

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Richard Lingeman, author of
Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street

NEW LIBRARY OF AMERICA EDITION OF LEWIS

The Library of America has released a new collection of Lewis novels, *Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, Dodsworth*, edited by Richard Lingeman. The list price is \$40.00, although Amazon.com has it for \$28.00.

Amazon's description reads as follows:

Written at the height of his powers in the 1920s, the three novels in this volume continue the vigorous unmasking of American middle-class life begun by Sinclair Lewis in *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. In *Arrowsmith* (1925) Lewis portrays the medical career of Martin Arrowsmith, a physician who finds his

— New Library of America Edition continued on page 7

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD LINGEMAN

This interview was conducted by Sally E. Parry, editor of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter. The questions are similar in format to the interview conducted with Mr. Lingeman in the Fall 1997 Newsletter (Vol. 6, no. 1).

1. Are you pleased with your biography of Lewis?

I'm pleased I've finished it, relieved, but also sorry, for I miss it and the constant ruminating over why he did this or that, which kept my mind profitably and pleasantly occupied for many a day. But it was a rewarding project—for me and, I hope, for Lewis's reputation. I believe it was successful in the latter sense because it stirred up much discussion and reassessment by reviewers. That can be a double-edged sword, though. A few reviewers were prejudiced or said nothing cogent. And there were those essay reviews in which my book figures as a mere afterthought to the reviewer's self-indulgent flights. But the great bulk of the essays and assessments of Lewis were sincerely welcome. One of the freshest of them, by the way, was by the conservative *National Review's* reviewer, which you reprinted in the last issue of the *Newsletter*. My greatest disappointment was, naturally, the negative reviews, which can bruise one's self-esteem, however long one has been in the writing business—particularly the one by John Updike in the *New Yorker*. He made a kind of condescending allusion to the S.L. Society—why, I'm not sure—so I apologize for subjecting your members to guilt by association.

2. Mark Schorer's 1961 *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* is the touchstone to which critics are comparing your biography. In what ways do you think your approach to Lewis and his work has differed from Schorer's?

— Interview with Richard Lingeman continued on page 4

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LEWIS CATCHES FLIVVER FEVER: AUTHOR ENJOYED THE EARLY MOTORING DAYS

Dave Simpkins

Sauk Centre Herald Editor/Publisher

This article is reprinted with permission from the Sauk Centre Herald.

When Red Lewis returned home in April of 1916 to spend the summer introducing his wife Gracie to friends and family, he found himself caught up in the city’s fascination with the automobile.

The automobile was the rage throughout rural Minnesota in 1916 as the nation began revving up their 40 horse power, low priced Tin Lizzies with narrow tires and canvas tops.

What were once livery stables were converted into garages and auto agencies. The city council debated speed limits and parking regulations.

The pages of the *Sauk Centre Herald* reflected this fascination with the automobile. Every issue had several advertisements for Ford, Chalmers, and Maxwell automobiles selling for \$500 to \$1,000 at O’Gara’s and Otto’s garages.

Meetings were announced for the Motor Club, where automobile owners would meet on Main Street on a Sunday afternoon and tour the lakes and farms. The county fair hosted an organization meeting of the Good Roads Club, dedicated to improving county roads and promoting a trunk highway connecting the towns between St. Cloud and Sauk Centre.

The *Herald* reported highway robbers were working in the vicinity of Ashley Township and had robbed 17-year-old Robert Kensella and ransacked his family’s farm.

— Lewis Catches Flivver Fever continued on page 13

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 Rusty Allred, Frederick Betz, Martin Bucco, Kristin Dykstra, Robert E. Fleming, Hilary Justice, George Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Jackie Lawrence, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Roberta Olson, Tom Raynor, Dave Simpkins.

ARROWSMITH IN JAPANESE

Rusty Allred

If you have ever enjoyed an excellent novel in translation, you may have wondered how well the translation was performed. It has even occurred to me that a great translator could improve a written work, although that should hardly be his or her intention.

I do not read French or Russian, so I have had to trust the English translations of works originally composed in those languages. But with Japanese, I have the capability of testing for myself how well a translation was performed.

Of course, translation, especially literary translation, is very much an art. There are many ways to express the same information in any language, and when moving between languages, the available degrees of freedom increase even more.

I am not a literary translator, but as a technical Japanese-to-English translator, I usually work with one of two goals in mind: 1) translate the document to read as I would expect it to read if the author had been born American, rather than Japanese, but had pursued the same academic and career path, or 2) convey as nearly as possible to the American audience what the Japanese reader would have taken away from the document.

In the present article, my goal is the second: to show what I believe the Japanese audience would take away from reading a recent Japanese translation of Lewis's *Arrowsmith*. For example, consider the following:

It was widely known that he was by nature a pure person, a member of the Presbyterian faith, and a Republican. Therefore, no one found fault with him no matter how much he declared that he harbored immoral, skeptical and socialist thoughts. (Translation 16)

The above is my English translation of the Japanese translation of Lewis's original line:

He was permitted, without restriction, to speak of himself as immoral, agnostic and socialistic, so long as it was universally known that he remained pure, Presbyterian, and Republican. (8)

The information is mostly there, although it seems to me there might be a difference in nuance.

Quite independent of the current task, I had, during a recent reading of the original *Arrowsmith*, collected a set of favorite quotations.¹ So, as a means of finding out how well Lewis survived the translator's pen, these seemed a reasonable place to begin.

Unfortunately, the editors of this translation of *Arrowsmith* had in mind purposes not completely conducive to my goal. This new translation is a rather drastic abridgement, with two pages, 264 and 265, of the Japanese volume

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<i>Editor</i>	<i>Interns</i>
Sally E. Parry	Kathleen Dusenbery- Woods, Andrew Ervin, Laine Morreau, Mary Mueller, Lorraine Propheter
<i>Layout Editor</i>	
Amanda Karvelaitis	
<i>Production Director</i>	
Tara Reeser	

Please address all correspondence to: Sally Parry, Editor, 4240 English Dept., Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240

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LEWIS, LONDON—AND HEMINGWAY?

Robert E. Fleming
University of New Mexico

Jerry Leath Mills's article on the connection between Jack London's *The Road* (1907) and Sinclair Lewis's "They That Take the Sword" made an excellent case for London's novel as a source for the 1909 *Red Book* story by Lewis.

A more speculative connection might be extended to Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Battler," written in late 1924 or early 1925 and published in *In Our Time* (1925). In "The Battler," Hemingway's young protagonist Nick Adams is knocked off the top of a moving



Ernest Hemingway

boxcar by a sadistic brakeman who calls him over in friendly manner and then punches him in the eye.

Knowing Hemingway's early enthusiasm for London's work, I have always considered *The Road* a source for the incident (which makes up

only the first three pages of the story). But the Lewis story in *Red Book* adds possible revenge by the hobo to the plot. That element is also present in the Hemingway story, as Nick promises himself to pay the brakeman back, perhaps by hitting him with a rock the next time he passes.

Although he would scorn Sinclair Lewis in his later career, Hemingway read *Main Street* and *Babbitt* when they appeared. He was also an omnivorous reader during childhood—he would have been ten years old in 1909—and frequented the Oak Park library. Did he read "They That Take the Sword"?

If he did, he ignored the "heartwarming" family magazine ending chosen by Lewis. In keeping with the Modernism he had been absorbing during his association with Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, Hemingway leaves the revenge unconsummated, and his protagonist simply chalks up his naïve trust in the brakeman to experience: "They would never suck him in that way again" (*Short Stories* 129).

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Surprisingly (to me), he found some eager defenders among the reviewers, who dismissed my attempt to take a new look at Lewis as presumptuous (after 40 years!). I must say that those reviewers—and I include Updike—seemed to be oblivious to the new material, new attitude, new critical perspectives I tried to inject into my book, though the fault for that may be mine. If I had it to do over, I would devote more space to spelling out what was new in my work and how, precisely, I differed from Schorer. But I figured that would become tedious, and I can't believe general readers care all that much about these matters. Some of Schorer's defenders were misleading, too. I recall, for example, Updike saying he read my notes and found no citations of new (post-Schorer) criticism. But I cited Jim Hutchisson's *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis*

frequently and also the collection of essays he edited—plus other somewhat older but still post-1961 collections like Marty Bucco's and the articles that appeared in this newsletter over the years, including those critical of Schorer! For the record, let me mention new material I used, inter alia: letters from Grace Lewis to Stella Wood, which covered the years of her marriage to Lewis; letters to a woman he had fallen in love with when he was breaking with Grace and writing *Elmer Gantry*; the correspondence between Lewis and George Horace Lorimer; Lewis's medical records from the Austin Riggs clinic, including interviews with psychiatrists and medical history; various memoirs such as Ida Kay Compton's and Jack Koblas's *Sinclair Lewis: Home at Last*, which features interviews with

— Interview with Richard Lingeman *continued on page 12*

EDITH WHARTON IN SINCLAIR LEWIS

Martin Bucco
Colorado State University

Sinclair Lewis's long-held respect for cosmopolitan Edith Wharton (1862–1937), despite her high aestheticism, remained intact. He appreciated her "flexible style, her exquisite understanding of people and places, her aloof mockery of popular follies, the humor that comes flashing out in her use of a word" ("The Book of the Week" 4). William Rose Benét recalls that Lewis, as a student in New Haven and as a hobohemian in Carmel, was "considerably under the influence of Edith Wharton whose work he truly admired" (421). Although both Henry James and Edith Wharton were born in New York City, Europeanized, devoted to the "art" of fiction, and keen on individual psychology, Wharton grounded her fiction in the external world of things, manners, and social forces. Thus any Jamesian overtones in *Our Mr. Wrenn* derive not from Wharton's *Maitre*, but from Wharton herself.

Recalling the "heroic and bespeaking" *Ethan Frome* (1911) in his Publishers Syndicate review of *The Custom of the Country* (1913), Lewis wondered if Wharton's latest novel might not be the most important of the year. As a Baedeker to society, the book will not disappoint, affirms the reviewer, but its literary merit places it "far above society and far above the clumsy word-carpenters who write melodramatic 'society' novels." Edith Wharton's "cold brilliance" coupled with her passion for Italy, her understanding of Undine Spragg's mother, and her sympathy for Undine's bewildered husbands make *The Custom of the Country* one of her two best books ("The Book of the Week" 4). Doubtless the novel influenced the cruder satire of Middle Western vulgarism in *Main Street*. Wharton herself later noted that Robert Grant's *Unleavened Bread* (1900) anticipated not only *The Custom of the Country* but the work of Dreiser and Lewis.

"...so you can imagine," Wharton wrote to Lewis in 1921, "what a pleasure it is to know that you have read *me*, cared, understood" (Schorer 312). R.W.B. Lewis notes in his biography of Wharton that while

Gertrude Stein was offering counsel to James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, and others, Edith Wharton was hostess to André Gide, Aldous Huxley, Sinclair Lewis, and others (440). What Lewis as a luncheon guest in Pavillon Colombe in St. Brice-sous-Forêt in 1921 might not have enjoyed was the "much delicate dissecting" of technique and process (Schorer 185). Apparently, however, Wharton's opinion of Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* declined as her personal relationship with this inner-circle friend deteriorated. Regally eager to guide the artistic understanding of Lewis and others, Wharton modeled the character Tristram Fyner in her novel *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) after the author of *Main Street*, but apparently she came to prefer the fiction of Theodore Dreiser.

In his Nobel Lecture, Lewis named Edith Wharton as one of America's first-rate novelists in the American Academy of Arts and Letters ("The American Fear of Literature" 10). Before this, in *Dodsworth*, he has Professor Braut remark to Sam that a few true "Europeans" are Americans—"your author Mrs. Edith Wharton, I imagine, must be so" (251). Doubtless Edith Wharton, as Hilton Anderson has noted, served as the model for Edith Cortright, Sam's newfound love in the novel (5–6). With Gideon's deanship in *Planish* comes relief, for no longer does he have to pretend that he has read the latest book by certain authors, "Mrs. Edith Wharton" among them (124). Three Lewis novels mention *Ethan Frome*. In *Elmer Gantry*, Frank Shallard makes the novel known to his congregation (382). In *Ann Vickers*, the title character tells Lafa

————— Edith Wharton in Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 8*



Edith Wharton

RESPONSES TO SINCLAIR LEWIS: REBEL FROM MAIN STREET

Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street

By Richard Lingeman

(New York: Random House, 2002. 659 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)

Response from Jacqueline Koenig

I first read Sinclair Lewis in the late sixties. Raised in the Midwest, and sitting in my Oakland, California, home 35 years ago, from Sinclair Lewis I came to understand so many things about myself, things Lingeman talks about—"the hurt-hunger" inside, my love of land and animals in place of human beings, insisting on having my own Walden Pond (always doing what I want and rarely finding anybody to do it with, with its "burdens of freedom and solitude"), why I can't go home again, why I bolt from churches, etc.

Mark Schorer didn't understand any of this. Living on the west coast, how could he evaluate *Main Street*, which Lewis got exactly right? Lingeman, on the other hand, coming from Crawfordsville, Indiana, which is near the town where I grew up, knows. It's all there, in Lewis's credo, on page 406:

Everything that is worth while in the world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring, critical spirit and that the preservation of this spirit is more important than any social system whatsoever.

Kudos are due Lingeman.

Response from Frederick Betz

Southern Illinois University-Carbondale

Frederick Betz reviewed *Rebel from Main Street* for *Dreiser Studies* 33.2 (Fall 2002:106-09). Some of his thoughts on the biography are in the previous *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* (11.1 [Fall 2002]: 5+). In his review for *Dreiser Studies*, Betz praises Lingeman's biography, noting that Lingeman "conveys a thematic focus on Lewis" and, unlike Schorer, "assesses Lewis's life and work with an open mind, sympathy, sensitivity, and balance." Some of the review is a discussion of the shortcomings of the Schorer biography, with its strong New

Critical focus and sometimes heavy-handed contributions of Dorothy Thompson in the shaping of Lewis's character and career. Betz mentions a number of critical challenges to Schorer that preceded the new biography and perhaps galvanized Lingeman in his writing:

Lingeman blends the life and works into an eminently readable narrative, which is uncluttered by the massive detail that Schorer gives in his almost daily account of Lewis's activities, and offers more substantive analysis of individual works, whether major or minor novels, short stories, or plays, than Schorer, who often simply records the positive and negative contemporary criticism.

Betz praises Lingeman for offering a more well-rounded assessment of Lewis's writing and life:

That is Lingeman's answer to Schorer's diagnosis of Lewis's "paralysis of the heart." Lingeman has lifted "the Schorer curse" by convincingly demonstrating that we should care about Sinclair Lewis too.

Response from George Killough

College of St. Scholastica

Review of *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*, reprinted from *Minnesota History* 58 (Fall 2002): 187-88. Used with permission.

Sinclair Lewis has at last found a biographer who can capture his extraordinary life. With driving energy, Lewis rose from small-town Minnesota to gain international prominence as a writer in the 1920s. In four novels (*Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Elmer Gantry*), he offered a startling view of America through a satirical lens tinted with sympathy. His career peaked in 1930 when he won the first Nobel Prize for literature ever awarded an American. Still determined to produce important fiction, he continued to write a book every two or three years until his death in 1951. He, his family, and his friends paid a price for the intensity of his life, and his story is fascinating. Richard Lingeman's new biography tells that story well.

————— Responses to *Sinclair Lewis* continued on page 10

THE ART OF THE LITERARY FEUD

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

An entertaining look at literary quarrels of the past century is the focus of Anthony Arthur's new book *Literary Feuds: A Century of Celebrated Quarrels—From Mark Twain to Tom Wolfe* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2002). He examines eight of these literary contretemps, giving some biographical information about each of the authors, how their paths cross, and what seemed to precipitate the quarrels. Most of the writers are well known and some of these feuds have been written about before, but never combined into a text which shows the literary profession at its petty and jealous worst.

The chapter titles, which set up the conflicts, are a good indication of the focus of Arthur's writing. "Partners No More: Mark Twain and Bret Harte" sets the tone for the book by tracing the relationship between Twain and Harte and how Harte's mentorship of Twain later turned into animosity on Twain's part, fueled by, in Justin Kaplan's words, Twain's "rage at the world." Many of the chapters seem to discuss a relationship in which a younger writer eventually dismisses or argues with an older writer that he or she looked up to at one time. The next chapter, "The Boy with the Interested Eyes: Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein" could easily have focused on Hemingway and any number of other authors. Hemingway saw Stein as a "sort of gauge of civilization," superior in this regard to Sinclair Lewis or H. L.

Mencken." Hemingway's insecurities and nastiness comes forth quite strongly in his attacks on his contemporaries in *The Torrents of Spring* (1925), notorious not only for its vitriolic attack on Sherwood Anderson, but also on Stein, Sinclair Lewis, and Willa Cather. The chapter ends with a telling quotation by Donald Ogden Stewart, the screenwriter and model for Bill Gorton in *The Sun Also Rises*:

The minute he began to love you, or the minute he began to have some sort of obligation to you of love or friendship or something, then is when he had to kill you. Then you were too close to something he was protecting. He, one-by-one, knocked off the best friendships he ever had. He did it with Scott; he did it with Dos Passos—with everybody.

The chapter of most interest to Lewis scholars is "The Slap Heard 'Round the World: Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Dreiser, and the Nobel Prize." The chapter traces both men's desire for the Nobel Prize for Literature, which Lewis was awarded in 1930, and the later conflict over accusations that Dreiser plagiarized material from one of Dorothy Thompson's books, *The New Russia*. This confrontation has been written about by a number of scholars, including Dreiser biographers Robert Elias and Richard Lingeman, as well as Lewis biographers Mark Schorer and Richard Lingeman. The description of the dinner at which Dreiser slapped Lewis after Lewis's accusation of plagiarism is well done and nicely contextualized. Unfortunately, Arthur relies on

—————The Art of the Literary Feud *continued on page 10*

commitment to the ideals of his profession tested by the cynicism and opportunism he encounters in private practice, public health work, and scientific research. The novel reaches its climax as its hero faces his greatest challenges amid a deadly outbreak of plague on a Caribbean island.

Elmer Gantry (1927) aroused intense controversy with its brutal depiction of a hypocritical preacher in relentless pursuit of worldly pleasure and power. Through his satiric exposé of American religion,

Lewis captured the growing cultural and political tension in the 1920s between the forces of secularism and fundamentalism.

Dodsworth (1929) follows Sam Dodsworth, a wealthy, retired Midwestern automobile manufacturer, as he travels through Europe with his increasingly restless wife, Fran. The novel intimately explores the unraveling of their marriage, while pitting the proud heritage of European culture against the rude vigor of American commercialism. ❧



Cover of Twentieth Century Interpretations of Arrowsmith.

being an epilogue that summarizes chapters 19 through the end of the original—roughly half of the book.

Even prior to

that point, a fair amount of abridgement has taken place.²

For example, a quote I like from an early point in the original is completely missing from the translation, although the previous and subsequent paragraphs are rendered faithfully:

It is not a snobbish rich-man's college, devoted to leisurely nonsense. It is the property of the people of the state, and what they want—or what they are told they want—is a mill to turn out men and women who will lead moral lives, play bridge, drive good cars, be enterprising in business, and occasionally mention books, though they are not expected to have time to read them. It is a Ford Motor Factory, and if its products rattle a little, they are beautifully standardized, with perfectly interchangeable parts. (6-7)

Perhaps that paragraph just didn't work for Japanese eyes and ears. Or maybe it was just not seen as

important enough to make the abridger's cut.

As with the above quotation, many of my favorites are missing from the book, since many of them would have been in the untranslated latter half. But other gems were translated, so let us proceed to see how they fared.

For example, I have long appreciated Lewis's take on truth, as found in the following:

In the study of the profession to which he had looked forward all his life he found irritation and vacuity as well as serene wisdom; he saw no one clear path to Truth but a thousand paths to a thousand truths far-off and doubtful. (8)

I translate the Japanese translation as follows:

Even as he studied medicine, the profession to which he intended to devote his life, Martin had not only gained serene knowledge, he had also retained a feeling of annoyance. What he could see was not just a single, clear path to truth. Rather, he saw floating thousands of indistinguishable vague and distant paths leading to thousands of truths. (Translation 36)

Beautiful though the original is, the act of translation forces the translator to ascribe an exact meaning or to be able to render the same generality in the target

Arrowsmith in Japanese continued on page 15

What on in Sinclair Lewis continued from page 5

Resnick that he must read this book (174)—and later one of Ann's friends gives her a copy of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) to read on her trip to England (251). Finally, Lewis tells us in *Bethel Merriday* that the previous summer the drama critic for the *New London Era* had praised Andrew Deacon's "robust characterization of *Ethan Frome*" (97). Opening in New York in 1936, the play version—featuring Raymond Massey as the crippled Ethan, Pauline Lord as his shrewish wife, and Ruth Gordon as cousin Mattie Silver—ran for 119 performances.

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 —. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.
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HEMINGWAY READ SOME LEWIS

Hilary Justice, a colleague at Illinois State University and a Hemingway scholar, was able to visit the Hemingway house in Cuba. She writes that Hemingway, despite his seeming dislike of Lewis, had the following books by Lewis in his library there:

From Main Street to Stockholm: The Letters of Sinclair Lewis, 1919–1950. Ed. Harrison Smith. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952.

Main Street. [No edition noted.]

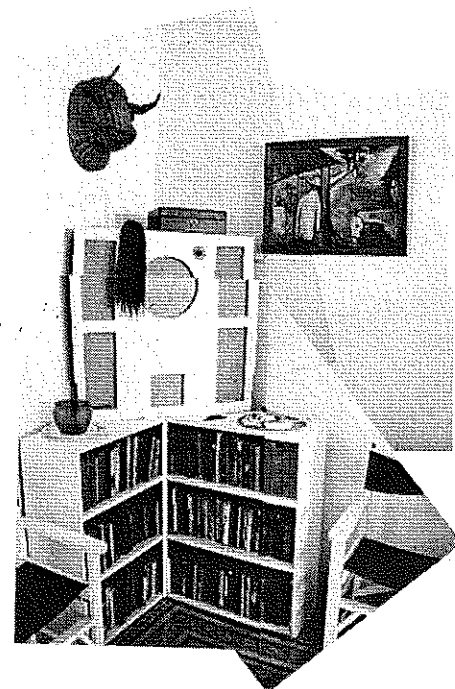
The Man from Main Street: A Sinclair Lewis Reader; Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904–1950. Ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. New York: Random House, 1953.

Justice writes:

Cuba is a strange place, and the Hemingway house stranger. If anyone would like to see what the house looks like inside, here's a URL: <http://hometown.aol.com/steinway1/finca.html>

The photos on the site are from my visit in 2000. We weren't allowed in the basement (where the papers are) either, but we were allowed inside the house. You may have to hit 'refresh' a few times to get the pictures to load; AOL is crotchety sometimes. The pages are under deconstruction because they're moving to www.hemingwaysociety.org.

The Cuban government in 2002 agreed to allow access to Ernest Hemingway's papers that were in the house outside Havana, where he lived for much of his later life. It was in this house, La Finca Vigia, where he wrote some of his most important works. Experts say these papers will greatly expand our knowledge of Hemingway's writing methods and ideas. The collection includes rifles, stuffed African game heads, 3,000 letters and documents, 3,000 photographs, and 9,000 books, many with his musings in the margins. One biographer, A. Scott Berg, called these a "CAT-scan of Hemingway's brain."



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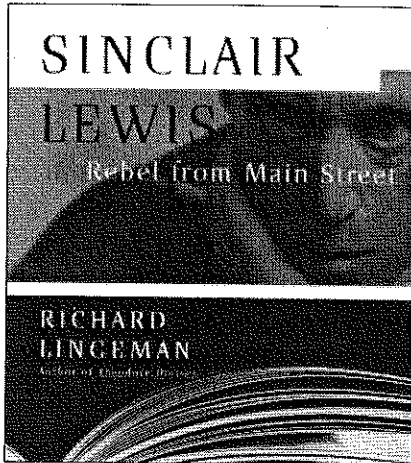
SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY TO SPONSOR ALA PANEL

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be sponsoring a fascinating panel at the American Literature Association Conference 2003 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the end of May. The panel's title is "Lewis, Lingeman, and Literary Biography."

The Chair of the session is Frederick Betz, president of the Sinclair Lewis Society, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. His introduction to the session is entitled "Behind the Biography: Lingeman's Way to Lewis."

The panelists and their papers are: Roger Forseth, University of Wisconsin-Superior, "Alcoholite at the Altar' Revisited: The Biographical Treatment of Sinclair Lewis's Drinking"; James M. Hutchisson, The Citadel, "The Marriage of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson"; and Todd Stanley, The Christopher Program-Ohio, "Sinclair Lewis Who? Why One of the Most Successful Authors of His Time is Not Easily Remembered in Today's Day and Age."

Responses to Sinclair Lewis continued from page 6



Cover of Sinclair Lewis:
Rebel from Main Street

Lewis has not been treated so well before. The only other full-scale biography is Mark Schorer's 867-page *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*, published in 1961. To his credit, Schorer investigated the subject exhaustively and amassed a mountain of facts. But he disliked

Lewis and wrote as if struggling to account for a national embarrassment. Burdened by masses of material and tortured assessments of Lewis's failings, a reader finishes Schorer's book not with the sense of having met an extraordinary human being but with the sense of having been stuck on a coast-to-coast bus ride with an unpleasant seatmate.

Not so with Lingeman's portrayal, which explains better the sources of Lewis's achievement. A highlight has to do with Lewis's will to work, one of his greatest strengths. Determined to make a living with his typewriter, he forced himself to write for the popular market, garnering handsome returns for *Saturday Evening Post* short stories from 1915 to 1920. With *Main Street* in 1920, he took the big risk of affronting popular taste and, rather than relaxing when this paid off, he plunged into another original project (*Babbitt*, 1922), then another (*Arrowsmith*, 1925), and still another (*Elmer Gantry*, 1927), not to mention lesser works for additional income. Each major novel required travel for research, and so Lewis, who was restless anyway, rarely stayed in one place longer than ten months.

As Lingeman shows, Lewis's near-heroic devotion to work had conflicting effects. It allowed him to generate several distinctive novels and brought wealth, but it also led to some second-rate fiction, which hurt his reputation, and it strained family life. In his final ten years, the discipline of writing helped keep him away

Responses to Sinclair Lewis continued on page 14

The American Literary Feuds continued from page 10

some Dreiser-Lewis letters of uncertain provenance that were published in *American Literary Realism* and possibly should have been discounted in making the argument. Lewis's forbearance in literally turning the other cheek when Dreiser slapped him has always amazed me. Although neither the Dreiser nor Thompson books on Russia are much more than historical curiosities now, this plagiarism made an already tense relationship between these two authors much worse.

The other chapter titles include: "Not Always a 'Pleasant Tussle': The Difficult Friendship of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov," "The Battle of the 'Two Cultures': C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis," "*Les Enfants Terribles*: Truman Capote and Gore Vidal," and "'Now There's a Play': Lillian Hellman and Mary McCarthy." There have been several plays with Lillian Hellman as a character, including *Cakewalk*, the PBS program *Lilly and Dash*, and the 2002 Broadway play *Imaginary Friends* (with Swoozie Kurtz as Hellman and Cherry Jones as McCarthy). "Not-So-Dry Bones: Tom Wolfe, John Updike, and the Perils of Literary Ambition" is the last chapter and a fitting one for Lewis

scholars since Tom Wolfe has said on a number of occasions how much he admires Lewis. In a 1989 *Harper's* article, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," Wolfe said that novelists who made a difference in their world, like Lewis, Charles Dickens, and Émile Zola, "assumed that the novelist had to go beyond his personal experience and head out into society as a reporter." Arthur notes that

not many writers' works and reputations survive for more than a generation or two. Many popular and influential masters of social realism such as Lewis, Dreiser, and John Dos Passos created more and better fiction than Wolfe has, and they are little read today.... Even in Dickens, Lewis, and Mark Twain, it's not their satire that makes them live but the efforts of their great characters, like David Copperfield, Carol Kennicott, and Huckleberry Finn, to make sense of their lives.

Literary Feuds is highly recommended for providing insight into why authors criticize each other, even when there seems to be no compelling aesthetic reason. ✍

ENLIGHTENED ON LEWIS

Dave Simpkins

Sauk Centre Herald Editor/Publisher

This article is reprinted with permission from the Sauk Centre Herald.

If you've ever wondered why we have a Sinclair Lewis Avenue, celebrate Sinclair Lewis Days, and cheer the Mainstreeters, you will want to read the new biography, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*, by Richard Lingeman.

Lingeman does a better job than any biographer before him in describing one very complicated person. I learned more of the significance of Lewis as a Nobel Prize winning author and national commentator, as well as more than I'd really care to know about a lonely, cynical man from this small town on the prairie.

Lingeman is sensitive and honest in his easy-to-read chronology of Lewis's incredible life.

ODD DUCK

Reading Lingeman, it sounds like Lewis was born on the wrong side of the bed. He was awkward, unappealing, and cynical from the start. His father was fond of asking him, "Why can't you be like the other boys?"

He lost his mother at an early age and suffered under his father's well-meaning but oppressive encouragement to settle in his hometown and live an upstanding life of a businessman or doctor. Instead, he withdrew into books and a career writing satirical books about his hometown, business, medicine, and religion.

The awkward, gangling, red-haired teenager knew he was going to be a writer. He sent off poems and story ideas to publishers while in high school under the name H. Sinclayre Lewis. One summer he went around town interviewing people with the idea of writing a book. It is believed he sold story ideas to Jack London.

We're proud to say Lewis was first published in the *Sauk Centre Herald*, reporting on commencement ceremonies. The summer before he left for college, he went around town interviewing locals. He used his newspaper job to gather notes and character sketches for future novels.

NEVER LEFT TOWN

Lewis never really left Sauk Centre, and Sauk Centre never really left him. It has been 100 years since he left town at the age of 17, and people are still linking him with his hometown.

While hobnobbing with the cads at Yale or the high society of New York's publishing circles and Hollywood's acting world, he still came off as a small town guy. H. L. Mencken said he was a hick and a genius, never really leaving his rural roots even though he partied with the likes of Lord and Lady Astor.

"I have heard them for 17 years and love them. They make me feel that the world and its riches are not worth a sliver of home and its surroundings," wrote Lewis in his diary about the church bells he would miss once he left home.

SAVVY WRITER

After Yale, Lewis bounced around working for newspapers and publishing houses, learning just what kind of stories sell. He teamed up with a young publisher named Alf Harcourt. Lewis would become an early investor in Harcourt and Brace, which became one of the largest publishing houses in the nation.

Lewis's imagination was legendary. He could spin out story lines like the Beatles spun songs. He began writing short fiction for the *Saturday Evening Post*. This was the popular magazine with all those beautiful Norman Rockwell paintings on the cover. These stories gave him celebrity status and enough money to live well in rented mansions and travel often with his first wife Gracie.

He had some real foresight into what would become the movie industry, because he told Harcourt to give him the movie rights to his books rather than an advance.

Lewis didn't want to write sweet little magazine articles all this life. He wanted to make a statement, and that he did with three controversial novels: *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*. While all his books had important things to say to the people of the roaring

Enlightened on Lewis continued on page 14

Interview with Richard Lingeman *continued from page 4*

a lot of contemporary Minnesota folk; three biographies of Dorothy Thompson, plus all the material in her papers and diaries at Syracuse (including accounts of her lesbian affairs, which Schorer did not touch, though it might just have had a passing effect on the marriage).

3. How has your attitude about Lewis as both a person and an author changed as you've done your research on him? I remember that after Schorer finished his biography, he seemed to have developed an incredible dislike for Lewis (although that never stopped him from writing on him at every given opportunity).

Speaking of Dorothy, I have a theory that Schorer reflected her vision of Lewis and may have, in a kind of twisted gallantry, seen Lewis as a cad and avenged her honor, so to speak. As for me, my appreciation of him deepened, though I can cite the litany of his well-known faults. But I think of the good side, the generosity, the feverish brilliance, the humor and spontaneity. As he matured (much delayed) and while he was on the wagon, he was more mellow than in his "famooser" years, a more emotionally generous human being at this time. (His letters to Wells Lewis, at the Harry Ransom Research center with Grace's papers, are touching.) Marcella Powers had much to do with his improved mood (see his letters to her, from which I didn't quote enough). So it was a severe blow when she left him—though she couldn't have done otherwise at her age—and his life started spiraling downward without her.

4. Although most of the critical attention has been paid to Lewis's big five novels, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*, you indicate that there are others that also have much to offer the reader and critic. Are there any novels, pre- or post-1920s, to which you think more critical attention ought to be paid? Are there any of Lewis's novels that are not currently in print that you think ought to be?

I think *The Job* has obvious relevance to women's lives today, though it is probably seen as a portrait of a much, much older sister. *Ann Vickers* would appeal to the same constituency, though it doesn't hold up very well as a novel in my opinion. *It Can't Happen Here* has an eternal relevance to what I might call the recurring fascist tendencies in American life. *Kingsblood Royal* is a searing historical pamphlet, and I was very

gratified to see Brent Staples praise it in the *New York Times* as still true today.

5. What is your favorite Lewis novel and why? (I'm curious to see if you respond differently than you did when you were at work on the biography.) Is this the one that you would recommend to a first-time reader of Lewis to start with?

Babbitt is still my favorite. It achieves such a deft balance between realism and satire. It is funny in places. It evokes, with accuracy and hardly a whiff of didacticism, the politics and power and the social anatomy of a typical American city, as well as the leading institutions, such as business and religion, and the booming Chamber of Commerce and the competitiveness, and the petty corruption, and the power structure—the real rulers who pull the strings behind the scenes. And Lewis limns a brilliant, almost tactile, and surreal portrait of the central character's environment, the "thingification" of his life, the tinny gadgets, consumerism, advertising, and PR that oppress him. I sometimes wonder if T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* influenced him. Has America changed that much since 1922?

6. If you could have access to any of the people who you write about in your biography, who would you like to talk to? (Schorer had much access to Dorothy Thompson, which on the one hand was a good thing, but, on the other hand, I think colored his interpretation of Lewis's later life.)

Well, you're correct about Thompson (see #2 above). I would have very much liked to have talked to Alfred Harcourt and learned more about the estrangement between him and Lewis, though I think I offered some good theories. H.L. Mencken's diaries and his memoir *My Life as Author and Editor* (another post-Schorer source) are pretty revealing, though handle with care, but I'd love to have interviewed him. But then I'd love to interview Mencken on general principles. Also Carl Van Doren, his oldest friend. All men, I see, so I'd add Marcella Powers. (I contacted her daughter by her second husband and was ready to interview her out in New Mexico, but she suddenly refused to talk to me. Why, I don't know.) Though I should say, judging from Mark Schorer's letters at Berkeley, he found the three main women in Lewis's life quite a handful—used to have nightmares about them! *Cherchez la femme!* Think of all the novels Lewis's wives inspired! He got as good as he gave. ✍

Lewis Catches Flivver Fever *continued from page 2*

Enter Red Lewis, the famous writer of short stories—now called Sinclair Lewis—who was published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, along with drawings by Norman Rockwell. While Lewis's later books may have been dry and satirical, his short stories were light, humorous, and romantic.

The May 4 issue of the *Herald* reported, "Famed Writer Visits Here."

Lewis had written three popular novels. He wanted to spend the summer finishing his fourth novel, *The Job*, do some research for ideas he had of a novel on small town life, and introduce his wife Gracie to the people and places where he grew up.

Red and Gracie arrived by train, expecting to spend a quiet couple of months away from the fast paced life on the East Coast.

Their evenings were very normal. Gracie and Dr. E.J. Lewis would play cribbage, Isabel would sew, and Red would read. Occasionally, Red would be asked to speak before a service group. The two would go for long walks, visiting with people and visiting the places where he played as a boy.

As Lewis moved around town, he caught "Flivver Fever" and decided to buy a car of his own.

He purchased a Ford Model T, which was called Henry's Flivver after Henry Ford.

It took Lewis several days to learn how to drive this horseless carriage. First, the crank snapped back at him and nearly broke his arm. Afraid of damaging his writing hand, he installed an electric starter. He also learned to do the mechanical chores of adjusting the carburetor, repairing tires, and cooling down the engine once it overheated.

Once he mastered his new automobile, he was hooked. He and Gracie motored out to visit farmers and the patients he helped his father attend to when he was a boy.

Soon his nights were filled with plans of turning the flivver into a camper. He began planning a cross-country trip from Sauk Centre to California across the wild prairies that had few roads.

Lewis designed the tent, and Gracie sewed it together using the local shoemaker's sewing machine. They would fold it out of the back seat to cover sleeping cots and [the] folding kitchen table and chairs. Gracie later wrote, "Our tent-covered Ford looked like a pocket handkerchief dropped on the vast hill-scalloped plain."

Lewis equipped the camper with an ax, rifle, canned goods, extra gasoline, spare inner-tubes, lantern, bird book, and camera.

Gracie wore a khaki riding habit with a knee-length coat and short divided skirt.

They tested their gypsy car on an overnight stay at Fairy Lake, then a weekend at Itasca State park, and a couple weeks in Duluth and the North Shore.

On their visit to Duluth, Gracie, in her travel outfit, was mistaken for the labor organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and taken into police headquarters for questioning.

Finally, they set off across North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and California.

Besides the usual tire problems and overheating, the car did very well, and the couple had the time of their lives.

Lewis wrote about the trip, "Motoring is the real test of marriage. After a week of it you either stop and get a divorce, or else, free from telephone calls and neighbors and dressing for dinner, slipping past fields blue with flax and ringing with meadow larks in the fresh morning, you discover again the girl you used to know."

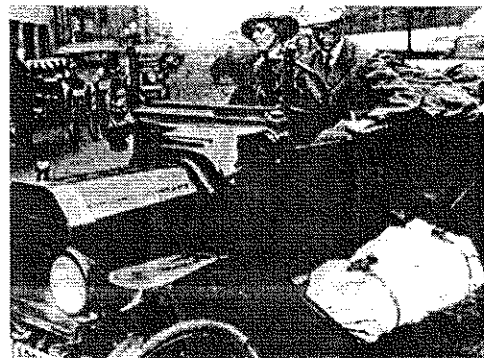
Despite Gracie's British/New York roots, she took very well to life on the road.

Gracie later wrote this trip was the highlight of their marriage. When they reached California, she discovered she was pregnant.

They sold the flivver and traveled to Washington, D.C. to settle down and begin writing *Main Street*.

But Lewis never really settled down. For the rest of his life, he wanted to travel more, never staying in one place more than a few months. This cost him two marriages and any sense of peace.

He returned to live in Minnesota in 1942. For a week, he retraced the first leg of the trip he and Gracie took 26 years earlier, writing in his journal how much things had changed in that time. ❧



Sinclair Lewis and Grace Heggarr. Image courtesy of the Sauk Centre Herald.

Enlightened on Lewis *continued from page 11*

twenties, they also sold like hot cakes. *Main Street* was the biggest selling book of its time.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

I've always questioned Lewis's liberal politics. Today, he'd be called a limousine liberal. A rich man concerned about the poor and downtrodden, but he didn't spend much time with those folks. Instead, he spent his time with the rich and famous, like himself.

There are many reports of his generosity. He was always helping some struggling writer or farmer. He inherited land in North Dakota and ended up building the renters a new home with all the luxuries of the city.

He wanted to write a great labor novel but couldn't get too close to labor leaders. I figure he had a tough time with people so strongly committed to an ideal that they couldn't see any other point of view. He felt the same way with religion and pointed that out in *Elmer Gantry*.

Lewis's dislike for power politics may have been one reason he didn't get along with his second wife Dorothy Thompson, a leading political reporter and commentator of the 1930s and '40s.

PARTY ANIMAL

Lewis could be the life or death of a party. Whenever he and his wife went, a party was soon to follow. They loved having people over for dinner and conver-

sation. Lewis would do research on his guests so he could discuss or debate about their field of work. He would recite dramatic poems with his guests in the stanza or imitate great writers and national personalities.

Eventually, his partying and drinking would get the best of him. He went from being fun at parties to being dangerous. While working on a lake near Brainard, he punched out some guy critical of his books.

FAMILY AND NATION

Lewis died a sad and lonely man. He had separated himself from friends and family, and his writing abilities dried up. His relationships with his wives, sons, and father were sad at best. He died without family or friends around him.

While Lewis could be charming, entertaining, and brilliant, he was driven by some ideal of perfection that even he couldn't live up to.

He looked at America the same way. He loved his country, but he didn't like it. He wanted us to be a far greater nation. He wanted Americans to have culture, grace, and generosity.

Lingeman's biography does a good job of outlining this complicated life and presenting a case for Lewis's importance as an American author and man worthy of a festival. While he wasn't a warm and fuzzy storyteller, he did manage to draw our attention to what is important. ❧

from drink, gave him the chance to add new themes to his observations on America, and earned him a lot of money. It may even have prolonged his life, but because writing had supplanted most other things of value, he had little else to hold on to at the end.

Equally revealing and sometimes equally poignant is the way the new biography accounts for other ironies in Lewis's life—his desire for a home *versus* his inability to settle in one place, his scorn for organized religion *versus* his search for spiritual value, his admiration of socialism *versus* his admiration of entrepreneurial success, his role as a wise-cracking prankster *versus* his earnest desire to find truth. These contradictions underlie Lingeman's captivating portrait of Lewis as a character and help explain why Lewis could write fiction with a complex point of view.

The new biography reads quickly. It has tight chapters. It elucidates Lewis's connection to his historical context and explains his economic and political learnings. It draws on the best scholarship in its criticism of the novels, and it makes good use of archival material, especially the George Lorimer-Sinclair Lewis correspondence acquired in 1995 by the Minnesota Historical Society. Although the earlier biography by Mark Schorer, with its myriad facts, will still receive attention from scholars, Lingeman's book is unquestionably the new standard. It makes sense of Lewis, and it tells a better story.

Reviewed by George Killough, professor of English at the College of St. Scholastica, former president of the Sinclair Lewis Society, and editor of Sinclair Lewis's Minnesota Diary 1942-46 (2000). ❧

Arrowsmith in Japanese continued from page 8

language. This is sometimes very difficult to do. In my own translation, I struggled with the phrase I finally rendered as “feeling of annoyance.” Even knowing that this phrase started life as “irritation and vacuity,” or perhaps partly due to that knowledge, it was difficult to find just the right English words to represent the Japanese expression. I like this quote because I understand the feeling, but putting that feeling into precise language is difficult. And even the best written description will still only resonate with those who have felt it.

Besides occasional work as a translator, I am a practicing engineer and researcher. From that point of view, I find Gottlieb’s following advice quite appropriate, especially since I also share his joy regarding those who do not follow it:

“Gentlemen, the most important part of living is not the living but pondering upon it. And the most important part of experimentation is not doing the experiment but making notes, ve-ry accurate *quantitative* notes—in ink. I am told that a great many clever people feel they can keep notes in their heads. I have often observed with pleasure that such persons do not have heads in which to keep their notes. This iss very good, because thus the world never sees their results and science is not encumbered with them.” (34)

In the translation, this becomes:

“Everyone, the most important aspect of life is not the living, but deep thought about life. Similarly, the most important aspect of experimentation is not the experiments, but the taking of notes—the taking of accurate, copious notes, in ink.

“Speaking from experience, it would appear that many wise people think they can retain everything in their heads. I have joyfully witnessed many cases where such people did not have brains capable of such retention. This is splendid indeed, because the world will not have to see their results, and because science will not have to endure their interference.” (Translation 61–62)

This quote in particular I find to be a very nice Japanese rendering of Lewis. It is interesting, however, that Gottlieb’s accent does not come through at all. In fact, I am unsure how one would do that in Japanese. Instead, the translator gives him the very proper language of a professor and, perhaps, makes him a bit more polite than one might expect a Japanese professor to be when addressing his students.

Although the language that made it through abridgement is quite nicely translated, the above excerpts are the only ones of my pre-collected quotes that exist in this translation. Therefore, I find myself disappointed that the book was so drastically abridged, but pleased with the quality of the translation. Perhaps someday this translator, or another good one, will make all of *Arrowsmith* available for Japanese readers.³

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Notes

- ¹ See <http://www.lilt.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/arrowsmith.html>.
² Japanese translations often use more pages than the English original, and many novels are published in two to three volumes.
³ I assume that there was a contemporary Japanese translation, but I have not been able to find a copy. *Main Street* was translated, but that is also unavailable currently. Besides this new translation of *Arrowsmith*, there is also a collection of Lewis’s short stories currently available in Japanese. ∞

BIOGRAPHY MAKES NOTABLE BOOK LISTS

Congratulations to Richard Lingeman. The *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Chicago Tribune* all named his biography, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel From Main Street*, as a notable book of the year. The *Times* says, “A biography of Lewis (1885–1951), America’s first Nobel laureate in literature (1930), whose once immense reputation has suffered an undeserved posthumous decline” (*New York Times Book Review* 8 Dec. 2002: 70). The *Monitor* states, “A major reinterpretation of the life of a writer who helped chart America’s literary and political path for more than three decades.” The *Tribune* notes, “Richard Lingeman, senior editor at *The Nation*, takes a fresh look at one of America’s foremost satirists” (8 Dec. 2002, sec. 14: 3).

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

LEWIS BOYHOOD HOME TO BE SPRUCED UP FOR SPRING



Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home

“beautiful,” and has sent a picture to show it off. The Foundation’s board has decided to move on to exterior repairs, including siding, windows, and the front porch, as well as painting both the interior and exterior. They hope to have all these accomplished before the house opens in May.

INSPECTED AND DISSECTED

Dave Simpkins

Sauk Centre Herald Editor/Publisher

This article is reprinted with permission from the Sauk Centre Herald.

Ollie Klienschmidt, drinking coffee at the counter of the Main Street Café, made the cover of a national magazine.

Jody Olson was caught cutting the hair of an uncooperative three-year-old.

And Ivy Hildebrand got a chance to pontificate in the March/April edition of *Preservation Magazine*, operated by the National Trust For Historic Places. About twice a year, Sauk Centre gets inspected, dissected, and introspected by the national media.

Ever since Red Lewis wrote *Main Street*, with all its hypocrisies, cruelties, well-nourished prejudices, and cultural bleakness, people have been coming to Sauk Centre to see what he meant.

They come looking for the high and mighty Carol

Kennicott, the greedy George Babbitt, or the huckster preacher Elmer Gantry.

We’ve been featured in thousands of magazine and newspaper articles from the *Washington Post* to the *Tokyo Herald*, as well as news features on CBS, BBC, and CNN.

These writers thrive on gossip more than the little biddies peering through window curtains in Lewis’s book.

Our most recent exposure was part of a feature section called “American Places” and an article entitled “This Side of Main Street” by Adam Goodheart, a freelance travel writer, and Richard Olsenius, a freelance photographer.

Goodheart’s piece is much gentler than most. He notes that Lewis’s fierce indictment of small-town life attracted him to see if the town was any different today, and he found more than he bargained for.

He says walking down our Original Main Street was like walking through a living museum of houses and storefronts of America’s distant past.

Small towns with real Main Streets are rare today. Strip malls and corporate, big, box stores are rapidly replacing individually owned downtown businesses. If Lewis did anything for his Sauk Centre, it was to put it into the national landscape as a metaphor for that American place called “my hometown”—good, bad, or ugly.

Goodheart and Olsenius were here in December asking all those old questions. What is Main Street like today? What do the people think of Sinclair Lewis?

Goodheart, a seasoned twenty-something, Harvard-educated writer, was surprised by the brightness of our dusty little prairie town. He was impressed by the casual, friendly nature of the people.

“Sauk Centre seems as exotic at first glance to me, as an East Coast urbanite, as any Moroccan casbah or Mongolian yurt,” says the diplomatic Goodheart.

But he could see Gopher Prairie is still here.

Sauk Centre, Goodheart reports, is much the same as it was when Lewis was here. The population is about the same, the churches and the library are the same, downtown has many of the same buildings, and people still farm, hunt, and fish.

In the five days he was here, he visited the who’s who and what’s what of Sauk Centre. He took in burger

night at the VFW, caught a hockey game, went to the movies, toured the home school, and accepted a couple dinner invitations.

He talked with 94-year-old Ivy Hildebrand, who read *Main Street* when it was first published. She told him Sauk Centre was a nice place to grow old.

He found Dave Jacobson “the closest thing to a modern day Lewis, a romantic rebel against the present, an avid environmentalist. Like Lewis, he understands that in order to create, it is also often necessary to destroy.”

He visited a high school classroom to learn *Main Street* isn’t taught in Sauk Centre and few students really know who Sinclair Lewis was. From Goodheart’s account, it sounds like they are more interested in attending parties in wooded shacks than in reading literature.

Goodheart, who has traveled the world for Condé Nast, *Traveler*, *Outside*, *GQ*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New York Times* found some interesting comparisons.

“Its café culture, for one thing, would almost rival that of Paris or Prague. Stop by any morning at the Main Street Café, or the Ding-Dong and you will find the kind of easy comradeship, the conversation amid coffee fumes and the smell of buttered toast, that is now only a distant memory in most of America,” wrote Goodheart.

Unlike many cynical national reporters we’ve seen, Goodheart was friendly and easy to talk to.

“I arrived in Sauk Centre three days ago without knowing a soul, and already I’m getting bombarded with kindness, besieged with invitations: supper, holiday parties, a school play and seen some petty cruelties as well.”

He says he found himself wanting badly to be liked by all these Daves and Bobs and to shelter them from any inconvenient facts about himself that might get in the way—that he’s a liberal, gay, and a Jew.

“Suddenly, I can’t wait to escape. The novel’s presence is too pervasive here; I’d arrived wondering if I’d find any traces at all, and now it is overpowering,” wrote Goodheart.

On the way back east, Goodheart notices so much of what brought Lewis’s book alive throughout the nation.

Ironically, he learns while reading the latest biography on Lewis by Richard Lingeman that *Main Street* was written while Lewis lived in Washington, D.C., a block from where Goodheart lives.

“Sinclair Lewis lives here, too,” wrote Goodheart.

Goodheart learned what many of us know.

Lewis used his hometown to depict the shortcomings of a great nation in the making, hoping it would do

better.

A message that needs to be preached to every generation.

LEIF ENGER SHARES STORIES AT WRITER’S CONFERENCE

Dave Simpkins

Sauk Centre Herald *Editor/Publisher*

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Leif Enger’s best-selling novel, *Peace Like a River*, begins with a stunning scene of a doctor setting a baby boy aside on a steel table to die because his lungs weren’t working.



Leif Enger with his wife, Robin, and his parents, Don and Wilma. Image courtesy of the Sauk Centre Herald.

The boy’s father breaks in, knocking the doctor down, wraps the baby in his coat, and yells, “Breathe!” The baby started breathing and the story begins.

Enger found this story in a collection of rich family stories. His family loved telling stories while he grew up in Osakis. The baby story was the story of his mother’s birth.

Many of Enger’s stories come from family experiences.

“Yeah, and the goose hunting stories, they are all true. We went hunting in North Dakota every year,” said Enger’s father, Don, a retired Osakis High School band teacher.

While the murder may not be a family story, it and many other stories and miracles in the book come from Enger’s strong interest in reading, his experiences as a reporter for Minnesota Public Radio, and his Christian tradition.

Leif Enger spoke before the Sinclair Lewis Writer’s Conference, Saturday [Oct. 12, 2002]. His parents and wife Robin were along to share their stories.

The Enger children grew up in a household of stories. Their mother, a former country school teacher, read

them stories from Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain.

"The children would want to act out the stories, so I would make them costumes and they would play and play," remembers Wilma Enger.

The novel is a gripping story of a murder and how the family works through the crisis. It is also a novel of faith, miracles, and cowboy poems.

"Leif has always been interested in just about everything, and everything he is interested in seems to find a way into his stories," said his father.

The 41-year-old Enger grew up in Osakis, graduated from Osakis High School and Moorhead State University, and worked as a reporter for Minnesota Public Radio.

He and his brother Lin, a professor at Moorhead

ATWOOD WRITES A "LETTER TO AMERICA"

Margaret Atwood wrote "Letter to America" for the *Toronto Globe & Mail* (March 28, 2003, A17), an essay that also appears in *The Nation*. She starts:

Dear America:

This is a difficult letter to write, because I'm no longer sure who you are.

Some of you may be having the same trouble. I thought I knew you: We'd become well acquainted over the past 55 years. You were the Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck comic books I read in the late 1940s. You were the radio shows—Jack Benny, Our Miss Brooks. You were the music I sang and danced to: the Andrews Sisters, Ella Fitzgerald, the Platters, Elvis. You were a ton of fun.

You wrote some of my favourite books. You created Huckleberry Finn, and Hawkeye, and Beth and Jo in *Little Women*, courageous in their different ways. Later, you were my beloved Thoreau, father of environmentalism, witness to individual conscience; and Walt Whitman, singer of the great Republic; and Emily Dickinson, keeper of the private soul. You were Hammett and Chandler, heroic walkers of mean streets; even later, you were the amazing trio, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, who traced the dark labyrinths of your hidden heart. You were Sinclair Lewis and Arthur Miller, who, with their own American idealism went after the sham in you, because they thought you could do better.

The entire essay is very powerful and can be accessed at <http://www.arena.org.nz/iraqwc67.htm>

State, wrote a series of five mystery novels, but mystery just wasn't Enger's niche.

"I wanted to write something that had more meaning. I really didn't think of this book being a seller, I wrote as much for my family."

Enger thanks two Osakis teachers for encouraging his writing, Loraine Johnson and Karen Sinotte. Having a poem published in a *Jack 'n' Jill* magazine gave him a boost of confidence.

"You know, I don't really think the teachers encouraged me so much because my writing was good, but more because I was the only kid to turn in anything extra," remembered Enger.

Enger offered the audience of about 100 writers a list of suggestions to improve their writing:

- Believe you have something to say.
- Take joy in your writing and your characters.
- Read widely.
- Write about what you know and love.
- Fill your stories with the things you love and take interest in.
- Love your characters.
- Read work out loud to people important to you.
- Get disciplined.

Today Enger lives with his wife and two sons, Ty, 14, and John, 10. Ty has asthma, much like the main character in his book, so the Engers home school at their home in Aiken County.

Enger is keeping the family story tradition alive. He reads his stories to his family and they help him with names and constructive criticism.

Since becoming a best-selling author, Enger travels across the country for book signings and lectures. He made an arrangement with his publisher to drive rather than fly to his appearances.

The publisher rented a sport utility van and the family went on the road visiting 25 cities over 10,000 miles in 31 days on one trip.

"The boys loved it, but it was very fatiguing to drive seven hours and then perform at night."

Leif said he read some Sinclair Lewis in high school but wasn't a fan. "I found Lewis a bit grim and unforgiving, but I may have to give him another try."

Between appearances, he is trying to write his next novel. It is coming together as a tale of a former train robber before World War I coming to terms with his past. Enger says it will be filled with adventure and reconciliation.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

In *MidAmerica XXVII* (2000: 11-20), the yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, Kenneth B. Grant brings to light some interesting biographical information about Mark Schorer and August Derleth and muses on the impact their relationship had on Schorer's biography of Lewis. "Novelists and Biographers: The Sinclair Lewis, August Derleth, and Mark Schorer Triangle" was published last year and won the Midwest Heritage Prize for scholarly essay. Grant writes that Lewis had met Derleth and spoke highly of his writing. Although Lewis knew of Schorer's fiction as well, he apparently found it cold and unsympathetic. Derleth and Schorer grew up in the same city, Sauk City, Wisconsin, and, although from different social classes, became friends and probably lovers. They co-wrote some stories for *Weird Tales*, attended the University of Wisconsin together, and eventually went their separate ways, partially because of Schorer's drinking and increasing coldness toward Derleth. Grant also found evidence that Schorer had "borrowed" some of Derleth's writing and passed it off as his own. "Derleth felt Schorer lacked self-understanding just as Schorer felt Lewis did... [T]he Lewis biography becomes simultaneously a shadow Schorer autobiography, and the created image of the subject mysteriously assumes the raiment of the writer. The lack of charity, the inclination to focus on the petty, the failed human relationships—much of what we wince at while reading *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*—have all passed through the distorting filter of the personality of the biographer."

—SLSN—

George Will, in a recent syndicated column, "About Schmidt Offers Haunting Look at Meaning of Regret" (Bloomington, IL *Pantagraph* 16 Jan. 2003: A9 and Duluth *New Tribune* 16 Jan. 2003: 11A), connects this recent movie to *Babbitt*, quoting several passages from the beginning of the novel. Will discusses other Midwestern authors as well, including Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Evan Connell, and the culture of regret. "But whereas Fitzgerald came East to be exhilarated by Princeton and the 1920s, and kept moving east, to Europe, Lewis was unhappy at Yale and looked

back in anger at the Midwest. His curdled spirit considered that region unforgivably middling—no longer a heroic frontier, never likely to become more than (as another young Midwesterner, Ernest Hemingway, called his native Oak Park in Illinois) a place of 'broad lawns and narrow minds.'" In concluding, Will compares Babbitt to Willy Loman for never doing anything in life that he wants. "However, a haunting sense of regret about time wasted is a timeless theme of literature. Timeless, and placeless. It is the human condition, not a Midwestern affliction."

—SLSN—

A.O. Scott also noted connections between *About Schmidt* and Lewis. In "That Mythic American Hero: The Regular Guy" (*New York Times Arts and Leisure* 8 Dec. 2002, sec. 2: 1+) he writes of some of the differences between the movie and the novel. "Schmidt has migrated from the Ivy League, Episcopal world of Louis Auchincloss (and behind him, Henry James) into the broad Rotarian heartland of Sinclair Lewis." Schmidt is also compared to characters by Arthur Miller, Clifford Odets, and John Updike. "This mythic figure is with us—he is us—in bad times and good. In 1922, the same year that James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, turned an ordinary Dubliner named Leopold Bloom into a mythic hero, Sinclair Lewis introduced George Babbitt, an Ohio [*sic*] real estate salesman whose name quickly entered the vernacular. The American Heritage dictionary defines a Babbitt as 'a member of the middle class whose attachment to its business and social ideals is such as to make that person a model of narrow-mindedness and self-satisfaction.' But the original Babbitt is, by the novel's end, a victim as well as an embodiment of the cautiousness and conformity that surrounds him. He is unable to escape his family, his town and his fraternal association even as he is dimly aware of deeper meanings and higher values beyond their ken.

"Babbitt carries out his failed revolt—and Lewis advanced his enormously successful critique—in the name of individualism. In *Babbitt*, the regimentation of small town civic life, the tyranny of consumerism and the passionless routines of marriage all conspire to stul-

=tify every creative, rebellious or original impulse. 'I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life!' Babbitt tells his son, Ted, at the novel's end. 'I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods.' Perhaps the son, who forsakes college to pursue his dream of being an inventor, will redeem his father's compromised existence. 'Well,' Babbitt continues, 'maybe you'll carry things on further. I don't know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil!'

"These words are moving but also strangely self-canceling. Even as he rails against the oppressive power of 'those folks' and everything they stand for, Babbitt remains, to the last, one of them. His energetic dissent is, in some ways, a restatement of their governing values. If the ideologies of American business and consumerism can be imagined as the slow poison that asphyxiates our fantasies of heroic self-fulfillment, they can also—if anything, more plausibly—be viewed as the oxygen that feeds such vague, vain dreams as George and Teddy Babbitt's. If towns like the fictitious Zenith, Ohio [sic], were, in the decades from the end of the Civil War to the start of the cold war, graveyards of ambition, they were also its seedbeds, spawning more than their share of architects, industrialists, philosophers, and, not incidentally, novelists like Fitzgerald and Lewis.

"The broad concept of Babbitt— the idea that the average American lives in a benighted, blinkered spiritual state—has been both popular and durable. Lewis's novel was an immediate best seller, on a scale that suggests that many of its potential targets must also have been readers. With some important alterations in political tone, and moral attitude, Lewis's central idea, like the name of his hero, has survived depression, war, the rise of the suburbs, the revolt of the cities, feminism, the sexual revolution, the counterculture, multiculturalism and the Internet. The 1930s added a dimension of economic desperation and political radicalism to the literary plight of the average American, who began to speak in urban accents that reflected, at least implicitly, backgrounds more exotic than Babbitt's native-born Protestantism."

The article continues with a discussion of the "common man" in politics and popular culture, ranging from *Marty*, *Death of a Salesman*, and Ralph

Cramden of *The Honeymooners* through *Frankie and Johnny*, Archie Bunker, Homer Simpson, *Roseanne*, and Hank Hill. Often the most loyal audiences for these representations have been the people who are targeted by the art, suggesting, "self-criticism may be a major American pastime."

—SLSN—

In "The Obsolescence of the American Intellectual," a recent article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (4 Oct. 2002), John Lukacs discusses the notion of the intellectual, in both European and American culture. He writes, "By about 1910, intellectuals were found in many American places. What were their main characteristics? They were men and women who were less provincial, more bookish, generally more liberal, and more progressive than were most of their neighbors.... What intellectuals resented was the shallow sentimentality of the opinions and beliefs of the majority. It was thus that they identified themselves as constituting a minority. That self-identification ranged from intellectual snobbery, from the social ambition to be recognized as belonging to a certain class of people, to small personal tragedies of loneliness. A classic case of the last was that of Carol Kennicott in Sinclair Lewis's 1920 *Main Street*. There had been a few earlier American novels describing intellectuals; but by 1920 a personality of someone like Carol Kennicott, lonely in the intellectual desert of Gopher Prairie, had become generally, if not universally, recognizable. She had better tastes, judgments, opinions than had her neighbors. She was what the German language still describes as a Kulturträgerin, a bearer of culture (of culture, rather than civilization: yes, there is a problem there...); she was more—something else—than an 'educated citizen.'"

—SLSN—

Some reviews of the new biography of H.L. Mencken, *The Skeptic: A Life of H.L. Mencken* (HarperCollins, 2002) by Terry Teachout, have included mentions of Sinclair Lewis, since Mencken was so influential at the start of Lewis's career as a novelist. Joan Acocella, in the *New Yorker* (2 Dec. 2002: 130-35), notes "He was the reviewer who first brought Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis to national attention" (132). Mencken's writing on the "boobus americanus," "the average American, ignorant, righteous, credulous, ready to follow any rabble-rouser who

came along and yelled at him long enough” was fleshed out to a certain extent in Lewis’s literary creation George F. Babbitt. Alfred Kazin wrote, “Every Babbitt read him [Mencken] gleefully and pronounced his neighbor a Babbitt.” Mencken had such a low opinion of the average American that “The general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honor is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practices the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head.”

————— SLSN —————

Barnaby Conrad, Sinclair Lewis’s secretary in 1947 and a novelist of note, chaired the 13th annual *Santa Barbara News-Press* Writing Contest. Held in June 2002 in conjunction with the 30th Santa Barbara Writers’ Conference, June 21-28, at Westmont College, the first-place winner received a \$400 student scholarship to a weeklong literary retreat of workshops and guest speakers, including the legendary Ray Bradbury.

For an article called “Get Shorty—With the 13th Annual Writing Contest” (16 May 2002), Charlotte Boechler of the *Santa Barbara News-Press* interviewed Barnaby Conrad. “‘They’re damn lucky to get it,’ said Conrad, co-director of the conference, with a chuckle. ‘It’s the most prestigious writer’s conference, possibly, in America. Julia Child, for those people who are trying to write a cookbook, will give a speech,’ explained Mr. Conrad. ‘Marta Kauffman, who writes *Friends*, which is one of the most popular TV series, (is) gonna be interviewed.’”

Last year’s winner, Jack Foster, recounted the birth of the notorious Charles Manson, who was described as a healthy baby.

Among the rules were:

- For contest purposes, a story contains four elements: setting, character(s), conflict, and resolution.
- All subjects are fair game, but stories must be fiction and can’t exceed 55 words.
- Hyphenated words are not counted as one word. For example, “long-winded story” is three words.
- Story title isn’t included in word count.
- Contractions, initials, and acronyms count as single words.
- Numerals, such as 55, count as one word.
- Any punctuation is allowed, and it doesn’t count as words.

————— SLSN —————

Tom Raynor writes that in *Generation of Vipers*, by Philip Wylie (reprinted by Dalkey Archive Press in 1996 [<http://www.centerforbookculture.org/dalkey/backlist/wylie.html>]), Dorothy Thompson is strongly criticized. It’s a highly opinionated conservative tract that went through 40 printings in 1942. Wylie writes:

“Dorothy Thompson, [is] one of the great she-sachs of the intellectuals. She has the virtue of being exceedingly earnest. She has had several sound, workable ideas, mostly of a retributive nature. She has the additional nuance of knowing always, in a superficial way, what she is talking about... But she has the handicap, like any average product of modern educational methods, of not knowing *why* she talks about anything at all, or why anybody does what anybody does. She can answer the routine questions of who, where, what, when, and how. But when you ask why, she talks gibberish...”

He excerpts another of her quotes: “‘The three main props of Western civilization,’ writes this precious example of what I’m discussing, [are] ‘Christianity, Rationality, and Organized Law.’ There, forsooth is the little red schoolhouse talking! If these are, in truth, the props of Western society, then Western society is done for. They *could* be. They aren’t.”

Raynor notes, “I suppose it’s statements like this that contribute to charges of anti-Semitism that’ve been leveled against her, but she certainly wasn’t the only prominent and respected opinion leader of the period who didn’t use the phrase Judeo-Christian tradition in analyzing Western culture. (Perhaps it’s because she assumed that the Christian tradition incorporated the Judeo tradition.)” Thompson did receive a commendation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which has a strong, positive statement about Thompson on its home page.

————— SLSN —————

Aurelia C. Scott writes in the *New York Times* about a trip she and her husband took across the southern part of Kansas. In “Small Kansas Towns with a Big Impact” (*New York Times* travel section 13 Oct. 2002: 8+), she mentions visiting Independence, Kansas, which features a Little House on the Prairie at Walnut Creek, plus the papers of playwright William Inge at Independence Community College. The papers included annotated manuscripts of such classics as *Picnic* and *Come Back, Little Sheba*, but also theater memorabilia, correspondence, and “his personal library, which included full collections of authors ranging from Sinclair Lewis to Henry James.”

LEWIS AND THE WEB: INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

The Web site is in the process of receiving a facelift from Publications Unit intern Amanda Karvelaitis. She has reorganized the site to make it more user friendly and has updated the links. She has also put listings for the more recent newsletters on the site and added the new interview with Richard Lingeman. The new site address is <http://www.ilstu.edu/separry/SinclairLewis>. The following are examples of some of the more recent questions that have been received.

— SLSN —

Can you help me find who holds the copyright to *It Can't Happen Here*? We need copies for a class that started September 3 that has 48 people enrolled. Penguin states it is out of stock with no due date. I realize there are many available in the out of print, collectable market, but I would prefer to have something printed for the class since there are so many. Any help you can provide would be appreciated. I can't believe I can't get this book.

Book Buyer

Bryn Mawr College Bookshop

[The editor finds this a very disturbing development and hopes that Penguin rectifies this situation soon.]

— SLSN —

My students (4 classes of Honors English III) think I am the only teacher in the nation who has students read Sinclair Lewis. Three years ago I was visiting my daughter who then lived in Minneapolis—we went northwest to the parents' home of one of her friends, and I ended up seeing Sauk Centre. I was elated; ever since I discovered Lewis in 1958 when I was a junior in high school, I dreamed of being on the real MAIN STREET. Never did I think I would actually be there. I ran up and down the streets taking pictures and exclaiming how happy I was—went into the Palmer House, etc. My daughter's friend and her parents thought I was absolutely nuts, but I was so excited. Also visited Summit Avenue in St. Paul and bought a book called *Fitzgerald: Toward the Summit* in a nifty little book shop on a side street.

Stone House B&B, Carmel-by-the Sea (www.carmelstonehouse.com) doesn't have much history left, but there is a Sinclair room and a Jack London room. I, of course, was thrilled just to be in the house—my sister had no idea when she booked it that I would know anything about the writers who had visited there. Bought a great video titled *Don't Pave Main Street*—narrated by Clint Eastwood. Has wonderful home movies of London and Lewis and the early days of Carmel. Contact Chamber of Commerce if you want a copy.

— SLSN —

Did Lewis not acknowledge Mr. Thomas Clayton Wolfe as deserving of a future Nobel Prize? There is no mention of this much overlooked Wolfe on your Lewis page. I'm sure perhaps Lewis would be upset there is no mention.

Have you ever read the part in *You Can't Go Home Again* about a certain Mr. Lloyd McHarg? It is worth reading.... I guess I'm a bit upset that Thomas Clayton Wolfe is perhaps the most underrated American author ever. I believe he breathed a certain energy and life into his works, and into American literature. What do you think?

— SLSN —

I've just placed a link to the Sinclair Lewis Society home page on one of my Web pages and wondered if you would be interested in placing a reciprocal link back to Abacci Books on your site. Your link can be found on: <http://www.abacci.com/books/authorDetails.asp?authorID=130>. This is also the page I'm hoping you will link to from your site.

Abacci Books is an experimental combination of the e-texts at Project Gutenberg and user reviews from amazon.com—allowing our visitors to browse through the Project Gutenberg archives and read contemporary opinions of the work found there—a great way to discover interesting new books and authors.

— SLSN —

I heard a quote attributed to Sinclair Lewis and I

wanted to check out its validity. It is: "It was twelve noon on the courthouse clock and the Presbyterian Church was giving up its dead." Is this really from a Sinclair Lewis novel? And was he a Presbyterian himself?

————— SLSN —————

I so much enjoyed reading once again about Sinclair Lewis. I last read him in the 60s at the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison. Today a friend asked a question about Lewis which motivated my search and find on the computer. I will come back to these pages. It's such a good place to visit.

————— SLSN —————

I have been asked to translate S. Lewis. The title of the book was *Der Erwerb*. Being German, I should have been able to translate it correctly, but I had not heard of this title. Please, could you identify this? Please tell me what the title is in English. [Fred Betz: Off-hand, I think *Der Erwerb* would be the German title for *The Job*.]

————— SLSN —————

Is the location of Lake Wobegon the same as Sauk Centre? I recently reread the first chapter or two and then grabbed a map. If it is, why????? Minnesota is a fairly large state. If not, then do you know where Lake Wobegon is supposed to be?

————— SLSN —————

I have two questions, perhaps you can help?

Did Sinclair Lewis have a middle name, and if so, what was the name?

Do you know the years in which Lewis spent in Carmel, California?

————— SLSN —————

What was Sinclair Lewis's first name? Or did he just use an initial?

————— SLSN —————

I am rereading *Cass Timberlane*. Sinclair Lewis is timeless and ageless.

————— SLSN —————

We have been told that we own a home Sinclair Lewis lived in. The home is in Seattle near the University of Washington. Do you have any records that could prove or disprove that could be the case?

————— SLSN —————

The Brunner Art Museum at Iowa State University is organizing an exhibition on Grant Wood's original drawings for the 1939 Lakeside Press edition of *Main Street*. We are trying to locate 4 of the drawings and I wonder if anyone at the Society can give me any information as to the whereabouts of these 4 original drawings. They are:

- "Practical Idealist"
- "The Radical"
- "General Practitioner"
- "Village Slums"

————— SLSN —————

I contacted you some months ago as I was searching for Grant Wood's drawings for the 1937 edition of *Main Street*, which is the subject of our exhibition here at the Brunner Art Museum at Iowa State University (it is scheduled for Jan. 13–Aug. 7, 2004). I am happy to report that I was able to locate all nine of the original drawings and I believe that all nine will be shown together for the first time since 1937. I am now working on my essay for the exhibition catalogue. In addition to my essay for the catalogue, we will have shorter essays by other writers: Henry Adams (Case Western University), scholar in American Art who is working on a new biography of Wood, and Kent Ryden (University of Southern Maine), professor of American and New England Studies who has written on the "sense of place" in American culture.

Lea Rosson DeLong, Guest Curator

STUDENT QUERIES

I am on the Social Studies academic team at my local high school, and we received a question tonight regarding whether or not Sinclair Lewis was a poet. I know he did write poetry for Yale during his freshman year; what I need to know is if he wrote poetry after becoming a professional writer. Another point I would appreciate your opinion on is whether or not the poem he published during his freshman year would be considered professional or reputable. Thank you in advance for your assistance, if at all possible could you send this to me by tomorrow afternoon around 3:30 so I could send this information to the review board tomorrow.

[Sinclair Lewis did write some poetry as a professional writer, mainly while starting out in his literary career. His first published poem was "Launcelot" for the *Yale Literary Magazine* in March 1904. I'm not sure whether poetry published for college literary magazines is particularly "professional"; one could say that poetry or any sort of writing like that for college magazines is really apprentice work.

In 1906 Lewis started having his poetry published in national magazines. About half of the poetry was either children's poetry or humorous verse. Among the publications he wrote for were *The Housekeeper*, *Youth*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Reader Magazine*, *Peoples Magazine*, *The Outer's Book*, *Puck*, *Smart Set*, *New England Magazine*, *Advance*, *National Home Journal*, and *Mayflower*. He seems to have stopped writing poetry around 1912, the year that his first book, *Hike and the Aeroplane* (published pseudonymously as Tom Graham), came out.]

----- SLSN -----

I'm 16 and a sophomore in high school, and I am doing my term paper on Sinclair Lewis. I have plenty

of secondary sources, but I need some primary ones as well. Could you possibly be able to tell me where I can find interviews of Sinclair and what the critics had to say about his works?

----- SLSN -----

My daughter is a high school junior at Byram Hills High School in Armonk, New York and has selected Sinclair Lewis as her author of choice for her great author project. She has just finished reading *Main Street* and needs to look for source material for reviews of the novel. She needs complete materials, not excerpts. If you could provide same, we would be more than willing to reimburse the Society for whatever costs may be incurred.

----- SLSN -----

I need an interview with Sinclair Lewis for a project for AP English. Do you know where I might find one? Anything in a question-answer format would be fine.

----- SLSN -----

I am writing a paper on *Elmer Gantry* and the themes introduced by the characters of Frank Shallard, Elmer and Sharon. The internet seems to have very little on criticism of the novel and on the characters. I was wondering if it would be possible to obtain some information on the book, a website or a book to read and look at?

----- SLSN -----

Dear Lewis,
Hi! I am a fifth grader and I was wondering if you can give me more information on you because I am doing a report on you. And also can you give me good pictures of you so I could put it on my report. Thank you for everything! Bye!

Your friend,
Chelsea

Dear Sally Parry
Hey it's me again THE FIFTH GRADER who wrote you yesterday, I would like to thank-you for giving me more info on Lewis Sinclare,

Well my mom is calling me for dinner. Bye!!!!
Your friend,
Chelsea

CONSTRUCTION COMPLETE



The Sinclair Lewis Society Web site has been revamped!

Check it out at:

www.lilt.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis

and update your bookmarks!

Thank you for all of your suggestions and contributions!

—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.]

Between the Covers Rare Books, Inc.

35 W. Maple Avenue
Merchantville, NJ 08109

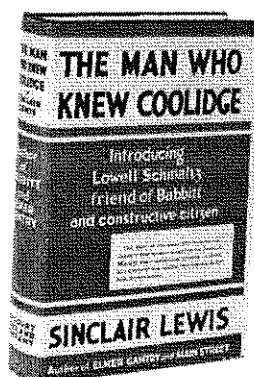
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OCTOBER 2002



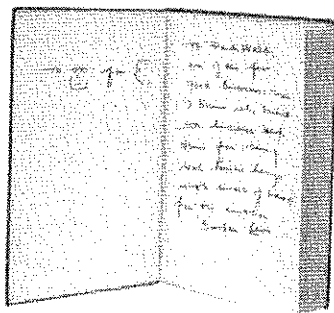
44. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Man who Knew Coolidge* (Introducing Lowell Schamltz, Friend of Babbitt and Constructive Citizen). New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. \$2000

First edition. Fine in a dustwrapper. A beautiful copy.

CATALOGUE 98—HOLIDAY 2002

144. Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914. \$7500

First edition, first issue ("M-N"). Light wear to the spine ends, an attractive, very good copy lacking the dustwrapper. This copy is **inscribed** by the author using most of the front fly: "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." On the facing page (the front pastedown) Lewis has drawn caricatures of Webb and himself: "To (caricature of Webb with horn-rimmed glasses) from (caricature of Lewis, complete with his trademark red-hair penciled in)." Perhaps the

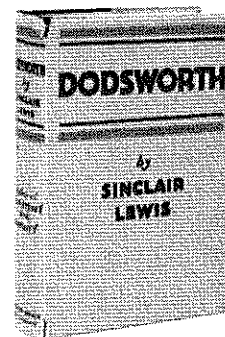


Collector's Corner

longest Lewis inscription we have seen, and certainly one of the earliest. An interesting copy of the author's second book, and the first book published under his own name.

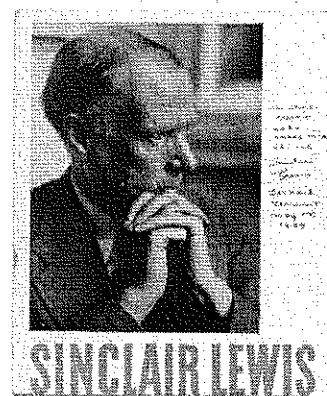
145. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$850

First edition. Fine in an attractive, very good or better dustwrapper with some uniform age-toning. Lewis's classic novel of a staid, retired car manufacturer who takes a trip to Europe with his wife and learns more about her, and their relationship, than he did in twenty years of marriage. Basis first for a stage hit and then for the excellent 1936 William Wyler film featuring Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, Mary Astor, David Niven, and Maria Ouspanskaya. Wyler, Huston, Ouspanskaya, and the picture itself were all nominated for Oscars. A nice copy.



146. Inscribed Promotional Poster. \$950

Poster. Approximately 11 1/4" x 9 1/4" on cardboard stock. Light edgewear, very good plus. Consists of a portrait of the pensive Lewis and "Sinclair Lewis" in bold red letters. Undated, but circa 1933. Presumably intended to promote the author's latest novel, possibly additional information (such as book title) has been trimmed from the poster, although there is no tangible evidence of that. Inscribed by the author to the right of his portrait: "To Mrs. Currie, who takes care of us. Sinclair Lewis. Barnard, Vermont, May 15, 1935." Attractive visual display piece.



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E-mail: daggbooks@worldnet.att.net

HALLOWEEN MISCELLANY 2002

130. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. Chicago: Limited Editions Club, 1937. \$850

With a Special Introduction by the Author. Illustrations by Grant Wood. First illustrated edition. One of 1,500 numbered copies signed by the illustrator. A lovely fine copy in the original glassine dust jacket and publisher's box (spine label slightly faded, minutely nicked at edges). It is very unusual to find the slipcase undamaged. Beautifully illustrated edition of this classic.

CHRISTMAS MISCELLANY 2002

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

First edition. A fine bright copy in a dust jacket (neatly price-clipped).

128. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1938. \$150

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

129. Lewis, Sinclair. *Bethel Merriday*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$175

First edition. A fine tight copy in a fine bright dust jacket (one closed tear). Beautiful copy.

130. Lewis, Sinclair. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, [1943]. \$150

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

131. Lewis, Sinclair. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, [1949]. \$150

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

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SALE 249

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2002

1:00 P.M.

FINE MODERN LITERATURE

149. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1938.

Red cloth, blind-stamped initials "SL" to front cover, spine lettered in gilt, jacket. First edition. Inscribed by Sinclair Lewis on the front free end paper: "To Dr. & Mrs. Hugh Baldwin, my hosts, with love and thanks, Sinclair Lewis, Columbus, Feb. 18, 1939." With an additional inscription on the front pastedown in the same hand and purple ink as the signed inscription to the front free endpaper. Jacket price clipped, short tears, light chipping to spine ends, some soiling, minor scratch to the front panel; volume spine somewhat dulled with a faint discoloration spot to publisher's imprint, slight shelf wear; a bit of offsetting to endpapers; very good or better in a very good jacket—still an attractive copy. **Went unsold. (600/900)**

148. Graham, Tom. [Sinclair Lewis]. *Hike and the Aeroplane*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1912.

Illustrated with four duotone plates by Arthur Hutchins including frontispiece with tissue-guard. 7 1/4" x 5", original gray cloth stamped pictorially in orange, dark blue and bluish-grey, lettered in dark blue. First edition, first issue. First issue of Sinclair Lewis's first book, with "August 1912" printed on the copyright page. A juvenile adventure book pseudonymously written as Tom Graham, of which only 1,000 copies were printed. Spine slightly leaning and somewhat faded, spine ends a bit crimped, mild soiling; rubberstamp of Frederick S. Moody, Jr. in purple to half-title page, else a near fine copy of Lewis's scarcest title. **Sold for \$4,024. (4000/6000)**



SALE 252
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2002
1:00 P.M.

FINE & RARE BOOKS

149. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925.

Blue cloth stamped in orange, jacket. First trade edition. Inscribed presentation copy, signed by Sinclair Lewis on the front free endpaper to his friend Dr. Robert Lang (who had him inscribe all the Lewis titles from 1914 to 1934). Lewis's classic medical novel, the first novel by an American to win the Pulitzer Prize. States: "Second printing [first trade edition], January, 1925" on copyright page. The true first edition was limited to 500 signed copies on handmade paper. A restored jacket with a fine appearance, verso backed with paper, colors and lettering completely retouched; volume spine ends and joints restored and retouched, light soiling and shelf wear; very good in a very good and exceptionally rare jacket. (5000/8000)

150. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929.

Blue cloth, stamped in orange, jacket, custom slipcase. First edition. Winner of the 1930 Nobel Prize for Literature. Short tears and tiny chips to jacket extremities, some soiling; light wear to volume; about fine in a near fine and scarce jacket, fine slipcase. (1200/1800)

151. Lewis, Sinclair. *Free Air*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1919.

Blue cloth decorated and lettered in light blue, pictorial jacket. First edition. Author's sixth book and the first novel published by Harcourt for Lewis. Professionally restored jacket, with tissue mending to verso, joints, and extremities with white touch-ups, blue lettering to head and foot with minor restoration, light soiling; minor shelf wear to volume, else a fine copy in a very good to near fine scarce jacket—very clean and bright. (6000/9000)

152. Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914.

Gray cloth decorated and lettered in gilt, pictorial jacket. First Edition. Lewis' second novel, the first published under his real name. First printing with the publishers letter codes "M-N" on the copyright page. Jacket professionally restored, tissue backing to verso, some of the white and the lady's hat on the front cover plus the spine and verso lettering retouched; minor shelf wear; faint offsetting to endpapers; still a fine copy in a very good and rare jacket. (5000/8000)

James Pepper
Rare Books, Inc.

2026 Cliff Drive, Suite 224
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
Phone: (805) 963-1025
Fax: (805) 966-9737
E-mail: pepbooks@aol.com

CATALOGUE 118

170. Bloomgarden, Henry S. *Dorothy and Red*. Unpublished Play. Reston, Virginia: n.d. [1977]. \$225

First edition. 105 page photomechanically reproduced script brad bound in stiff wrappers. This copy belonged to actress Nancy Kelly, and she has signed the title page: "Final Draft. N. Kelly." Nancy Kelly starred as the mother in *The Bad Seed* on Broadway and in the motion picture version. This is an unpublished play about the stormy relationship between Sinclair Lewis and his wife Dorothy Thompson.

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

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

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

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

JOIN TODAY...

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY. MEMBERS RECEIVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER. PLEASE CHOOSE A CATEGORY BELOW:

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Send form, along with check, to: The Sinclair Lewis Society, Box 4240, English Dept.,
Illinois State University, Normal, IL, 61790-4240.

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4240/DEPT. OF ENGLISH
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
NORMAL, IL 61790-4240