, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, was elected to serve a second term as president of the Sinclair Lewis Society. He has presented on Sinclair Lewis at several conferences, including the three Sinclair Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre, and has also published articles on Lewis in a variety of scholarly journals. Robert L. McLaughlin, Professor of English, Illinois State University, was reelected secretary-treasurer. He has presented on Sinclair Lewis at several American Literature Association conferences, the three Sinclair Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre, and has published articles on Lewis in *Sinclair Lewis: New Essays in Criticism*, the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, and the *Hemingway Review*. Here are the other new members of the Board: Roger Forseth, Professor Emeritus of English, University of Wisconsin-Superior, who recently contributed the essay "Addiction" to *American History through Literature 1870-1920*, edited by Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005) and has spoken on Lewis at the three Sinclair Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre. George Killough, Professor of English at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota, has written on Lewis for the *South Dakota Review*, *Sinclair Lewis: New Essays in Criticism*, and the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. His edition of Lewis's *Minnesota Diary, 1942-46*, published in 2000 by the University of Idaho Press, is now available from Caxton Press in Caldwell, Idaho. He also served a term as president of the Sinclair Lewis Society. Todd Stanley, a history teacher from the Reynoldsburg schools in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, has presented papers on Sinclair Lewis at the ALA conferences in Baltimore and

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The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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BABBITT IN THE ADVERTISING AGE

QUENTIN E. MARTIN

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT COLORADO SPRINGS

During the course of Myra Babbitt's illness late in the novel, an illness that cements George Babbitt's return to the fold of Ideal Citizenship, an unremarked and seemingly unremarkable passage occurs. Babbitt and his wife are riding in the back of an ambulance, both of them panicked by the emergency appendectomy that awaits her.

He sat beside her in that traveling cabin with its cot, its stool, its active little electric radiator, and its quite *unexplained* calendar, displaying a girl eating cherries, and the name of an enterprising grocer. (387, emphasis added)

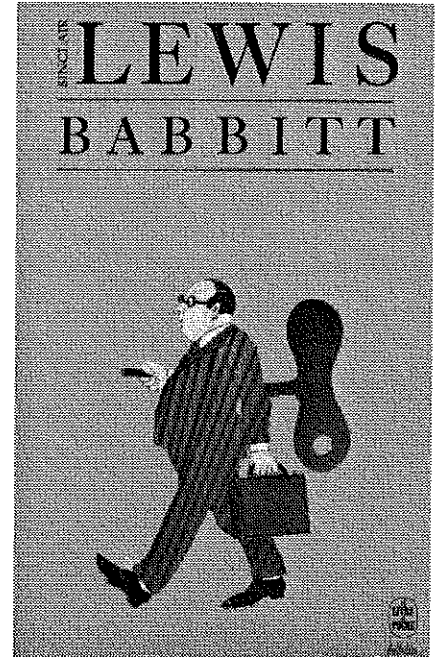
This intrusion of commercialism, even into moments of the most acute and private distress, has reached the point of no longer needing explanation. In the America of 1922, it just is. All aspects of life from the "nationally advertised" morning alarm clock to the "standard" nighttime sleeping porch—the products that bracket Babbitt's daily life as well as the opening seven chapters of the novel—have been colonized by the reigning commercial culture. Babbitt and the other leading characters may not have read Marx's *Capital*, but they have the marks of capital all over them. That this colonization is often "unexplained," if not beneath detection, makes it all the more dominant and corrosive.

The outward trappings of this colonization were unmistakable. Postwar America had become the most commercialized nation in the history of the world. The sheer amount of advertising had swelled to \$3 billion worth in 1920, a sixfold increase over the 1900 figure, and 60 times what it had been at the end of the Civil War (Fox 39, 77). In newspapers, where

large-scale advertising had its beginning, the value amount of all advertisements soared from \$90 million annually in the 1890s to \$600 million in 1920, a 566% increase within the space of one generation (Commager 71). According to a 1925 *New Republic* article, anywhere from 40 to 75% of all newspaper space was taken up by advertising (Chase 16). Newspapers no longer surrounded their news with some ads; they surrounded

their ads with some news. The 1920s are often called the Jazz Age or the Roaring Twenties, but a more accurate, if less romantic, label comes from the name of a journal launched at the end of that decade: the *Advertising Age*.

Babbitt is an unmatched portrait and critique of this Advertising Age. In the opening section of the novel, which depicts a typical day in Babbitt's life, hundreds of ads parade in front of his eyes. Driving to work, he sees "Billboards with



Detail from cover
of French edition of *Babbitt*

Advertising Age continued on next page

CONTRIBUTORS

The editor of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue by writing articles or sending in notes.

These people include Martin Bucco, Ralph Goldstein, James Hutchisson, George Killough, Patrick Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Will Kraemer, Joyce Lyng, Quentin E. Martin, Robert L. McLaughlin, Dave Moore, William Ostrem, Liz Potter, Dave Simpkins, Marlyn Tadros, and Ed Tant.

Advertising Age *continued from previous page*

crimson goddesses nine feet tall advertising cinema films, pipe tobacco, and talcum powder" (31). Stopping at a gas station, he "admired" the snappy inducement, "A fill in time saves getting stuck—gas to-day 31 cents" (28). At his office he reviews and creates his own ads, employing as a model "the new school of Poets of Business" (36).

During the midday drive to his club for lunch, Babbitt purchases something that "he had coveted for a week," namely, an electric cigar-lighter. In the shop, a placard adjacent to the lighter assures the buyer that this item is "a dandy little refinement, lending the last touch of class to a gentleman's auto" (54).

But Lewis pushes the point here, offering a further critique. Ads aren't just blossoming everywhere in view, they are also invading people's minds and language. Babbitt, for example, is soon saying to himself, while admiring the gadget as it rests on his dashboard, "Certainly is a mighty clever little jigger. Gives the last touch of refinement and class" (54). At the Zenith Athletic Club—which has its own advertising pamphlet, trumpeting its exclusive features (59)—a fellow club member, obviously having seen the same ad, congratulates Babbitt on his wise purchase, saying, "That makes a dandy accessory. Cigar-lighter gives tone to the dashboard" (56).

Ads—and addled mind—parade through the rest of the day. At home after work, Babbitt's son, Ted, shows his father some 60 advertisements cascading from his schoolbooks. (The physical juxtaposition of ads and education is part of the point.) All concern various home-study courses, a line of business termed "culture by mail." One, which is headlined "\$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$," guarantees "POWER AND PROSPERITY" to anyone who takes its course in public speaking (78). Another promises quick mastery of a musical instrument "without tiresome exercises, special training or long drawn out study..." (83). Other courses promise to show students how to become

a detective ("There's MONEY in it, BIG money..." [84]), how to improve the memory, how to raise chickens, how to become a movie actor, and how to acquire "Money! Money!! Money!!!" without specifying the means (83).

And again these ads begin to take over people's minds and language. Ted, like his father and the man at the club, begins to unconsciously parrot the words in the ads. Trying to convince his father to purchase a home-study course that will teach self-defense in case "some one passes a slighting remark or uses improper language..." (80) while out with a woman, Ted says: "just suppose I was walking with Mama or Rone, and somebody passed a slighting remark or used improper language. What would I do?" (81).

Daily life is swamped by ads—and so is death. Babbitt's company owns some choice burial spots, for which "the older craftsman, George F. Babbitt," pens the following inducement:

DO YOU RESPECT YOUR LOVED ONES?

When the last sad rites of bereavement are over, do you know for certain that you have done your best for the Departed? You haven't unless they lie in Cemetery Beautiful

LINDEN LANE

the only strictly up-to-date burial place in or near Zenith, where exquisitely gardened plots look from daisy-dotted hill-slopes across the smiling fields of Dorchester.

Babbitt knows he has put one over on his rivals who run "weedy old" Wildwood Cemetery. Unlike them, he knows "something about modern merchandizing" (39).

This "merchandizing" trumpeted all the new mass-produced goods that were in turn being mass consumed:

————— *Advertising Age continued on page 17*

NEW MEMBERS

A hearty welcome to these new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the spring 2006 issue.

Benjamin R. Beede
North Brunswick, NJ

Elizabeth Potter
Bluffton, SC

Libby West
Hallowell, ME

Michael Goodell
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI

Benjamin A. Moderate
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire
England

Phyllis Whitney
Dearborn, MI

Ann Lawrence
Tioga, ND

John Jay Rouse
St. Cloud, MN

STRANGERS: SINCLAIR LEWIS BACK ON BROADWAY

ROBERT L. MCLAUGHLIN
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

It's well known that Sinclair Lewis was fascinated by the theater. His 1940 novel *Bethel Merriday* is the story of a stage-struck girl and summer stock. And although his fame rests on his fiction, he wrote a number of plays during his career, including *Hobohemia*, which played on Broadway in 1919; *Jayhawker*, a 1934 collaboration with Lloyd Lewis about nineteenth-century Kansas; and a 1936 adaptation of his own novel *It Can't Happen Here*. Lewis even directed a play on Broadway, *Good Neighbor*, a 1941 one-performance flop starring a little-known actress named Marcella Powers. And, of course, around the same time he met Powers, Lewis caught the acting bug, traveling the summer stock circuit in such plays as *Angela Is Twenty-Two* (which he co-authored), *Shadow and Substance*, and as Doremus Jessup in *It Can't Happen Here*. Given this background, I wonder what Lewis would have thought about becoming the subject of a Broadway play.

That's exactly what happened in 1979. Playwright Sherman Yellen, who had previously written the books for the musicals *The Rothschilds* and *Rex* and would go on to write the teleplay for the ground-breaking AIDS drama *An Early Frost*, brought to Broadway the play *Strangers*, based on the relationship between Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson. It starred Bruce Dern as Lewis and Lois Nettleton as Thompson, with William Newman, Ellen Parker, and Jean-Pierre Stewart as everyone else: waiters, reporters, hotel managers, diplomats, etc. Directed by Arvin Brown, *Strangers* opened at the John Golden Theatre on March 4, 1979, to mostly mediocre reviews. A few days later, Dern, who had just been nominated for the Best Supporting Actor Academy Award for his work in the film *Coming Home*, left the show, reportedly because he wanted to be in Hollywood during Oscar season to capitalize on the nomination. The play's producers opted not to replace him, and so *Strangers* closed on March 11, after 12 previews and nine performances.

On Broadway, *Strangers* was designed environmentally, a bare stage with a couple of platforms onto which furniture could glide while signs or flags or skylines flew in. A few pieces of furniture, suggesting a hotel room, could easily be replaced by a table, two chairs, and a neon sign, suggesting a nightclub. Thus, with the help of atmospheric lighting transitions, the action flowed continuously from scene to scene, with the ac-

tors often not even leaving the stage, but making some costume adjustments as they moved from one setting to another. This cinematic effect was sometimes successful, as in the opening sequence, where the first three scenes all present Lewis and Thompson's first evening together, and sometimes jarring, as in much of the second act where much time is supposed to have separated some of the scenes.

The play begins in Berlin in 1927, as the last guests are leaving Dorothy's birthday party. Alone at last, Dorothy sits down to cry—not only is she another year older, but the divorce from her first husband has just become final—but she's surprised by one remaining guest: Sinclair Lewis, who had locked himself in the hotel room's bathroom with a bottle of champagne. As he explains, "Surest way to get rid of unwanted guests is to keep the bathroom door locked" (10). Sinclair introduces himself to the audience, if not to Dorothy, by imitating two of the other party guests:

"Is ziss your first time in Bairleen, Herr Lewis? Here one finds everyzing undt everyone. We are the capital of culture, nein? Allow me to present my wife, Minna, whom you will fall in love with at once, bitte. Minna! Herr Sinclair Lewis. Such an honor. You are the greatest living writer in America. What a masterpiece is your book on the Chicago slaughterhouse. Because of you, Herr Sinclair, I can never touch meat again. Madam. I think you confuse me with Upton Sinclair. I am Sinclair Lewis. 'Main Street?' 'Babbitt?' 'Elmer Gantry?' 'Arrowsmith?' Ach, das ist nicht der richtige Sinclair? Otto, pass me the pork chops bitte!" (11)

He has met Dorothy only the day before, but he's already



Strangers continued on next page

Strangers continued from previous page

convinced he wants to marry her. She tries to put him off with a number of strategies, including interviewing him:

Dorothy: What brings you to Berlin?

Sinclair: Gertrude Stein.

Dorothy: But she's in Paris.

Sinclair: Precisely. (18-19)

The sparring continues at a decadent nightclub and then at the Templehof Airport, where Dorothy is about to take a dilapidated plane to Vienna to cover some riots for her news service. She challenges Sinclair to join her, but he resists, saying, "If God meant for me to fly, he'da given me nerves" (28). Dorothy says of the pilot, "Heinrich was a flight lieutenant in the war. He's flown thousands of hours safely under the worst conditions. Can you understand what that means?" "Yeah," answers Sinclair, "We have here a man who is accustomed to killing Americans in mid-air" (29). Still, Sinclair can't pass up the opportunity to prove his devotion to Dorothy, and off they go.

This sequence establishes many of the basic conflicts for the play, most important, the conflict between the two characters' views of the world. One of their first disagreements arises from Dorothy's insisting on flying to Vienna.

Dorothy: I'm sorry you consider it unimportant.
But the future of Europe may be decided in those streets.

Sinclair: And my future may be decided in this flat.
(12)

This exchange, with Dorothy on the side of the global and Sinclair on the side of the local, with Dorothy on the side of the political and Sinclair on the side of the personal, is repeated throughout the play. In the nightclub Dorothy says, "Berlin is my home." Sinclair responds by drawing a picture of a house and saying, "No. This is your home. Soon as we marry I'll buy us a farmhouse in Vermont. This shape. Looking down a valley. You put in the garden. Like it?" (22). Both characters live lives of constant travel and both tell themselves that they yearn for a home. But Dorothy's idea of home is a paradox—a hotel room in a foreign country is the epitome of a life in transit. Sinclair's idea of home is a romanticized fantasy of the sort he explodes in his novels, and it's connected to his romanticizing of Dorothy. He says,

You're all the heroines of my youth. You're Little Emma who shamed the wicked rich man in the top hat and led him to Jesus. You're Clara the orphaned but righteous daughter of missionaries in Zambola,

who counseled the ship's captain in the storm and roused him to give up rum and the harmonica. You're Ivanhoe's Rebecca and Rowena, you're the unexpurgated edition of McGuffey's Fifth Reader. (24)

This suggests that what Lewis is looking for in his idea of home and in Dorothy is a never-to-be-realized ideal, an ideal that is likely to be a failure and disappointment for him and a trap for her. Despite these warning signals, Lewis brushes away the differences between them that Dorothy insists are there and emphasizes the things in which they are alike, even when Dorothy tells him about her attraction to women: "in high school I would fall in love with some good-looking woman teacher or a pretty young girl." Lewis responds, "Hey, that's swell!... Why when I was a boy in high school, I would fall in love with some good-looking woman teacher or a pretty girl. We got so damned much in common" (26).

The play next takes us to Moscow, where Sinclair has joined Dorothy for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution and where he tries to lead the commissars in "Stand up! Stand up for Jesus." His divorce from Grace has come through, and he wants to marry Dorothy, but he also makes it clear that he expects her to give up her job with the news service. He says, "You can write some freelance articles. But no job. As Pa woulda said, 'Woman takes a job, then the job takes the woman.' Nobody's gonna take this woman from me" (33). He proposes instead that they "go adventuring together" (33), the flip side of his ideal of home: childlike, romantic adventures, from which one never has to go home or grow up.

When next we see the couple, they are back in Dorothy's Berlin hotel and are indeed married. Dorothy is eager to write, but much to her dismay, Sinclair invites her ex-husband and the woman he left her for, Josef and Moira, up to their room for drinks. Josef and Sinclair quickly compare notes on Dorothy and collaborate in mocking her political passions, her writing, and her tendency to excessive talk. Sinclair once again implies that her career interferes with their marriage: "Last week we were in bed in Claridges in London when I feel this terrible stabbing in my thigh. I look down and see a lead pencil sticking into it—just missing my manhood by inches. Dorthy confesses that she keeps a pencil in the pocket of her nightgown in case she has some notion she wants to jot down in the middle of the night" (40-41). Furious, Dorothy throws Josef and Moira out, then prepares to leave Sinclair. She tells him, "when I talk too much, it's because I want people to understand what I feel, what I believe" (42). Lewis pleads his feeling out of place in Europe as the excuse for his excessive drinking and promises

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A CITIZEN OF THE MIRAGE (PART II)

SINCLAIR LEWIS

SUMMARY PROVIDED BY JORDAN READY

"A Citizen of the Mirage" is a short story written by Sinclair Lewis that was published in Redbook in 1921. Part I, published in the spring 2006 issue of the Newsletter, introduced a brisk young man, Leonard Lamb Shanklin, Ph.D., as well as the president of the University of Daily Life, Basil Quaero. Quaero's university, founded on the principle that its scholars should learn practical lessons and receive no grades, is having a bit of a problem recruiting students. Part I left off just as Leonard was invited to spend the evening with President Quaero to discuss his empty university.

"A CITIZEN OF THE MIRAGE"

After two hours of gossip about teachers and the future of science, Leonard had not yet acquired the courage to ask why the University of Daily Life lacked the usual details of teachers and students. For all his colloquialness and his fits of floweriness, the old man had a shrewd eye, and his study indicated the man was used to books. It had deep-hollowed chairs, and it reeked with the good smell of tobacco and old leather bindings.

A little after six Quaero said: "Stay to supper, Doctor. You suggest things to me. This problem of the use of tides for generation of power—it sets my mind off wandering and imagining, and that's the sweetest use of knowledge. Come, you'll stay!"

Leonard was astounded to find that Quaero had no maid, that he actually intended to cook supper himself—and actually did not intend to apologize about it. The kitchen was a place of miracles, with electric range, electrically timed fireless cooker, electric dish-washer. The dining-table was at one end of the kitchen but set off from it by two high-backed settles with the table wedged between—a corner for companionable talk.

Basil Quaero showed an unexpected quickness and exactness of movement as his heavy fingers cracked the eggs for a mushroom omelet, and set an amethyst vase of asters on an embroidered cloth. He was boyishly proud of his electrical devices. Midway in the eating of his omelet, he jabbed at the table with his fork, and demanded:

"Out with it son! You're wondering why there aren't any students here. Very well. This university is the dream of two old fools, myself and W. I. Pusey—I believe the W. I. stands for Washington Irving—you may remember Pusey's Boston

department store. At one time he must have been about the most prosperous retail merchant in New England. I suspect that he was so busy making money, which means power, that he forgot how to be a wondering child. But he had the sense to know he'd forgotten it.

"When he retired, he sent for me, and told me to start this university. Since then I scarcely hear a word of him, except when he sends the annual interest—I suspect he put most of his fortune into the endowment, and is living off some place in lean retirement, hoping I'll save his soul for him. I tell you this so you can understand my curious job. I have to guess at what Mr. Pusey wants, and try to carry it out. And that's why there are no students here.

"He told me that the two principles of this place were to be freedom and common sense, but I've found that those are the things that people most fear—for other people. Pusey wanted people to be free to study anything whatever here, from the Sabbatarian code of the Seventh Day Adventists to the philosophy of anarchism. But as it's worked out, I find that when students or teachers come here complaining that they have not been free to follow their own brand of truth, they still object to the other fellow following his own brand.

"The persecuted mental-healer won't come and play unless I promise to persecute the atheist, and the socialist-labor-party man seems to detest other kinds of socialists more than he does a Republican banker. Several times, these seven years, I've gathered a bunch of students who have all held unconventional theories in the world. They all seemed to be fond of me, though I'm an orthodox, capitalistic old pedagogue, with an unregenerate liking for coon-songs and beefsteak, but they never could stand one another, and they quarreled and parted.

"Still, I suppose the greatest reason why no student will stay here is because we don't confer degrees. A man is welcome to come and spend one month loafing and reading French poetry, or he can grind over Assyrian inscriptions for nineteen years, but in neither case will we give him a label, like Bachelor of Arts or Doctor of Philosophy."

"B-b-but what good would it do a man to study if he didn't get a degree?" wailed the Doctor of Philosophy.

"What degree does a mechanic get for ten years of hard reading in a public library? What degree did Will Shakespeare

————— A Citizen of the Mirage continued on next page

A Citizen of the Mirage *continued from previous page*

get for writing 'Romeo'? What degree did Socrates confer on Plato?"

Leonard turned from resentment to horror as Quaero outlined the other eccentricities of his collegiate madhouse. There were to be no sane, regular courses. Quaero declared himself willing to secure teachers for anything that silly dabblers might find interesting, the etymology of North Berber or the flying of kites: the phenomena of clairvoyance, or playing skat; agnosticism, or banking and foreign exchange; window-dressing for stores, or psychochromatic portrait-painting, or going camping. He was willing to have on the faculty persons who weren't even college graduates. He said that he knew a "very able plumber, splendid fellow, such a dear little wife," whom he wanted to teach household hygiene for bridegrooms. And he believed that the principles of good digestion were more important, even to the son of a gentleman, than the ability to read Greek with a translation on the opposite page.

Craziest of all, he didn't believe in intercollegiate athletics, which Leonard knew to be the best advertisement for any college. Quaero pretended that he could not understand why marshals and cheer-leaders should take so much trouble to train seventy-thousand people to sit on benches and watch twenty-two men play football. What he wanted to see, he said, was twenty-two people watching seventy thousand play.

He wound up by declaring that examinations are frequently futile, because any idler can cram for an examination, and any wise man be flustered by the pompousness of an examiner into forgetting his wisdom.

Quaero betrayed that he wasn't even sincere about his sensationalism. For when Leonard stammered "Y-yes, all very interesting, but I know the standard colleges rather widely, and I'm afraid your innovations wouldn't succeed," Quaero roared:

"Of course they wouldn't! Ninety-nine per cent of them would be considered ridiculous. But one per cent might succeed. There are plenty of 'standard colleges.' That job is being done. What Pusey said he longed for, after he got tired of being standardized and successful, was a place for experiments."

"I rather suspect," and Leonard smiled neatly, "that most students wouldn't care to be experimented on! They'd be afraid of blunders!"

"Yes-yes. They might blunder into heroism and divine splendor, and I don't doubt that those burdens would inconvenience a man who was fitting himself to be an instructor in polite literature in a Ladies' Academy!"

Leonard was indignant at this impertinence, but his frown seemed to affect the obtuse old man as much as the most

eloquent remarks of a young squirrel would affect an oak. He wanted to say something epigrammatic and nasty, and tramp back to his hotel. But—oh—the Jefferson House was dismal, and the strain of listening to all this amateurish nonsense had left him too feeble to walk.

Quaero rumbled: "Well, Doctor, that's enough. Forgive an old man's second childhood, and stay here tonight. At least, I'll give you a bed that isn't heretical."

He did. That bed was a four-poster, the sheets fresh and smooth; and on the bedside table was a light, a clock, and a volume not of educational heresy, but of "Alice in Wonderland." Leonard had a tiled bathroom of his own, with a glass-enclosed shower. He washed away the soilure of silly speculation, and slept contentedly. Even in sleep he felt the breeze from the jolly little hills about the valley.

He awoke to ambitious energy. He remembered his desire to get hold of this educational plant for himself. He lay abed, seeing on the faded blue ceiling of the bed-canopy the legend, "Leonard Lamb Shanklin, Ph.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Secretary of the University, and Future President."

He looked at the clock. It was only six. He wondered what had awakened him so early. He was conscious of the sound of a lawn-mower. He would find out what vanishing elf cared for the grounds! He slipped to the window.

Steadily pushing the mower across the grass of the nearest quadrangle was President Basil Quaero, in overalls and an old straw hat.

Leonard did breathing exercises at the window while he snorted: "The poor fish! I'll have to take the money away from him before somebody comes and sells him the Brooklyn Bridge!" He returned to bed and lay stretching his toes, luxuriously listening to someone splitting wood, sweeping the porch, making a bed in the next room. When Leonard emerged, at eight, President Quaero was in his study, in a silk dressing-gown, reading a translation of the *Mahabharata*.

Leonard was afraid that at breakfast—a nervous meal, requiring diplomacy and disarmament—Quaero would return to his belligerent ignorance about education, but the old man was as peaceful as the morning. He trumpeted, "Hungry, my boy?" and attended to the making of scientifically crisp waffles, his massy hands hovering over the electric range.

"I want to be very abrupt, and perhaps shocking," he said at the pleasant moment of the second cup of coffee. "I am a man of quick decisions. I want to do certain things for you and the University. I could promise you a thousand students here in five years."

————— A Citizen of the Mirage *continued on next page*

A Citizen of the Mirage *continued from previous page*

Basil Quaero seemed to grow smaller. He rose. He wobbled to the kitchen-table, took out a fork, carefully laid it on the stove, dusted at a crumb as fussily as an old woman. His voice came thin: "You c-could? It—I would—" He peered about the kitchen as though he wasn't quite sure what he was looking for. He smiled apologetically, took from the kitchen-table another fork, brought it to the dining-table, carefully aligned it with his knife, and slid down in his seat, staring at Leonard. Gone from before his eyes was the veil we humans wear as defense against curiosity, gone all humor and boisterousness and readiness to fight. Helpless as a man who had just been told by his physician that he is sick unto death, he gaped

at Leonard. He implored:

"How could you do it?"

Enjoying his own importance, Leonard rattled: "By interesting the better class of people. I could do it if I had two things: the secretaryship of the university, and a promise that for the period of expansion, we should grant the usual degrees, and institute regular academic courses, keeping the freak, well, the too unusual subjects in the background—just temporarily, you understand—" ❧

To be continued in the spring 2007 issue.

A NEW STAGE PRODUCTION OF *BABBITT* IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

RALPH GOLDSTEIN

David Rambo sold real estate in the years before he shifted his energies to theater and became a playwright. In the late '80s, while driving his Cadillac from one listing to another, he happened to tune in to the L.A. Theater Works radio version of *Babbitt*, a fourteen-hour presentation with Edward Asner as the leading voice. Rambo was intrigued; not hearing the entire production, he later read the novel and was captivated. Now, after compiling a number of stage and television credits, he has joined forces with A Noise Within Theatre Company to create an adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's novel.

It was my pleasure to be in the audience for a staged reading of this work in progress. A Noise Within has earned a reputation as one of California's leading classic theater companies, producing consistently excellent plays season after season. While company members are also involved with film and television, the chief interest of many of them is live theater. Their abundant talent was in evidence during the two-hour reading. Stephen Rockwell is convincing as George Babbitt, mixing peppy bravado with cankerous doubts about his roles as husband and father, his place in the community, and his ability to distance himself from his Catawba roots. Deborah Strang's Myra reflects concern over her growing estrangement from her husband as she triggers his rage with her dutifulness. The other players are multiply cast. Steven Weingartner plays Seneca Doane as a first-generation American with a thick Irish brogue and Vergil Gunch who puts a soft fascist boot to George over joining the Good Citizens League; J. Todd Adams is both an ebullient Ted Babbitt and melancholic Paul Riesling; Robertson Dean plays a stuffy Howard Littlefield and vapid Fulton Bemis; and Denise Tarr is a fiery Zilla, crude-talking Ida Putiak, and one of the dream

girls who occasionally act like sirens manipulating George's lust. Rambo has increased the prominence of the fairy girl, giving her dialogue at the outset and encouraging George to ally himself with Ted at the end. The staging, under Sabin Epstein's direction, is brisk and vibrant. Lewis's narration is carried out at times by a chorus of voices that delivers satirical punches still appreciated by a twenty-first century audience. Another particularly clever turn takes place as Myra and Tanis Judique, unaware of each other's presence, compete simultaneously for George's attention. Although it leaves out several characters from the book, Rambo's thread holds the piece together.

Responding to questions from the audience after the reading, members of the company indicated that if *Babbitt* becomes part of A Noise Within's '07-'08 season, its rapid pace will necessitate a set design that minimizes changes and other distractions from the text. A future production will not likely narrow itself into a period piece but emphasize the universal and still timely features of the book.

Those deeply loyal to the novel might find this or any other representation of *Babbitt* wanting. One audience member complained that the reading failed to spotlight George's lack of business ethics; I missed George's sickbed meditation on his mechanical life and the flashback to the compromise he struck with himself when he became engaged to Myra, scenes which would show his rebellion in sharper relief. They were omitted, Rambo explained, in the service of theatrical economy. So it goes. The novel is a literary feast, and the play a tasty shish kebab of elements from the text. Nevertheless, those of us who want greater attention paid to Lewis and his works should welcome this new production. ❧

BABBITT STILL VISIBLE IN THE BIG PICTURE: A REVIEW OF VICTORIA DE GRAZIA'S *IRRESISTIBLE EMPIRE*

GEORGE KILLOUGH
COLLEGE OF ST. SCHOLASTICA

How heartening to Lewis fans that *Babbitt* continues to be useful to historians. As an explanatory concept, *Babbitt* has appeared again in a recent study of the way American mass marketing and consumerism has invaded Europe during the last hundred years. The book is *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005) by Columbia professor Victoria de Grazia. The paperback came out in October 2006.

To dramatize the difference between Europe and America in the early 1900s, de Grazia's first chapter contrasts Dresden, the venerable city in Saxony, with the young city of Duluth, Minnesota. Dresden embodied the cultured forms of high-bourgeoisie Europe, whereas Duluth represented the brash informality and lowbrow energy of America—the Babbittry of America.

Babbitt is an appropriate keynote for the book. With his shallow consumerism and loud gregariousness, Babbitt embodies delightfully the Americanizing forces de Grazia finds in early twentieth-century Europe, as expressed in Rotary Clubs, the idea of a decent standard of living, chain stores such as Woolworth's, Hollywood movies, and the mass marketing of products such as Gillette razors. Anyone who has crossed the ocean in search of Europe and found Coca-Cola and McDonald's instead will enjoy seeing how this metamorphosis took place, how Europe's door opened and Babbitt rushed in.

De Grazia has an engaging style and a flair for the dramatic. The contrast she sets up between the Rotary Clubs Sinclair Lewis knew in America and the Rotary Club to which Thomas Mann belonged in Munich is ironic and amusing.

Unfortunately, she sometimes lets the drama go too far, producing unnecessary weakness in her case. An instance of special interest to me is the big link she forges in the first chapter between Babbitt and Duluth. She does this to enhance the Dresden-Duluth contrast and, in so doing, stretches the facts. She writes, "Under the guise of Zenith, Duluth had become world-famous through the novels of Sinclair Lewis. It was in Zenith-Duluth, the closest big town to his birthplace, tiny Sauk Centre, that Lewis sited his tragic-pathetic story of George Babbitt" (18-19).

First of all, Duluth was not the closest big town. Min-

neapolis was a lot closer and quite a bit bigger, not to mention St. Paul.

Second, and here is where the matter becomes sensitive for me, the source cited for the Duluth-Babbitt connection is George Killough, "Sinclair Lewis—Minnesota Rustic," *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 7 (Fall 1998). In this article, I assert that Duluth is *not* the setting for *Babbitt*. Babbitt, after all, lived in a city of over 360,000 inhabitants. Duluth has never been even half that size. De Grazia also cites John T. Flanagan, "The Minnesota Backgrounds of Sinclair Lewis's Fiction," *Minnesota History* 37 (Mar. 1960), and he does not claim Duluth is the setting for *Babbitt* either.

Of course the point is minor. My article dealt with it as an aside, buried on the last page. And though de Grazia cites the wrong sources, she probably did read something that made the connection. Literate Duluthians have believed since the 1920s that *Babbitt* was set in Duluth. My assertions to the contrary have been focused exactly on combating this myth.

Admittedly, I grimace to see my name used as an endorsement, especially when the *Babbitt* connection is alleged to have made Duluth "world-famous," but the Dresden-Duluth contrast still has big ironic appeal, and what looks like exaggeration may have support somewhere. After all, if five people in England and three in France were to associate *Babbitt* with Duluth, the claim about world fame would be, in a small way, true.

Of greater importance is the fact that dramatic tendencies get in the way of de Grazia's main point. The introduction explains that the book will chronicle the rise and progress of the American Market Empire. Realizing that "empire" means something different to historians than it means in this case, she redefines the term. She says that among the Market Empire's characteristics are the export of its knowledge and civic spirit in advance of its products, the promotion of equality through consumer choice, and apparent peaceableness.

The term "empire" seems excessive for these features. Even de Grazia may have doubts. Although she drops dark hints about wrenching change and victims, she also says that "typically, the Market Empire's power was so mobile and

Babbitt Still Visible continued on next page

Babbitt Still Visible *continued from previous page*

transitory that it was never all-determining" (8). She says "it never created a stable center" (8). She says it was a "system of global leadership" (6).

Whatever this is, it looks less and less like an empire as the book unfolds. In each of the first four chapters, a particular American influence starts to take root in Europe before World War II, and then, as each chapter draws to a close, the Nazis or the war crush everything.

The reader begins to think the subject of the book has shifted to the Nazi empire and the war. Every American Market Empire initiative is choked off—the German Rotary Clubs, the Henry Ford-inspired idea of a decent standard of living, and the spread of chain stores such as Woolworth's.

In each instance, de Grazia cannot rein in her desire to describe the devastating power unleashed at the time. The last paragraph in chapter 1 reminds us that if the ghost of a Rotary Club in Dresden had survived Nazi disapproval, it would not have survived the Allied firebombing of February 13–14, 1945. The last lines in chapter 2 describe the Third Reich as living out the old idea "that the table at nature's feast was overcrowded, and the latecomers, failing to find a place, were cannibalized by their fellow diners."

This is exciting language but it takes attention away from the book's thesis. By the end of chapter 4 (nearly halfway through the book), with Hitler and the war continuing as the crucial factors, American mass marketing seems a mere influence, a friendly game, something that dies when the Nazis rule Europe but flourishes after Allied armies take over. You find yourself thinking that, if America has an empire, it comes from bombs, not ads for Kellogg's Corn Flakes.

Still, the book is worth attention. Twenty years in the making, it provides a detailed view of marketing history. It is especially revealing in the moments of contrast between European customs and the invading American methods. The Europe of fine shops and large commercial fairs was structured in such a way as to encourage refined taste, personal relationships in trade, exquisite craftsmanship, and, above all, the privilege of the high bourgeoisie. When big-brand marketing enters, you can see why many people might wish it had not.

An especially interesting chapter shows the methods of

the J. Walter Thompson Agency competing with European advertising. Whereas the Europeans had a high-level poster art that emphasized the object itself, the American style was to use large-circulation newspapers and magazines and to add text that explained why the product was desirable—its benefit, its personality—in the tone of a trusted advice-giver. This advertising voice, still familiar today, has been a great social leveler.

The leveling effect of mass marketing is one of the delights of the book. You cannot feel too sad about the American-induced decline in craftsmanship and taste when the other big result is equality. De Grazia enjoys this irony too—that the old hierarchies fell in Europe, not because of political movements or revolutions, but because of the influx of American consumerism. Whirlpool washing machines and Tide detergent bring on a glorious destiny.

The pleasure she takes from showcasing this effect, and the way it elevates the housewife as the arbiter of culture and consumer choice, raises suspicion about whether she ever believed her dire talk about empire. Even the original statement of the thesis, about the "rise of a great imperium with the outlook of a great emporium" (3), seems just funny enough to make you wonder.

I read this book in order to find out whether the inaccurate citing of my work had occurred in vain or in support of a worthy cause. I wish the book were shorter and more accessible, and I wish the author had exercised more control, but at the end I felt happy. After all, *Babbitt* has a noteworthy role, and although American mass marketing can hardly be the hope of the world, what de Grazia claims it did for Europe is just positive enough and goofy enough to make a good story.

Notes

My thanks to Jörge Thunecke for calling my attention to the book.

My article "Sinclair Lewis—Minnesota Rustic" was first published in shorter form in Duluth. The title was "Back to Main Street." It was the cover story in *NorthLife* magazine, which is associated with WDSE-TV, the public television station in Duluth (Mar. 1998): 6–11. ✍

New Board continued from page 1

Boston as well as the 1997 and 2005 Sinclair Lewis Conferences in Sauk Centre. Also reelected as Executive Director was Sally E. Parry, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Illinois State University, who served as the Sinclair Lewis Society's first president. She edits the *Sinclair Lewis*

Society Newsletter, and has coordinated the last three Sinclair Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre. She has also edited two collections of short stories by Sinclair Lewis: *Go East, Young Man: Sinclair Lewis on Class in America* and *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. ✍

ED TANT AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

Ed Tant, a progressive columnist for the *Athens (Georgia) Banner-Herald* and a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Z*, the *Progressive*, and the *New York Times* among other publications, feels that Sinclair Lewis is a big influence on his work. One of his articles on Lewis, "A Ringing American Accent," appeared in the *Sauk Centre Herald* on February 7, 1985, the Lewis Centennial year. In that essay Tant celebrates Lewis's battle with the great social issues of the day and ends by comparing him to Charles Dickens.

Tant is especially fond of *It Can't Happen Here* and *Kingsblood Royal*. In a December 29, 2001 column in the *Banner-Herald*, "Novels Enlighten Us about Losing Freedom," he compares *It Can't Happen Here* to George Orwell's *1984*:

Both novels deal with propagandized populations living under the grip of police states, and both are grimly prophetic works with lessons to be learned by Americans today.... In *It Can't Happen Here* Lewis targeted "that eternal enemy: the conservative manipulators of privilege who damn as dangerous manipulators any man who menaces their fortunes."

He discusses the plots of both novels and ends by referring to September 11: "As Americans become more and more willing to forsake their freedoms in the aftermath of Sept. 11, books like *It Can't Happen Here* and *1984* are becoming more and more relevant. Orwell said it right: 'In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.'" ✍

WHEN FASCISM COMES TO AMERICA....

There has been a very lively discussion on the new Sinclair Lewis discussion Listserv about the following quote: "When fascism comes to America, it will come wrapped in a flag and carrying a cross." Received wisdom was that it was from *It Can't Happen Here*. However, after I received an e-mail from an artist who read the novel and wrote to confirm that the quote was indeed from the novel (because she couldn't find it), I took a serious look and couldn't find it either. Here is her query:

Greetings, Wondering if you can assist with my search to properly attribute a quote to Sinclair? "When Fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." I am a photographic artist (B&W/analog/darkroom) and I am currently working on a series of collages using my photographs on painted canvases. This has a war/peace/I'm-pissed-off theme running through it. I am using quotes from leaders, poets, songwriters, authors, etc. from the last 250 years to complete each canvas. I want to properly attribute this quote but am having difficulty finding the source. I have even had a couple of librarians try to help; one in turn has floated it to a literary group she referred to as "stumpers," but no luck yet.

I read *It Can't Happen Here* last weekend (which is where most sources point to). The thing about that book is there is a scene where Buzz Windrip has orchestrated this political rally...he has the procession of veterans, waving flags, some in wheelchairs from the last wars, followed by all the common folks beaten down by the depression and carrying signs of

support for their guy Buzz, then bringing up the rear is the bishop. By this time the crowd in the arena is worked into a frenzy, and, of course, the politician follows. It seems to me that at some point someone may have tried to create a "snapshot" of this procession & it's where the quote came from. Was it indeed Sinclair? Do you know of the context and date where this is from?

Members from across the country have weighed in on the matter, but none who could locate the quote or the author. Here's a sample of the responses. If anyone can locate the quote, please let the editor know.

Marty Bucco writes, "I am damned if I can come up with a source for the quotation about fascism-flag-cross that you cite, but I can understand why it is attributed to Sinclair Lewis. If it doesn't appear in our man, I wonder if it might not come out of Upton Sinclair or, for that matter, John L. Lewis!"

I found the quote in Wikipedia. It states that it is a quote from Sinclair Lewis (along with several others) but doesn't name an actual book from which it came. Another of his quotes is, "I love America, but I don't like it." [This one I have seen in print.]

My first instinct would have definitely been *It Can't Happen*

— When fascism comes to America.... *continued on next page*

When fascism comes to America.... *continued from previous page*

Here. But what I am getting after googling it and finding it attributed time and again to Lewis, is that it really was Huey Long who said it and not Sinclair Lewis.

A word search through the online version of *It Can't Happen Here* (<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301001h.html>) yielded nothing close to the quote attributed to Lewis. Could

he have written it in an early intro or said it in an interview?

There's a lot of confusion out there in cyberspace. The most confused attribution I found for this quotation (using Google) was: "Upton Sinclair, *It Can't Happen Here* (1932)." This is why I always teach my students to be cautious when using the Internet for research. ☞

LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

David McGuire's "An Empty Vision: The American Dream on *Main Street*" (*Midwestern Miscellany* XXXIII Spring 2005: 55-72) is an in-depth look at how Carol's failure to make changes in the town is connected to the failure of the American Dream. McGuire compares her to the pioneers in her quest for change, but like the Champ Perrys who evoke the nostalgia of the small town, the mythos on which it and the American Dream is based is something that has never really existed. The essay is an intelligent one, although not particularly up-to-date in terms of scholarship, relying heavily on Anthony Channell Hilfer and no sources past 1993 except for the edition of *Main Street* he uses.

MidAmerica XXXI (2004, but published 2006) lists several articles about Lewis:

Goodheart, Adam. "This Side of Main Street." *Preservation* 54 (Mar.-Apr. 2002): 36-41.

Gumery, Keith. "Old School/New School: Henry Blake Fuller's Response to *Main Street*." *American Literary Realism* 34 (Winter 2002): 158-71.

Höbel, Susanne. "Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*: A Case for Re-Translation." *Translation Review* 63 (2002): 42-46.

Newlyn, Andrea K. "Undergoing Radical 'Reassignment': The Politics of Transracial Crossing in Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 48 (Winter 2002): 1041-74.

American Literary Scholarship: An Annual, 2004 recently came out (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) and mentioned several articles and books that are about or refer to Sinclair Lewis. Oxford UP published *A Historical Guide to F. Scott Fitzgerald* and in one of the essays, "F. Scott Fitzgerald: Professional Author," by James L. W. West, III, Fitzgerald's sources of income are

compared to a number of his contemporaries, including Robert Frost and Sinclair Lewis.

Lewis Society member Caren J. Town published "The Most Blatant of All Our American Myths': Masculinity, Male Bonding, and the Wilderness in Sinclair Lewis's *Mantrap*" in *Journal of Men's Studies* 12: 193-205. She looks at the conflicting ideologies of manhood and the wilderness that are presented and how in some ways it is a response by Lewis to the writings of Thoreau. Lewis Society members may remember that an earlier version of this paper was presented at a Sinclair Lewis Society Conference in Sauk Centre.

Rob Hardy, another Lewis Society member, also writes on a late Lewis novel in "Sinclair Lewis's *Work of Art*" in *New England Review: Middlebury Series* 25:161-71. More of the focus of the article, according to Donna M. Campbell, is on

the conflict between idealism and realism in Harold Fredric's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and in Lewis's appreciation for Thoreau. Despite his admiration for Thoreau and his ability to evoke a real community in the Grand Republic of *Cass Timberlane*, Lewis's "distrust of ideology" and perennial restlessness made him incapable of making a home except in his imagination. (305)

Lewis Society member Martin Bucco's encyclopedic book, *Sinclair Lewis as Reader and Critic* (Mellen), is also favorably mentioned. Campbell notes that it

is sure to be consulted by those interested in Lewis's allusions and his responses to various forms of writing. The first and third sections address Lewis's experiences in publishing, as an author theorizing his trade, and as a reviewer, but the bulk of the book (which

Lewis Scholarship *continued on next page*

Lewis Scholarship *continued from previous page*

includes several sections previously published in the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* and elsewhere) is given over to references to other authors and texts in Lewis's works, a resource made easy to work with because of the extensive index. (305)

Tom Lutz's book, *Cosmopolitan Vistas*, focuses on questions about Midwestern regionalism and includes sections on Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and Ruth Suckow, among others.

In Julia Ehrhardt's *Writers of Conviction: The Personal Politics of Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Rose Wilder Lane, and*

Josephine Herbst (U of Missouri P), Gale becomes a central figure in the "Revolt from the Village" movement, since her "successful 'municipal housekeeping stories' set in Friendship Village caused the revolt" (311), with Lewis's *Main Street* written as one of the responses to her work.

Robert D. Whipple's edited collection *Essays on the Literature of American Novelist John P. Marquand (1893-1960)* (Mellen) includes an essay that mentions Lewis. "Names in the Fiction of John P. Marquand" by Fred Tarpley argues that Marquand's characters' names are as important to him as they were to Lewis or Fitzgerald. ✍

ONLINE REVIEWS OF LEWIS NOVELS

Lewis Society member Patrick Killough has created a Web site http://www.patrickkillough.com/courses/sinclair-lewis_list&reviews.html which gives a thumbnail summary of all of Lewis's novels and also a connection to online reviews for all the novels. Most of these online reviews are for amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com. Here's a sample done for amazon.com:

Review Title: Across a wide world from Colorado to Italy

Book rating: Three Stars * * *

Reviewer: T. Patrick Killough (Black Mountain, NC, U.S.)

Sinclair Lewis died in Florence, Italy on January 10, 1951. His last novel, published shortly after his death, is set in that city and portrays a segment, generally unlovely, of Florence's expatriate communities, mainly American.

World So Wide is the story of young, recently widowed ex-Army major and architect Hayden Chart. He strives mightily to find personal meaning in Florence. Beautiful fellow American Dr. Olivia Lomond is a budding scholar who tempts him to make his mind grow in appreciation of art and history. But earthy, honest Roxanna Eldritch, hometown girl and reporter sent to Europe to cover the 1950 Holy Year in Rome, improbably wins Chart's heart in the end.

Apart from its utility as a tourist's guide to Florence, *World So Wide* is Sinclair Lewis's last chance to skewer pretentiousness and hypocrisy. His instrument for ferreting out lies among the expatriates is red-headed American reporter Roxanna (Roxy) Eldritch. She had been a friend of Hayden's recently deceased wife back in their native Newlife, Colorado. Towards the novel's end Roxy punctures the facades of two expatriates.

First is young, protofascist pseudointellectual American

Lorenzo Lundsgard who is preparing a series of lectures supported by films and shoddy research designed to prove that history teaches that great men have always ruled the world through their innate gifts of leadership. Roxy's contacts as a journalist allow her to confront him with his lies about his real Christian name, which is Oley. He had, moreover, been married twice and was twice messily divorced, despite his claims never to have wed. Lundsgard is a favorite of and financially dependent on the next phony that Roxanna skewers.

With Lorenzo, Roxy was just warming up for Sir Henry Belfont, an English gentleman's English gentleman, a snob with infinite contempt for all things American. Roxy's sources have revealed Sir Henry's true past: he was born in Ohio; his grandfather had made a fortune selling shoddy goods to both sides in the Civil War; Belfont never saw England until age 14, and later bought a seat in Parliament and a title. The enraged Belfont turns on Lundsgard, cuts off his funding for research, lectures, and documentary films and, somehow, some way, drives our hero Hayden Chart definitively into the arms of the spunky, honest, all American Roxy Eldritch. Lundsgard then inexplicably lands a cushy foreign service job in South America and Olivia Lomond seems disposed to go there with him at the curtain.

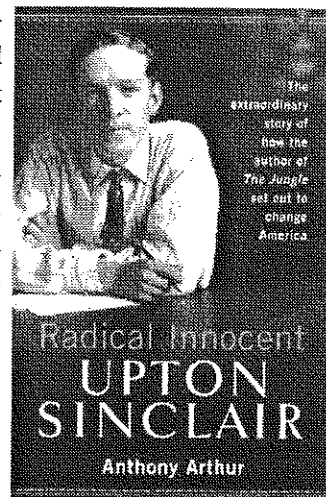
In 1914, Sinclair Lewis's first novel *Our Mr. Wrenn* began outside the Nickeloron movie house in New York City. 1951's *World So Wide*, Lewis's final novel, ended with the hero and his new bride happily relaxing in a bar in Ravenna, Italy. The world of Sinclair Lewis was not often deep but it was always wide. He traveled through it, ever restless, ever hoping for something better, only to end in drink, dissipation and loneliness. R.I.P. ✍

NEW BIOGRAPHY OF UPTON SINCLAIR

Sinclair Lewis Society member Anthony Arthur has written a new biography, *Radical Innocent: Upton Sinclair*, published by Random House. A review in the *New York Times Book Review* (July 2, 2006) by David Thomson, coupled with a review of *Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century* by Kevin Mattson, praised both books as reasonable and “tempered in passion,” although at times Thomson seems to prefer the books themselves to the energetic Sinclair. “*The Jungle* had its impact on Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and Steinbeck, but Upton Sinclair is not in their class as a novelist because he does not see or inhabit character and emotional plot in the way that he editorializes over situation, grievance and muck” (10). The review goes on to mention that Sinclair won the Nobel Prize in 1930; however, there was a correction elsewhere in the *Times*: “Although Upton Sinclair campaigned for the award, it was

won by Sinclair Lewis.” *Radical Innocent* was also reviewed by David Denby in the August 28 issue of the *New Yorker*.

Arthur spoke at California State University, Los Angeles, and the appearance was carried on Book TV C-SPAN 2. In the question and answer period, Arthur said Upton Sinclair’s solution to the problem of the confusion of the names Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair was that both call themselves Upton Sinclair Lewis. ✍



American Village continued from page 1

Michael Connaughton, who was one of the organizers of the 1985 conference, again helped to organize and also spoke at the conference. Pat Lewis, of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and the Sinclair Lewis Society, served as an organizer as well. Others on the committee included Philippe Costaglioli, Teri Dent, Judy Foster, Bob Inkster, Suellen Rundquist, and Roland Specht-Jarvis. The conference was supported by the Charles and Ida K. Compton Symposium on Midwest Culture and Letters Fund.

The four keynote speakers were: Bill Holm, Southwest Minnesota State University, “What America Looks Like from Minnesota and Hofsos”; Walter Kalaidjian, Emory University, “Reading Psy-Ops: Ordinary Americans and Empire”; Sally E. Parry, Illinois State University, “‘This is America’: The Village

of Gopher Prairie in War and Peace”; and Susan Shillinglaw, San Jose State University, “Steinbeck’s Holistic Ecology: Village as Ecosystem.”

The sessions included presentations on Lewis and his work, his contemporaries, and some more generally on community. Listed below are the speakers and their papers. Many of these papers, as well as the keynote speeches, will be published by St. Cloud State University in 2007.

Art, Architecture, and Community

Diane Shaw, Carnegie Mellon University, “Cooperation and the Architectural Landscape of Village Improvement, 1900–1925”

Janice Courtney, St. Cloud State University, “Cultural Diversity through Art”

Perspectives on Willa Cather

Connie Perry, St. Cloud State University, “From Manhattan to Grand Manan: Willa Cather’s Islands”

Richard Dillman, St. Cloud State University, “The Revolt from the Village in Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* (1918) and *A Lost Lady* (1923)”

The Midwest and Suburbia on Screen

George Killough, College of St. Scholastica, “The



Sally Parry presenting a keynote address at the American Village Conference at St. Cloud State University

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CBS *Babbitt* Documentary: Case Study in Confusing Fact with Fiction”

Udo Greinacher, University of Cincinnati, “Suburban Superiority: Hollywood’s Depiction of the Central City”

Linda Robinson, Northwestern University, “The Day They Stopped the Mail in Mason City: Mason City, Iowa’s Nostalgic Exploitation of *The Music Man*”

The American Holocaust

Joseph Edelheit, Chris Gordon, and Steve Klepetar, St. Cloud State University, “It Can Happen Here: Lewis and Roth as Holocaust Literature”

Community at the Margins I

Chuks Ugochukwu, Jackson State University, “The Global Village: Culture/Heritage Conservation and Its Role in African-American Neighborhood Revitalization”

Jaime Chahin, Texas State University-San Marcos, “Voices of Transnational Immigrant Mothers”

Christopher Pears, St. Thomas University, “Neither ‘fish nor fowl’: The Impact of Race, Gender, Language and Socioeconomic Status in the Acculturation and Education of Second Generation Immigrants in the United States”

Art, Architecture, and Community II

Bill Morgan, St. Cloud State University, “Sauk Centre, Real and Ideal: The Town as Viewed in Painting, Architecture, and Literature, 1858–1903”

Rural Communities

Suzanne Ross, St. Cloud State University, “The



Participants at the 2005 Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota

Gentle Polemic of Paul Gruchow’s *Grass Roots: The Universe of Home*”

Mary Ryder, South Dakota State University, “Beyond *Main Street*: Teutonic Land Lust and Domestic Violence in 1920s Farm Fiction”

John Schwetman, University of Minnesota-Duluth, “Somewhere between the Ideal and the Depraved: Kent Haruf’s *Prairie Community*”

Carol Mohrbacher, St. Cloud State University, “Meridel Le Sueur: Metaphors from the Margins”

Community at the Margins II

Carla Johnson, St. Cloud State University, “Alternative Communities and the Limits of Toleration: Investigating the Israelite House of David”

Janna Knittel, St. Cloud State University, “‘Land is the only thing that lasts life to life’: How Federal Indian Policy Threatens Community in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*”

Seongho Yoon, University of Massachusetts, “Unsettling the American Suburbia: Reading Transnational Imaginaries in Chang-Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*”

Margaret Villanueva, St. Cloud State University, “Community, Sense of Place, and Immigrants of Color in Minnesota: The Insights of Sinclair Lewis”

Contemporary Perspectives on Sinclair Lewis

Jeffrey Charis-Carlson, University of Iowa, “Representing Gopher Prairie: The Washingtons of Carol



Sinclair Lewis exhibit, St. Cloud State University

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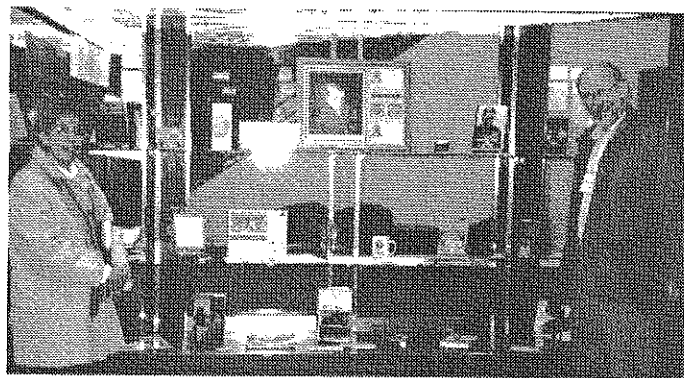
American Village *continued from previous page*

Kennicott and Sinclair Lewis"

Michael Connaughton, St. Cloud State University,
 "'This Mick Agitator': Sinclair Lewis and the Irish"

Amy Spellacy, University of Iowa, "The International Reach of American Provincialism: Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and the U.S. Good Neighbor Policy"

Jeffrey Swenson, University of Iowa, "Tripping over the Border: An Outsider's View of the North in Sinclair Lewis's *Mantrap*" ❧



Roberta Olson and George Killough at the Sinclair Lewis exhibit at St. Cloud State University

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consumer spending soared during the decade, going from \$56 billion a year in 1922 to \$77 billion in 1929, an increase of 37% over these seven years (the cost of living index was flat from 1923–29, thus purchasing power remained constant) (Soule 101, 122–23). Edward Filene, the Boston department store founder, said, "Mass production demands the education of the masses.... The masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world" (qtd. in Ewen 54). It was advertising's job, therefore, to provide this education in mass consumption.

Perhaps the most important element in this education was to convince everyone that they needed the newest, latest, most up-to-date version of every conceivable product; the flip side of this "education" was to feel dissatisfaction with anything that was not "the latest thing." An executive at General Motors was refreshingly upfront about this strategy. In a 1929 speech, he argued that advertising must make consumers "healthily dissatisfied with what they now have in favor of something better. The old factors of wear and tear can no longer be depended upon to create a demand. They are too slow" (qtd. in Pease 23). *Printers' Ink*, the advertising trade paper, echoed that point, maintaining that one of the supreme functions of advertising is "to keep the masses dissatisfied with their mode of life, discontented with *ugly things* around them. Satisfied customers are not as profitable as dissatisfied ones" (qtd. in Ewen 39).

Thus, dissatisfaction, which gave rise to continually new acquisitions, was built into the economic culture; it was a calculated strategy to fatten sales figures. The goal of American capitalism—and its propaganda tool, advertising—was, in short, not to satisfy wants but to create unease. Thus, one of the most powerful paradoxes of the era, and of the novel, is explained: Babbitt, with all his fancy fixtures and gurgling

goodwill, is also a study of dissatisfaction. The endless hustle and buying and backslapping leave him empty, vaguely groping for something else. And this is the exact condition the GM executive wants him, and every other American, to be in. "Unhappy?" the *Advertising Age* asks. "Well, go shopping, buy things. Trust us, that'll cure your dissatisfaction.... It didn't? Try buying again." Hence, Babbitt: dreaming of the fairy child, romanticizing the Maine woods (and buying the requisite gear for the adventure), lurching into affairs with women, but mostly purchasing and contemplating new purchases, and then hustling, if not cheating, for more money in order to buy more new things.

The success of these marketing and advertising strategies, though, was only part of the massive reeducation campaign engineered by the *Advertising Age*. Within a single generation, this campaign had upended one of the most enduring and seemingly essential elements of the American character: thrift. Advertisers, based on research carried out by their firms and employing psychiatrists like Edward Bernays (the nephew of Freud) and John B. Watson, the founder of Behaviorism, had determined that the average consumer was a "fourteen-year-old animal" characterized by "inexplicable whims," with a "careless, uncomprehending mentality," possessing "crude and often false standards of measurement"—all in the words of an executive at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency (qtd. in Pease 179). Bernays, in his 1928 book on the subject, writes, "the group mind does not *think* in the strict sense of the word. In place of thoughts it has impulses, habits and emotions" (50). This eminently ductile public, then, could be molded into almost any shape that expert propagandizers wished.

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The proof of such assertions lay in the immediate past: during WWI, war propagandists had, in the space of months, converted a nation that was predominately isolationist and pacifistic into one clamoring for Hun blood. Afterwards, Bernays argued that "it was...the astounding success of propaganda during the war that opened the eyes of the intelligent few in all departments of life to the possibilities of regimenting the public mind," and that it was "only natural, after the war ended,...to apply a similar technique to the problems of peace" (27, 28).

In the peaceful America of the 1920s, the "fourteen-year-old animal" was put on the scent of consumption. Americans "learned" to value spending over saving, consumption over conservation. The thrift and self-restraint of the past were dispatched as easily as pacifism and isolationism had been during the war. Debt was not a mark of shame but of progress. The cultural historian Warren Susman, citing Willa Cather's famous remark that "the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts" (which, of course, coincides with the publication date of *Babbitt*), provides a cogent summary of this crucial transformation engineered by the Advertising Age:

Generally, Americans had grown up to believe in the Protestant work ethic. In the 1870s, William Graham Sumner said that hard work and self-denial equaled capitalism; the savings bank depositor was the true hero of civilization! Now the world really seemed to break in two: the American learned that he was largely to think of himself as a consumer. He was encouraged...not to hoard savings...but to spend and spend. He was told he no longer lived in a world of scarcity but in one of abundance, and that he must develop new values in keeping with that new status.... [H]e must learn a pleasure ethic, if not to replace, at least to put beside, his work ethic. (111)

Being thrifty was replaced by being a spendthrift.

If the world did break in two in 1922, the other side of the break featured the omnipresence of advertisements, the shaping of people's minds and language by those ads, the seemingly paradoxical state of dissatisfaction despite the avalanche of consumer goods, and this banishment of thrift. And all of these titanic cultural transformations, engineered by the Advertising Age, are registered in *Babbitt*. The narrator writes:

the large national advertisers fix the surface of his [Babbitt's] life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares—toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heat-

ers—were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom. (95)

Chum Frink, Zenith's "Famous Poet and a distinguished advertising-agent" (119), provides for his clients "Ads that Add" (111). But what the Advertising Age first did was to subtract: subtract out the tradition of thrift and self-restraint, before adding in the imperative need for the latest socks and sedans.

The Advertising Age also bred something else—a changed people. With advertisements blaring the same products in the same language, with newspapers broadcasting the same stories and same opinions across the land, and with the "Standardized Citizen" repeating these words and thoughts at every meeting, the resulting standardization of thought is virtually inevitable.

The opening scenes of *Babbitt* lampoon this. Ideas are not the product of any individual, autonomous thought process, but rather batons that get passed from one "Ideal Citizen" to the next. With the fall 1920 presidential elections coming up, the various institutions in these citizens' lives have already processed and packaged the standard take on it. Babbitt, who early that morning "tasted the exhilarating drug of the *Advocate-Times* headlines" (18), begins the baton-passing, with everyone agreeing that "it's about time we had a real business administration" (27).

That idea, as well as others, rattle from citizen to citizen. Throughout the day others agree and re-agree that the New York Assembly did "fine" and "corking" work in kicking out its (freely elected) socialist legislators, that the recent turn in weather indicates "it's real spring now," and that Prohibition, while great for the "shiftless" lower classes because it keeps up industrial productivity, is a "violation of personal liberty" for "fellows like ourselves." After the last re-restatement of this idea, the group of men, drunk, "bobbed their heads [and] looked admiringly at one another" (115). Here, the echo chamber that replaces thought—the exact formula and effect of massive advertising campaigns—is made visual.

This new advertising culture has even further and uglier ramifications. Standardization of consumer goods seemingly led to the desire to standardize everything, including people's actions, thoughts, beliefs, and ethnicity. The 1920s may have witnessed material mastery, the apogee of consumerism and advertising, but it also witnessed, coincidentally or not, the apogee of Red Scare campaigns, of racist hysteria over the

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polluting of the white Aryan stock by immigrants and resident inferiors, and the apogee of the KKK, which came close to dominating American political life by the middle of the decade. This second, and largest, incarnation of the KKK was, despite the myths, a largely northern, urban movement directed against whites (not blacks), especially Catholics and other “cranks,” who threatened the norms of behavior and thought. Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio—which circle Lewis’s fictional state of Winnemac—contained over 40% of the national Klan membership; the mayor of Indianapolis and the governor of Indiana were both Klan members, and both state legislatures were controlled by the Klan (Jackson 144–60). Thus, it was in “nice,” modern, prosperous, white cities like Zenith that the Klan roared.

Klan-like intolerance and intimidation dominate the mood of the last sections of the novel, when Babbitt himself rebels and is met with the fate of most rebels of the time: banishment from the tribe of Solid American Citizens. He is corralled back to conformity by the very KKK-like Good Citizens League (G.C.L.). An organization of the “best people” of the city (346), the G.C.L. sprang to life in the wake of the strike that nearly paralyzed Zenith. Like the KKK, the G.C.L. was especially “effective and well esteemed... in cities of the type of Zenith” (391). It targets anyone who threatens the standardized ideal, whether it be foreigners, dissenters (like Seneca Doane), or union organizers and laborers. The G.C.L. also physically attacks dissenting groups, as seen in the ransacking and destruction of the headquarters of the Zenith Socialist Party and the roughing up of its members. When some of the smaller newspapers of the city actually report this event, the G.C.L. confronts the editors, who agree to clear all future reporting with that group. These editors “saw the light, and retained their advertising” (392). Thus, the power base of the G.C.L.—just as it’s the base of the characters’ thoughts and language, their aspirations, dissatisfactions, jobs, the look and layout of their homes and cities, the creator of their political ideas and ideals—is advertising.

Is there, then, a link between the best of “nationally advertised” alarm clocks and political purges and ethnic cleansing? Even if this connection is tenuous and overstated—Lewis himself does not quite go that far in *Babbitt*, though the actual KKK rears up in *Elmer Gantry* (1927) and fascist purges are featured *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935)—what can be claimed about the immense paradoxes of this material paradise is that it in fact recoiled on itself. Another major historian of the period, William Leuchtenburg, terms it the “perils of prosperity.” Namely, the oversaturation of goods, the cupidity created

by the Advertising Age that led to reckless spending and ballooning debts, and the hubris about the “Wheels of Progress” that masked the decade’s severe economic dislocations and political ineptitude were among the leading precipitators of the October 1929 collapse, which laid bare the social and economic flaws of the trumpeted American way of life, and ushered in the most desperate decade in American history. “Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of this ‘business civilization,’” two historians write, “is that it managed its business so badly” (Commager and Morris ix).

Henry Steele Commager argues that the paradoxes of the consumer-goods revolution “dramatize the danger of all merely material interpretations of history” (416). It is *Babbitt*’s supreme mission and accomplishment to offset such interpretations and explain the “unexplained” in America’s Advertising Age.

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that once they're settled in Vermont, he'll stop drinking, "And I'll love you properly there" (44). When she wonders if they can ever be happy, he responds, "What is this sentimental obsession you have with happiness? Where is it written that one must be happy to be happy?" (44). As the first act ends, Sinclair makes Dorothy swear on a Bible that she'll never leave him, then this final exchange:

Sinclair: Now teach me.

Dorothy: What can I teach you?

Sinclair: How to love. I don't know how to love.

(45)

Act 2 begins with Sinclair and Dorothy at Twin Farms in Vermont in 1932. Son Michael has recently been born, and Wells, Lewis's son from his first marriage, is visiting. Dorothy is conflicted between the demands of motherhood and her desire to work. She's also having trouble adjusting to being Mrs. Sinclair Lewis. She says, "I've spent years trying to make a reputation as a journalist. Now I find that my name, my work, everything I've ever accomplished is drowned in your fame. And what little of myself is left, is taken up with being a mother" (49). Sinclair is blocked trying to write his never-completed labor novel and blames the presence of the children. He's having a crisis of confidence in the value of his work, manifested in his anxiety over the possibility of Theodore Dreiser winning the Nobel Prize. When Dorothy reminds him that he hates prizes, he answers, "Not as much as I hate Dreiser" (53). Right on cue, a phone call comes announcing that Lewis has become the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Sinclair and Dorothy, despite their previously expressed ideas of home, leap at the opportunity to travel, first to Stockholm and then to Berlin so Dorothy can interview Hitler. (Connecting the Hitler interview to the Nobel Prize trip is the reason Sinclair gets the news about the prize in 1932 instead of the historically accurate 1930.)

The play gives us a snippet of Sinclair's Nobel Prize speech, then takes us back to Dorothy's hotel room in Berlin, just after she's interviewed Hitler. She is so shaken by him that exposing him as a threat to the whole world becomes her mission. Listening to her, Sinclair gets the idea for *It Can't Happen Here*:

"Darth, you don't need jack boots and a swastika just to become a Fascist. Hell, it can be done just as easy in a white bedsheet, a pair of red suspenders and a straw hat. Christ, if Fascism comes to America, it'll arrive wearing an undershirt and speakin' like an ole boy from down home—jest folks. Why, they're lynchin'

nigras in Biloxi with as little trouble as it takes to bludgeon a Jew in Berlin nowadays. You can warn the folks about the dangers abroad, but somebody's got to tell them that it can happen at home." (57)

Dorothy wants to stay in Berlin to gather more information but Sinclair, blocked again, wants to go to London where he's sure he'll be able to write. Dorothy asks him to stay at least until after her dinner with Crista Winsloe, about which she seems nervous.

Dorothy: She is a very good novelist. You said so yourself.

Sinclair: Not quite. I do remember saying that she had written the best book I ever read about a lesbian love affair in a girl's school in Potsdam.

Dorothy: There!

Sinclair: It's not exactly a crowded field. (58)

He leaves, and in a very compressed sequence, Dorothy has an affair with Crista, Sinclair returns, forgives her, and urges her to forgive herself. Just then the SS bursts in, announcing that Dorothy is being expelled from Germany because of her "anti-German publications in the American press" (59). She moves quickly to the Berlin train depot as Dorothy and Sinclair are leaving. The reporters there indicate that Dorothy has gone from reporting news to being news. Sinclair sums up, "Right or wrong, you are famous. You're up there with Dutch Shultz, John Nance Garner, and Anna May Wong. Amazing. It took me years to scramble up that greasy pole to fame, without so much as a helpful lift from anyone above—or a muscle on either arm. And here you are, famous overnight. Scary, ain't it, Darthy?" (60–61).

The play then returns to the U.S. and shows us Lewis decline exacerbated by Thompson's rise. We see him in the Bronxville apartment, drinking again and crumpling up pages and throwing them on the floor—apparently still unable to write—and then listening to one of Dorothy's radio broadcasts responding to her sardonically. Possibly that same night, Sinclair arrives at their New York City apartment, but Dorothy warns him, "...I don't think you'll get much work accomplished here. In the daytime this place is nothing but ringing phones and scurrying secretaries..." (63). She suggests he go to Twin Farms, but that has become a guesthouse for two dozen of Dorothy's European refugee friends. Sinclair wants Dorothy to spend more time on him and less on her broadcasts and lecture tours. He tells her,

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"Everyone already knows what you think about 'the situation.' You prefer freedom to tyranny, liberalism to intolerance, peace to war, and your own point of view to anyone else's. You keep sayin' how you love the beauty of our farm. How you can't bear bein' away from the boy. But you're almost never there. You'd rather be out lecturin' in the drabbist cities made by man. And for what? To promote Dorothy Thompson. Like everything else in this country, you start out okay and end up a goddamned publicity stunt." (65)

There's enough truth to this that Dorothy briefly agrees to give up her broadcasts and write her column from Twin Farms, but then they are interrupted by a phone call from President Roosevelt! While Sinclair tries to avoid being strangled by the phone cord, Dorothy becomes reenergized by her conversation with FDR. She says, "with my broadcast and the column I can reach nearly every home in this country. Roosevelt can't warn the people about a war that's sure to come without declaring war. But I can!" (68). Sinclair responds by telling her that he's accepted an offer to be an actor at a Stockbridge, Massachusetts, summer stock theater.

The next scene takes place in Lewis's dressing room at the theater in Stockbridge. Dorothy has come to see his performance, and afterward he tells her that he's having an affair with a very young actress named Corinna (not Marcella—Marcella Powers was still alive at the time the play was written, which may account for the name change). Sinclair asks Dorothy for a divorce. He sees in Corinna some of the same things he saw in Dorothy when they first met: a vision for the future and "my last chance to love" (71). Dorothy warns, "She'll destroy you," to which Sinclair answers, "Whereas you feel that's your exclusive privilege as my wife?" (71). Recalling the vow she'd made never to leave him, Dorothy refuses to give him a divorce, even after he insults her and shoves her to the floor. The scene ends ominously with Sinclair beginning to drink from a full bottle of scotch.

We move next to a hospital where a doctor is explaining to Dorothy that after Corinna left Sinclair he went into a drunken rage, breaking into the rooms of the hotel where he was staying and smashing the radios. When Dorothy sees him, he is in a straitjacket and unaware that she is there. He offers a long monologue in which he takes on the character of his father talking to his son, Harry Sinclair. Throughout the play, Sinclair has presented an idealized picture of his father, contrasting him to Dorothy's father, who rejected her, and saying, "Pa was a hard man, but I loved him till the day he died. And he believed in me when nobody else thought I had any talent"

(51). Also throughout the play, we have seen Lewis the mimic: imitating tourists he meets and taking on the character of Lowell Schmaltz, the narrator of *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, his representative American. During their fight at the end of act 1, Dorothy accuses him of doing this as a form of repression: "When you do your imitations, your German Professor, your Lowell Shmaltz [sic], it's because you want to hide your feelings behind a cheap vaudeville" (42). But here, in the hospital, Sinclair's imitation reveals what he's been hiding from Dorothy: his troubled relationship with his father. In the voice of Dr. Lewis, he begins, "Harry? Harry Sinclair Lewis? What you readin' there, boy? 'Ivanhoe?' Boy, you're eight, goin' on nine, time to stop readin' fool books like that and do somethin' useful with your time" (74). Dr. Lewis berates his son for being too sensitive. He mocks the boy's acne. He compares Sinclair's failures to his brother Claude's achievements. He makes him work to pay his own way through Yale but pays for Claude's medical school. He refuses to be impressed by any of Sinclair's accomplishments:

"Look Harry, you're already past the age of thirty-five, and not one of your books has been a success. Don't you think it's time you told yourself the truth and gave it up—it's one thing to make up funny stories for parties and another to ask folks to pay for it between covers. Is that a fact? 'Main Street' is that much of a seller? Well I think it's a disgrace that you must make money by poking fun at us—It's a pity you couldn't have written somethin' worthwhile like 'Ivanhoe.' It's a wonder to me how a bundle of nerves like you can pull in the money. You better save it, 'cuz I doubt you'll ever get lucky again." (75)

He ends with a final rejection by his father: "I'm dying Harry. No, don't bother to come home. Claude's here to take care of me. Don't need you about sobbin' and misbehavin' like some damned fool sensitive soul. What's death after all? Nothin'. Just like life. Nothin'. Only stone survives" (75).

Dorothy and the audience learn here the etiology of Sinclair's troubles: the need to hide his feelings; the insecurity about his accomplishments; the paralyzing fear that he won't be able to write any worthwhile new books; the certainty that his ugliness makes him unlovable; his inability to love; the drinking to deal with it all. Dorothy tells the doctor that when Sinclair comes out of his dementia to tell him that she'll give him the divorce.

The play then jumps to 1948, when Dorothy and Sinclair

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DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

In "Remembrances of a Village Past," Robert Cross writes of walking around Greenwich Village in New York City and all the connections to be found there with famous authors (*Chicago Tribune Magazine*, Apr. 18, 2004: 12-15, 36). Among the places he notes is Chumley's at 86 Bedford, "a notorious Prohibition-era speakeasy that still lacks a sign, as if management fears the feds will break in at any moment." A Village guide, Arthur Pommer, says,

If you were a writer and in New York to visit your publisher, you'd stop at Chumley's and leave the cover of your book.... Some of the writers who left their stuff here were John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Eugene O'Neill, Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, James Agee, John Cheever, Malcolm Crowley, J. D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac. And the list goes on from there. (15)

The *New York Times Book Review* polled a couple of hundred prominent writers and critics earlier this year and asked them to identify "the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years." *Beloved* by Toni Morrison won, although many were unhappy with the current trend of making lists, some wanted to list more than one book, others were against any sort of ranking, and some asked, "why 25 years?" A. O. Scott wrote, in "In Search of the Best" (*New York Times Book Review*, May 21, 2006), "One best-selling author...reflected on the poverty of our current literary situation by wondering what the poll might have looked like in 1940, with Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald—to say nothing of Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, and Sinclair Lewis—in its lustrous purview" (17). See Frederick Betz's article, "Lewis and the Immortality Polls of 1936 and 1948," in the fall 2004 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* (vol. 13, no. 1).

In "The Nutty Professor," a review of *Timothy Leary: A Biography* by Robert Greenfield in the June 25, 2006 *New York*

Times Book Review, critic Luc Sante notes:

Nearly every page is riveting in *Timothy Leary*, which unfolds like the great novel Sinclair Lewis might have written had he lived to the age of 120. Greenfield is not one of those biographers who set out to besmirch their subjects and deplore their lives, and for whom every detail is an indictment. Neither, unlike many, does he seek foreshadowing in every trespass of his subject's youth. Nevertheless, he cannot exactly airbrush a life that comes so lavishly shadowed: abandonment of the family by professional-drinker father in 1933, when Tim was 13; dismissal from West Point for blatant transport of hooch; suicide of first wife as a consequence of his dogging around—under the banner of non-bourgeois unpossessiveness, of course.

On April 29, 2006, Tom Wolfe spoke at the North Carolina Festival of the Book at Duke University in Durham. In the Q & A session Wolfe was asked, "For young writers... what things one just has to read?"

Wolfe listed John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*, John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* or *Butterfield 8*, John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Wolfe talked in more detail about Sinclair Lewis than about any of the others, noting especially his great attempt to portray the clergy. As a reporter, he even gave sermons from the pulpits of ministers who were on vacation and visiting seminaries. Tom Wolfe's talk has been carried numerous times on C-Span Book TV.

The Chronicle of Higher Education (Mar. 24, 2006: C1), includes an article by Robert A. Weisbuch, "Deal or No Deal: How the Search for a College President is Exactly Like a Game Show" in which he talks about how difficult it is to be a "real person" when interviewing for that sort of job. He speaks of a bad experience, and one where he connected well with students but with "the faculty and the alumni and the trustees, some of whom I couldn't drop the Elmer Gantry imitation" (C4).

William Ostrem has changed the location of his Web column, "Northern Letter." He has a three part series on *Main Street* that he thought readers of the newsletter might enjoy. The links to his columns on Sinclair Lewis are below:

<http://williamostrem.net/nl/2005/09/12/classic-book-review-sinclair-lewiss-main-street-part-1/>

<http://williamostrem.net/nl/2005/09/19/classic-book-review-sinclair-lewiss-main-street-part-2/>

<http://williamostrem.net/nl/2005/09/29/classic-book-review-sinclair-lewiss-main-street-part-3/>

Heather Cox Richardson's excellent review of *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* by Debby Applegate (Doubleday 2006) in the *Chicago Tribune Books* (Aug. 27, 2006) notes that it is:

one of those rare books that delivers a great deal more than it promises.... Her portrait of the minister is reminiscent of Theodore Dreiser's Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* or of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, fictional characters swept along by the peculiar forces driving the nation in their eras. But while Hurstwood and Babbitt are sad figures emblematic of failure and the shallowness of American life, Beecher was a star. His success invites a reader to reflect on the nature of moral and political popularity. (3)

Elizabeth Dilling, a Kenilworth housewife, was the leader of an isolationist "mothers group," which opposed the entry of the United States into World War II. The *Chicago Tribune* did a picture spread on her in a recent magazine issue. She was an anti-Semite and anti-Communist organizer who was accused of sedition in 1944 (the case was dropped in 1947). Sinclair Lewis based a character on Dilling in *It Can't Happen Here*.

"Ever since *Elmer Gantry* was published in 1927, we have had very dark clergy in literature,' the novelist Jan Karon told *USA Today*.... 'They've been melancholy, depraved, greedy, godless, grasping. They've been the most miserable creatures,'" Inside the List from the *New York Times Book Review* (Nov. 27, 2005: 26) notes. The brief story is about Karon's best-selling series of Mitford novels featuring a good-hearted small-town clergyman.

Frank Rich, writing on the defeat of Ralph Reed in the primary for lieutenant governor of Georgia, notes: "Hypocrisy among self-aggrandizing evangelists is as old as Elmer Gantry—older, actually" (12) in "The Passion of the Embryos" (*New York Times*, Week in Review, July 23, 2006).

Elmer Gantry also appears in an article, "The Rabbi Who Loved Evangelicals (and Vice Versa)" by Zev Chafets in the *New York Times Magazine* (July 24, 2005). The story focuses on an Orthodox rabbi who is courting born-again Christians: "Few A.D.L. [Anti-Defamation League] people had ever met an evangelical Christian face to face, but they had seen *Elmer Gantry* and *Inherit the Wind*, and they associated Bible Belt Christians with snake charmers, K.K.K. nightriders, toothless fiddlers, and flat-earth troglodytes" (24).

Here's another case of Lewis being confused with Upton Sinclair. In the June 2, 2006 Magazine of the *Chicago Tribune*, Selwyn Becker writes in a letter to the editor, "Eric Schlosser's article (May 21) detailed how Sinclair Lewis's *The Jungle* catalyzed reform of the trusts and other ills rampant in American life 100 years ago" (4).

E. L. Doctorow's new collection of essays, *Creationists: Selected Essays, 1993–2006* (Random House), is a musing on writers he admires, "a love for the aesthetic struggle as it shines with a kind of blessedness." The authors he admires are an eclectic group, including Lewis, Fitzgerald, Twain, and Dos Passos, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe, W. G. Sebald, Harpo Marx, Albert Einstein, the translators of the King James version of Genesis, and the makers of the atomic bomb. As critic Ron Powers notes in the *New York Times Book Review* (Sept. 24, 2006), "Sinclair Lewis was fueled by 'an obsessive detestation of American provincial life'; his booster-monster George F. Babbitt was nothing less than the replacement for Tom Sawyer as 'carrier of our national soul'" (9).

Will Kraemer writes that the adventurer Cushman Rice was a model for F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby and enclosed a recent newspaper article supporting this. Rice was a larger-than-life figure who was involved in intrigues in Central America. Will wonders whether Lewis might have also used Rice as a model for one of his characters and hopes that any Lewis scholar who knows will write to him in care of the newsletter.

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

JOYCE LYNQ HONORED FOR YEARS OF SERVICE

Joyce Lyng, member of both the Sinclair Lewis Society and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, was honored this year by the Sinclair Lewis Foundation for 22 years of service. Her work with the Foundation and her interest in Lewis were featured in an article in the *Sauk Centre Herald* on August 8, 2006 (all quotes are from this article). Lyng has worked with the Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce at the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center since 1983. She was involved with the planning for the Sinclair Lewis Centennial in 1985 and became interested in Lewis's life and work.

About the Centennial she remembers,

"NBC, CBS, ABC, PBS, Radio Free Europe, and the *New York Times* all came. The phone wouldn't stop ringing. They had to wait their turn to go through the museum to film. I was interviewed by Andrew Malcolm from the *New York Times*, and he took my picture holding a Sinclair Lewis Centennial t-shirt."

The article about her continues:

Al Tingley, past president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, and the board members asked Lyng to work as a tour guide at the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home in 1986.

"Al used to call me Mrs. Lewis. I didn't mind that," said Lyng chuckling.

Lyng continued giving tours of the home until 2001. "I truly loved my tour guide job, and wonderful things happened while I was employed at the Boyhood Home," said Lyng with a smile.

Being involved with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation has also allowed Lyng to meet some of Lewis's family. She remembers each of them very well and still keeps in contact with a few.

"I have met Ida Kay, Lewis's second lady friend, and his granddaughter, Lesley D. Lewis, and grandson, Jean Paul Sinclair Lewis, who I am good friends with. I also have met his nieces, Isabel and Virginia, and his grandnephew, Richard Lewis," said Lyng.

Lyng has given tours to dignitaries including the Ambassador to Qatar and Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota. She has been featured in various videos about Lewis and currently works with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation ordering books, do-

ing inventory, and helping with the museum. On one vacation she even visited Thorvale Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts, the last house that Lewis owned.

Joyce Lyng's enthusiasm for Sinclair Lewis and the work of the Foundation is truly inspiring.



Joyce Lyng, being honored for her years of service to Sauk Centre

SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation reports that it had an eventful year. The Sinclair Lewis National Writers Symposium was held at St. Cloud State University on October 6 and 7, 2005 to celebrate the 120th birthday of Lewis. The symposium's theme was "An American Village in a Global Setting: 1901-2000." The event was sponsored by the estate of the late Ida L. Compton. Several of the board members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation attended the symposium (see related story, page 1).

Foundation board members cosponsored the Sinclair Lewis Conference held last July 13-15 in Sauk Centre (see stories in the fall 2005 and spring 2006 issues of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* and picture on page 16).

The 15th annual Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference was held at the school auditorium on Saturday, October 8, 2005. About 85 people participated in the event. Bill Holm was the keynote speaker. Catherine Watson talked about travel writing, Jim Heynen talked about short story writing, and Cathy Weber Zunker discussed self-publishing. The event continued to support itself with the help of several grants.

The Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home was part of the "Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska" series on Public Television. Over 600 people visited the Boyhood Home in 2005; 37 states were represented, and at least 18 foreign countries, including India, Ghana, Russia, England, the Philippines, Sweden, France, and Norway.

SINCLAIR LEWIS DAYS 2006

The Sinclair Lewis Days were held July 9-16 in very hot weather. Joyce Lyng writes that it reached about 98° on the day of the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade. Among the events were the Sinclair Lewis Days Treasure Hunt, Girls' and Boys' Team

Basketball Tournament, Turtle Races at Jimmy's Pizza, Kid-die Parade, Battle of the Bands, Craft Show and Flea Market, Softball Tournament, Bean Bag Tournament, Fireworks, and First Lutheran Church Pie Social.

One of the highlights, as usual, was the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. The contestants included Stephanie Bellefeuille, Crystal Emanuelson, Brittany Gapinski, Kayla Hinnenkamp, Tricia Kvam, Cheryl Middendorf, Shannon Middendorf, Abbey Newell, Sarah Poepping, and Andrea Stone. Sarah Poepping was named the 2006–2007 Miss Sauk Centre and for her talent performed a comedic lip-synching routine. Princesses were Stephanie Bellefeuille and Cheryl Middendorf. Kayla Hinnenkamp was awarded Miss Congeniality, Tricia Kvam won the evening gown portion of the pageant, and Cheryl Middendorf won the talent portion with a rousing dance routine involving hula hoops. The categories in which the contestants were judged were: Pre-Pageant (10 points), Interview (40 points), Talent (15 points), Evening Gown (25 points), and Overall (10 points).

Barb Borgerding, who has been the director of the pageant for the last nine years, retired after the 2006 pageant, but hopes to stay involved, possibly by becoming one of the judges. During her time as director she and her husband Dick built many of the sets for the pageant at their farm, later reconstructing them at the auditorium for the pageant itself. The pageant has been in existence since 1975.

LAKE WOBEGON MEETS MAIN STREET

Dave Simpkins, in his column *Common Ground*, in the July 18, 2006 issue of the *Sauk Centre Herald*, wrote of his impressions about *A Prairie Home Companion*, written by and featuring Garrison Keillor. After viewing the film at the Main Street Theatre, he wrote:

I figure old Red Lewis would have loved this movie and he'd be a great Prairie Home fan. The careers of these two lanky literary types intersect many times. Not only does the Lake Wobegon Trail cross the Original Main Street, but the two men have carved out very impressive careers telling our story. Lewis and Keillor found fame and fortune telling stories about the people and predicaments of Stearns County....

Lewis's stories had deep, troubled messages about church, state, and love with bitter satire. Keillor on the other hand has the same universal subjects but presented with humor and music.

Simpkins highly recommends the movie, adding, "No doubt this will bring thousands of tourists coming through town

looking for the real Lake Wobegon just as so many have been looking for the Original Main Street" (7).


SINCLAIR LEWIS 2006 WRITERS' CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis 2006 Writers' Conference was held October 14 at the Sauk Centre Junior High School. The annual conference is open to all interested writers who can participate in three workshops and a panel discussion on various kinds of writing. This year's keynote speaker was Faith Sullivan speaking on "Writers: Minnesota's Best Crop." She is the author of seven novels including *Watchdog*, *Mrs. Demming and the Mythical Beast*, and *The Empress of One*. Her talk focused on Minnesota writers in the regional and national landscape and the obligations of writers coming out of a Minnesota tradition. She also did a small group presentation, "Staying the Course in Fiction," on how to keep up enthusiasm and self-discipline in writing, especially for people who are not full-time writers.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson spoke on "Savvy and Frugal Tactics for Marketing Your Book." Ms. Howard-Johnson's third book, *The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't*, was named "Best Professional Book 2004" by USA Book News. Her new book, *Best Book Forward: How to Edit Manuscripts for a Spotless Presentation*, was published this fall. Roger Storkamp, author of *Just Thelma* and *Beneath a Crescent Moon*, spoke on his writing about the rural Minnesota setting of his childhood. Barton Sutter, the only author to win the Minnesota Book Award in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, spoke on "The Crisscross Effect: Come to Your Senses." His concern is that writers use all of their senses when writing, whether they are writing poetry, fiction, or the personal essay. Among his published works are *My Father's War and Other Stories* (1991), *The Book of Names: New and Selected Poems* (1993), and *Cold Comfort: Life at the Top of the Map* (1998).

Who would turn down the
Pulitzer Prize?

Sinclair Lewis did.



Find out why at
www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis

WEB NOTES

Over 70,000 people have accessed the Sinclair Lewis Web site in the last three years since the Web site was revamped. There has been a lot of interest in Lewis's political views, especially on fascism, as well as his general interest in popular culture. Here are some of the questions that have been received recently.

Sinclair Lewis is in the minds of many, as the queries below show. Since the last issue the Web site has been contacted by the Boston University School of Medicine, several authors, the executive assistant to Samuel Goldwyn, Jr., a student in Iraq, among others, and received an award from StudySphere, which is sponsored by National Geographic.

Could you provide some guidance for us?

Boston University School of Medicine is preparing a poster recounting the history of medicine in the 20th century, and we'd like to have a small item about the enormous importance of *Arrowsmith* in improving the image of physicians.

We'd like to capture a small image of either the cover of the Signet edition or the movie poster, and before we go scurrying to e-bay and various used book sites, we wonder if you might be able to help us. Of course we'd be willing to pay for reproduction costs.

Any thoughts? [I sent back a response offering to send a variety of editions.]

Thanks very much (By the way, one of Lewis's dicta about the secret of writing, "Stick the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair," has become a family saying).

Thanks for the rapid response. Meantime, I have ordered from an online bookseller a (creased) copy of the 1942 edition that shows a slumped Arrowsmith looking dejected with a sympathetic nurse looking on. If you have a crisp version of that you could send, we will return it. Otherwise, the Ronald Colman poster with Helen Hayes in the flask would be great. We already have three posters from the school's origin as the first medical college for women (1848), and another poster about BUSM in the Civil War with a magnificent Winslow Homer illustration.

For years, in a Literature of Medicine course, I taught medical students using Schorer's chapter on Morris Fishbein's changing the course of history by persuading Lewis to write *Arrowsmith* instead of the great labor novel. That period, about 1925, also marks the point after which, as one scholar observed,

the average person going to the average doctor stood a better than 50/50 chance of actually getting better.

I have a patron who is interested in obtaining a copy of a short story by Sinclair Lewis entitled: "Detour—Rough Roads." This story was published in *Every Week* on March 30, 1918 or March 20, 1918.

I've located two libraries that own *Every Week*, however, neither owns the date needed. I've also contacted the Clark County Public Library in Ohio (*Every Week* was published there), as well as the Clark County Historical Society, Ohio Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society. Each indicated they didn't own the item.

I finally contacted the Library of Congress, who had no further luck than I did. They suggested I contact the Sinclair Lewis Society to see if you have any further suggestions as to where I might locate this short story. Thank you in advance for your help!

When I received a reply from the librarian at the Library of Congress, he sent me a quote from Sinclair Lewis that provides a clue as to why finding some lesser known Sinclair Lewis works might be difficult.

In a letter to Mr. Morris Sadow on June 4, 1933, Lewis stated, "I am sorry to have to agree with Mr. Maule [Maule was Lewis's editor at Doubleday] against you in the matter of the republication of my earlier work now buried away in minor magazines and college publications. I see no real value in bringing this amateur work to light..."

Lewis is now, and from the first novel I read of his in my twenties, has been my favorite author. I have made my living in higher education (my firm, Burrston House, does research and development re: texts, etc.) and have never understood why Lewis isn't more revered and studied in American Literature courses. Can you shed some light on this?

Thank you for the Web site. I found it very informative and entertaining. [I'm never sure why that is so since Lewis is still read around the world. Last year, before *It Can't Happen Here* was brought back into print, it was one of the top ten books on used-bookstore Web sites.

Some of it may have to do with the very influential biography by Mark Schorer which came out in 1961 and, although very well researched, applied a New Critical paradigm to his work, basically dismissing everything he wrote after he won the Nobel Prize and saying that his books were interesting as a snapshot of the times, but not very well written. Many teachers picked up on this, not bothering to read Lewis. That's the reason

I did my dissertation on Lewis's novels after 1930, because I wanted to examine what they were like rather than rely on hearsay. The Lewis Society has been active for 14 years now and we see some progress. Richard Lingeman's biography of several years ago is helping to make a difference. It does come down to people teaching him. And sometimes it takes more energy because one has to talk about history and sociology as well as literature. There is some demand though, because in addition to the Lingeman biography, there are two new collections of his short stories, one published by Signet and one by the Minnesota Historical Society Press.]

I'm doing research on Jackie Robinson for an author who's writing a book on him. I hope you can help with a research inquiry: Do you know if Sinclair Lewis mentioned Robinson in any of his writings (even private ones)? [I can't find any mention of Jackie Robinson in writings by Lewis. Lewis did receive the Thomas Jefferson Award for the Advancement of Democracy in the field of journalism and literature from the Council against Intolerance in the same year (1947) that Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey received the award in public service from the same organization.]

I am the Executive Assistant to Samuel Goldwyn, Jr. At this year's Telluride Film Festival there will be a special screening of the film *Dodsworth* and I am currently doing research in support of the question and answer period to follow the screening.

To that end, I am writing to inquire if you have any original reviews of the novel, the play, and the film versions of *Dodsworth*. Many thanks for your assistance on this matter. [She was referred to the Beinecke Library at Yale.]

I just discovered your Sinclair Lewis Society. How wonderful. As a nurse, most of my reading is technical. When I want a "good read" for enjoyment, I always love any of Sinclair Lewis's work. I'm rereading *Babbitt*. I've been curious for years about the term "Balkan maid." Can you give me a definition? [A Balkan maid was considered an inferior sort of maid, below Scandinavian maids that would have been the norm in Minnesota. They were thought to be lazier and less clean.]

On a recent trip to the Sinclair Lewis Society Web site, I learned that his novel *It Can't Happen Here* was adapted for the stage by the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s (WPA). Do you know where one may obtain a copy of this play?

After reading *It Can't Happen Here* 3 times (...and thinking I had the brilliant idea to adapt it for the stage, since it is so relevant to what is happening today) I was a little disappointed that the original author had beaten me to it some 70 years before!

At any rate, I am thinking of using the original work to write a play "based on" this work and updating this play to today's time or putting it in another time period and genre...any help or resources that you may be able to assist me with would be greatly appreciated...also, do you know if this property was ever sold to MGM? And do they still own the rights for a screenplay? [Dramatists Play Service has a copy of the play in manuscript <http://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=2068>. This is a revision of the play that was done on Broadway and at other venues by the Federal Theatre Project. The revision was done in summer stock, mostly in the Northeast, and at several theaters, Lewis played Doremus Jessup. Someone else wrote me last year about the play and found the revision very clunky. Maybe you could readapt the novel since so much of it is still unfortunately timely.

The rights were sold to MGM in the 1930s, but, although casting had started (Lionel Barrymore was set to play Jessup) and a script was written, external forces caused the production to close down. I don't know whether the rights have finally reverted back to the estate, but I would guess so. You can contact the literary agency that deals with Lewis's works at McIntosh & Otis, 353 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016, (212) 687-7400.]

"Doremus Jessup can never die." The final words of *It Can't Happen Here*, which I just reread, noting the presence of Minute Men, an amiable dunce of a President with a hidden agenda, and my copy has a cover illustration with red and blue barbed wire.

Lewis was always good with names (President Windrip for another example) and I know you can't really copyright them, but still...

I also recently read the opening to an unfinished novel by Charles Willeford, written 1975, which opens with the programming executive of a TV network supervising the setup of a new reality show. His name is Doremus Jessup. Now why would the author use that name? It can't be associational, because the character is definitely not like Sinclair's.

I hope you can help: I am about to begin a PhD at the University of Nottingham in the UK, and part of my study will be on Lewis's *Main Street*, and possibly *Babbitt*. I've had a look around but I can't really work out what the accepted, standard scholarly edi-

tions of these works are—i.e. who publishes them. This may be difficult for you to answer as I'll be getting them in the UK. I have the Barnes and Noble edition of *Main Street*, but I've seen several others (Dodo Press for instance) and am not sure which one I should be using. Any suggestions? [The accepted scholarly editions for *Main Street* and *Babbitt* are the ones that were published by Harcourt, Brace in 1920 and 1922 respectively. These were reprinted with the same plates by Grosset and Dunlap a few years later and are relatively plentiful.]

I hope you don't mind my writing to you. I have been trying to ascertain whether or not my 1922 edition of *Babbitt* is a 1st edition or not.

I sell some books on Abe Books, but am not an expert. I bought this at an estate sale of a wealthy person in and around NBC Studios in Burbank, CA. I have not been able to find out about my particular copy and was wondering if you might be able to help me.

I did see one ad that was advertised as a "First Thus" and talked about "Purdy" being on line 4, page 49. Well, mine does not say that. What mine does say is:

Copyright 1922, by
Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America

That is all it says. The inside endpapers are printed with the HB logo in beige and light green.

I am also sending a picture that I have taken. If you could provide any clues, I would be VERY GRATEFUL!!! [Alas, the copy she had was a reprint.]

Can you tell me, please, how I can find out whether my copy of *Main Street* is a first edition? It's a hardback copy with a beautiful blue color, and an image of Alfred Nobel is embossed on the front cover and on the spine. There is also a representation of the author's signature in gold on the front cover. The copyright date is 1920, and the publisher is Collier. [This was the Nobel Prize edition that Harcourt, Brace published after Lewis won the Nobel Prize.]

I publish political books out of copyright using "print on demand." I want to reprint as a hardback *It Can't Happen Here* but it is very confusing if this is copyrighted. I found info that a Michael Lewis renewed it in 1963 and I see that he was born in 1930. Can you tell me how I might reach him? Or any other information that is relevant. [He was referred to the literary agency McIntosh & Otis].

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE



Your Web site <http://lilt.ilstu.edu/separry/lewis.html> has been selected as one of the best educational resources on the Web by StudySphere. StudySphere is one of the Internet's fastest growing sites of educational resources for students, teachers, and parents. StudySphere has scoured the Internet to select only the finest sites to be included within its listing of educational links.

I am an MA student in English Literature from Iraq. My thesis is entitled "Charles Dickens and Sinclair Lewis as Satirists and Social Reformers: A Comparative Study." According to the hard circumstances we pass through in Iraq, I cannot get the necessary sources to complete my work. I hope, sir, if you can help me in this matter with my ultimate gratitude to your help, sir. By now, I am really in need of any article about irony, comedy, exaggeration, humour, etc. in the novels of Lewis, especially *Babbitt* and *Main Street*. [I asked for more specifics on his project.]

Thank very much for spending your time reading and responding to my letter. Actually, I do not know how I could express my gratitude for you as the words sometimes cannot reflect the real feelings of a human being. In short, I think it is the real humanity that you help a person whom you are not acquainted with. I have read your letter and the articles as the titles reveal are useful but the titles as you know do not show me where can I find irony, comedy, exaggeration, humour in *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. I think the following articles are hopeful:

"Clearing the Smoke: Babbitt's 'Curious Inscription'"
by Michael Carroll Dooling

"If George Babbitt Were a Woman" by Sally E. Parry
(on the Emma McChesney series by Edna Ferber)

"Babbitt's Mysterious Inscription" by Ingrid Wilson

"*Main Street* at the Great American History Theatre
in St. Paul: A Review" by George Killough

"*Main Street* Invites Interpretations: Theater Review"
by Carolyn Petrie

"Lewis as Pornography" by Sally E. Parry

"Literary Style in Lingeman's Lewis Biography, *Rebel
from Main Street*" by Frederick Betz

"Standardization and Conformity: A Critical Study of

Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*" by Lucy Zhang

"Trouble on Main Street" by Sally E. Parry

"*Babbitt*: The Literary Dimension" by Martin Bucco

"Revisiting *Main Street*," Review of *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis, edited with a biographical explanation and explanatory notes by Martin Bucco; by James M. Hutchisson

"Canonized—At Last," Review of *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, edited by John Hersey; by Roger Forseth.

[The appropriate newsletter articles were sent to him. We look forward to hearing about his work.]

My father suggested I contact you to verify the validity of this quote attributed to Sinclair Lewis: "When fascism comes to America, it will come wrapped in a flag and carrying a cross." Was this from *It Can't Happen Here*? I tried to find a copy of the book in the local library, but regrettably in Bush country the library is small. [I've been receiving queries about this quote

Strangers continued from page 21

meet at a cocktail party. He's learning Italian in preparation for going to Rome. When Dorothy compliments all his recent books, he brushes it off: "They're just poor imitations of myself" (77). As he exits, Dorothy turns to the audience and says, "He died in Rome. He was alone. America would never be the same after him and neither would I" (78). Curtain.

When I saw *Strangers* at the Golden Theatre back in March 1979, I didn't know much about Sinclair Lewis and I knew nothing about Dorothy Thompson. I enjoyed the play, and there's much about it I still remember vividly, particularly the straitjacket scene. But now I'm in a better position to appreciate its virtues and its flaws. As I think the preceding indicates, I admire the efficiency with which Yellen has identified certain traits for each of the characters and put them into conflict. He has done this in a way that helps us understand their attraction—they are both convinced that they are unlovable and yet here is another person willing to love them—and understand why their relationship is impossible—each in his or her own way is unable to love anyone. The play's flaws arise from the impossibility of representing the complexity of history and real historical figures in a two-hour play. They also arise, in my opinion, from too much reliance on Mark Schorer's take

for the last several months, and despite my corresponding with a biographer of Lewis and other experts, I've had no luck. It may be Huey Long, it may be Upton Sinclair, but according to my experts, it's probably not Sinclair Lewis.]

Hello there! I have just recently heard an amazing prophetic quote that is attributed to Sinclair Lewis, and I wanted to verify it before using it in a letter to the (newspaper) editor. The quote reads, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag, and carrying a cross." Is this the actual quote? Also, your Web site is very nice. If this quote truly came from *It Can't Happen Here*, it would be worth adding.

I have seen the following quote attributed to Sinclair Lewis: "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross." Supposedly it is from the book *It Can't Happen Here*. I searched the version of the book hosted by <http://www.gutenberg.org/> (<http://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301001h.html>). It did not contain the phrase. This quote is all over the Internet. Is this an accurate quote?

on Lewis. Like Schorer, Yellen presents Lewis at his zenith in 1929 and everything after as failure. Plays and films about artists are often problematic because the making of art—in this case writing—is inherently undramatic. *Strangers* gives little indication of why Lewis was an important author. We do get a stronger impression of why Dorothy Thompson was important because she gets to talk a lot about her political convictions and we get to see what she's doing to act on them. But as the play goes along, Dorothy's character receives less attention for its own sake and becomes more a vehicle to make the revealing of Lewis's character possible.

But even though it isn't everything we Lewis fans might wish it to be, *Strangers* is a moving and smart evening in the theater. It has had some post-Broadway productions, including one in Lewis's hometown of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, several years ago. It's nice to know that whenever it's performed, the spirit of Sinclair Lewis gets one more chance to indulge his passion for the theater.

Work Cited

Yellen, Sherman. *Strangers*. New York: Samuel French, 1979. ✍

—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 contributions to this section.]

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CATALOGUE 156

73. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1350.

First edition, first issue binding. Tiny bit of rubbing to spine lettering, else a fine, clean copy with the lettering bright in a very good dust jacket which has been restored by a paper conservationist.

74. —. Original poster advertising the May 1935 issue of *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 50th Anniversary Issue, 1885–1935. \$185.

Printed on stiff board, 8 ½" x 13" with a deep royal blue background and yellow-orange accents. "50th Anniversary Number 1935–45 Stories—Features—Serials—Good Housekeeping—Every Woman's Magazine" and lists as contributors Sinclair Lewis, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Ursula Parrott, Edith Barnard Delano, Grace Coolidge, and Violette Kimball Dunn as being in the special issue. About fine. Scarce and striking poster.

75. —. Original poster advertising the June issue of Hearst's *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. 1935. \$185.

A striking art moderne design in a rich red, dark grey, and black and white; 8 ½" x 13" printed on stiff board. "Cosmopolitan For June—Just Out—3 New Novels, 22 Star Writers" and lists the issue's contributors which are Sinclair Lewis, Peter B. Kyne, A.J. Cronin, Pearl S. Buck, P.G. Wodehouse, Bess Streeter Aldrich, and Noel Pierce. About fine. Handsome and scarce poster.

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CATALOGUE 28

COLLECTOR'S
CORNER

329. Lewis, Sinclair. (Ghostwriter). *Tennis As I Play It* by Maurice E. McLoughlin. New York: George H. Doran, 1915. \$1000.

First edition. Illustrated with photographs. Though nowhere cited in this book, this volume was ghostwritten by the then 30-year-old Sinclair Lewis only three years after he had published his first book. This copy bears a contemporary inscription by McLoughlin on the front endpaper. McLoughlin was considered the first great tennis star of the modern era. He was the number one-ranked American player from 1912–1914, captain of the winning Davis Cup team in 1913, and is enshrined in the Tennis Hall of Fame. An envelope containing three lengthy printed obituaries of McLoughlin from 1957 is pasted to the half-title page; otherwise this is a fine, bright, tight copy of this book, which usually comes to market these days in woeful condition.

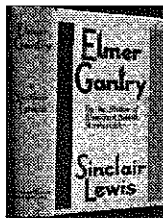
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SALE 324

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2006

197. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$2000/\$3000.



Blue cloth lettered and stamped in orange, jacket. First edition, 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 (just above the publisher's imprint).

198. —. *Main Street*. New York: Limited Editions Club, 1937. \$200/\$300.

Illustrated by Grant Wood with color plates. 9¾" x 7½", gray cloth, top page edge stained blue-gray, glassine, original slipcase. No. 545 of 1500 hand-numbered copies, signed by the artist. One of the great American artist-author pairings of the 1930s. One edge of slipcase detached (but present) plus other

wear; glassine with edge wear and lacks spine portion; light wear to volume; bookplate of Marc J. Sandler; volume fine, slipcase and glassine fair.

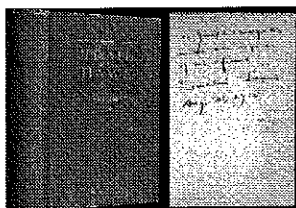
199. —. *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914. \$1500/\$2500.

Frontispiece. 7¼" x 4¾", original gray cloth, gilt-lettered. First edition. Presentation copy, inscribed, signed, and with two sketch portraits by the author on the front endpapers: "To Frank Webb, one of the few good business-men I know who haven't let business keep them from being real human beings with senses of humor, from the author Sinclair Lewis." Opposite to this inscription, Lewis has penned a charming pictographic inscription, with two sketch portraits of himself and of Webb. This is the first edition (with "M-N" on copyright page) of the first book Sinclair Lewis published under his own name. This early inscription is particularly poignant as Lewis made his reputation as a critic of conservative, materialistic American society, and of businessmen in particular.



200. —. *The Trail of the Hawk*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915. \$1200/\$1800.

Color frontispiece by Norman Rockwell. 7¼" x 4¾", original blue cloth, gilt-lettered. First edition. Presentation copy, inscribed and signed by the author in the year of publication on the front free endpaper: "To Joseph Margolis with the regards of his friend / Sinclair Lewis / Aug. 31, 1915." The scarce first edition (with "H-P" on copyright page) of Sinclair Lewis's third book.



201. —. Lot of two titles. Comprises: *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. \$150/\$250.

Together, 2 volumes. Dust jackets. First editions. *Ann Vickers* jacket with some creasing, two tears, mark to back panel; volume with some fading and a bookplate. *Cass Timberlane* jacket with edge-wear. Overall, a very good pair.

202. —. Lot of three titles. Comprises: *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1914. *Cass Timberlane*. Dust jacket. New York: Random House, 1945. *The God-Seeker*. Dust jacket. New York: Random House, 1949. \$300/\$500.

Together, 3 volumes. First editions. Appealing group of books by Sinclair Lewis, including a very fine copy of *The God-Seeker* in jacket; an about fine copy of *Cass Timberlane* which was the basis for the movie starring Spencer Tracy, Lana Turner, and Mary Astor; and a copy of *Our Mr. Wrenn*, Lewis's first book written for adults. *Our Mr. Wrenn* with a little staining to cloth, small stain to a couple of leaves internally; *Cass Timberlane* jacket with some tiny nicks at extremities, volume endleaves browned.

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111. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$3000.

First edition; first state. About fine in a dust jacket with a dime-sized chip at the foot of the spine, some other tiny chips and tears and minor staining and wear.

112. —. *The Trail of the Hawk*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1923. \$675.

First English edition. Owner's inscription; very good plus in a dust jacket with minor interior mends.

113. —. *Mantrap*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$500.

First English edition. Owner's inscription; very good plus in a dust jacket with a small interior mend.

114. —. *The Job*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$575.

First English edition. Owner's inscription; very good plus in dust jacket.

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120. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Job*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$3750.

First edition. Some offsetting to front and rear free endpapers from reaction to jacket flaps. A near fine copy in a very good dust jacket which is complete on spine, rear panel and both jacket flaps, but is missing a triangular piece from the upper left-hand corner of front panel, about 1-inch deep and an inch and a half wide (removing part of the publisher's blurb in this area). The author's fourth book. Very scarce in dust jacket.

121. —. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1500.

First edition. First issue binding with "G" resembling a "C" on spine. A near fine copy in bright, clean dust jacket with two tiny chips to bottom edge.

122. —. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$750.

First edition. Near fine copy in a fine, clean dust jacket, slightly creased at spine panel. Jacket is the second issue with reviews at bottom of front flap.

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