

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME FOURTEEN, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 2006



Detail from cover of *The Man from Main Street*,
Selected Essays and Other Writings: 1904–1950

BABBITT: PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN CYCLE ENFORCES MIDDLE-CLASS MESSAGE

LAURIE S. FUMEA

INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

In *Babbitt*, Sinclair Lewis sums up and satirizes the contributing factors to the distress labeled middle-class malaise in a column of “-isms”: consumerism, materialism, industrialism, spiritualism, and, of course, boosterism. He takes these societal characteristics, puts them under a microscope, magnifying and intensifying the smallest details of everyday life, and scrutinizes them for readers. Despite the relative comfort these “-isms” contribute to Babbitt’s middle-class life, they fall short of providing any sustaining value, any real meaning to his life. Hence, *Babbitt* is seen primarily as a satire that exposes the discontent and emptiness in the life of the main character.

— Middle-Class Message continued on page 11

INTRODUCING SINCLAIR LEWIS’S NOVELS TO ADULTS

PATRICK AND MARY KILLOUGH

In October–November 2005, we co-taught for Montreat College, North Carolina, a course introducing to adults the twenty-two novels of Harry Sinclair Lewis and his boy’s adventure tale, *Hike and the Aéroplane*. Why did we do it? How did we structure the course? How did students take to Lewis?

For a dozen years we have participated in the informal adult education program of Montreat College, Montreat, NC, called McCALL (Montreat College Center for Adult Lifelong Learning). (See <http://www.montreat.edu/academics/mccall/>). McCALL offers four-week (eight contact hours) and six-week (twelve contact hours) courses in the standard format of the Elderhostel Institute Network (see <http://www.elderhostel.org/ein/intro.asp>). Our Sinclair Lewis course was from 10:00 a.m. to noon on six consecutive Wednesdays.

Patrick, who retired in 1991 from the U.S. foreign service (Department of State), has taught numerous solo courses for McCALL. He had also collaborated three times with Mary (whose PhD is in German and Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin) on McCALL courses, *The Germans* (twice) and *John Henry Newman: From Calvinist to Cardinal*.

Since the 1970s Patrick has been fascinated by the informal education of adults, of the sort presented at service club meetings, in church sermons, Great Decision foreign policy discussions, book clubs and the like. A special focus within that framework has been service clubs and their predecessor booster clubs. Early on Patrick discovered Sinclair Lewis’s skewering of Rotary in *Elmer Gantry* and had found scattered other references to attacks on service clubs by Lewis.

The year 2005 was the centennial of the founding of the first service club, the Rotary Club of Chicago. Some months

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The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter is published twice a year with help from the Publications Unit of the English Department at Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240

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A CITIZEN OF THE MIRAGE (PART I)

SINCLAIR LEWIS

INTRODUCTION BY TODD STANLEY

"A Citizen of the Mirage" was a Sinclair Lewis short story published in 1921 in Redbook, sandwiched in between two of his most famous and satirical books, Main Street (1920) and Babbitt (1922). The story is about a man who runs a college founded on the most idealistic principles; students study whatever they want, take no exams, receive no grades or degrees, and leave having learned practical lessons rather than courses they will never use again in their lives. Sounds like the way higher education ought to be, but that's where school gets in the way. School must contain sports, Latin, and professors who do not question controversial issues. These two philosophies butt heads as the president, Quaero, and Leonard, who is trying to get students to actually attend the University of Daily Life, do battle.

The story is classic Lewis for two reasons: 1) it is rife with satire and 2) it is timeless. Many of the references to university thinking are even funnier when read today, having had another eighty years for colleges to become even more of a target. Although the ending, like "The Hack Driver," is predictable and can be seen coming a mile away, the ending does not really matter. It is Lewis's observations and commentary on the American way of life that make the story so good.

"A CITIZEN OF THE MIRAGE"

Brisk young men are the cocktails of business. A brisk young man is a person between sixteen and sixty who is a little too well dressed and a little too flattering, who is always hustling somewhere, but hasn't much of anything to do when he gets there.

His frequently exhibited gold teeth are a cause of sorrow

to the thoughtful, and of homicide to the violent. He is found not only in commerce. He has been discovered among clergymen, doctors, farmers, and playwrights; and not infrequently he is a female, and is brisk and important about insufficiently boiling the potatoes.

Leonard Lamb Shanklin, Ph.D., was a brisk young man in the academic world. He had been instructor in chemistry in a college, and once, at the Association of Colleges of South-eastern Missouri, he had said mighty revolutionary things about marking on a basis of five instead of four. But he demanded more money than was to be snatched out of anything as slow as being patient with unfolding minds. In student days Leonard had made two dollars an hour by tutoring rich classmates, though the standard rate for feeding predigested wisdom was only one dollar, because he had been clever at guessing which questions the bored examiners would put this time. He still had the academic mind, in thinking of the universe as a collection of professors surrounded by darkness, but he also had the money-making mind.

Leonard had airs, neat feet and a respectable baldness. He wore piping on his waistcoat; he had a seal ring; and when he drank tea or smoked a pipe, he elegantly stuck out his little finger. When he was among business men, he enjoyed his ability to laugh heartily, to talk about motorcars, and to say "damn" just as though he weren't a Doctor of Philosophy.

At thirty-three Leonard Lamb Shanklin was manager of the School Laboratory Department of the Vigilance Chemical and Supply House, a company which made an interesting saving in the cost of raw materials by being generous to such

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

CONTRIBUTORS

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

These people include Frederick Betz, Barnaby Conrad, Cortney Dawson, Roger Forseth, Laurie Fumea, Anne Gately, Carl Iverson, Patrick and Mary Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Richard Lingeman, Robert McLaughlin, Roberta Parry, and Todd Stanley.

A Citizen of the Mirage *continued from previous page*

college purchasing-agents and science teachers as would listen to common sense. Lots of times Leonard was kicked out of professional studies, but other times he became chummy. He patted babies, and remembered whether Mrs. Professor preferred violets or candy; he was a sunbeam and a brisk young man.

He liked his new work; the importance of sending telegrams and of taking Pullmans from Ohio to Texas, the pay and his peculiarly confidential relations with men who took his bribes but decorously pretended that they did things for him because of their feverish admiration. Not all of his business was on a basis of bribery. Even honestly earned commissions were acceptable to Leonard, and he liked the adventure of opening up new territory. There was drama in introducing himself to a new set of solemn, shy, underpaid instructors in a back-pasture school, and watching them gape as he urbanely handed out the newest gossip about what the Big Fellows were doing in the laboratories at Johns Hopkins and Columbia.

He had one failure in mapping new territory. He had never been able to get even a feeler from a Midwestern college fantastically named "The University of Daily Life." The chemical faculty had not answered his letters, never acknowledged his best samples of test-tubes and language. Nor could he find out anything about the university, except that its president was one Basil Quaero, that it had five thousand volumes in the library, and was situated in a town called New Ratersford.

The official lists of colleges did not give the number of students at the University of Daily Life, nor even such fundamental facts as its colors and yell, nor whether its motto was or was not "*Per aspera ad astra.*" Regarding President Basil Quaero, Leonard got no information even at the big scientific associations, at which Leonard was always to be seen giving an imitation of a six-month pup starting on a walk with master.

It was in September, the time of opening of colleges, that he called on Melanchton Institute, and realized that by an easy jump he could reach the town of New Ratersford and look over the University of Daily Life. He arrived at noon, found that New Ratersford was a place of two thousand people. Behind it the hills were woolly with maples, but Leonard did not notice them. He was too unhappy over having to lunch at the Jefferson House. Leonard liked hotels with tiling, bell-boys, and café parfait. He restrained his sighs, after lunch, and made himself to be friendly with the day clerk, who was a hemmer, a hawer, and a rememberer of anecdotes. While Leonard tapped the toes of his low shoes and turned his seal ring round and round, the clerk leaned his skinny-shirt-sleeved arms on the desk and told what he knew about the University of Daily Life:

"Well sir, the fellow that runs it, he's an old fellow named Quaero. Way I get it, the idea at the University is to teach a lot of nut theories—vegetarianism and the Lord knows what-all. But they got an elegant lot of buildings. All stone!"

"How many students are there?"

"Well sir, I couldn't just say as to that. Some says one thing; some says another. Never had much chance to find out. You see, I haven't lived here but five years!"

The University was a mile and a half from the town. In the tranquil September afternoon Leonard walked to it, past scattered brick houses which poured out sunshine from their ruddy walls. Red apples glittered; oak leaves were tapping; bird-chatter and the brittle sound of dry weeds made the quiet more tender. Even the brisk young man was in a soft mood, as one expectant of the coming of some shining girl, when he topped a hill and looked into a tiny valley that was the campus.

————— A Citizen of the Mirage *continued on page 15*

NEW MEMBERS

A hearty welcome to these new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the fall 2005 issue.

Richmond B. Adams
Carbondale, IL

Marisa Iglesias
Tampa, FL

James D. and Penny A. Schroeder
Rochester, MN

Anne Gately
Moody, ME

T. Patrick and Mary K. Killough
Black Mountain, NC

Ralph David Wilkinson IV
Wilmington, DE

Thomas L. Gower
Milford, DE

Jim Mueller
APO, AE

SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2005: A JOURNAL

JACQUELINE KOENIG

Jacqueline Koenig is a member of the Sinclair Lewis Society Board of Directors and is attending her third Sinclair Lewis conference in Sauk Centre. She has graciously agreed to allow parts of her journal to be published so that readers will get a sense of the conference from a participant's point of view. What follows below are excerpts. For another report on the conference, see "Society Sponsors Third Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre" by Robert McLaughlin in the Fall 2005 Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter.

[Wednesday night] Sinclair Lewis Foundation Immediate Past President Roberta Olson introduced the keynote speaker John-Paul Sinclair Lewis, the grandson of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson. Olson informed us that [the last time] John-Paul was in Sauk Centre, as a child, with his mother Bernadette Lewis and grandmother Dorothy Thompson, he broke out with measles.

Now, in Sauk Centre for the second time, John-Paul began his address, "Sinclair died in Rome before I was born. Living in the shadow of my grandfather has been a double-edged sword." His mother's influence was important to him, and his grandmother Dorothy Thompson was the most powerful woman [in the United States] after Eleanor Roosevelt....

Calling his grandfather "Red," John-Paul's keynote speech concerned the state of American Society...[and] concluded that now, five years into the twenty-first century, "there is a cloud; it is easy to despair today.... Criticism is met with jail, repression.... Are we on the path of a perpetual war? We still have a ballot box to vote the leaders out of power; but we must get out the vote."

Q: Tell us about your father.

A: My father died at 44. My parents divorced when I was fairly young, but I spent time with him in Vermont. He was a Shakespearean actor. My father was an extrovert.

Q: What became of Twin Farms?

A: Dorothy wanted it sold to a farmer. It could become a beautiful farm, and she sold it cheap for that reason. It was, however, developed. Today, for fifteen hundred a night, Bill Gates can stay there. The 1796 Twin Farms house burned with the loss of things of both my mother and my father....

John-Paul maintains that he had such a privileged



*The Lewises at the parade
(Photo courtesy of Roberta Olson)*

background because of his grandparents.... Judging from [his] attention to this conference, his grandparents' money is well spent.

[Thursday morning] Juleen Trisko-Schneider, a Minnesotan, titled her talk "Growing Up Main Street—Sinclair Lewis: Our SOB." That got our attention! Trisko-Schneider is a third generation Sauk Centreite, a town living in the spotlight ever since *Main Street* was published (1920). Four thousand tourists come to Sauk Centre every year. Every publicist who comes to town stands at the Palmer House and shoots a picture south on Main Street, with the drug store and the theatre; and they all seem to talk to the same people. They all end with "If Sinclair Lewis were alive today, blah, blah, blah."

As a tour guide to the Sinclair Lewis home, Trisko-Schneider was subjected to hurtful comments such as, "Can you imagine someone from here going to Yale?"

She wondered, if I loved *Main Street*, was I betraying this town I loved? We are the Sauk Centre Main Streeters. We can't ignore him. He could write *Main Street* and still love his home town.

Trisko-Schneider does make us think about a monumental creation regarded with awe worldwide—*Main Street*.

——— Sinclair Lewis Conference 2005 *continued on next page*

Sinclair Lewis Conference 2005 *continued from previous page*

She finds Sauk Centre is proud of Sinclair Lewis. "He was hard to live with, hard to love, and hard to ignore." He didn't become too big for his hometown. He came when asked; he kept in touch with his friends here. Sinclair Lewis's final visit to Sauk Centre was in 1948.

"Yes, Sinclair Lewis may have been an SOB, but he's our SOB," Trisko-Schneider concluded....

Q: Is *Main Street* still taught in Sauk Centre?

A: Trisko-Schneider talked about the history of reading *Main Street*. In the 1940s it was required. In the 1980s she gave her students the option. Sometimes teachers have come under superintendents who didn't want Lewis taught.

W. Kirkland Symmes....was introduced to Sinclair Lewis when he read *Arrowsmith* as a teenager. He grew up in Oak Park, Illinois.... It was the home of the original Bab-bitt.... "Dodsworth would fit in with Sears executives who lived in Oak Park."

Why isn't Lewis highly recognized today? Was he a nonconformist and doomed to be forgotten? Symmes sees him as very American. Lewis captures the mood of the 20s and 30s better than any other author.

Lewis is not taught at Yale, where he received his degree and an honorary degree....Symmes wrote the English Department at Yale. A professor replied that no one mentioned Sinclair Lewis when surveyed on novelists.

The urbanization of America has depleted the small town today. Lewis saw flaws in the great American scene, and those flaws still exist today. Lewis criticized; whereas some authors thought they must glorify America....

Symmes went through Lewis titles [that are] as timely



John-Paul and Charlotte Lewis meet Roberta Olson

today [as they were then]. For instance, *Arrowsmith* is relevant as regards global warming and stem cell research. Read *Elmer Gantry* and look at Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

Symmes concluded that any criticism of our way of life today is considered unpatriotic; we must conform. "Sinclair Lewis is alive and well today."

We were in for a treat this afternoon when Frederick Betz, Robert McLaughlin, Sally Parry, Maureen Roen, Tom Raynor, and Jörg Thunke presented "Main Street Goes to War."

"Main Street Goes to War" was published for the first time in *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis* (2005), and it was staged for the first time at this 2005 conference.

Sally Parry, in her introduction to *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, described "Main Street Goes to War":

As William Faulkner felt about the inhabitants of Yoknapatowpha County, Lewis believed that his characters had a life to them that existed beyond the bounds of his books. This is illustrated even more strongly in the unproduced radio drama, "Main Street Goes to War," written in 1942. Here we see Gopher Prairie contributing to the war effort: Will and Carol's son Hugh is in the army; their daughter Betty is in the Service Club; Carol collects scrap rubber and sells war bonds.

[Thursday night] At 7:30 p.m. in the First Lutheran Church, we saw the movie *I Married a Doctor*. It is little known today....In this film, W. P. Kennicott, M.D. comes home with a new wife. The town doesn't trust an intelligent woman. The talk at the Wobingo Country Club is that there were plenty of eligible girls right here; that's what the country club girls resent.

As the Kennicotts arrive at their welcome-home party, the doctor is called out—a young woman has attempted suicide. She turns out to be a former girlfriend of Kennicott [Vida Sherwin, called Vera in the film].

Mrs. Kennicott presents herself well, in spite of gossip. When the Kennicotts split up, after she leaves, the townsfolk talk about how splendid she was.

Following the film, Robert McLaughlin made a few remarks. He mentioned that the screenwriter, Casey Robinson, was also a writer of the script for *Casablanca*. Sinclair

—Sinclair Lewis Conference 2005 *continued on next page*

Sinclair Lewis Conference 2005 *continued from previous page*

Lewis sold the film rights to *Main Street* in 1920. The film, *I Married a Doctor*, was made sixteen years later.

[Friday morning] We were treated to a 2-minute Sinclair Lewis book auction. Auctioneer Martin Bucco does these auctions for Western American Literature conferences. Bucco brought books from his own library, and the proceeds went to the Sinclair Lewis Society. One lucky bidder got a review copy of Richard Lingeman's biography.

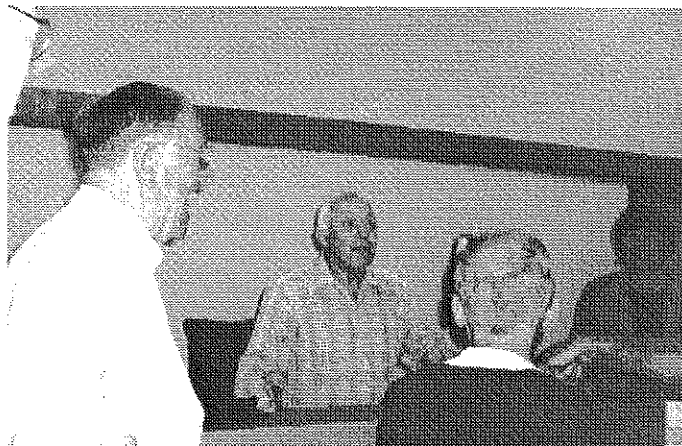
Michael Lewis was a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and appeared on Broadway and nationally in such productions as Quadrille and The Visit with the Lunts, as Henry VIII in A Man for All Seasons and Small War on Murray Hill, and also spent fifteen months on tour, standing by for Anthony Quayle in Sleuth. He also appeared in Hallmark Hall of Fame productions of Little Moon of Alban, The Holy Terror, and Saint Joan.

Before lunch we listened to a reading by Michael Lewis, John-Paul's father, of a Caedmon Records recording (1973) of a one-hour abridged version of *It Can't Happen Here*. Michael studied acting in London and had a successful career as a stage and television actor.

Robert L. McLaughlin's paper, "*Strangers: Sinclair Lewis Back on Broadway*," introduced me to a 1979 Broadway show I didn't know existed, *Strangers*. About the relationship between Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson, it was originally produced at the John Golden Theatre. Right off, Robert told us you can see why the marriage didn't work—neither was capable of loving anyone else.

Bruce Dern played Sinclair Lewis and Lois Nettleton was Dorothy Thompson. Immediately [after it opened], Dern was nominated for an Academy Award [for *Coming Home*] and left for Hollywood, causing *Strangers* to close after twelve previews and nine performances.

McLaughlin told us that in *Strangers* Lewis was looking for his idea of home in Dorothy Thompson, something that would never happen, and their marriage would be a trap for Dorothy. Lewis insists they are right for one another; Dorothy thinks otherwise.



Kirk Symmes, Martin Bucco, Fred Betz, and Sally Parry at the auction

They marry, Sinclair Lewis wins the Nobel, and Dorothy herself becomes very famous. Marital problems fill the drama, with Dorothy visiting Sinclair, who is in a mental hospital unit.

McLaughlin saw this play on Broadway in the days before his interest in Sinclair Lewis and still remembers it vividly. McLaughlin finds that the play fails to show Lewis's importance as a writer. He, however, calls the production "a moving and smart evening in the theatre." There have been some post-Broadway productions.

In our last session, Professor George Killough, from Duluth, and former president of the Sinclair Lewis Society, spoke about Sinclair Lewis's time spent in Duluth.

In 1944, at the age of 59, Sinclair Lewis moved from New York City to Duluth. Killough showed photographs of Lewis's Duluth home, which Killough called a "palace." According to Mark Schorer, the house had a bowling alley and a ballroom.

In editing Lewis's *Minnesota Diary, 1942-46*, Killough learned that Sinclair moved back because 1) he had the idea to experience nature, like Thoreau with Walden Pond, 2) he wanted to get in touch with his roots, and 3) he wanted to get reacquainted with his home state which he loved.

Lewis got details for fictional houses right in his Duluth neighborhood. He also used people [as models for characters], and George has pictures of them. Elsa Anneke was a friend who told George that Lewis had little ear for music.

At the end of his life, Lewis still felt he hadn't captured his characters as well as he'd wished; he never stopped trying, according to Killough. *z*

A READING GROUP'S RESPONSE TO *MAIN STREET*

ANNE GATELY
MOODY, MAINE

The Ogunquit Library Book Club meets the third Tuesday of each month at the Ogunquit Library, Ogunquit, Maine. This is a lively group of older women and a few men who all read every book assigned, take notes and contribute their unreserved opinions. In December 2005 we discussed *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis.

I had read Sally Parry's comment in one of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletters* that some of her college-aged students get impatient with Carol and her inability to be happy. She suggests that they read the book in ten years. How about forty or fifty years? Sally also asks her students what they think Carol does after the book ends. Does she stay or go? Some of the students came up with fanciful and creative comments and many resolved matters in the next generation. The over-sixty-five crowd of the Ogunquit group, without exception, said she came to terms with her life, stayed, and appreciated what she had and grew to like the town. Another interesting opinion was their admiration for the doctor. I thought he was manipulative and changed his MO just long enough to get her back but I was outnumbered. Unfortunately none of the men attended this session.

I was disappointed that there was no interest in continuing with reading Sinclair Lewis. They all wanted to go on to

something else. We will be reading *Mambo Kings* for next month. I intend to continue to read more of Sinclair Lewis's work. I'm particularly interested in *Kingsblood Royal* which I got from the library this afternoon and *It Can't Happen Here* which was not in the library so I'll have to search for it. And I look forward to receiving future *SLS Newsletters*.

[Here's an additional note from her.] The Ogunquit Library Book Club met yesterday but our male member was not present. I asked his wife to ask him to send me an e-mail with his response to *Main Street*. Here is what he said:

Hi Anne, I understand that you wanted me to let you know what I thought of *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis. First of all, I may not have been in the mood for that kind of story at that time. Having said that, I found it to be very slow. I couldn't get interested in the life of the girl. I was waiting for it to get interesting and, for me, it never did. I did think it was very well written. I would be interested in hearing why you liked the story so much. I understand that the next book to be discussed by your group is to be *Babbitt*. I read it a long time ago but my recollection is that I enjoyed it very much and that it was a wonderful depiction of a small town and the daily life of a local businessman. ☺

LEWIS'S CARMEL HOME

Sinclair Lewis lived in Carmel in 1909–1910 when he served as the secretary to two sisters, Grace MacGowan Cook and Alice MacGowan, who were writers. Although Lewis did not stay in Carmel long, he enjoyed the place, partly because of the beautiful climate, but more for the bohemian atmosphere since at the time Carmel was a gathering place for writers and artists.

The house that Lewis lived in during that time, known as "Brownie" or "The Shack," still exists and celebrated its hundredth birthday in November 2005. The house is currently owned by Carl Iverson, a new member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, who has been at work restoring the house for the last twenty years. Iverson and his late wife Marilyn "replaced the wiring

and plumbing and added modern amenities, such as alarm and stereo systems. The work includes original and salvaged wood, window glass, and other materials where possible.

"Iverson included built-in shelves in the front bedroom he believes was occupied by novelist, journalist, dramatist, and poet Sinclair Lewis, who rented it for \$5 a month," according to Mary Brownfield in the *Carmel Pine Cone* (October 21–27, 2005: 14A).

Brenda Moore of the *Monterey County Herald* also took note of the house's renovations, praising the "Craftsman-style features," "the flagstone walkway," and "the nearly finished

————— Lewis's Carmel Home *continued on next page*

Lewis's Carmel Home *continued from previous page*

living room, a cocoon of redwood walls, floor, ceiling, and doors" (November 5, 2005: D1, 6). The study is inspired by the famous former tenants, including not only Lewis but Pulitzer Prize-winning poet William Rose Benét and noted landscape painter Ferdinand Burgdorff. Outside the study is a recessed bookcase with many Lewis works.

At the hundredth birthday party celebration (to which the Sinclair Lewis Society donated books and newsletters), Iverson held an open house for a number of people, including members of the Carmel Heritage Society, and the house's previous owner, Kay Prine. He hopes that the house will soon be listed on Carmel's register of historic buildings. *✍*

THE RECORDING OF *IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE*

Caedmon Records released a spoken version of *It Can't Happen Here* in 1973 with an abridgement by Barbara Holdridge and read by Lewis's son Michael, an accomplished actor. The notes on the back of the record album were by Herbert Mitgang and are as pertinent today as they were then. Below are some of the highlights of Mitgang's appraisal. This recording was played at the 2005 Sinclair Lewis Conference in Sauk Centre.

"Babbitt in the White House"

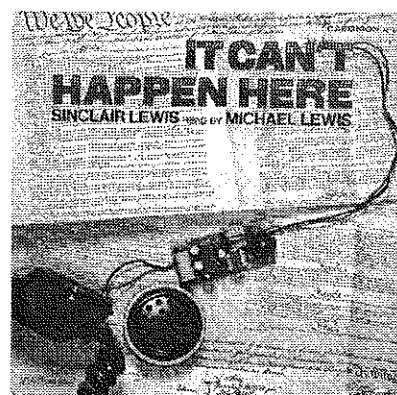
Recently the Knight Newspapers placed a public service ad in its own and other publications. The ad's headline stated, boldly and ironically, "It Can't Happen Here." The illustration showed the famous picture of Storm Troopers in Berlin putting the torch to books that were "un-German." The ad said: "There is a struggle going on in this country. It is not just a fight by reporters and editors to protect their sources. It is a fight to protect the public's right to know. Even the protection of the First Amendment may not be sufficient to prevent a gradual erosion of this cherished freedom under pressure from courts and government. It can't happen here as long as the press remains an open conduit through which public information flows. But, if the press becomes a tool through which the government informs the public of only those things it thinks the public should know, anything can happen here."

The headline of this ad is the title of a novel that keeps insinuating itself these days, not because of its literary qualities but because of its prescience. The author was Sinclair Lewis, and the point he was making when he wrote the book in the mid-thirties was that it could—that home-grown hypocrisy leads to a nice brand of home-grown authoritarianism, as American as Mylai and Watergate. Lewis had looked at Unter den Linden and envisioned the jackboots

marching smartly past the residence on Pennsylvania Avenue right to Main Street.

"In all the years of Depression and turmoil," wrote Charles and Mary Beard, "no novel written in the United States portrayed

more dynamically the ideals of democracy pitted against the tyranny of the demagogic dictator." Well, not quite. The novel was too much of a lecture-platform for his characters. But Lewis had the brilliant perception to place a Senator in the White House, not some foreign monster, but an apple-pie, hypocritical, patriotic Babbitt.



[Mitgang goes on to summarize the plot and quote from Windrip's book of crisis, *Zero Hour*. Here's one of the quotes he uses.]

ON NATIONAL SECURITY: "President Windrip... explained that powerful and secret enemies of American principles—one rather gathered that they were a combination of Wall Street and Soviet Russia... had planned their last charge. Everything would be tranquil in a few months, but meantime there was a Crisis, during which the country 'must bear with him.'"

Prophecies and coincidences abound—including the Presidential dream of retirement cottages in Florida and California. Little-known lawyers are

The Recording *continued on next page*

The Recording *continued from previous page*

appointed by the President to the Supreme Court; defense budgets increase for peace; the Attorney General assails irresponsible news reporting. Lewis wrote the book in heat and perhaps too hastily for a Nobel laureate, but the country and the world in the thirties wore a fright-wig and creative artists in every medium felt a need to shatter illusion and unmask hypocrisy....

It Can't Happen Here proves that the novel as polemic has its historical place, then and today. Lewis said men could be more savage than tigers "because we kill not just for meat but for our highest

ideals" and, rubbing it in, that "some leaders believed conditions could be made all sweet and holy just by a few fine phrases."

There are times when the most clear-eyed view of a Government requires a look through the novelist's prism—Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Heller's *Catch-22*, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. American fiction has a way of serving as an early warning system against what Henry James, looking at Washington in our century, called "the triumph of the superficial, the apotheosis of the raw." ❧

BARNABY CONRAD'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH SINCLAIR LEWIS

Author Barnaby Conrad writes, "I enjoyed the 'Meeting Sinclair Lewis' section very much. (I always find your newsletter revealing and fascinating reading.)

"Here is one of the most graphic first impressions I've read by anyone about anyone: Dorothy Thompson's description of SL upon their first meeting, July 1927":

Lewis was forty-two; Thompson, thirty-three. She had been granted a divorce the previous day and was feeling pretty low when introduced to the celebrated writer, who thereupon announced, "I have been looking for you for years. Will you marry me?"

"He seemed to bring in with him a disturbing atmospheric tension such as that which precedes an electric storm," she recalled. "I saw a narrow, ravaged face, roughened, red, and scarred by repeated radium and electrical needle burnings, less of a face below the hawkish nose than above it, where it broadened into a massive frontal skull, crossed by horizontal lines; reddish but almost colorless eyebrows above round, cavernously set, remarkably brilliant eyes, transparent as aquamarines and in them a strange, shy, imploring look; red-blond hair, already retreating, very fine and silky; a small and narrow mouth, almost lipless, drawn away from the long teeth by repeated burnings, and in which in the course of a few minutes could smile a dozen ways. The face of a man who had walked through flame throwers." She found his figure tall, slim, and elegant—he was attired that day in a suit tailored on Saville Row. And she detected "an immediate aura of greatness, large, torrential, tortured, and palpitatingly sensitive. I felt that if one but touched him with the softest finger tip, he would recoil. My instantaneous reaction was, "God, what

a lonely, unhappy, helpless man! Somebody *must* love and take care of him." [This description was originally in "The Boy and Man from Sauk Centre" by Dorothy Thompson, *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1960, 39–40.]

Conrad notes, "This is my first meeting with SL in Santa Barbara, California in 1947. I had written him a fan letter, and he had invited me to tea":

Suddenly I heard a Midwestern voice say, "How d'ye do!"

I turned and rose to see Mr. Lewis coming into the room, his head back, his skeletal hand extended and held high. He was an awesome and startling sight. At sixty-two, he was tall and fiercely ugly, quite the ugliest person I had ever seen. I recoiled from the haunted eyes sunk in his scarlet face which was ravaged and scarred, pocked and cratered from countless operations for skin cancer. His once blazing red hair was now thin and orangy-white.

Yet I swear that ten minutes after I met him—when he started to talk and ramble—I no longer thought him ugly. He was kind and rapacious and charming and witty and factual and fanciful and reverent and irreverent and gossipy and profound, and one no longer was aware of a face but only of a powerful personality and a towering imagination and great boyish enthusiasm. We talked of all manner of things. I learned later that this was a talking period for him, a lonely period. Subsequently, I would know his long silent times; both were equally compulsive. [From *Fun While It Lasted* by Barnaby Conrad, New York: Random House, 1969, 268–69.] ❧

Following the publication of *Babbitt* in 1922 and its subsequent success, the novel was perceived as an exposé of the materialistic middle class. Lewis was labeled both as a “journalist” for his reportage of the story and as a “diagnostician” for identifying the symptoms of the illness suffered by America’s middle class (Wilson 208). Publicity agent, ad man, and public relations representative may be other applicable labels, as Lewis applied the not-so-subtle principles of persuasion utilized in those fields to layer his societal portrayal in *Babbitt*.

Unlike some advertising campaigns designed to hard-sell a product or cure, *Babbitt* offers no definitive solution or remedy for society’s white-collar woes. Patent medicines of the 1920s, such as Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup and Kickapoo Indian Sagwa, claimed to cure many ailments, but some of their ingredients, such as drugs and alcohol, often numbed or addicted users. Lewis claims to possess no knowledge of such curative powers. He doesn’t resort to a typical sales pitch or public relations campaign with respect to George Babbitt’s discontent with life. He offers no pat solutions, no quick answers and no surefire cure. In fact, he didn’t believe American society in the midst of the Industrial Age had such a remedy available.

While Lewis uses many of the persuasive techniques still present today in advertising, for example the “bandwagon” or “everybody has one, you need one too” approach and the “celebrity” approach apparent in his mimicry of Billy Sunday and Mary Baker Eddy, he doesn’t “sell” his readers an answer to a societal dilemma. Instead of an outright sales pitch or a campaign aimed at a sale, Lewis’s goal is more subtle. *Babbitt* is a literary work first and foremost, but it is framed on the principles of an advertising or public relations campaign. It is a novel supported by structured advertising methods and messages designed to change people’s attitudes toward vulgar materialism, consumerism, and conformity.

Lewis relies heavily on his background as a publicity writer for book publishers to accomplish his picture of middle-class life in the 1920s. He incorporates myth, hyperbole, prophecy, and publicity and synthesizes them with a highly saturated style to present his social critique. Christopher Wilson notes one of Lewis’s characters refers to a “hyphenated” citizen (212), a reference that may be applied to the author’s own career, extending half in the middle-class office environment of publicity writer and half in the realm of literary writer. This “hyphenated” citizenry, Wilson concludes, contributed to the dual status of *Babbitt* as a literary work and as a campaign against middle-class values: “*Babbitt* is partly a work

of imagination and partly, in the marketing sense, the product of a literary work conceived as a ‘campaign’” (240).

Lewis, however, preferred to look upon *Babbitt* as a literary work, a culmination of his imagination and skill that utilized material obtained through his ancillary career as a publicity agent. Biographer Mark Schorer notes that in a press conference prior to Lewis’s receipt of the Nobel Prize, the author downplayed any journalistic skills, telling a reporter from the International News Service, “I’m not in the business of exposing things. I’m a novelist” (544).

While the literary plot line of *Babbitt* follows “a course of his rising discontent, his rebellion, his retreat and resignation” (Schorer 353), the campaign strategy for the novel involves making readers aware of the impact consumerism and materialism have on their lives, changing readers’ attitudes toward the “-isms” prevalent in society, and encouraging a shift in ideals and values.

Using a detail-rich, saturated style of writing, Lewis accomplishes what many advertisers seek to achieve in either repetition of a message or the saturation of media markets with similar messages. Advertising seeks to connect product names, images, or concepts with consumers’ real or perceived needs. Lewis itemizes social graces, furnishings, floor plans, colloquial speech patterns, gestures, and even menus to illustrate the consumerist/materialist codes of the middle class and their repercussions on society:

With the awed swelling of the heart suitable to so grave a business as giving a dinner, he slew the temptation to wear his plaited dress-shirt for a fourth time, took out an entirely fresh one, tightened his black bow, and rubbed his patent-leather pumps with a handkerchief. He glanced with pleasure at his garnet and silver studs. He smoothed and patted his ankles, transformed by silk socks.... He stood before the pier-glass, viewing his trim dinner-coat, his beautiful triple-braided trousers; and murmured in lyric beatitude, “By golly, I don’t look so bad.... If the hicks back home could see me in this rig, they’d have a fit!” (109–10)

With the use of exaggeration, overstatement, and alliteration, even the plumbing in Babbitt’s bathroom objectifies the effects of capitalism on the American middle class: “The drain-pipe was dripping, a dulcet and lively song: drippety, drip drip dribble, drippety drip drip drip. He was enchanted by it. He looked at the solid tub, the beautiful nickel taps, the

Middle-Class Message *continued on next page*

Middle-Class Message *continued from previous page*

tilled walls of the room, and felt virtuous in the possession of this splendor" (Lewis 95).

Lewis uses an outright advertising sales pitch to ridicule Babbitt's consumer gullibility in regard to the purchase of an electric cigar lighter, a device he purchases *after* he resolves to give up smoking:

It was a pretty thing, a nickeled cylinder with an almost silvery socket, to be attached to the dashboard of his car. It was not only, as the placard on the counter observed, "a dandy little refinement, lending the last touch of class to a gentleman's auto," but a priceless time-saver. By freeing him from halting the car to light a match, it would in a month or two easily save ten minutes. (54)

Prior to the publication of *Babbitt*, Lewis wrote letters to Harcourt requesting those advertising pamphlets, real estate information, and other materials be incorporated with the text (Wilson 240). These materials were not included, but Lewis did employ ad copy and layout for mail-order public speaking and boxing courses discussed by Babbitt and his son, Ted, in chapter three. During Babbitt's attendance of the S.A.R.E.B. (State Association of Real Estate Boards) convention in Monarch, he encounters a newspaper's ad layout for the Old Colony Theatre, promoting the WROLICKING WRENS, "The bonniest bevy of beauteous bathing babes in burlesque" (172).

This Barnumesque hyperbole can be construed as an advertising device, a catchy phrase, slogan, or jingle that attracts the consumer, and Lewis's saturation style of writing is part of an ad campaign cycle of repetition that reinforces the message. Copywriters were taught to repeat the name of the product or company at least three times in an advertisement with the aim of imprinting it on the readers' minds. Using concepts and ideas rather than brand names, Lewis uses this technique throughout *Babbitt*. However, the significance of the novel lies in the message it holds and the actual literary work itself, not necessarily the devices Lewis uses to attain it.

The campaign strategy that underpins the novel begins with making readers aware of the impact materialism, standardization, and capitalism have on their lives. Mechanical devices become symbols of wealth and beauty, and "closed" rather than "open top" cars and identical houses with sleeping porches indicate social rank. Political ideas, religious beliefs, and even mundane thoughts are standardized according to the editorial in the town newspaper, conversation at the Athletic Club, or Sunday's sermon.

Capitalistic spins are thrust on ideologies and even religious beliefs. The author mixes the voices of commercialism and evangelism in his persuasive technique. In chapter 4, Lewis imposes dollar figures on the cost of salvation when he writes about evangelist Mike Monday, who is reportedly about to retire with a fortune:

"Rev. Mr. Monday, the Prophet with a Punch, has shown that he is the world's greatest salesman of salvation, and that by efficient organization the overhead of spiritual regeneration may be kept down to an unprecedented rock-bottom basis. He has converted over two hundred thousand lost and priceless souls at an average cost of less than ten dollars a head." (98)

The cycle of saturation and repetition of messages continues as Lewis's campaign gains momentum. He is identifying a problem, intensifying reader awareness. Material goods can improve the American standard of life and offer convenience; higher status and increased wealth are desirable, but at what expense? Using literary dialogue rather than exaggeration or overstatement, Lewis argues that the price middle-class Americans will have to pay for conformity is a loss of individuality.

In a discussion with Seneca Doane, the radical lawyer, Dr. Kurt Yavitch, the histologist, says:

"Standardization is excellent, *per se*.... No, what I fight in Zenith is standardization of thought, and, of course, the traditions of competition. The real villains of the piece are the clean, kind, industrious Family Men who use every known brand of trickery and cruelty to insure the prosperity of their cubs. The worst thing about these fellows is that they're so good and, in their work at least, so intelligent. You can't hate them properly, and yet their standardized minds are the enemy." (Lewis 100-01)

Lewis adopts lures and revelations similar to those used by circus showman and promoter P. T. Barnum to attract audiences to his shows. The author layers cultural descriptions with myth, hyperbole, and publicity as he describes the white-collar world to readers. As the campaign progresses and Lewis's heavy doses of satire and exaggeration take effect, the results of materialism, industrialism, and standardization on middle-class America become clearer. This clarity, tak-

————— Middle-Class Message *continued on next page*

Middle-Class Message *continued from previous page*

ing the form of reader awareness, coincides with Babbitt's unhappiness and discontent.

Following Paul Riesling's incarceration in the state penitentiary for shooting his wife Zilla, Babbitt finds his life to be meaningless:

It was coming to him that perhaps all life as he knew it and vigorously practised it was futile; that heaven as portrayed by the Reverend Dr. John Jennison Drew was neither probable nor very interesting; that he hadn't much pleasure out of making money; that it was of doubtful worth to rear children merely that they might rear children who would rear children. What was it all about? What did he want? (Lewis 273)

As Babbitt ponders the discontent in his life, Lewis continues to saturate readers with details and observations that imprint and encode a message about the artificiality of the culture. The societal ills associated with materialism, capitalism, consumerism, and boosterism are identified; middle-class readers are now aware of the potential side effects. Just as Barnum enjoined his audiences to play along in sideshow trickery, Lewis acknowledges through his satire that his readers are also consumers and susceptible to the same discontent and emptiness Babbitt is facing in his life.

It is at this point in Lewis's advertising/public relations campaign that he begins to encourage a change in attitudes, a shift in ideals and values.

Babbitt attempts to break ties with Zenith, and ultimately he revolts against capitalistic codes. A full break with Zenith is impossible, but he takes a trip into Maine's wilderness in an attempt to recapture the essence of a previous outing with Paul Reisling. Enlightened and transformed into a more liberal man, Babbitt returns to Zenith determined to make some changes. "But I'm going to—oh, I'm going to start something!" he vowed, and he tried to make it valiant" (Lewis 301).

Babbitt's "something" evolves into a midlife crisis and rebellion that includes an affair with Tanis Judique, drinking bouts, affiliations with some of the community's less-desirable citizenry, and a resistance to join the Good Citizens' League, a move that jeopardizes Babbitt's business career and social status in Zenith.

Crisis in literary form converges with crisis in public relations management. The plot line moves along what Schorer calls the "rebellion" stage, soon to be followed by Babbitt's retreat and resignation. The campaign strategy has identified the problem, persuaded readers to change attitudes,

and encouraged a shift in ideals and values, but Lewis takes it no further. Although he continues to saturate his writing with advertising and publicity techniques in the remainder of *Babbitt*, he doesn't attempt to hard-sell a product or answer to America's middle class. The author doesn't offer a solution for Babbitt's affliction.

In literary form, he describes an individual trapped in an environment. Babbitt engages in a loveless marriage, a boring job, and a routine life. He is caught in the snares of the white-collar class values of Zenith, a community that adopts standardization and conformity as judiciously as it enacts town ordinances, a community that worships distorted images of patriotism and spiritualism.

Materialism, while indicating American supremacy, has failed to satisfy Babbitt. Consumerism, capitalism, and standardization have fallen short of his expectations. Community and professional status and family life have left him unfulfilled. Patriotism, spiritualism, and evangelism haven't filled the void. However, there is no escape, and Babbitt remains in his environment. He resigns himself to his fate and nurtures a hope that his son, Ted, will one day break the middle-class mold and cycle of discontent.

Schorer writes that the novel makes it easy enough to identify "the values that would save Zenith, and Babbitt with it; they are love and friendship; kindness, tolerance, justice, and integrity; beauty; intellect" (355). The acquisition of these values and characteristics, with the possible exception of intellect, is within Babbitt's reach, but he is thwarted by the effects of the "-isms" and society's immersion in them. Babbitt, in his capitalistic environment, is a consumer, but he also becomes a by-product of the system, a character whose empty and discontented life exemplifies the entire white-collar middle class of the 1920s.

Lewis declined a Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* (1925), claiming it was only intended for champions of wholesomeness. In 1930, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature "for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humour, new types of original characters" ("Nobel Prize"). In his acceptance speech, "The American Fear of Literature," which he delivered before the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, Lewis explained his views of American society:

I should even have supposed that so international a scholar would have believed that Scandinavia, accus-

Middle-Class Message *continued on next page*

Middle-Class Message *continued from previous page*

tomed to the works of Strindberg, Ibsen, and Pontopidan, would not have been peculiarly shocked by a writer whose most anarchistic assertion has been that America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures. ("American" 6)

Lewis's *Babbitt* succeeds as a social discourse because it doesn't provide a pat solution to a complicated problem. Unlike patent medicines advertised as cure-alls for physical ills, there is no remedy for the middle-class malaise. Lewis diagnoses the societal ailment, but he doesn't prescribe treatment. Paralleling this, in the public relations campaign underlying his literary work, he identifies the problem, makes readers aware of it, and encourages a change or shift in values. He does not offer a solution or a remedy because he believes none exists in American society.

Introducing Lewis's Novels *continued from page 1*

ago Patrick joined the Rotary Global History Project (see <http://www.rotaryhistoryfellowship.org/>) and was surprised to discover certain stereotypical attitudes and even errors about Lewis's characters (e.g. the widespread belief among Rotarians that Lewis's fictional George F. Babbitt was a Rotarian [he was not; he was a Booster]).

From this came our decision to offer an introductory survey of twenty-three of Lewis's books. In the process, Patrick would, *inter alia*, keep an eye out for remarks about service clubs. Mary would focus on Lewis's presentation of women. (For details see our web site at http://www.patrickillough.com/courses/sinclairlewis_outline.html and associated links.)

Our model for constructing our class was an Elderhostel course given a few years back at a Geneva Bay Centre Elderhostel on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (see: http://www.covenantharbor.org/elderhostel_main.htm). It was a survey of Irish culture and literature. A professor of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee gave each of us a four-page listing of Irish literature from the beginning until now. With that bare outline before us, she then filled in the blanks in her lectures. We thought that was a helpful, doable, and transferable approach for the many fewer works we would present about Sinclair Lewis.

Since Lewis's works were fewer and all in the first half of the twentieth century, we could present them in more depth than was done for the Irish literature list, especially Lewis's seven or eight "best" works. But for each of the twenty-three books our core would be reading aloud selected passages. The

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- Lewis, Sinclair. "The American Fear of Literature." *The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904-1950*. Ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. New York: Random House, 1953. 3-17.
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- Wilson, Christopher P. *White Collar Fictions*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992. z

books were presented chronologically. And each was located within Lewis's biography. Publishing history and critics' reactions were also given. In our final section there was a general summing up and free for all discussion.

To prepare to teach, we first read the twenty-three books in whatever order we could lay our hands on them. We looked as well at over a dozen secondary sources and films on video tape. We bought copies of all but three books (those we read via interlibrary loan). As he read each one, Patrick dashed off brief reviews for www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com. As course time approached, we then reread the books in the order they were written. That second reading gave us remarkably new insights.

We live in Buncombe County (its seat, Asheville, in western North Carolina). This is anything but an intellectual and cultural desert. There are small private and public colleges and universities (some with national or regional reputations), but there are no major research universities within a hundred miles. Since 1988 the University of North Carolina at Asheville has offered, through its Center For Creative Retirement (see <http://www.unca.edu/ncccr/>), a rich program of non-credit courses in religion, arts, literature, sciences, etc. Patrick took an excellent course there with a retired professor on Joyce's *Ulysses*. Montreat College's McCALL (twenty miles to the east) is a smaller, more modest version of the Creative Retirement approach.

————— Introducing Lewis's Novels *continued on next page*

Introducing Lewis's Novels *continued from previous page*

Had there been a resident Sinclair Lewis expert whom McCALL could have persuaded to teach an introduction to the novels of Lewis, we need not have offered our course. But we have long agreed with Chesterton that "if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing badly." So we went ahead.

Our goal was to give a solid informal introduction to Lewis's twenty-three books for the purpose of empowering our students to select for themselves which three or four or five to read by themselves. Both we and our students seemed pleased with our modest, clearly defined goal and our methods of presentation. Students included a published novelist and one PhD candidate who had taken other courses of ours and read for the course nearly as much of Lewis as we did. We stay in touch with several of our students and lend them copies of Lewis films on tape.

A temptation we had to overcome was to be dragged

A Citizen of the Mirage continued from page 4

It was a spot which a weary man would remember out of his wanderings, for its gentleness and security. A sandy-bottomed, alder-sheltered brook curved past a grove of birches, and encircling the valley were fat little hills.

There were a dozen Tudor buildings, with tower and pointed arch, and leaded casements overlooking rhododendron-bordered walks. Leonard was astonished, then uncomfortable. A mysterious sickness crept among these gray stone walls. Blankly new they were, yet still as veritable death. Not one person was in sight; the silken wind carried to him no sound of life.

With a shyness unnatural, he descended, walked among the cloistered buildings. In the plague of silence his footsteps were shocking. He caught himself stalking on tiptoe. Through the windows of a dormitory he saw pictures, fireplaces, and couches on which undergraduates should have been loafing and making terrific noises. In a laboratory he noted static machines, motors, balances under glass. But no human being was visible. He fancied a breathing of hidden spirits around him. He heard the tremendous whispers of dead things. He felt not brisk, but futile.

He tried to laugh at his fancies, but it was the laughter of a shaky-kneed boy who tells himself that he isn't embarrassed by the titter of a group of girls on a porch. He assured himself that the campus was deserted because the term hadn't opened or because everyone was away on vacation. But he didn't believe it. He caught a quiver of unhappiness. The innocent brightness of the day, of bending sky and light-washed walls, made the silence evil. He peeped into a quadrangle. He rarely

too much into Lewis's complicated biography at the expense of his text. This temptation was complicated by the fact that Lewis wrote so often of events in the nation's very recent past, drawing on personal experiences. It was only after the course's end that we read the rather sunny biography, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* by Richard Lingeman. So we were probably too much influenced in our preparations by Mark Schorer's generally negative, often depressing *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*.

For follow-up we are thinking of offering for the April 2007 McCALL session a four-week course on Sinclair Lewis and the American theater. His contributions, of course, to theater, were far less than to the art of the novel. But the thinness of his work, except for *It Can't Happen Here* and the Federal Theatre Project, might let us focus more on Lewis's often sad life. Our students have asked us to work up such a course. ✍

rose so high as sentimentality, but now with a weak emptiness he felt the pity that these tiled walks and grass-plots should be barren of strolling, singing students.

Always the silence drifted about him. He caught gloomy eyes glaring from behind stone pillars; yet when he whirled to confront them, no one was there.

"Anybody around?" he cried. He tried to make it the jolly hail of a brisk young man, but it came out a whine. There wasn't even an echo. His stomach prickled with uneasiness.

Even in vacation time there should have been janitors. The campus was immaculate, the grass-plots trim, the new ivy almost too carefully pruned. But who had done the work? He who had laughed at fairy-tales ever since his first successful trade—when, at nine, he had swapped twelve imitation aggies for a real twenty-two caliber rifle—was betrayed into the fancy that elves clipped these hedges, and the ponderous walls had been erected by the gnomes.

With relief he left the main group of buildings and climbed unbriskly toward what seemed to be the chapel—a detached Gothic structure on a rise. He started, stopped. The tall bronze doors were open.

But through them came no sound. He stood in the vestibule. His stare awkwardly ventured into the banner-flaunting nave. He gasped, and his arms twitched as from somewhere in the dusky loftiness he heard a voice—a bell voice, deep, serious, rich with ancient sorrows:

"My friends, we open our seventh year of this University,

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

A Citizen of the Mirage *continued from previous page*

our seventh year of seeking the excellence of wisdom.”

In the vestibule a much relieved salesman chortled: “Huh! Idiot! Imagining everybody dead, when they were all up here at opening service!”

He peered in. Instantly he felt gaunt again, and helpless, for there was no one in all the chapel save the speaker, a huge old man, white-bearded, erect, standing alone by the lectern. The grim rows of pews were blankly empty.

Leonard slipped behind a baize inner door while the old man went on:

“This is to be our year of glory—as, to the man who with seeing eyes beholds the good brown earth and the aspiring sky, every year is a new glory. But peculiarly this year shall we—we will, oh, we will—”

Then as the great tree crashes, the old man sank to his knees. Sunlight splashed the place where he knelt, and Leonard could see that he wore a black silk cassock, rusty and darned. He held up his two mighty arms, threw back his head so that in the licking sun-flame his white beard was silver fire. The triumphant voice that had filled the stone arches with soaring life was shattered to a whimpering cry for help, the cry of a man unused to weeping but beaten now, and he prayed:

“Lord of hosts, I cannot go on! I am defeated. Seven years I have waited for disciples, and not one has come to stay, not one, not one! I take Thy rebuke but—give to Thy servant one follower before I die!”

Leonard Lamb Shanklin was dreadfully uncomfortable. He discovered himself skittering down the chapel steps, through the campus back toward town. He had a feeling that he wasn’t worthy to witness the agony of a giant; but that couldn’t have been true, for not only was he a Doctor of Philosophy, but also he had been acknowledged by his boss as “the best gab-artist in the school-junk business.” He had had enough of self-depreciation. He felt injured. He had been letting mere imagination interfere with business. When he had walked the unmanly awe out of his system, he grumbled:

“I believe I’m letting something good get by me. Don’t know why the old nut hasn’t any students, but he certainly has got one complete plant here, and a man with pep and efficiency could do something with it. Old whiskerando must be this Basil Quaero, the president. Me for you, Basil.”

With which Leonard turned and marched back, a young sun-god in eyeglasses. From the archway of a recitation hall he watched the door of the chapel till he saw the white-bearded man emerge, walk down the hill, enter a garden-ringed stone cottage at the edge of the birch-grove. The man had removed his cassock, wore a careless, old short coat and no hat. He tramped like a veteran soldier.

Leonard dusted his knees and sleeves, pulled down his waistcoat, cleaned his eyeglasses and with the judiciousness of an ex-instructor combined with the busy practicality of a crack salesman, he darted across the rough heath beyond the main buildings and pounded the knocker on the oak door of the cottage.

The old man opened the door. Leonard was embarrassed by his near-seen hugeness. He was massive-shouldered, with arms and legs like ship’s-timbers; and his beard was that of those ancient Irish poet-kings who broke battles with their hands. His face was rough, the nose a chunk of hickory, but over his vast forehead and deep in his quiet eyes was the melancholy beauty of the Quest of Truth. He gazed absently down on the dapper Leonard.

“Is this President Quaero?”

“It is.” The strange eyes widened, grew lively. “Are you a student?”

“Why not, not exactly, but—My card.”

The card asserted that not only was Leonard Lamb Shanklin a Doctor of Philosophy—which, because interpreted, means a wise man devoted to the love of learning, a most pleasant thing to be called—but also that he had formerly been instructor in chemistry at Littlejohn University.

Quaero’s laugh came like the March blast in a ringing mountain-cleft. He dropped his paw on the dainty shoulder of the wise man devoted to learning and he roared: “Welcome my boy! I don’t know what heresy they’ve fired you for, and you needn’t tell me. The last refugee was a literature teacher who had said that Cicero and Caesar were damn’ bad writers. Here you can teach the truth as you see it—if any students come to be taught.”

Now, that was no reasonable greeting to the smartest salesman of the Vigilance Chemical House. Leonard snapped:

“I haven’t been fired for anything! Fact is, I’ve, uh, temporarily abandoned the purely pedagogic aspect to assist in developing the distributive function of the commercial—”

“I see. You mean you’re on the road, selling. Plain words break no images, Doctor. But come in—stay overnight—as long as you can. I am lonely, and I am garrulous!”

To be continued in the fall 2006 issue.

DEPARTMENTS

BOOK NOTES

In 1929 Sinclair Lewis visited Marion, North Carolina, to file news reports about a labor dispute where deputies killed six strikers and wounded over twenty others. The Scripps Howard News Service reports were published in a pamphlet, "Cheap and Contented Labor" and his observation of the events was an important source for the book by Mike Lawing, *The Marion Massacre*, published by Wasteland Press in 2004. The story was used as a radio documentary produced by WNCW and broadcast as a five-part series in September 2005. "Cheap and Contented Labor" was reprinted in *The Man from Main Street*.

The book description from Amazon.com is as follows:

Buried in the collective memory of Marion, North Carolina lives a shadowy story of struggle, of power and of blood in the streets.

Mike Lawing exhumes this tale of desperate factory workers—the outcast lintheads—and the small town sheriff whose questionable actions forever silenced the call for organized labor in this mountain mill town.

Putting Marion's 1929 strike at Clinchfield Mills and Marion Manufacturing in historical perspective alongside more well known movements like Gastonia and the uprising of '34, Lawing examines the mystery of his hometown's oft-forgotten massacre and tracks the rise of its figures through the state's political ranks.

It is a story of good and evil and the line in the mud that blurs them both. It is a story that deserves to be remembered.

Linda Turcato wrote Amazon to say:

My great grand father was one of the men shot in the neck and was the last one to die, He name was Tilden Lee Carver, married to Emma Lue Payne. T.L. Carver was shot in the neck and died 11 days later. This is a great book, it opens your eyes to see the very hard life in 1929 in Marion. And if your a part of the book as I am, it means so much to be a part of it.

MORE ON *IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE*

The Boston Globe reported on the reprinting of *It Can't Happen Here* in "Public enemy Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here* envisioned an America in thrall to a homespun fascist dictator. Newly reissued, it's as unsettling a read as ever." The article, by Joe Keohane, and published on December 18, 2005, starts out by making some very striking connections to the present. Here are some excerpts from it:

Picture this: A folksy, self-consciously plainspoken Southern politician rises to power during a period of profound unrest in America. The nation is facing one of the half-dozen or so of its worst existential crises to date, and the people, once sunny, confident, and striving, are now scared, angry, and disillusioned.

This politician, a "Professional Common Man," executes his rise by relentlessly attacking the liberal media, fancy-talking intellectuals, shiftless progressives, pinkos, promiscuity, and welfare hangers-on, all the while clamoring for a return to traditional values, to love of country, to the pie-scented days of old when things made sense and Americans were indisputably American. He speaks almost entirely in "noble but slippery abstraction"—Liberty, Freedom, Equality—and people love him, even if they can't fully articulate why without resorting to abstractions themselves.

Through a combination of factors—his easy bearing chief among them (along with massive cash donations from Big Business; disorganization in the liberal opposition; a stuffy, aloof opponent; and support from religious fanatics who feel they've been unfairly marginalized)—he wins the presidential election.

Once in, he appoints his friends and political advisers to high-level positions, stocks the Supreme Court with "surprisingly unknown lawyers who called [him] by his first name," declaws Congress, allows Big Business to dictate policy, consolidates the media, and fills newspapers with "syndicated gossip from Hollywood." Carping newspapermen worry that America is moving backward to a time when anti-German politicians renamed sauerkraut "Liberty Cabbage" and "hick legislators...set up shop as scientific experts and made the world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution," but newspaper readers, wary of excessive negativity, pay no mind.

Given the nature of “powerful and secret enemies” of America—who are “planning their last charge” to take away our freedom—an indefinite state of crisis is declared, and that freedom is stowed away for safekeeping. When the threat passes, we can have it back, but in the meantime, citizens are asked to “bear with” the president. Sure, some say these methods are extreme, but the plain folks are tired of wishy-washy leaders, and feel the president’s decisiveness is its own excuse. Besides, as one man says, a fascist dictatorship “couldn’t happen here in America...we’re a country of freemen!”...

While more paranoid readers might be tempted to draw parallels between this scenario and sundry predicaments we may or may not be in right now, the story line is actually that of Sinclair Lewis’s 1935 novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, a hastily written cautionary note about America’s potential descent into fascism, recently reissued by New American Library in a handsome trade edition with a blood-spattered cover design.

[Keohane then gives some background on Lewis and the context for the publication of *It Can’t Happen Here*.]

It’s an unsettling read, especially in a day and age where wags and politicians on both sides compulsively accuse one another of plotting to destroy America. Other such books, most recently Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America*, ask whether a fascist dictatorship *can* happen here. But whereas Roth manipulates history in order to show what could have happened, imagining an America so blinded by celebrity adulation that it elects an isolationist, anti-Semitic Charles Lindbergh president, Lewis suggests that it *already has happened*, in little pockets all over America: in bridge club meetings, Rotary luncheons. No invading army will be needed to turn America fascist. Instead, the catalyst will come from within, and when it does it will speak colloquial American, and it will come waving the Stars and Stripes....

Windrip’s economic policies are disastrous, his figures often incorrect, and his platform seems to change depending on who he’s talking to, but none of that matters as long as he keeps expressing himself decisively. “I want to stand up on my hind legs,” he writes in *Zero Hour*, his widely read pre-campaign book, “and not just admit but frankly holler right out that...we’ve got to change our system a lot, maybe even change the whole Constitution (but change it legally, not by violence)... The Executive has got to have a freer hand and be able to move quick in an emergency, and not be tied down by dumb shyster lawyer congressmen taking months to shoot off their

mouths in debates.” When Windrip is elected, all hell breaks loose. Dissent is crushed, the Bill of Rights is gutted, war is declared (on Mexico), and labor camps are established to help shore up Windrip’s vaunted “New Freedom,” which is more like a freedom from freedom. All that’s really left of the old America are the flags and patriotic ditties, which for many is more than enough. But to Lewis it’s not entirely the fault of those who will gladly abide America’s principles being gutted. The blame also falls on the “it can’t happen here” crowd, those yet to realize that being American doesn’t change your human nature; whatever it is that attracts people to tyranny is in Americans like it’s in anyone else.

When Lewis embarked on *It Can’t Happen Here*, his wife wondered if a dictatorship could happen in this country, whether complacent Babbitt, as she put it, could be taught to march “quickly enough.” It was a question that Lewis had already answered. There’s a scene in *Babbitt* where the title character blows up at his wife and admits for the first time in years that he’s not as thrilled with his lot as he lets on. His wife soothes him and sends him off to bed, where, “For many minutes, for many hours, for a bleak eternity, he lay awake, shivering, reduced to primitive terror, comprehending that he had won freedom, and wondering what he could do with anything so unknown and so embarrassing as freedom.”

In other words, the marching is just pageantry. Windrip’s most formidable task, convincing Americans to renounce bedrock democratic principles, was already accomplished well before he took power. It was just waiting for its moment.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

The January/February 2006 issue of *American Book Review* focused on “The 100 Best First Lines from Novels” (3–9). As Charles B. Harris, the focus editor, notes, the list was done in a spirit of play, inspired by the American Film Institute’s 100 best movie lines. Two of Sinclair Lewis’s novels made it in. “Elmer Gantry was drunk” came in at #51. “The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods” was #90. Sally Parry wrote an appreciation of the two for the issue, noting the contrasts between them:

The beginning of *Babbitt* is aesthetically beautiful, as though it were a description of a European landscape in a nineteenth-century travelogue...[while *Elmer*

Gantry] starts with a short declarative sentence.... Lewis startles readers by informing them that the character they are going to be spending the next 400 plus pages with drinks to excess. (8)

The list received great press, including mentions in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*.

For a touching memory of Fay Wray's last days, see "Fay Wray: The Passing of a Legend," by Justin Clayton in *Films of the Golden Age 43* (Winter 2005/2006): 76–82. Clayton befriended Miss Wray and spent much time with her as she talked about the Golden Age of Hollywood and many of her friends, including Cary Grant, Loretta Young, Jimmy Stewart, Ronald Colman, and Sinclair Lewis.

In January and February 2006, the *Chicago Tribune* Books section ran a call for nominations for the best Midwestern novel. Jim Hisler wrote to the chicagotribune.com/novels website to nominate *Main Street*. His comments were also printed in the Books section on February 5, 2006: "Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* has stayed in my mind more than any other midwestern novel: the combination of Carol's loneliness and the bleak beauty of frozen Minnesota fields" (8).

Language maven William Safire commented on the phrase "talking points" in his November 27, 2005 column (*New York Times Magazine*: 26). He dates the phrase to the Civil War, but notes occurrences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. "In Sinclair Lewis's classic 1922 novel, *Babbitt*, the author described 'a broker...who understood *Talking Points*, Strategic Values, Key Situations, Underappraisals.' To underscore his satire, the novelist capitalized the pretentious words used to bedazzle investors."

The Weather Channel has a series with a title that recalls *It Can't Happen Here*: "It Could Happen Tomorrow," about various cataclysmic occurrences of weather that haven't happened yet, but might, such as a hurricane in New York City or a tornado in Dallas.

Last year the Library of Congress found the two-hour version of the television play *What Makes Sammy Run?* by Budd Schul-

berg, which was originally broadcast by NBC in 1959. Joseph Berger, in "Back to '59: Sammy Is Running Again" (*New York Times*, April 6, 2005: B1, 8), notes that "Despite a character type as iconically American as George Babbitt, Jay Gatsby, and Willy Loman, *What Makes Sammy Run?* was never made into a film." This is probably because the subject matter was too critical of Hollywood. "Sammy was an original, an archetype for the ruthless climber who sheds scruples and uses up friends as he slithers his way to the top. He steals credit for scripts, drops his girlfriend for the studio owner's regal daughter, and displays an almost acrobatic ability to feign ardent loyalty to his boss while making a case for dumping him at the same time." The insight into the characters of the studio system was heightened by Schulberg's insider knowledge since his father, B. P. Schulberg, had been the head of Paramount Pictures. The television version starred Larry Blyden, John Forsythe, Barbara Rush, and Dina Merrill.

In "Don't Call Me Thomas: How Can I Give a C to Someone Who Is Close Enough to Me to Use My First Name?" Thomas H. Benton (a pseudonym) discusses how friendly a professor ought to be with college students (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 20, 2006: C1, 4). As part of his musings, he notes that he had "tried the business path but, like Holden Caulfield armed with B.A. in English (and familiarity with Sinclair Lewis), I couldn't quite participate in the earnest phoniness of corporate sales meetings."

The novelist Allegra Goodman was interviewed by Deborah Solomon for the *New York Times Magazine* (January 15, 2006: 15) on real scientific scandals and the fictional scandal portrayed in her new novel *Intuition*. Solomon contends that scientists in literature "like Dr. Victor Frankenstein are romanticized as madmen who push their experiments over the edge and endanger mankind." Goodman responds, "In the realist vein, we have a novel like Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, in which a young scientist comes of age and learns something about the intensity and frustrations of research."

Novelist Herbert Gold wrote "In Bellow's Company" for *Commentary* (September 2005: 38–44) and in it discusses a variety of postwar American writers, but the essay serves mainly as an appreciation of Saul Bellow. Gold was in Paris after World War II where he met Bellow who had recently (1947) finished *The Victim*. One day, while strolling with Bellow in Paris,

I happened to speak of Sinclair Lewis, who was still alive and writing his worn-out, alcoholic last novels. As a boy, when I first discovered grownup books, *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, and *It Can't Happen Here* opened doors to the world outside Lakewood, Ohio. But by 1950 it seemed that Lewis's fingers were merely punching the typewriter, his rage had devolved to hysteria, the satire was diminished into abuse of a world he no longer fathomed. His erotic yearning—I was in my early twenties—seemed pathetic in an old man.

Saul interrupted, turning his warm and amused gaze on me, with a reproach that was just, aimed exactly right, naming the lack of generosity in a young man's sniping against his elders. "Don't count any writer out until he's gone." (43-44)

Jackie Koenig writes, "Herb Gold is 81 and still writing (his forthcoming novel is *My First Murder*). Sounds like he is appreciating Saul Bellow's advice, 'Don't count any writer out until he's gone,' all those years ago when HG was 24."

Transaction Publishers announces a reprint of *Babbitts and Bohemians: From the Great War to the Great Depression* by Elizabeth Stevenson, with a new introduction by the author. Originally published in 1997, this book "finds that the true twenties was a society of contrast. On the one hand, it was an era of sameness and political conformity, but on the other hand, it was also a time of cultural revolt. In places labeled *Main Street* and *Middletown*, the citizenry followed a conventional pattern. At the same time, while most of America enjoyed the good life of this period, bohemians in Greenwich Village and expatriates in Paris were fervently scornful of it."

WEB NOTES

Over 58,390 people have accessed the Sinclair Lewis website in the last two years since the website was revamped. There has been a lot of interest in Lewis's political views, especially on fascism, as well as his general interest in popular culture. Here are some of the questions that have been received recently.

I am on the board of a small theatre in Los Angeles, The 24th Street Theatre, and we are interested in doing a play that was written at the time the building we are in was built, 1928. We have found a mention that a play of *Elmer Gantry* by Patrick

Kearney was on Broadway in 1928. But we can not find out anything else. Is there anyone or anything that the Sinclair Lewis Society might do to help us locate this script? I have found little on Patrick Kearney as well. He is also credited with a play *An American Tragedy* in 1927. He was given credit for that play as the basis for the film *A Place in the Sun*. If there are any leads you could give us to find the *Elmer Gantry* play, we would greatly appreciate it.

[What a great idea to include it in your season. I do some work for a community theater in Illinois so I know how it is in setting up schedules. I know very little about the play. Lewis was not involved in the production although he and his wife did see it. It had a tryout in Cleveland for a month and there were numerous script problems. A play doctor, Thompson Buchanan, was called in and there was a lot of rewriting. On the day that the play was to open both the director and producer announced that they were retiring from the project. It actually opened on August 9 and closed on September 15. Extras in the show came into the house to encourage people to be saved. Brooks Atkinson reviewed it and thought it kind of a mess.

I hope that the above doesn't deter you! You might try the Library for the Performing Arts in New York since I don't think the Lewis papers either at Yale or Syracuse would have a copy.

Best of luck and let me know if you find more information (most of mine was taken from a biography of Lewis by Mark Schorer).]

Sally, thanks for these tid-bits. I did locate some information about the actor who played Elmer Gantry in the original production. His name was Edward Joel Pawley. He was said to have a sonorous baritone voice. He listed *Elmer Gantry* as one of his Broadway credits. I've also run across a play called *Gantry* and a musical from the '70s titled *Elmer Gantry*. We'll check the NY library.

[There are actually two musicals of *Elmer Gantry*. The one done in the '70s starred Robert Shaw and I don't think lasted a week. There is a new version that I saw several years ago in Chicago and was pretty good. It did end at about the same point that the movie does, with the fire and death of Sharon.]

This is an odd question, but because I am no scholar on Sinclair Lewis maybe you can help me. I am a council member in a small city in Texas. We try to instill city pride and implement many innovative programs to protect our environment while creating a unique and eclectic place to live. I have received a piece of hate mail from an anonymous person that chastises our city spirit efforts and includes the following reference "with all this dreaming of some gadfly coming along to do to

SV what Sinclair Lewis did to Sauk Centre, Minnesota. You have it coming to you.”

I have no idea what they are talking about. Can you help explain what this reference means?

[What an odd but neat question. One of your hate mail writers must be somewhat well read. I can try and guess what this person means. Sinclair Lewis wrote a novel in 1920 called *Main Street*. It was based to a great extent on his home town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota. In it he assails small town life as being very parochial and problematic through the eyes of his main character Carol Kennicott. She moves to the town from the big city of St. Paul and decides that the town needs improving. She starts a little theater group, helps establish a ladies waiting room for farmers' wives, and tries to encourage the citizens of the town to be more forward in their thinking. They are reluctant and she skips from idea to idea without putting in the time (the citizens think it should be years) to make these changes. She eventually leaves her husband, moves to Washington, DC, and only comes back to town when she finds out that she is pregnant again. She says to her husband at the end, "I've never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to have gone beyond them. I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that Gopher Prairie [the town] is greater or more generous than Europe! I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women! I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith." She thinks she has failed, but looks to her daughter to carry on the fight.

At the time, the citizens of Sauk Centre really were angry about the novel that they thought slammed small towns. Back then small towns were considered to be very nice places as opposed to the evil cities. Lewis, and a number of other writers, including Sherwood Anderson and Floyd Dell, showed that the opportunities for small-mindedness, prejudice, and greed existed in small towns as well. Lewis contended that what he wrote could apply to small towns across the US and the response he got (it was a big best-seller) confirmed that.

Ironically, Sauk Centre (for the most part) now celebrates Lewis. The boyhood home is a landmark, the street that the house is on is now named Sinclair Lewis Boulevard, and there is also a sign for the Original Main Street. The high school team is called the Main Streeters and every summer there are Sinclair Lewis Days which are a small town celebration, not always so much about Lewis (although his grandson was in the parade this year) as to celebrate the town itself.

So, in a backhanded way the letter may be a compliment, whether the writer intended it that way or not.]

Sally, thank you so much for the synopsis. It was my take as well that what was meant as a slam is actually something

I embrace as a compliment. I guess I am the living, breathing female protagonist in as much as I have served the public here in our small town since 1999 in public office. We, as a small town, have had to hold onto our identity tightly as the city of Austin has woven around us on all 4 sides with densities we would never have dreamed of. We have stood steadfast against overdevelopment and have taken the environmental charge to protect our regional aquifer.

We have many new people that have bought homes here with only land speculation in mind and it is one of these people that I believe sent me this anonymous note. He or she ends the note with a rather cryptic statement hoping that I will "get what I have coming."

Unlike what my understanding of the rather "closed society" of *Main Street*, we are somewhat the antithesis. We are an eclectic bunch that has resisted melting into the larger society that is Austin.

I am an optimist and I continue to believe with all my heart that my citizens are, as a whole, good people that care about each other and the small city we live in. As we meet the challenges of over urbanization all around us, I suppose there will be people that see the choice not to yield to sameness as a kind of repression...at least to their land value speculation.

Again thank you so much for taking the time to help me understand this work of Lewis. And if you are ever out our way do drop in.

Cat Quintanilla
Mayor Pro Tem
City of Sunset Valley, Texas
www.sunsetvalley.org

I have a Sinclair Lewis *Elmer Gantry* which is written in French. It is soft copy and is signed by Lewis. It is inscribed on the front cover in French "To Tish and Wally, in memory of the good times and naturally of Zimbalist." It was purchased in a bookstore in Chapel Hill, NC in 1966.

I would like to find out, if possible, who Tish and Wally and Zimbalist were.

I would consider donating the book to an appropriate university or organization.

[I haven't been able to figure out who Tish and Wally are, but Zimbalist mostly likely refers to Efrem Zimbalist, Sr. who was a renown classical violinist. Lewis was conversant in both French and German, and at the time of his death, in 1951, was learning Italian. Is there any date on the inscription?

Institutions that have Lewis collections include Yale (where he got a BA), Syracuse (where his second wife Dorothy Thompson earned her degree), University of Texas at Austin

(where Lewis's first wife Grace Hegger donated her papers), the Minnesota Historical Society which has a very nice collection of letters and memorabilia, St. Cloud State University which has Lewis family papers (and the only recording I've heard of Lewis's voice), and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation in Lewis's home town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota.]

I have a Post Card mailed in 1920 from Harefield, England to a Miss Emma or Erma Davis, Lutherville, MD, USA and it is signed S Lewis. The message is as follows, "Trust you are well. I visited your uncle last monday found them all well. Sail on Adriatic on March 3 from Southampton S Lewis" I have taken the liberty of sending you a scan of it and was wondering if this is Sinclair Lewis of renown.

[Unfortunately Lewis was not in England at the time.]

I'm a director/writer and would like to know more about the Federal Theatre Project of his work, *It Can't Happen Here*. I've recently read the novel and would love to see what the Fed Theatre Project was able to do with the work.

Can you help guide me on this quest?

[I recommended the Dramatists Play Service edition which is a revision of what was done on Broadway.]



I did get the revised version and unfortunately, found it unworkable as a piece of theatre for our times. The new authors, out of necessity or theatrical taste or whatever, so collapsed events and characters that the piece seems more like a bad pot boiler than a treatise on the resistable rise of George W...er... Buzz Windrip. I long to see the original adaptation done by the Federal Theatre Project in '36...I

have read three other FTP scripts, *Triple A Plowed Under*, *Spiroccete*, and *Power* and found *Power* to be the most doable even though it requires a cast of about 50 actors...the style of a living newspaper, a kind of episodic-Brechtian, neo-Greek choral, agitprop approach works for me rather than a trimmed down, super-telescoped pot-boiling approach...the approach that I found in *ICHH*.

I would be curious to know as to whether Mr. Lewis adapted *It Can't Happen Here* for radio presentation.

[To the best of my knowledge there was no radio presentation of *ICHH*. The Federal Theatre Project produced it on Broadway and at 20 other venues around the country, starting on the same night, and it was later revised and done in some

regional theaters. Dramatists Play Service has a copy of that script for sale.]

I am the father of an 11-year-old boy and 14-year-old daughter.

Can you recommend some Sinclair Lewis books or short stories, that my 11-year-old and 14-year-old might enjoy & won't be over their head? They are both avid readers, but I am afraid they don't always read the things that would strengthen their values and prepare them for the realities of this world.

While trying to find books that they might like to read by Lewis, I came across your website.

[I recommend the two new collections of Lewis short stories, *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis* and *Go East, Young Man: Sinclair Lewis on Class in America*.]

Can you tell me the years Sinclair Lewis lived in Duluth? I know he taught at Duluth State Teachers College briefly. And I believe *Cass Timberlane* is set in the Duluth area. Are any other novels set here?

[Lewis lived in Duluth in the mid to late 1940s and also set *Kingsblood Royal* there.]

Thank you so very much. We own a grandfather clock that was owned by Sinclair Lewis and was in his Duluth home. We are going to put it on display in our new restaurant with a little sign that talks about Sinclair Lewis, and I wanted to be sure I had my facts right! If you come north, please plan to visit us at the Nokomis Restaurant and Bar, 5593 North Shore Drive, Duluth, MN 55804 218-525-2286. Our website is www.nokomisonthelake.com. Our name also has literary origins: Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" places the home of Nokomis on Gitchee Gumee (Lake Superior).

I am curious to find out if this is the same Sinclair Lewis who wrote under the nom de plume of "Neckyoke Jones" for the Sheridan Press. I am interesting in anything he may have written regarding Native Americans.

[Not to my knowledge.]

For the information of the society, I have just written a book recently compared to *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis. I was shocked to learn of such a comparison, but nonetheless thought it appropriate to make you and your colleagues aware of the book entitled *Stop Breathing My*



Air. Apparently it has taken my little small town by surprise!

Thanks,
Cortney Dawson

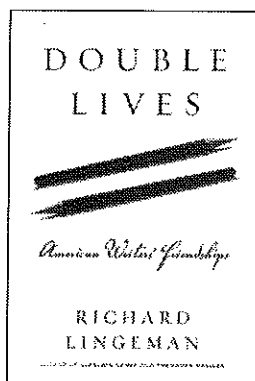
I have class work to find criticism on Mr. Lewis and some of his writings and would like some direction to go on. Could you help me?

[If you go to the links page of the Sinclair Lewis website <http://www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/links.html> that will take you to a number of links connected with Lewis. If you want criticism on a specific novel, go to <http://www.english.ilstu.edu/separry/sinclairlewis/scholarly.html>. There are lists of scholarly articles by text. The text of the article is not linked to; you would need to go to the library for that.

If you want just more general information on Lewis's writings, you might try the biography of him by Richard Lingeman. That should be very helpful.]

William Safire's column "On Language" in the *New York Times Magazine* (February 12, 2006: 24) discusses the use of the word "heck" as genteel cussing. "Heck appeared during our Civil War and was popularized by novelists in the first third of the 20th century; Sinclair Lewis in the 1922 novel *Babbitt* had a character say 'by heck' and James T. Farrell, in his 1932 book *Young Lonigan*—which some of us, in puerile passion, read for the 'hot parts'—wrote, 'He would have the heck of a time explaining his shiner to the old lady.'"

MEMBER NEWS



Double Lives: American Writers' Friendships by Richard Lingeman (Random House, 2006) sheds fresh light on the lives of America's most renowned writers.

Lingeman, author of the highly praised biographies of Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, tells the stories of seven friendships between fifteen major American writers. Through their letters and

correspondence, he shows how these personal relationships altered the course of American literature. Could Melville have unleashed his genius in *Moby-Dick* had

he not met his soul mate Nathaniel Hawthorne? Would Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* have found its real voice without the early edits Scott Fitzgerald suggested that summer in Paris? Could Willa Cather have discovered her true Nebraska subject matter—and her real sexuality—had she not befriended an older, wiser Sarah Orne Jewett? Whether it's the unlikely pairing of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells, the tenderness between the sensualist Edith Wharton and acetic aesthete Henry James, or the ties among Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Neal Cassady that gave birth to the beat movement and ushered in a new era in American literature, Lingeman's dual biographies show the perils as well as the advantages of literary friendships.

Sally E. Parry and Robert L. McLaughlin have written a new book, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II* (University Press of Kentucky, 2006). This book explores how movies were made in Hollywood during the war and how they served as a vehicle for helping Americans understand the war. They viewed over 600 films made between 1937 and 1946 in preparation for this volume which comments on how these films asked audiences to consider the implications of the Nazi threat, put a face on both our allies and our enemies, and explored the changing wartime gender roles. For more information visit www.kentuckypress.com.



ELECTIONS

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be holding an election this summer for new officers and board of directors. If you are interested in nominating someone, or nominating yourself, please send this information to Sally Parry at separry@ilstu.edu or c/o Dept. of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240 by the end of May. Some names were put forth at the last business meeting of the Society at the Lewis conference. These people do not have to submit their names again.

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

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Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$4200.

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205. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Howe, 1921. \$500.

Nineteenth printing. Light rubbing to the extremities, a near fine copy lacking the dustwrapper. Signed by the author.

206. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge: Being the Soul of Lowell Schmaltz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. \$350.

First edition. Fine in a near very good dustwrapper with some loss at the crown. A flawed but presentable copy.

207. —. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943. \$350.

First edition. Advance Reading Copy in self-wrappers. Red portion of the spine a bit faded, and some rubbing on the front wrap, an about very good copy of this uncommon advance issue.

Ed Smith Books, ABAA

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CATALOG 53



110. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$1500.

First edition. Inscribed by Lewis on the front endpaper. Bookplate on front pastedown, a very good to near fine copy in a good dust jacket with a piece missing in the middle of the spine and extensive internal tape mending. Signed copies of this Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, in dust jacket, are seldom seen.

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CATALOGUE 148

75. Lewis, Sinclair and Sidney Howard. *Sinclair Lewis's Dodsworth—Dramatized by Sidney Howard. With Comments by Sidney Howard and Sinclair Lewis on the Art of Dramatization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934. \$4500.

First edition. Special presentation edition signed by the authors Sinclair Lewis and Sidney Howard. This issue was made in a tiny quantity specifically for members of the original Broadway production with a special printed page which reads "To Jo Mielziner for helping to turn 'Dodsworth' from a manuscript into a play with gratitude of [hand signed in ink] Sinclair Lewis and [hand signed in ink] Sidney Howard. New York—September 1934." Illustrated with photographs from the production. Fine bright copy in a fine dust jacket. An important presentation copy to Jo Mielziner, who designed the sets for the original production. Sidney Howard discusses Mielziner's contribution in his essay on adapting the novel into play on pages xvi-xvii. Sidney Howard was a very successful Broadway playwright in the 1930s and wrote the screenplays for *Gone With the Wind* and film adaptations of Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* and *Arrowsmith*. Jo Mielziner is arguably the most distinguished set designer in Broadway history, creating the sets for such classics as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *South Pacific*, *Carousel*, *Mister Roberts*, *Key Largo*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, *Pal Joey*, *The King and I*, *Guys and Dolls*, etc. An excellent association copy of a highly successful Broadway play.

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150. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$500.

First trade edition, third printing. This copy is inscribed by Lewis on the front free endpaper. Back hinge starting, a very good to near-fine copy (lacking the dust jacket).

152. —. *The Job*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$950.

First edition, first issue. This copy is signed by Lewis on the front free endpaper. Fine (lacking rare dust jacket).

153. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1921. \$450.

First edition, seventeenth printing. This copy is inscribed by the author on the front free endpaper: "To V.P. Newmark from the striking face portrayed opposite—Sinclair Lewis." The "striking face portrayed opposite" is a photograph of Lewis that is mounted to the front pastedown. With the recipient's ownership signature ("Valentine P. Newmark") on the back endpaper. A very good copy.

154. —. *Mantrap*. Berlin: Rowholt, 1928. \$375.

First German edition. Printed wrappers. This copy is inscribed (in German!) by Lewis in the year of publication to the father of his friend, Ferdinand Reyher, who had been a guest at Lewis's wedding just the week before to Dorothy Thompson. Near fine.

155. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. London: Cape, 1928. \$175.

First English edition. This copy is in a variant binding of red cloth instead of the more usual blue. A fine, tight copy in a fine, bright dust jacket (price-clipped) with some internal tape strengthening at the edges.

156. —. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1938. \$125.

First edition. Faint offsetting to front free endpaper, else a fine, fresh copy in a fine dust jacket.

157. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$375.

First edition. This copy bears the author's personal presentation inscription on the dedication page to newspaper columnist Leonard Lyons and his wife. Above the dedication Lewis has written, "To Len & Sylvia" and below it "Red / Sinclair Lewis." This novel is dedicated to drama critic Cornelius Traeger. The placement of the inscription on the dedication page and the lack of any added

sentiments suggests that Lewis may have wanted to convey to this critic a similar sense of gratitude for his support (there were certainly many critics in Lewis's later career who were not in his camp). There is glue residue to front pastedown and endpaper, probably from a clipping (a book review?) or letter that was once attached, but this is otherwise a fine, fresh copy in a near-fine dust jacket.

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

First edition. A fine copy in a fine dust jacket.

159. —. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. \$150.

First edition. This copy is in the green dust jacket (one of several color variants, no priority). A fine copy in a fine dust jacket.

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

First edition. An unusually fine, fresh copy in an equally fine, bright dust jacket.

161. —. *World So Wide*. New York: Random House, 1951. \$150.

First edition. A superb copy in an equally fine, fresh dust jacket, almost like new.

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CATALOGUE 304

674. Lewis, Sinclair. ALS, three pages on two adjoining sheets, 5¼" x 7", Hotel Dorset letterhead, January 6, 1943. MB \$200.

A letter sending greetings and news to his friend, fellow author, and priest Father Edward J. Murphy. In part: "I'm at last back in NY after 8 quite happy months in Minnesota, & I returned with my novel done. It's called 'Gideon Planish,' & Random House will publish it in mid-April." In fine condition, with toning, usual mailing fold (touching signature), and staple holes.

675. —. ALS, signed "Red," one page, 7¼" x 10½", January 31, 1947. MB \$200.

Writing from Beverly Hills, Lewis sends news to his friend Father Edward J. Murphy. In full: "Seven more weeks I'll be here, working with [AA-winning director] Leo McCarey, who is a darling—quick, intelligent, gay, simple—then back to my farm. Mar-

cella seems very happy with Mike; seems to have a sense of their building together, which is of extreme importance. Can't you come to the farm next summer?" In fine condition, with light, even toning, usual mailing folds, and a few mounting traces to verso.

CATALOGUE 303

599. Lewis, Sinclair. ALS signed "SL," one page both sides, 7¼" x 10½", personal letterhead, September 25 [no year; circa 1940s]. MB \$200.

A letter relating activities and upcoming plans to Father Edward J. Murphy. In part: "It looks as tho [sic] Lewis Browne (read his 'This Believing World') & I will have several days in N. Orleans, between Univ. of La. & Univ. of Iowa... Marcella is really writing a story! More of that when I see you." In very good condition, with usual mailing folds, toning, removal remnants on the second page, and some spreading, offsetting and show-through of ink, affecting signature.

CATALOGUE 302

621. Lewis, Sinclair. ALS signed "SL," one page, 7¼" x 10½", personal letterhead, September 1929. MB \$200.

A letter relating travel plans to Father Edward J. Murphy. In full: "Present plans, at Hotel Monteleone, N.O., Nov. 6th-8th, before going to Lafayette, La., to lecture there on the 8th. Then on to San Antonio." In very good condition, with mailing folds (touching signature), light toning, light ink haloing to a few words, and remnants from a previous mounting on reverse.

622. —. TLS signed "SL," one page, 6½" x 9½", personal letterhead, March 13, 1944. MB \$150.

A letter relating activities and upcoming plans to Father Edward J. Murphy. In part: "For three months now I've actually been set here, and doing nothing more dangerous than write a two-part story which the *Cosmopolitan* will publish some time this year... I'll be starting in a month, and I'll be working on in Minnesota, my new novel, which will keep me busy all the rest of the year or longer... [Marcella] and I spent all our spare time playing chess... It is, at least, I should think, one of our safer games, and as most of the masters of it are Russian Jews, I don't think it can even be put down as capitalistic and reactionary!" In very good condition, with trimmed edges, usual mailing folds, slight haloing to signature, and remnants from a previous mounting on reverse.

624. —. ALS signed "Red," one page both sides, 7¼" x 10¼", personal letterhead, April 1, 1943.

A letter relating upcoming plans to Father Edward J. Murphy. In part: "I've taken a flat here, way up at 90th St. &, as it's on the 30th floor, there's such a view as you never have seen — & I hope you'll be seeing it some time this year... [I will be] having a two-months lecture trip, debating with Lewis Browne." In very good condition, with usual mailing folds, light toning (slightly more prominent at edges and along folds), and traces from a previous mounting to lower portion of second page, not affecting any text.

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

First edition. A study of tennis by the 1913-14 National Champion. Illustrated with numerous photographs. This copy is inscribed by McLoughlin. Lewis had been hired by the publisher, George H. Doran, in the summer of 1914 as an editorial assistant and was asked to write the text because McLoughlin was not up to its composition. Laid into this copy is a 1986 memorandum from Alf R. Stavig, an attorney-at-law who knew McLoughlin, in which he authenticates the circumstances under which Lewis was commissioned to ghost-write the book. Open front hinge professionally restored by a master conservator, else fine.

433. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920. \$2000.

First edition. This copy is inscribed by the author on a bound-in leaf preceding the half-title: "To Charles Wayne Collins, scribo ergo sum. Sinclair Lewis, Pittsburgh, Dec. 12, 1929." The front free endpaper bears the ownership signature of Louise Fauteaux as well as her bookplate. Written below the ownership signature is the following presentation: "To Louise, with love of the father and mother of the author." Very good, lacking the rare dust jacket. An intriguing copy.

434. —. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$4000.

First edition, first issue. Fine in a bright dust jacket that is lightly chipped at the spinal extremities.

436. —. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$2000.

First edition. One of 500 numbered copies signed by the author. Fine.

437. —. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$1500.

First trade edition. An advance review copy, with the publisher's stamp on the front free endpaper giving the date of publication (March 5, 1925). A fine copy in a bright dust jacket that lacks a two-inch piece at the crown of the spine and a crescent-shaped piece from the back flap.

438. —. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$4500.

First edition. Fine in an unusually fine, first issue dust jacket that has been lightly restored by a master conservator.

439. —. *John Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926. \$450.

First edition. One of 975 numbered copies. A 22 page appreciation of *Manhattan Transfer* by Lewis. Fine without printed dust jacket as issued.

440. —. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$2000.

First edition. In the earliest binding state with the "G" in Gantry on the spine resembling a "C." Laid into this copy is a 1936 TLS from Lewis granting permission to quote the sermon in *Elmer Gantry*: "You know, don't you, that this spasm of eloquence is based upon something by that most florid of sermonizers, Robert J. Ingersoll!" Fine in a bright dust jacket with a few chips.

441. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. \$3500.

First edition. A fine copy in an especially fine dust jacket with some niggling wear at the spine.

443. —. *Cheap and Contented Labor*. New York: United Textile Workers, 1929. \$750.

First edition. Pictorial wrappers. Laid in is a letter from the United Textile Workers to Lewis's secretary at the time, Louis Florey, forwarding a copy of *Cheap and Contented Labor*. Near fine.

444. —. *Keep Out of the Kitchen*. New York: *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1929. \$1000.

First edition. The first printing of this story, issued in advance of its publication in the October 1929 issue of the magazine. This copy has the pictorial advertisement inserted into the rear flap of the book. A fine copy of this scarce booklet, rendered even scarcer by the presence of the advertisement.

445. [—]. *Half a Loaf* by Grace Hegger Lewis. New York: Horace Liveright, 1931. \$400.

First edition. A novel based on the author's marriage to Sinclair Lewis. Laid into this copy is a contemporary TLS from Lewis to a publisher, ordering a copy of Prince Von Bulow's memoirs. An unusually fine copy in a fresh, minimally used dust jacket.

446. —. *A Letter to Critics*. Brattleboro: American Booksellers Association, 1931. \$2000.

Three-column broadside. Elephant folio. One of 375 copies printed by the Stephen Daye Press. Designed by Vrest Orton. Accompanying the broadside is a TLS dated October 5, 1931, in which Lewis grants the Stanford University Press permission to reprint the broadside. Lewis bibliographer Harvey Taylor was unable to locate a copy of the reprint. Fine in a specially designed cloth portfolio. Rare.

447. —. *Launcelot*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1932. \$500.

First edition. Printed wrappers. One of 100 numbered copies printed for Harvey Taylor and signed by him. The text of a Lewis poem published in the *Yale Literary Magazine* in March, 1904.

Rare. Fine.

450. — and Lloyd Lewis. *Jayhawker: A Play in Three Acts*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1935. \$750.

First edition. An uncommonly scarce title. Fine in a fine dust jacket.

451. — and John C. Moffitt. *It Can't Happen Here*. New York: Federal Theatre Project, September 18, 1936. \$2000.

Original playscript. Printed wrappers. Mimeographed. Laid in is the original theater program for the WPA production. Adapted from Sinclair Lewis's novel of the same name.

[along with]

— and John C. Moffitt. *It Can't Happen Here*. New York: Federal Theatre Project, September 18, 1936.

Playscript. Printed wrappers. Copied by MGM's script department on February 4, 1937, this version omits a single scene from the play in anticipation of the writing of a filmscript. Both items very good.

452. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$500.

First edition. This copy is signed by the author on a tipped-in leaf that precedes the half-title. Fine in a fine dust jacket that shows some light use.

454. —. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. \$300.

First edition. This copy is in the red dust jacket (one of several, no priority). A fine copy in a fine dust jacket.

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106. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$2750.

First edition. First issue with "Purdy" for "Lyte" on page 49. A fine copy in an unusually bright, clean dust jacket, completely unfaded, with some restoration at flap folds and base of spine (not affecting any lettering). Particularly attractive copy of this highspot.

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

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

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