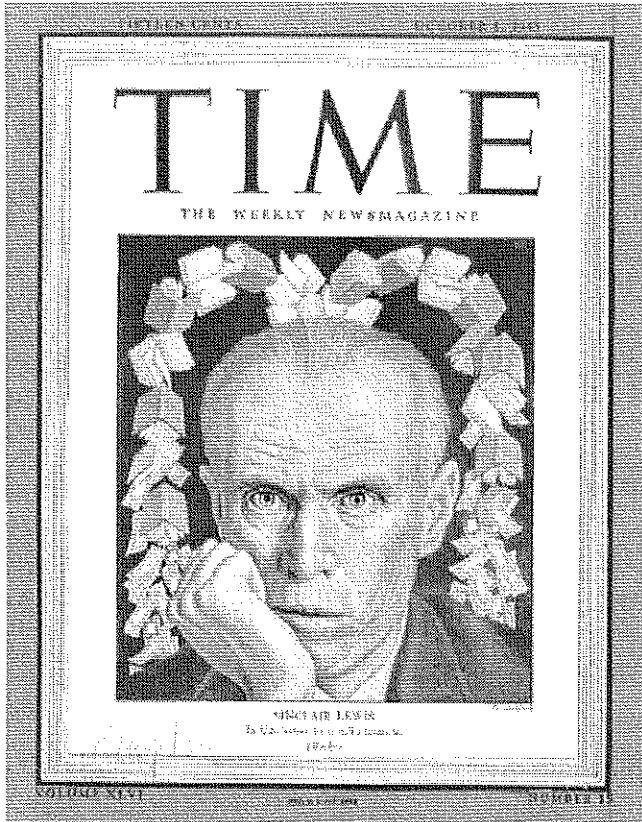


The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME ELEVEN, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2002



Cover of Time magazine
(October 8, 1945)

SINCLAIR LEWIS, JACK LONDON, AND THE “BO-TEASER”

*Jerry Leath Mills
Colby-Sawyer College*

Sinclair Lewis's personal and epistolary relations with Jack London extended from 1906 to 1915 and are documented by Mark Schorer (Schorer 96, *passim*). The young Lewis sold story plots to Lon-

—The “Bo-Teaser” continued on page 4

ROUNDUP OF REVIEWS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS: *REBEL FROM MAIN STREET*, PART II

As a service to the readers of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter, the editor is providing summaries of additional reviews of Richard Lingeman's *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* received since the Spring 2002 newsletter.

From the *Chicago Tribune*
(March 17, 2002: 14.1, 4)
“Resurrecting Sinclair Lewis”
By Ted Widmer

In general this is a positive review of the biography, with Widmer praising its pace and energy, as well as for bringing Lewis back into the public's attention. Widmer believes Lingeman was fated to write about Lewis since they share a similar background, with an upbringing in the Midwest and an education at Yale. Like most fans of Lewis's writing, Widmer often despairs at some of the things Lewis did. He considers the biography a “brave undertaking” since “Lewis has been giving headaches to his admirers ever since he burst onto the scene with his first triumph, *Main Street*, which affronted a too-easily-shocked America when it appeared in 1920.” Lewis alienated many writers, except Edith Wharton, for the amount of money he made from writing, and Widmer speculates that if Lewis had died at the height of his powers, after winning the Nobel Prize, he might be better thought of.

Although Widmer doesn't think the new biography replaces Mark Schorer's, he is happy to have Lewis's face before us again, because he thinks Lewis

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SINCLAIR LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

Midwestern Miscellany has finally published the first of two issues devoted to Sinclair Lewis. *Midwestern Miscellany* 28 (Fall 2000), which was just published this fall, has five essays on Lewis: "Deconstructing Culture in *Kingsblood Royal*" by Robert L. McLaughlin, "Constructing Masculinity in *Hike and the Aeroplane*" by Caren J. Town, "'war is a horrible thing': Looking at Lewis's Political Philosophy through *Hike and the Aeroplane*" by Sally E. Parry, "'Snowy talker father': Nativism and the Modern Family in *Babbitt*" by Ellen Dupree, and "*Babbitt*: The Literary Dimension" by Martin Bucco. The journal is produced by the Center for the Study of Midwestern Literature and Culture at Michigan State University.

MidAmerica 27 (2000) has published "A German *Main Street* and More: Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* (1918) and Sinclair Lewis's Satirical Novels of the 1920s" by Frederick Betz (66-77). Betz sees similarities between *Der Untertan* and *Main Street*, as well as thematic connections between Mann's writing and some of Lewis's other novels of the 1920s, including *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, and *Elmer Gantry*. The essay is a version of a presentation that Professor Betz made at the Sinclair Lewis Conference in 1997.

"*Arrowsmith* Goes Native: Medicine and Empire in Fiction and Film," *Mosaic* 33.4 (2000): 193-208, by Lisa Lynch, looks at the novel and 1931 movie of *Arrowsmith* critiquing both the medical theories of "climate-based diseases," as well as the "benevolent science" of modern American medicine.

Simone Weil Davis, in *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fiction of the 1920s* (Duke UP), examines "manhood and commercial enterprise" in *Babbitt* and Bruce

Scholarship continued on page 6

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, Martin Bucco, Dan Chabris, Brier Dudley and Jean Godden of the *Seattle Times*, Roger Forseth, Ralph Goldstein, John W. Hyland, Jr., George Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, William Kraemer, Brett Lettiere, Richard Lingeman, Glen Love, David Lull, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Jerry Leath Mills, Roberta Olson, Tom Raynor, Maureen Roen, Gerald Savage, W. Kirkland Symmes, and James Whalen.

MR. HARDY AND MR. LEWIS

Martin Bucco
Colorado State University

Although as a student of English literature, Madeline Fox in *Arrowsmith* approves of George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, she has not read anything by these writers for the past five years (24). Indeed, in the case of the complex and subtle Meredith, the English classics that he created—*The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), *Modern Love* (1862), *The Egoist* (1879), and *Diana of the Crossways* (1885)—go largely unread. Not so, however, the works of the less oblique and more gloomy Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) who, following Meredith's death in 1909, became the Grand Old Man of English letters. Although the writer was to achieve fame as a poet, he had long fulfilled his work as a novelist by the time young Sinclair Lewis reviewed Hardy's collection *A Changed Man and Other Tales* (1913) for the Publishers Syndicate. The tales, explains the reviewer, continue to reveal Hardy's understanding of the "commonest peasants," and the sentimentalist in Lewis even manages a soul-buttery phrase about the author's feelings for the "dear, common words of humble folk." Still, Lewis rightly points out that the collection does not match the "powerful art" of *The Return of the Native* in 1878 and the "enthraling pity" of *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 ("The Book of the Week" 8).

By 1914, Lewis no longer took seriously Thomas Hardy's view that luckless victims of circumstance really are victims of "inexplicable blind forces" ("The Passing of Capitalism" 331). By this time, Hardy himself, in fact, believed less in Immanent Will than in mankind's folly. Still, Lewis continued to celebrate the somber English artist, defending his adventurous melodramas ("Self-Conscious America" 135), recommending him to budding novelists ("A Lecture on Style" 190), and denoting him as one of his literary ancestors ("The Death of Arrowsmith" 106). In *Main Street*, bookworm Carol Kennicott would rather read Hardy, of course, than listen respectfully to dull Thanatopsis statistics about him (134). In contrast, elegantly flip Lorinda Pike in *It Can't Happen Here* views light romances as better guides to conduct than tomes by Thomas Hardy (172). But not so *Cass Timberlane's* hero-judge who, longing for his young wife, loses himself one evening in Hardy and other weighty British novelists (352).

In his contribution to *Thomas Hardy: Notes on his Life and Work* (1925)—an item not listed in the bibliographic checklist of Mark Schorer's biography—Lewis asserted that a hundred years from now Hardy "will be distinctly seen as one of the few geniuses of all prose fiction...." Lewis goes on to explain that when a friend asked him to name the writer who best combines original vision and warm humanness, Lewis singled out Hardy, citing images from *Jude the Obscure* that remain in the mind: "The boy Jude, reluctant to scare crows, looking to the

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

<i>Editor</i>	<i>Interns</i>
Sally E. Parry	Kathleen Dusenberry- Woods
<i>Layout Editor</i>	Sarah Haberstich
Amanda Karvelaitis	Lorraine Propheter
<i>Production Director</i>	William Thake
Tara Reeser	

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

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Roundup of Reviews *continued from page 1*

has been forgotten by too many readers. "Sinclair Lewis deserves better from his people—a people he loved, even if he did not like them much." Widmer says the biography is "especially good at capturing the work of writing," although he does criticize Lingeman for at times not providing enough context about Lewis's politics, inner feelings, or the greater world in which he lived. He doesn't place all the blame for Lewis's lack of depth on Lingeman's shoulders, rather noting that keeping track of Lewis's feuds, short-term apartments, and various writing assignments would tire anyone. "Lingeman heroically follows Lewis from lair to lair, like Elmer Fudd chasing Bugs Bunny, but after hundreds of pages, the effort weighs on writer and reader alike. If it's Tuesday, this must be *Dodsworth*." Yet, in conclusion, Widmer notes that "the attempt to resurrect Lewis is important and should not be dismissed lightly. In everything he did, including his colossal failures, Lewis revealed a scope of ambition that set the tone for the American century.... If it is true that he never wrote a book as good as *Sister Carrie*, he still wrote *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*, as good a study of religion as anything since *The Scarlet Letter*." Widmer wishes Lewis were still around to write about all the cant of the last fifty years, from savings and loan

scandals to the Salt Lake City Olympics. "This book is not perfect, befitting its subject. But it has given us a chance to reassess a major American artist shrouded in near total darkness."

From the *Denver Post*
(January 20, 2002: 1DD, 4EE)

"Affinity for an Old Rebel"

By Martin Bucco

Bucco compares Lingeman's biography to Mark Schorer's and finds Lingeman much more sympathetic to Lewis, even though he criticizes Lingeman for not revealing "his own reservations about Lewis's often outrageous behavior." Noting that the Lingeman biography is only about half the length of Schorer's, Bucco states that "Lingeman's book in effect restores the balance and reclaims the essential Lewis as a brilliant satiric social realist. Do not imagine, however, that Lingeman... is a sentimental pushover for literary crybabies. Sinclair Lewis boldly attacked dullness, conformity, injustice, hypocrisy and pomposity, but disparity between vision and performance in his own life was more often than not

Roundup of Reviews *continued on page 6*

The "Bo-Teaser" *continued from page 1*

don when the latter was in need of material outside of his own experience and imagination, sending him as many as seventeen to examine on a single occasion in 1911 (Schorer 186). The traffic of influence was not, however, entirely in one direction, as the following instance of intertextuality will show.

The *Red Book Magazine* for May 1909 published a story of Lewis's entitled "They That Take the Sword." This tale of hoboes and railroad men, a parable ending in redemption and poetic justice, has not been collected or, to my knowledge, reprinted since its original appearance. Briefly, it relates the story of Barney Chisholm, a railroad brakeman who is, by his own boast, "death to the hoboes, all right, all right" (109). Chisholm picks up extra change by extorting quarters from tramps attempting to ride the rails, and he beats and otherwise brutalizes those unable to pay. The first section relates such an instance with a young tramp named Rusty, who, after

vicious abuse by Chisholm, wounds the brakeman with a pistol shot during his escape.

Fueled by anger and vengefulness, Chisholm invents a diabolical weapon to use on hoboes riding the rails beneath the traincars. This he names the "bo-teaser," and constructs it by attaching a heavy metal coupling-pin to a length of wire, so that it can be extended back under a moving car and allowed to bounce violently back and forth between the track's crossties and the underside of the vehicle. This of course will batter mercilessly—most likely fatally—any unfortunate hobo on the rails below. As Chisholm gloats, "The trainman at the front end could fish for a tramp very nicely" (111). At a later railway station the body of the tramp could be removed, and "the stout lies about 'an accident to a tramp'" (115) be related.

So pleased is Chisholm's superintendent with

The "Bo-Teaser" *continued on page 12*

LITERARY STYLE IN LINGEMAN'S LEWIS BIOGRAPHY, *REBEL FROM MAIN STREET*

Frederick Betz

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

It is remarkable how some of the most prominent critics have so unfavorably compared Richard Lingeman's new biography of Lewis with Mark Schorer's biography of 1961. Elizabeth Hardwick thinks "Lingeman's biography, long as it is, manages [only] a sort of condensation of Schorer's book" (44). John Updike finds Schorer's biography "more energetic, more circumstantial, more engaging, and more earnestly analytical than Lingeman's" (77). Benjamin Schwarz characterizes Schorer's "definitive life of Lewis" as "comprehensive and stylishly written" and considers Lingeman "an honest and sober biographer" whose "long book cannot replace Schorer's even longer and far more thorough study" (99).

Incorporating a wealth of new information and documentation, as well as the results of modern Lewis scholarship, Lingeman's biography (cf. my review in *Dreiser Studies* [Fall 2002]) can hardly be dismissed as a mere condensation of Schorer's biography. Lingeman's biography is also not so much shorter as intentionally more selective than Schorer's exhaustive account, "in which seemingly the subject's every journey and quarrel is minutely chronicled, to deadening effect," as Benjamin Schwarz concedes (99). On the other hand, Lingeman meticulously documents his sources by the page in endnotes, while Schorer gives no documentation at all.

The argument that Schorer is "more energetic" and "more engaging" (Updike 77) than Lingeman is also inaccurate and unfair. Schorer may be more magisterial and stylish, but he writes, as Updike notes, "in the lofty, sometimes sardonic voice of fifties mandarinism" (78). Lingeman is not just a "sober biographer" who, by implication, merely records and analyzes in a matter-of-fact way, or who, as Jane Smiley argues, merely "follows him [Lewis] around," without revealing "anything about Lewis's inner life" or offering "an overriding theme or a general theory of Lewis" (10).

Unlike Schorer's bland and clichéd *An American Life*, Lingeman's *Rebel from Main Street* does convey a

thematic focus on Lewis as the ever restless, lonely, rebellious, subversive, and satirical writer who loved America but did not like it (Lingeman 547), because it was "not good enough" (547), who was only "fully alive" when he was writing (523), and whose "fiction functioned at its highest pitch when galvanized by anger at some banality or stupidity or injustice" (554). Schorer uses conventional chapter titles—"Small Town" (Ch. 1), "College" (Ch. 2), "Climb" (Ch. 3), "Success" (Ch. 4), "Decline" (Ch. 5), and "Fall" (Ch. 6)—the last four of which, however, impose a pyramidal scheme on Lewis's literary career, which allows for little or no differentiation in evaluation or appreciation, especially of his post-Nobel Prize novels of the 1930s and 40s. Lingeman uses both thematic titles and epigraphs (usually quotes from Lewis's letters or works, but also from Grace Hegger Lewis, Dorothy Thompson, and Alfred Harcourt) to give orientation rather than to impose any preconceived scheme on the thirty-four chapters covering Lewis's life and work. Like the epigraphs and chapter titles in Lingeman's two-volume Dreiser biography (1986, 1990), the epigraphs and chapter titles in his Lewis biography are distinctively thematic and carefully chosen from names, titles, or quotations, which also function at times as cross-references, reinforcing the structure of the literary biography.

In Lingeman's biography, the chapter title "Go East, Young Man" (Ch. 2 on 1902-10), for example, echoes the title of Lewis's 1930 short story. "The Satevenposter" (Ch. 6 on 1915-16) refers to Lewis becoming a regular contributor to Lorimer's *Saturday Evening Post* (78). "Research Magnificent" (Ch. 7 on 1916-17) refers to Lewis's research for *The Job* (1917), but also to what Lewis called his journey across America with Gracie in 1916, after a novel by H. G. Wells (78). "The Famooser" (Ch. 11 on 1920-21) quotes Lewis telling Gracie: "Jesus!... There's something to this being a Famooser!" (165), after the spectacular initial commercial and critical reception of *Main Street* (1920). "Sounding Brass" (Ch. 18 on 1926) was the working title for *Elmer Gantry* (282). "Dorothy and Red" (Ch. 21 on 1927-28) alludes

Roundup of Reviews *continued from page 4*

too severe to be ignored." Bucco seems somewhat surprised that Lingeman prefers to read Lewis in terms of content and ideas, rather than form and style, and finds that the separation of content from form leads to praise for some novels like *The God-Seeker* that Bucco finds undeserved. He notes the new light Lingeman casts on Lewis's relationship with his first wife Grace Hegger and their son Wells and ends by saying that "Lingeman brings to the genre of biography nothing really controversial or revolutionary, only keen intelligence, crisp writing, marvelous bits of wit, and scrupulous documentation."

From *Newsday*

(January 20, 2002: D24+)

"A Small-Town Satirist, A World-Class Scold"

By Linda Simon

Simon, more than many of the reviewers, focuses on the life of Lewis rather than his writings. She is obviously a reader who has never been engrossed by him. "Lewis, at his best, was an incisive, if ruthless, satirist; at his worst, he could be a haranguing scold whose novels sprawled, shapeless and toneless." Near the beginning of her review she quotes from an interview that Richard Lingeman did with the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* in 1997, in which Lingeman expressed his disappointment with the lack of sympathy that Mark Schorer held for Lewis. Much of the review focuses on the unhappy aspects of Lewis's life, with Simon noting that it is perhaps impossible to create "a sympathetic portrait of a selfish, hot-tempered, often paranoid man whose self-hatred emerged as distrust and disloyalty to those few who cared about him." Although she seems to appreciate Lingeman's effort, in the end she is not won over to Lewis's side, commenting that "Lingeman simply does not make a compelling case for Lewis's significance for our times. And Lewis, although he emerges here as sad

and tortured, is not likely to gain admirers."

From the *Yale Alumni Magazine*

(Summer 2002)

By Bruce Fellman

Bruce Fellman reviews the book of fellow alumni Lingeman (Law '59) in a relatively positive manner. Fellman thinks though that the "ambitious, protean quality of Sinclair Lewis...eludes the grasp of standard biography. It would take a novelist, one like Lewis himself, to encompass the man's satiric vision, his political and artistic passions, and the improbable arc of a career that included the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930 and a series of hellish alcoholic binges." He admires the way Lingeman creates a context for Lewis's writing by describing the America in which he lived, "how much Lewis belonged to his place and time, with his zest for aviation and automobiles and interest in social issues like female suffrage and racial integration." Although much of what Fellman mentions still has resonance today, his praise seems to focus on "Lewis's impact on American realist fiction and social criticism."

From *National Review Online*

(February 15, 2002)

"The Kindly Race of Men: A Conservative Case for Sinclair Lewis"

By John Derbyshire

This is one of the most unusual and overtly political discussions of Lewis and the Lingeman biography. It starts out with a startling claim: "I want to make a modest conservative claim on Sinclair Lewis. What, that Sinclair Lewis? The one who held up small-town America to ridicule in *Main Street*? Who mocked the

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Scholarship *continued from page 2*

Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*, which casts Jesus as the ideal for the modern salesman. Her analysis focuses on the tension between corporate conformity and traditional American realism.

Sally Parry was interviewed on Sinclair Lewis for *What's the Word?*, MLA's radio program, in a segment called "Regional Literature Volume II: The Mid-

west," 112, Spring 2002.

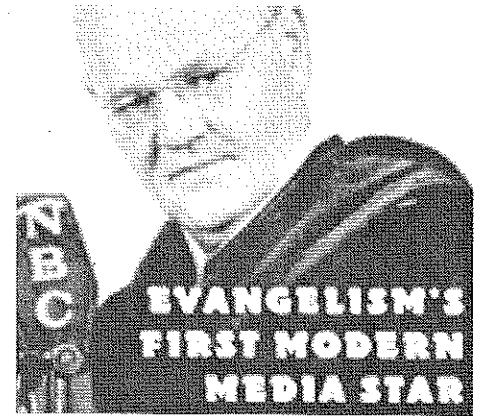
Board Member Jacqueline Koenig was interviewed for the *Jack London Foundation Quarterly Newsletter* 14.2 (April 2002) by Karen Poor. Jackie spoke of her love of book collecting, her board membership on the Jack London Foundation, and her continuing interest in traveling. ✍

A MODEL FOR ELMER GANTRY?: NEW BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM STIDGER IS PUBLISHED

John W. Hyland, Jr. has recently written a biography of his grandfather William Stidger. The Reverend Stidger, as Lewis aficionados may remember, was one of the models for Elmer Gantry. In *Evangelism's First Media Star: The Life of Rev. Bill Stidger* (Cooper Square, 2002), Hyland devotes a chapter to Stidger's relationship and eventual disillusionment with Lewis. This chapter, "A Battle of Egos: Sinclair Lewis and William L. Stidger," was reprinted in the Boston University School of Theology *Focus* (Fall/Winter 2000, 3-14).¹ For more information on the book, as well as some photographs, visit the website www.Stidger.com. This site also has recordings of Stidger's national radio broadcast, *Getting the Most Out of Life*, which was on NBC from 1937 to 1940.

Stidger's first congregation was in San Francisco in 1913, and because he had difficulty in attracting a congregation, he invented an electrified, revolving cross for the top of his church, an idea so great that Elmer Gantry uses it. In addition, he was instrumental in getting the police to close down the Red Light District there. Stidger was also with the military in World War I and visited missions in Asia before get-

ting his second pastorate in Detroit. He met Sinclair Lewis in 1922 at a Chautauqua conference in Indiana and there broached the subject of a novel about a preacher. Lewis seemed receptive to the idea, although at this point he was still working on *Arrowsmith*. Later that year, Stidger preached on Babbitt and sent Lewis a copy of his sermon, which in part read, "the reason we need books like *Babbitt*... [is] to shake our complacent audiences who feel that they have done well enough and given generously enough to missions and to starving humanity..."(5).



Cover of biography by Jack Hyland
(Cooper Square Press, 2002)

————— Elmer Gantry continued on page 10

THE SOURCE FOR BLODGETT COLLEGE

A doctoral student from Drew University wrote to ask if Blodgett College in Main Street was based on Augsburg College in Minneapolis, and George Killough provided such a thoughtful response that I thought the readers of the newsletter would be interested. Killough writes,

"The book provides very few identifying characteristics, and I have seen no documentary evidence of what Lewis had in mind. However, I'd guess that Blodgett is a composite of colleges Lewis had known, not a representative of one in particular.

"Does Lewis identify anywhere the denominational

affiliation of Blodgett? Given Carol Milford's background, I'd guess it was Congregational, Methodist, or Presbyterian, not Lutheran like Augsburg. Notice later in *Main Street* how Lewis depicts social stratification according to denominations and ethnic groups. Carol's father was from Massachusetts, a Yankee—not German, not Scandinavian, not Lutheran.

"Hamline in St. Paul is the oldest college in Minnesota and it's Methodist. So it's a likely source for the composite Blodgett, as is also Macalester in St. Paul,

————— Blodgett College continued on page 12

Mr. Hardy continued from page 3

distant towers of Oxford—these are scenes which remain more brilliantly than one's own experience" (14). In the early *The Trail of the Hawk*, eager young Carl Ericson simply looks forward to reading the book (201), but in the late *Kingsblood Royal*, Jude Frawley, Tess Derbyfield, and a few other English literary characters inhabit the war-torn mind of Neil Kingsblood during his convalescence in England (42). In *Work of Art*, Lewis had drawn a direct comparison between Jude Frawley in Christminster and Myron Weagle in New Haven: "If this 'Yankee Jude' was obscure enough, he could not be awed into remaining so" (115). The phrase also is an implied comparison between Jude at Christminster and Lewis at Yale. "If I were an Oxonian,"



Thomas Hardy

concludes Lewis's "Tribute to Thomas Hardy," "I should hunt though dusty classics now for a neat sliver of valedictory Latin to signify 'Thus to a crowned one a disciple dare gives testimony'" (14).

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Roundup of Reviews continued from page 6

vapid pally boosterism of provincial businessmen in *Babbitt*, and the spiritual claims of canting preachers in *Elmer Gantry*? The one who poured scorn on all the bourgeois verities of early 20th-century America? Yes, that one." Derbyshire wonders whether the new biography is sympathetic to the Left, noting that Richard Lingeman is a senior editor for the *Nation*.

His take is that Lewis thought he was on the Left. A faithful reader of the *Nation*, Lewis "worshipped Eugene Debs, the radical organizer, and was enthusiastic about the Bolshevik revolution. In his 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here* he warned of a fascist takeover of the United States, while *Kingsblood Royal* (1947) took on racism in a way that was advanced for its time. *Main Street* itself was seen in its time as a strong feminist statement, though I doubt many modern feminists would look at it that way. A man of the Left? Surely.

"Yet there are Lefties and Lefties." Derbyshire questions whether Orwell, Dickens, and H. G. Wells

were Lefties. "Writers of real imaginative powers are far too spiky and knobby to fit into any narrow ideological slot. Certainly Lewis's tendency was all Left. He never gave up on his ideals of reform and social justice. When his second wife was setting out on a lecture tour he gave her some advice, which she jotted down: 'Keep the clear radical line. Awareness of the tawdriness, silliness, immaturity and ruthlessness of this civilization. It is not good enough.'"

However, Derbyshire thinks Lewis may belong with the Old Left and would be horrified by today's trillion-dollar budgets and "the gross vulgarity of her [America's] popular culture." His conservative case for Lewis, though, is a mostly literary one, partly because of the "sympathetic insight" into characters such as Will Kennicott and George Babbitt, who are part of the ordinary men and women who do the jobs that need to be done in the world. "Lewis had no home,

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SCHORER AND LEWIS

Dan Chabris writes that some years ago he acquired three letters and a postcard written by Mark Schorer to Arthur Mizener. The letters date from 1952, 1953, and 1959 and indicate that long before the biography was published, Schorer did not think much of Lewis. In the first letter, Schorer writes of having lunch at Villa La Costa, Lewis's last residence and, at the time, the house of the commanding officer of the Southern European arm of the American Air Force. Although Lewis had rented the house, which belonged to the Italian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Schorer criticized the décor and blamed it all on Lewis, "a miserable, lonely man who had no capacity for humanizing a place." Only two years into the biography, Chabris notes, and Schorer already dis-

likes Lewis. In the 1959 letter, Schorer says he is trying to track down a rumor that Lewis had a breakdown after *Babbitt*, and that although he'd like to follow it up, he doesn't want to return to Gracie [Hegger] Casanova unless he has to and hopes Mizener can supply some information.



Detail from cover of Sinclair Lewis:
An American Life by Mark Schorer
(Delta Books, 1961)

Literary Style continued from page 5

to Vincent Sheean's *Dorothy and Red* (1962). "Zenith in Stockholm" (Ch. 23 on 1930) refers both to the zenith of Lewis's literary career and his fictional city of Zenith in *Babbitt* (1922), the novel for which he was especially selected for the Nobel Prize. "On Native Ground" (Ch. 30 on 1942-43) refers to Lewis's return to Minnesota (Lewis *Minnesota Diary, 1942-1946*), but could also allude to Alfred Kazin's influential study of modern American prose, *On Native Grounds* (1942). "The American Dilemma" (Ch. 32 on 1944-47), dealing with *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), alludes to Gunnar Myrdal's landmark sociological study of race relations, *An American Dilemma* (1944). "The Lion at Evening" (Ch. 33 on 1947-48), finally, is a play on Stephen Longstreet's novel, *The Lion at Morning* (1954), as "Lewis, in life, was the aging lion" (510).

Smiley may think that "the novel and the biography are diametrically opposed forms of literature" (10), but Lingeman's biography belies this distinction, for its narrative is strikingly novelistic in the pervasive use of similes, metaphors, puns or word plays, associations, allusions, quotations, repetition, vivid descriptions and characterizations, expressive and energetic parts of speech, and vocabulary ranging from esoteric, unusual, or for-

eign words (e.g., "troglodyte" [182], "tossspots" [218], "eponymous" [223], "divagations" [225], "gallimaufry" [463], "wanderjahr" [69], "dinner à trois" [238], "après-publication feelings" [309], "fascist kitsch" [537]) to colloquial or slang expressions ("AWOL" [143, 148], "boozier" [221], "baching it" [228], "kaput" [229], "off the wagon" [498], "blotto" [540]).

At the Sauk Centre cemetery on January 18, 1951, for example, "[t]here was a crunch of snow under booted feet; the black skeletal branches of trees were sheathed with ice under a gray winter sky" (xx); "[t]he watery disk of the sun hung in the gray sky, and the wind whipped people's faces cruelly" (xxii). At Yale, young Lewis was "a kind of walking exclamation point—following the word *provincial*" (19). Gracie might have met the ambassador she had envisioned herself marrying—"but for the creaking deus ex machina of a freight elevator, which presented her with the awkward Mr. Lewis" (56). "The first 10,000 copies [of *Main Street*] vanished like a spring snow" (154). In London in 1921, "Gracie felt she and Hal were Yankee Doodles on display" (167); there, "Lewis was bowled over by Edna's [St. Vincent Millay's]

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Elmer Gantry continued from page 7

Stidger expected Lewis would use him as a model and that the minister protagonist would be a compelling searcher after truth like Martin Arrowsmith. Lewis visited him in Detroit in 1924, and, in 1926, spent two weeks with Stidger and his family in Kansas City. Hyland obtained a description of Lewis as houseguest from an unpublished manuscript by his mother. It reads in part:

He was a fascinating guest, very considerate, but not too conscientious. He had the florist deliver huge baskets of flowers to his charming hostess, my Mother, and then charged them to Dad. He raved over our Jessie's cooking and then Jessie would forego the vacuuming to concoct some special dish for supper and likely as not "Red" Lewis would just eat at the Athletic Club that night. He slept until noon, used innumerable bath towels, wiped his razor blade on Mother's linen face towels, refused to send his shirts to the laundry because Jessie was such a nice ironer, brought a veritable host of friends home late at night and expected sustenance and gaiety. (7)

The family found Lewis in general quite affable. He gave a sermon at Stidger's church, the Linwood Boulevard Methodist Episcopal Church, and did research with other clergy who were acquainted with Stidger. Later in 1926, Lewis returned to Kansas City, but began working with Dr. L. M. Birkhead, an agnostic who was pastor at the All Souls' Unitarian Church. The work Lewis was doing became increasingly critical of organized religion, to the point where Lewis, in a lecture on "What to Do with 'Flaming Youth,'" at the Linwood Forum, said "If there is a fundamentalist God, I challenge Him to strike me dead within the next ten minutes" (9). He was obviously not struck down and between that and his refusal of the Pulitzer Prize, attracted much national attention. When *Elmer Gantry* came out the following year, interest in the novel was especially high in Kansas City.

The journalist William Allen White, a friend of Stidger's, reviewed the novel on the day the book was first sold in Kansas City. His opening paragraphs read:

Sinclair Lewis stood in the pulpit of a Kansas City church last spring and defied God to strike him dead.

So far as Sinclair Lewis, the artist, is concerned, in the book *Elmer Gantry*, God took him at his word.

Sinclair Lewis, the artist, is dead. He may rise again; probably he will. But in this book he got so excited making faces at God that he forgot his craftsmanship. (10)


He concluded his disgusted summary of the novel as follows, "The presumption is that this is the story of the man who commercializes organized religion. The trouble with the book is that it lacks contrast. The only good preacher in the book is a saphead. The only good women are dull. And the thing bears the same relation to life that Punch and Judy bear to life" (5).

White's reaction was shared by many people, including Bill Stidger. Stidger found that parts of his life, including his raids against brothels, his sophisticated appreciation of publicity, and his facility in public speaking were all built into Elmer's character, along with a great deal of cynicism and hypocrisy that Stidger resented. In Stidger's sermon the Sunday after *Elmer Gantry* was published, he denounced the novel and accused Lewis of being drunk the entire time he was working on it.

The friendship between Stidger and Lewis was dissolved and although several years later Stidger wrote a letter of apology to Lewis, it was not accepted. Lewis dismissed the attempt, saying that the apology was "three years too late" (13) and that too much had been said against him to have it resolved by one letter. They never spoke again. Stidger later became the head of the Department of Homiletics at the Boston University School of Theology and served in that position for nearly 20 years.

The one chapter of *Evangelism's First Media Star* adds to our understanding of Lewis's creation of *Elmer Gantry*, and the book as a whole shows much about liberal Protestantism in the first half of the twentieth century. It is available from amazon.com, barnes&noble.com, borders.com, and Cooper Square Press (1-800-462-6420). The list price is \$29.95.

Note

¹ Quotations for this summary are taken from the chapter excerpted in *Focus*. 

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH SINCLAIR LEWIS

Lisa Napoli

Lisa Napoli wrote an article for MSNBC.com in March 2002 with the above title and drew it to my attention. With a great title like that I figured that the readers of the Lewis newsletter would be interested as well. Here are excerpts from the article which can be accessed in full at <http://www.msnbc.com/news/723677.asp?cp1=1>

"I confess. For the past seven months I've been falling more and more deeply in love with a man who can never reciprocate my feelings: Sinclair Lewis. He's been dead for 51 years, and besides, everything I've read tells me that like many brilliant artists he'd have been a lousy partner.

"That hasn't stopped me from voraciously ordering up and consuming his complete major works, dissecting them with the glee of a scholar, passionately recounting his tales, as if I'd written them myself, to anyone who'll listen. Nor has it stopped me from becoming more and more enamored of his rich satire of American life and his depiction of romantic complexities, which make his books so resonant, even today—70, 80 years after he created them."

Her love affair began when she lost a full time job and read *Ann Vickers* while on a trip to Italy. She had reviewed *American Cassandra*, the biography of Dorothy Thompson, some years before and knew of her work as a suffragette and feminist pioneer. In reading about Ann Vickers who was inspired by Thompson, "I gasped at Ann's plight, as drawn by this man Sinclair Lewis—her struggles as a strong woman in the working world, as well as her struggles to find romance with a man not threatened by her strength and accomplishment....

"After finishing *Ann Vickers*, I knew I had to keep going, had to find out more about Sinclair Lewis through his characters and stories. I picked up the 1920 novel that catapulted him to fame and into controversy: *Main Street*. I'd heard about it for years, of course, but had no idea what it was about.

"It, too, was a startling, modern depiction of a woman's struggle to reconcile ambition with her de-

sire for love and security. Unlike Ann Vickers, Carol Kennicott, née Milford, was more conventional, a young woman working as a librarian in the city of St. Paul, disappointed by the boredom of her day-to-day career, and lonely, to boot.

"At a vulnerable point when she is questioning her choice of profession, she meets a small-town doctor, who convinces her to come to his world as his wife." Napoli discusses Lewis's reading of conventional America and her surprise, that despite his criticism, it became a best seller.

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SINCLAIR LEWIS IN SEATTLE

Brier Dudley of the *Seattle Times* writes, in an e-mail to the Lewis Society, "Did you know the late Sinclair Lewis, author of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith* and the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, once lived here? The laureate's Seattle digs, a three-bedroom house in Wedgwood, just went on the market. Real-estate agent Karen Wuthrich reports, 'The light fixture, designed after Cellini, is one that Lewis brought back from Rome around 1941.' Although the house, listed at \$359,500, has many amenities (vaulted ceilings, parquet floors), no unpublished manuscripts have tumbled out of the rafters."

In a followup e-mail, Jean Godden, city columnist of the *Seattle Times* writes, "I am unaware of the exact dates that Lewis lived in the house in the North Seattle neighborhood. The house was built in 1940, so he may have lived other places in the city if he came here first in 1916. As he died in 1951, I believe he couldn't have lived here that long. The area is very residential, somewhat wooded. Those who seem to know say that he treated it sort of as a vacation retreat."

[None of the biographies mention that Lewis lived in Seattle in the 1940s. Anyone with more information should contact the editor of the newsletter.]

The "Bo-Teaser" continued from page 4

his sadistic invention that he claims credit for it himself, using his influence to assure Chisholm's promotion. Success, however, is short-lived: Chisholm eventually



Jack London

finds himself out of a job and blacklisted by the railroad for taking part in a strike. After four years we find him in a hobo jungle, now a tramp and a rider of the rails himself,

learning guiltily of the widespread use of his invention: "I'd like to know where that 'Bo-teaser' come from" (113), remarks a fellow bum. That night, riding beneath a car, Chisholm's ironic fate arrives with "an iron coupling-pin, under the front of the car. It was fast to a wire, taut over the brake-beam. It bounded up and backward as it thumped each stringer; creeping back—back—toward him, an inch at each bound, as the kinks in the wire were straightened" (113). Chisholm envisions the trainman at the wire's end, "hauling it back and forth, from side to side, making

sure that his flail reached the whole center of the car...careful not to drop his fishing-tackle, for it was bothersome to make a new one!" (113-15).

When all seems lost, however, the pin begins to draw back. The brakeman operating it is inexperienced, and has no heart for the business anyway. That brakeman is, as the justice of parables will have it, Rusty—the pistol-packing hobo from Chisholm's past, now distanced from his tramping days and making an honest career at Chisholm's old job. When they confront one another, Rusty forswears further use of the teaser, and Chisholm heads off to take up farming and "to buckle down to business and make up for—for being a blamed hound" (115).

Throughout the story Lewis seems generally indebted for terminology and techniques of rail-riding to Jack London's chronicle of his own experience of hobo life, *The Road*, published in volume form two years earlier in 1907. Though Lewis seems to have coined the term "'bo-teaser'" (it occurs nowhere among the many other examples of hobo slang in London's writing, or among those in *The Dictionary of American Slang*), his conception of the device itself seems derived directly from this passage in *The Road*:

The "shack" (brakeman) takes a coupling-pin and a length of bell-cord to the platform in front of the truck in which the tramp is riding. The shack fastens the

The "Bo-Teaser" continued on page 14

Blodgett College, continued from page 8

which is Presbyterian.

"In regard to the landscape, yes, Augsburg is near the Mississippi and it's in Minneapolis, but it's not on the periphery of Minneapolis and the ground round about is very flat—all except for the deep wide gorge cut by the river. Augsburg borders the west bank campus of the University of Minnesota and so is not too terribly far from the center of town.

"When I think of hills, I think more of St. Paul than Minneapolis, at least the area around the downtown. True, the land around Hamline and Macalester is, I think, relatively flat, and those campuses are not very close to the river, but I can picture Carol

walking on a hill over the river more easily near downtown St. Paul than near Augsburg.

"On the other hand, I'm not a native Minnesotan. Twin Cities natives might know places near the Mississippi within Minneapolis where there might be fine hills from which one could see the lights of skyscrapers in both Minneapolis and St. Paul. I don't know the area that well. I've never looked at the land between Macalester and the river. Who knows? There might be a hill or two there that rises above the normal level of the river bluff....

"I'd still guess, though, that Blodgett is a composite, a sort of generic Protestant college, not based on one institution." ✍

pale beauty, like that of a bruised gardenia" (184-85). In September 1922, the "doctor novel [*Arrowsmith*] marinated along with other ideas" (209); in 1923, his collaborator Paul De Kruif "stoked the furnace of Lewis's fictional imagination with biochemical data" (225). With "Arrowsmith" nearly finished, "he was drifting into that treacherous sargasso between books" (239). "*Mantrap* [1926] is shallow, but beneath the surface thrash sea snakes of neuroses and the tensions in Lewis's marriage" (259). "*Elmer Gantry* hit America like a Sunday punch in the jaw" (300), and the "furor over [the novel] gathered force like a cyclone" (301), for "Lewis played Paul Revere, attempting to rouse the country against fundamentalist fascism" (307).

The first meeting of Lewis and Dorothy Thompson, "these two bruised souls" (313), took place in July 1927, and "[t]heirs became a Shavian verbal Ping Pong match played for life-and-death stakes" (315). When Lewis took her to meet Mencken for lunch at the Algonquin in 1928, "it was like introducing his bride to a favorite rich uncle whose approval he craved" (329). "On the morning of November 5, 1930, a lightning bolt [news of the Nobel Prize] shattered all their plans" (351). Mencken gained new sympathy for Dorothy in the summer of 1931, "as he watched her heroic efforts to keep Lewis off the stuff, though rationing his drinks was like putting out a fire with teaspoons of gasoline" (373). In *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), "Lewis makes clear parallels between his ersatz American fascist state and its *echt* [Nazi] counterparts" (404). The novel "erupted on October 21," and the "Communist Party crushingly embraced it" (408), but "in defanging the script [of the Federal Theater Project dramatization in 1936] of political controversy, some of the novel's anger was lost" (414). In *The Prodigal Parents* (1938), Fred Cornplow rescues his son and daughter from various bad influences, "primary of which is an eelish communist named Eugene Silga" (424), but the novel "was really about the prodigal son who accepts his father's values" (427).

While in summer stock in August 1939, Lewis met eighteen-year-old Rosemary Marcella Powers; "[h]is first Pygmalion intervention was to advise her to use *Marcella* as her professional name because *Peggy*, as she was then known, sounded like a serving girl" (440). Branded a traitor for switching her support from Willkie to FDR in 1940 and subjected to unflattering nicknames for cru-

sading relentlessly to bring the U.S. into the war in support of the British, Dorothy Thompson "seemed indomitable," but "[b]eneath her Boadicean armor [...] she was vulnerable" (457). "Lewis's antic way with language makes the book [*Gideon Planish* (1943)] a tour de farce" (471). When his older son Wells was killed in action (1944), Lewis "was typically contrarian, lashing out at lame condolences [...], saying nothing about his son," but he "buried his pain" and "surely there were tears in a dark recess within, like moisture oozing from the wall of a cave" (485). In *Cass Timberlane* (1945), "Lewis does not engage in wish fulfillment," but rather "dissects a situation from life on his operating table" (490); if in this novel he "contemplates the State of Marriage, he adds a sub-theme as well—the State of the (Grand) Republic" (490), which he regards as the "synecdoche of American democracy" (497). In January 1946, Lewis sold his Duluth house, as it was time, as he told his brother Claude, to move on; but he "was satisfied he had received full value in the form of two novels [*Cass Timberlane* and *Kingsblood Royal*] quarried in Duluth" (498). Returning to Williamstown, Massachusetts in April 1949, Lewis caught "pneumonia—that white plague of smokers and alcoholics with weakened immune systems" (532). In September 1949, "Claude and Mrs. Powers sailed with Lewis on what would be his last voyage" (534), and "[a]s he remained in Florence, his friends seemed to drop off, like leaves from a lone tree" (538).


Quotation and repetition, finally, convey both Lingeman's wicked wit (which he shares with Lewis) and final assessment of his subject. When, for example, Lewis taught a creative writing class at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 1942, the director of the honorary writing fraternity, Dr. Anna Augusta von Helmholtz Phelan ("a name [Lewis] might have thought up for her character" [467]), showed Lewis the finger her cat Nikki-poo had scratched, but was not amused by Lewis's suggestion: "Why don't you drown the son of a bitch?" (468). Having already noted that "Lewis's speech was studded with profanity, with *son of a bitch* his favorite epithet" (239), Lingeman comments later on *Cass Timberlane* (1945): "At its best, the writing is sharp and passionate, though the reader should pass over the silly lovers' talk Lewis crafts for Cass...and Jinny

Literary Style *continued from page 13*

...and ignore the annoying cat named Cleo—he should have drowned the son of a bitch” (488). In his epilogue, Lingeman concludes that Lewis “measured American life by high standards and found *it was not good enough*” (553), which echoes Dorothy Thompson’s diary entry for December 2, 1935 (547) and Lingeman’s use of the quote to explain what Lewis meant when he told Perry Miller in 1951: “I love America, but I don’t like it” (547). Lingeman’s biography ends with the words: “...he wrote with a real moral passion. *He really cared*” (554), which echoes Alfred Harcourt’s reminiscence of Lewis in 1951 (518), but also serves as Lingeman’s answer (cf. Schorer, “Burdens” 250).

Contrary to the claims of critics, Lingeman’s *Rebel from Main Street* is an eminently readable and reliable literary biography of critical substance and stylistic merit. Unlike Schorer, Lingeman *really cares* about Lewis.

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The “Bo-Teaser” *continued from page 12*

coupling-pin to the bell-cord, drops the former down between the platforms, and pays out the latter. The coupling-pin strikes the ties between the rails, rebounds against the bottom of the car, and again strikes the ties. The shack plays it back and forth, now to this side, now to the other, lets it out a bit and hauls it in a bit, giving his weapon opportunity for every variety of impact and rebound. Every blow of that flying coupling-pin is freighted with death, and at sixty miles an hour it beats a veritable tattoo of death. The next day the remains of that tramp are gathered up along the right of way, and a line in the local paper mentions the unknown man, undoubtedly a tramp, assumably drunk, who had probably fallen asleep on the track. (202-03)

Lewis’s moralistic and melodramatic tone (an effect increased by the posed photographic illustrations that accompany the piece) in “They That Take the Sword” is a far cry from London’s briskly reportorial—at times even jaunty—style in *The Road*. It is easy to guess that Lewis was aiming at what he took

to be the *Red Book*’s expectations about necessary didactic ingredients in such a tale. It is also easy to assume that London’s popularization of hobo culture in *The Road* as serialized in *Cosmopolitan* magazine as well as in book form had a good deal to do with Lewis’s own choice of the subject in 1909. In any case, Lewis’s borrowings here present an added instance of interaction between these two thoroughly professional writers.

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DR. LEWIS AND HOMEOPATHY

William Kraemer

On a recent visit to Sauk Centre, William Kraemer visited the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home and managed to take a look inside the medical bag of Dr. E. J. Lewis. Kraemer noticed that the bag contained many homeopathic medicines. Here is some additional information on homeopathy.

Sinclair Lewis's father was caught up in the medical trade war of his era. Homeopaths, osteopaths, and allopaths were fighting for turf against themselves and other healers.

Reverend Gerald Winrod was the "rabble rousing publisher-preacher-radio orator of Wichita, Kansas," according to those who did not like him. They also called him the "Prairie Pogromist" because of his attacks on Catholics, Jews, and people of color. This Kansas-based radio evangelist had a national flock and a nationally syndicated radio show. He also spread news of the impending apocalypse through a magazine, *The Defender*. The fact that *The Defender* carried articles like "Flying Saucers Considered Prophetically" did not hurt his credibility. Winrod, who used to intone, "God bless the quacks, the only quacks who

are healing cancer," advocated for Drs. Koch, Lincoln, and Ivy. This evangelist also defended Harry Hoxey of Dallas, a non-medical healer who treated cancer. These MDs were prosecuted by the American Medical Association. During WWII, he was nearly tried for sedition because of past associations with Nazis.

Lewis seems, by my little knowledge, to have been acutely aware of the trade war. What an astute reader of the American character he was.

Ironically, Hoxey's treatment was the same as one touted in a *JAMA* article and promoted by a Dr. Mohs. Faced with this fact, the AMA admitted in a court battle that Hoxey could cure external cancer. I know a woman who swears Hoxey cured her daughter of a terminal internal cancer. I also know a man whose father swore Hoxey cured his skin cancer. Hoxey, at least, had and still has supporters and admirers from the left wing, middle of the road, fundamentalist, John Birchers, and (later) flower child hippie Americans.

(Much of the information for this article came from Kenny Ausubel's work, *When Healing Becomes a Crime*, published in 2000 by Healing Arts Press of Rochester, VT.)

Roundup of Reviews *continued from page 8*

and could settle nowhere; yet he knew that human beings need homes, and that a healthy society is rooted in that need. He had done a good deal of office work, and found that he detested the hierarchy and routines of it; yet he had sense enough to know that the world could not go on without such work, and sufficient human sympathy to see that, as ill as it may have suited him, it suited most other people very well.

"The one organ indispensable to a social novelist—much more so than, for example, a brain—is the Cold Eye: the ability to see one's characters in all their folly and self-absorption, from a detached point of view—and yet with cynicism kept always at bay by some tenderness and a little envy. In that respect, at least, Sinclair Lewis was a great social novelist, which is of course a much higher thing than a mere satirist. The Cold Eye is everywhere in his books: he could not be sentimental if he wanted to—which, of course, he

didn't." Derbyshire mentions a passage in *Main Street* where Carol wants to romanticize the Perrys, an old pioneer couple, and although she sees the heroism and simplicity, she also realizes that they are narrow-minded fundamentalists.

In the end, Derbyshire writes, Lewis realized that most of us have to come to terms with life and work as it is. He describes Lewis's life in some detail, including his appearance, the critical comments against him, and the disappointments in his personal life. "Lewis was well equipped to write about quiet desperation.... His work is there, though, to be discovered and admired by anyone who loves the Cold Eye; and how well it reads, compared with the silly, gassy, pretentious, sentimental 'literary fiction' of our own time!"

For the complete review, see <http://www.nationalreview.com/weekend/books/books-derbyshire021602.shtml>. ✍

RICHARD LINGEMAN ON C-SPAN'S *BOOKNOTES*

On March 10, 2002 Richard Lingeman spoke on C-SPAN's *Booknotes*. The following are excerpts from the C-SPAN website.

"The critic Edmund Wilson called Sinclair Lewis one of the national poets. In the 1920s, Lewis fired off a fusillade of sensational novels, exploding American shibboleths with a volatile mixture of caricature and photographic realism. With an unerring eye for the American scene and an omnivorous ear for American talk, he mocked such sacrosanct institutions as the small town (*Main Street*), business (*Babbitt*), medicine (*Arrowsmith*), and religion (*Elmer Gantry*). His shrewdly observed characters became part of the American gallery, and his titles became part of the language.

"Despite his books' innate subversiveness, they were bestsellers and widely discussed and almost as widely damned. They had small-towners worried about being called Main Streeters, preachers fearful of being branded Elmer Gantrys, and Babbitts defiant of being labeled Babbitts. Lewis touched a nerve among Americans who secretly yearned for something more from life than hustling, making money, and buying new cars.

"Lewis danced along the fault line between the old, small-town, frugal, conservative, fundamentalist America and the modernist, big-business-dominated, youth-obsessed, advertising-powered consumer society

that was reshaping the American character in the iconoclastic 1920s.

"For all his use of humor and satire, Lewis probed serious themes: feminism (*The Job*, *Main Street*, *Ann Vickers*), commercial pressures on science (*Arrowsmith*), racial prejudice (*Kingsblood Royal*), and native fascism (*It Can't Happen Here*). In 1930, he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he feared he could never live up to it. In his heart, he was a scold with a conscience, a harsh truth-teller who laughed out loud. His novels, born out of a passionate conviction that America could be better, are thus as alive today as when they were written.

"Bringing to bear newly uncovered correspondence, diaries, and criticism, Richard Lingeman, distinguished biographer of Theodore Dreiser, paints a sympathetic portrait in all its multihued contradictions of a seminal American writer who could be inwardly the loneliest of men and outwardly as gregarious as George Follansbee Babbitt himself. Lingeman writes with sympathy and understanding about Lewis's losing struggle with alcoholism; his stormy marriages, including one to the superwoman Dorothy Thompson, whose fame as a newspaper columnist in the 1930s outshone Lewis's fading star as a novelist; and his wistful, autumnal love for an actress more than thirty years younger than he."

PRAISE FOR *KINGSBLOOD ROYAL*

Brent Staples, in an essay, "When the Bard of Main Street Turned the Kingsbloods Black," in the *New York Times* for August 18, 2002, celebrates Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*. He praises Lewis's prolific writing, where "his material came less from his imagination than from the voracious research that let him inhale the world, then expel it onto the page." He mentions *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*, as well as the revival in Lewis studies with *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* and the Library of America's two volumes of Lewis

novels. But the novel he finds most ahead of its time is *Kingsblood Royal*, "an admittedly melodramatic story with a racial theme that was mauled and quickly forgotten, partly because critics were unable to accept a multicultural novel published in the age of Jim Crow."

Staples offers a plot summary, ending with a discussion of how "Neil had been brought up to view Negroes as less than human. That view was reinforced dur-

Praise continued on page 17

Love Affair continued from page 11

She was pleased to find that a woman character in 1920 America would be asking the same questions about her place in the world as contemporary women do. "Ever since I was a young woman during the early '80s, I've eagerly consumed stories of women in the post-feminist age, looking for clues to how they've dealt with life's questions and hoping they would help me deal with them. Here was a man several generations before me, posing those same questions and drawing magnificently rich stories that illustrated how timeless those questions really are, and how difficult they are to answer.

"But it isn't just Lewis's women who are struggling. As I read *Arrowsmith* and *Babbitt* and *Cass Timberlane* and *Dodsworth*, I saw that the men he created were trying to balance their lives and their work and their quest for richness in love, too, and for meaning in their very existence.... With every page I have read, I've become more intrigued by the man behind them.

"Vincent Sheehan's 1963 portrait of Sinclair Lewis's marriage to Dorothy Thompson, *Dorothy and Red*, brought out a dimension of the man that I found upsetting, given my deepening admiration of his work. Though he created characters who feel emo-

tions deeply, suggesting that Lewis himself might be a kind, empathetic person, he doesn't appear to have been a compassionate husband or father, but rather a man possessed by his work and consumed at times by alcohol.

"Knowing that Sinclair Lewis was radically flawed makes my unrequited love affair easier to bear. Two weeks ago, I was on a crosstown bus, devouring the climactic last pages of *Dodsworth*, in which the lead character struggles over whether to reconcile with his shrew of a wife, who had left him for a younger man, or to go off with his newfound paramour. An elderly woman boarded and sat right next to me, disturbing my concentration. Her interruption turned out to be a welcome one, when she said, 'Are you enjoying Sinclair Lewis? I love that one you're reading!'

"The two of us gossiped about his books as if we were sharing details about people we knew, about men we were in love with. Like me, she'd read one Lewis—"back in the day," she said—and proceeded to read them all. She remembered the details vividly. As I got to my destination, I practically skipped off the bus, thrilled to have found a fellow Lewis fan—and vowing to pass along my admiration of his work, somehow, to others." ✍

Praise continued from page 16

ing the war, when he viewed black soldiers as lazy and dimwitted because they were denied arms and used primarily as laborers.... *Kingsblood* was published at a time when black people were mainly invisible in the white news media, except when they appeared as criminals or simple-minded servants. Lewis exploits this fact to great effect, turning up the lights on the faces of the black people in Grand Republic whom Neil had never before noticed. Venturing into the black part of town, he is astounded to encounter a broad array of black characters, some more cultured and literate than himself—a rare achievement for a white writer working in the period between 1940 and the present....

"The *Times*'s book critic, Orville Prescott, expressed the prevailing view when he denounced *Kingsblood* as 'artificial, unconvincing...about as subtle as a lynching bee.' But the black elite deluged

the book with praise, and *Ebony* magazine, the voice of the black middle class, named *Kingsblood Royal* the most important book of the year."

Walter White, head of the N.A.A.C.P., also praised the book and, with his blue eyes and blond hair, was much like Neil himself. He helped Lewis with his research, gave him access to the N.A.A.C.P.'s files, and introduced him to influential black people, many of whom knew people who had passed.

"Neil Kingsblood believes that 'God turned me white to save my soul.' Lewis did it to expose the theory of racial differences that dominated American life as an arbitrary fiction. Much of the country could not hear the sage of Main Street in 1947, but it can certainly hear him today." To access the entire article, go to: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/18/opinion/18SUN3.html?ex=1030684771&ei=1&en=ce3f30d08c4a2387>. ✍

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lewis Society member Ralph Goldstein writes, "My students and I constructed a hypertext version of *Babbitt*, which you can locate at www.damien-hs.edu/babbitt. While there are adjustments and more linking of sources to be made in the days ahead, the site is uploaded and operating." [Do take a look at this site. It's the whole text of *Babbitt*, plus links to pictures of various possibly unfamiliar terms. The picture for the link to the corset that Myra Babbitt wears will give you a whole new take on her!]

—SLSN—

Brett Lettiere, who was instrumental in updating the Sinclair Lewis Society website several years ago, is now working on his masters at the University of Chicago. He writes, "I am taking a class this semester with Stanley Fish called Public Intellectuals. Today, Fish responded to the *New York Times* book review of the new Sinclair Lewis biography, which appeared in Sunday's paper. He accused all of us of not knowing

him [Lewis], and urged us to read him. He then went on to argue that *Arrowsmith*, *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, and especially *It Can't Happen Here* are wonderful novels—he also gave summaries of all the above. The purpose of this little rant was to exemplify how popularity can cause the person not to be taken seriously. This is in light of conversations we have been having about whether or not academics can fulfill the role of public intellectual. Fish was claiming that it is terrible that such good literature is not taken seriously because Lewis was popular. I thought you might find that interesting."

—SLSN—

William Jennings, one of our members from Australia, writes that he thinks readers of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* should submit favorite quotations from Lewis, perhaps with a comment. The editor would be glad to run a feature on this and perhaps put them on the website the next time it is updated.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Tom Raynor and Maureen Roen are working toward nominating Dorothy Thompson for the Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. Do check out the web site of Syracuse University's School of Management, designed by Maureen, who was born and reared in Minnesota. The epigraph for the site is by Sinclair Lewis. It was recently named best institutional/promotional web site by the Syracuse Press Club.

—SLSN—

Sinclair Lewis gets a prominent mention in the article "Why Authors Get Hot" in the *Chicago Times Arts and Entertainment* section (April 21, 2002: 1, 12). Lewis is put in excellent company with John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Rudyard Kipling (a favorite writer of Lewis's), Edith Wharton, and Wallace Stevens. The author, Julia Keller, notes that "Literature, which some may like to

conceive of as an immutable set of timeless verities, solid as granite and fixed as the stars, instead is every bit as fragile as any other human creation. It is subject to the same whims and caprices of marketplace popularity as boy bands." She writes of how authors fade from and return to the canon, citing events such as Richard Lingeman's new biography of Lewis as a way of an author returning to the spotlight.

—SLSN—

Films of the Golden Age, in its Spring 2002 issue, had a lengthy article on Lana Turner, called "Lana Turner: Dangerous Curves," written by Neil Doyle. In the article, he notes that she "holds her own against veteran actor Spencer Tracy in *Cass Timberlane*" (18) and that her role as Jinny Timberlane proved she was a strong actress. "From the novel by Sinclair Lewis, it told the

story of a young woman from the wrong side of the tracks who marries an older, small-town judge despite the disapproval of his society friends. Zachary Scott was a playboy who provides some diversion for her when boredom sets in. Lana received glowing reviews for her work opposite Tracy. Kate Cameron in the *N.Y. Daily News* wrote: 'That she is able to hold the spotlight while Spencer Tracy is on the screen, is a test of her ability as an actress and charmer.' Not considered one of the author's best works, the film nevertheless proved its worth at the box office thanks to excellent supporting work by Tom Drake, Mary Astor, Albert Dekker, Margaret Lindsay, and Selena Royle" (26).

————— SLSN —————

John Updike, in his essay on Czeslaw Milosz, "Survivor/Believer," in the *New Yorker* (Dec. 24 & 31, 2001: 118-19), connects him with other American winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature, including Sinclair Lewis, Saul Bellow, and Toni Morrison. Milosz is the eleventh American to be so honored (he has lived in the United States since 1960), although he continues to write his poetry in Polish.

————— SLSN —————

Jon Hassler has written another novel, *The Staggerford Flood*, about his fictional community, Staggerford, Minnesota. In a review in the *Chicago Tribune* (August 25, 2002:14.7), Keith Taylor favorably reviews the novel, describing Staggerford as "somewhere north of Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, and it isn't far from Sinclair Lewis's Gopher Prairie with its infamous Main Street." Hassler's community has endured its series of hard times and "developed an established literary geography.... Hassler has been able to use his characters to gently prod his readers into considering the great themes: love and death, the choices between good and evil, the necessity of kindness."

————— SLSN —————

Lewis is cited in an article on Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, "Suicide Squeeze," by Frank Deford in the July 8, 2002 issue of *Sports Illustrated*. In a generally complimentary article, Deford describes Selig as a "neo-Babbitt" because he is still connected with his small-town business interests in the Midwest and his family fortune comes from selling cars. And everyone remembers how sentimental George Babbitt was about his car.

————— SLSN —————

Glen Love finds another, older reference to *Babbitt* in the Eric Ambler thriller *Cause for Alarm* (NY: Knopf, 1939). "We men of good-will have got to get together, roll up our sleeves and get something done, eh?" He beamed at me, a benevolent Babbitt with a parcel of real estate to unload" (128).

————— SLSN —————

Maritta Wolff Stegman, who created a literary sensation with her 1941 novel, *Whistle Stop*, died in July 2002. Her story of the underbelly of small-town American family life was hailed by Sinclair Lewis as "the most important first novel of the year," the *Chicago Tribune* reported in her obituary, July 17, 2002. She was 22 and a college student when she wrote her tale of a poor vulgar family living in a small town near Detroit. The novel included raw language, unflattering characters, and an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister. The novel was filmed in 1946 with George Raft and Ava Gardner, although the content was toned down. Her other novels include *Night Shift*, *About Lyddy Thomas*, and *The Big Nickelodeon*.

————— SLSN —————

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reports that the Guthrie Theater artistic director Joe Dowling hosted the first "Reading Allowed" event in March 2002, which paired Minnesota writers with actors from the Guthrie and the University of Minnesota. The event featured Sally Wingert reading from *Main Street*, Richard Iglewski performing Jon Hassler's "Rufus at the Door," as well as readings from Emily Carter and Dale Gregory Anderson.

————— SLSN —————

Distinguished contemporary author William Gass is compared to Sinclair Lewis in "The Invisible Made Audible," a review of *Tests of Time*, a collection of essays by Gass, reviewed by Benjamin Anastas in the *New York Times Book Review* (March 24, 2002: 19). Gass, in an essay called "How German Are We?," quotes *It Can't Happen Here*, in "a blistering cultural history of loutishness in American politics that revives the spirit of Sinclair Lewis: 'Why, there's no country in the world that can get more hysterical—yes, or more obsequious!—than America.' ... Gass makes plain that his pa-

triotism adheres to an even larger ideal, the integrity of language itself.”

————— SLSN —————

A reference in Bob Greene’s column in the *Chicago Tribune* on February 10, 2002, reminds one of how Main Street has insinuated itself into the common lexicon. Greene quotes from the writings of war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who traveled with the infantry, writing about them with an understanding shared by too few other writers. He wrote in May 1942 about the soldiers in Tunisia; “There is an agony in your heart and you almost feel ashamed to look at them. They are just guys from Broadway and Main Street, but you wouldn’t remember them. They are too far away now. They are too tired. Their world can never be known to you, but if you could see them just once, just for an instant, you would know that no matter how hard people work back home they are not keeping pace with these infantrymen in Tunisia” (A2).

————— SLSN —————

Three Disney features were released on DVD this past spring, including *Fun and Fancy Free*. As those who attended the last conference in Sauk Centre remember,

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The Sinclair
Lewis Society
web site
will be under
construction
soon.

You Can Help!



Please take some
time to visit us at:

<http://lilt.edu/separry/lewis.html>
and let us know what you’d like to see.

E-mail your suggestions to:
SinclairLewisSociety@hotmail.com

half of this feature is “Bongo the Bear,” based on a short story by Sinclair Lewis.

————— SLSN —————

Biography.com is a useful site for biographical summaries of over 25,000 people. Check out http://search.biography.com/print_record.pl?id=16965 for the Biography.com biography of Lewis. Here it is:

Writer; born in Sauk Centre, Minn. He studied at Yale (1903-06), left to join Upton Sinclair’s socialist colony in New Jersey, then returned and finished at Yale (1908). For the next few years he worked as a journalist, editor, and free-lance writer in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York City, but by 1916 he was devoting himself to his own writing, which would fall into three distinct periods. His first novels and short stories—all eminently forgettable—were a search for subject matter and a style. His second phase, essentially the 1920s, produced virtually all his important works, several of which provided names that would become proverbial stereotypes: *Main Street* (1920), a satirical portrait of a conservative small town in the Midwest; *Babbitt* (1922), equally satiric in its portrait of a conservative American businessman; *Elmer Gantry* (1927), also satirical in its portrait of religious hypocrisy. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* (1925) but refused it because he felt his views of American life did not conform to the idealized view of America espoused by the Pulitzer panel. He did, however, accept the Nobel Prize in literature (1930), the first American so honored. His fiction thereafter went into marked decline on the literary scale, although in such works as *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935) and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), he did anticipate certain social issues. He was married to the journalist, Dorothy Thompson, from 1928 to 1942, but theirs was a stormy relationship, aggravated by his severe alcoholism. He spent the last two decades of his life traveling around the U.S.A. and Europe—he died in Rome—as though avoiding the one place he truly knew, the American Midwest.

————— SLSN —————

From the Random House website:

The Last Empire: Essays 1992-2000, Gore Vidal, Vintage, 2002

The Last Empire is Gore Vidal’s ninth collection of essays in the course of his distinguished literary career.... There are warm (and shrewd) appreciations of Edmund Wilson, Dawn Powell, Sinclair Lewis, and Mark Twain; polemical observations on the major

figures and (as he sees it) deplorable developments in American politics—Bill Clinton, FDR, JFK, his cousin Al Gore, the CIA and the American empire, the global reach of media conglomerates, and the United States' disdain for the UN—as well as fascinating autobiographical vignettes.

For a complete table of contents, go to: <http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/display.pperl?037572639X>

————— SLSN —————

A strange article, "Dysfunction for Dollars," appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* (July 29, 2002: 22-25), on the author David Pelzer, who published a number of semiautobiographies about his childhood as a victim of abuse. The author of the article, Pat Jordan, casts doubt on the veracity of Pelzer's recollections and calls him "the Elmer Gantry of the 21st century, selling his books, his abuse, his platitudes, the DNA of Dave, an afternoon of laughter, some praise, and a nice lunch on a day away from the office" (25).

————— SLSN —————

Judith Shulevitz, in *The Close Reader*, her column at the end of the *New York Times Book Review* (May 19, 2002: 51), discussed book clubs and where passionate reading can lead. As a bad example, she used the protagonist of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, who becomes infatuated with a young tuberculosis patient and develops a passion for reading, where each book functions as a fetish object. Although Shulevitz thinks that there are times when book clubs can encourage people as readers, she's also suspicious of Oprah's Book Club and One Book, One City programs where a community is supposedly built through reading. "Every time I hear of library officials priding themselves on the program's social benefits, I think of George Babbitt jerry-building some shady real estate scheme and telling himself it will be good for the city of Zenith. . . . I'd feel safer attending a group animated by Oprah than one haunted by George Babbitt, but I'd be happiest reading my book at home."

————— SLSN —————

In a review of *H. L. Mencken on American Literature*, edited by S. T. Joshi (Ohio UP, 2002), writer Benjamin Schwarz, in the *Atlantic Monthly* (June 2002: 110-11), lavishly praises Mencken as one of the most insightful literary critics of the 20th century, along with Edmund Wilson, Gore Vidal, and possibly John Updike. Schwarz

admires Mencken's attention to formalism and aesthetics and mentions Mencken's review of *Main Street* as "the best thing ever written about that book" (111).

————— SLSN —————

The last note is from the *American Spectator* of April 2001, in an essay called "The Worst Book of the Year." This iconoclastic publication sponsors an annual award for worst book of the year, in part because the editorial philosophy is that there are too many boosters and not enough critics of the arts today. As an example, R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. writes, "The story is told about Mencken and Nathan getting wind of their friend Sinclair Lewis's nomination by the Pulitzer Prize committee for *Arrowsmith* and prevailing upon him to reject the indignity [Lewis did indeed refuse the Pulitzer Prize]. Years later, when he was menaced with the Nobel Prize for Literature, Mencken made heroic efforts to reach Lewis and preserve his honor. Unfortunately Lewis was drinking with his alcoholic wife and too stewed to accept Mencken's call. He became the Nobel laureate and never wrote another word worth reading. Today writers accept Pulitzers and Nobels even while sober, a state that afflicts them all too often" (96).

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be sponsoring a panel at the American Literature Association Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge in Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 22-25, 2003. The Society is interested in papers on any aspect of Lewis's life and work, including the new biography by Richard Lingeman. Please send an abstract by January 15, 2003 to:

Frederick Betz, President
Sinclair Lewis Society
Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literatures
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, IL 62901

or send an e-mail to fbetz@siu.edu.

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

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

SINCLAIR LEWIS WRITERS CONFERENCE

The 13th annual Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference was held on Saturday, Oct. 12, 2002, at the Sauk Centre School complex. The keynote speaker was Leif Enger, author of the best-seller *Peace Like a River*, which was a Book of the Month Club selection. He is also the author of several crime novels and a former producer at Minnesota Public Radio. His presentation, "The Writer's Journey," dealt with three points: first, that writing fiction is foremost a thing done out of love, fueled by passion and revealing the author's interior life; second, that fiction writing is risky, because "there is always rejection, even after you're published, and it never feels good"; and third, that fiction writing is worth doing, "even if you don't publish or if the rewards you work for are purely spiritual."

The second speaker was John Koblas, author of *Sinclair Lewis: Home at Last*, as well as books such as *Jesse James Ate Here: An Outlaw Tour & History of Minnesota at the Time of the Northfield Raid*, *J. J. Dickison: Swamp Fox of the Confederacy*, *The Jesse James Northfield Raid: Confessions of the Ninth Man*, *Willow River Almanac: A Father Copes With Divorce and Nature*, *The Great Cole Younger and Frank James Historical Wild West Show*, *When the Heavens Fell: The Youngers in Stillwater Prison*, and *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: His Homes and Haunts*. He is also a syndicated columnist for Columbia Features and spoke on writing biographies for books and television.

Lois Greiman spoke on the basics of novel writing and has quite an impressive resume, having written three romantic comedies, two westerns, ten historical romances, and one children's book. Her latest novel, *The MacGowan Betrothal*, is a Reviewer's Choice nomination for best Scottish historical fiction. She discussed how to structure novels, develop characters, and handle the mechanics of storytelling. Unlike her characters, she encourages her heroes and heroines to take outrageous risks, vent their tempers, and generally take life by storm.

The last speaker was poet Larry Schug, discussing "What to Write About." His collections of poetry include *Out of Balance*, *Caution: Thin Ice*,

Obsessed with Mud, and *The Turning Wheels*. He has been featured on Minnesota Public Radio and has spoken to many public school children over the years. His presentation focused on strategies he uses when he feels he either does not know what to write about or does not think what he has to say will be valuable to others.

ANNUAL SINCLAIR LEWIS FOUNDATION MEETING 2002

The annual meeting of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation took place on February 7, 2002. This year they honored Alyce Olsen, who retired after many years of service as a tour guide at the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home. Dave Simpkins also spoke on the new Lingeman biography of Lewis. The Foundation, which operates the Lewis Boyhood Home, sponsors the Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference, and cosponsors the Lewis Society conferences in Sauk Centre, is always looking for new members. Membership is \$10 for individuals, \$7 for those over 65, \$12 for couples, and \$25 for businesses. They can be contacted at Box 25, Sauk Centre, MN 56378, 612-352-5201.

ANNUAL SINCLAIR LEWIS DAYS A BIG SUCCESS

The annual Sinclair Lewis Days was held in Sauk Centre, July 15-21, 2002. Among the many events were a Sinclair Lewis Days Treasure Hunt, Rambling Riders Posse Competition, Kiddie Parade, Softball and Volleyball Tournaments, Battle of the Bands, Crafts and Flea Market, Heart of the Lakes Bike Tour, Sinclair Lewis Days Parade, fireworks, and the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. Crowned Miss Sauk Centre was Tia Trierweiler, who performed a lyrical dance routine to "There You'll Be." Over 700 people attended the pageant, and nearly 1,500 were at the fairgrounds after the parade. The Parade Marshal was Lorraine Peschel, who has distinguished herself by the amount of volunteer work that she does for organizations such as the VFW Auxiliary, Meals on Wheels, Center Area Concert Association, Christian Mothers, Chamber of Commerce, American Cancer Society, and the Retired Educators Association of Minnesota.

LEWIS AND THE WEB: INFORMATION AND REQUESTS

Richard Lingeman's biography of Lewis has certainly increased traffic on the Sinclair Lewis website. In less than four years, the website has received over 110,000 hits from all over the world. Recent e-mails have been received from Massachusetts, Mississippi, France, Italy, and China. The following are examples of some of the more recent questions that have been received.

————— SLSN —————

A librarian from the *Wall Street Journal* asks, "Is there anything to tie Sinclair Lewis to Baltimore, other than early patronage and long friendship with H. L. Mencken?" [Editor's reply: There's not a lot, although Lewis spent the first night of his honeymoon with his first wife, Grace Hegger, in a Baltimore hotel in 1914. There's also a tale of a drunken spree that Lewis undertook with A. S. Frere, the publisher, in 1931, when they drove up to Baltimore from Washington and woke up Mencken at dawn.]

————— SLSN —————

Thank you for the site on Sinclair Lewis, who I think is the best all-time American author but who I find is largely forgotten. *Cass Timberlane* is my favorite.

————— SLSN —————

I am interested in learning more about this site and about Sinclair Lewis. I wander around his old Minnesota country yearly and was by his boyhood home and grave twice last year.

————— SLSN —————

1) I'm hoping you can help me. A long time ago I remember reading a short story that was included in a high school literature text called "The Little Yellow Dog." I thought it was written by Sinclair Lewis. Could you verify if it was or not? And if it was, do you know where I might be able to find it again? I've been looking off and on for it for over twenty years—I found it once but have since misplaced it! The internet (including the Library of Congress) has not

been overly helpful so far. [The editor was not able to find a Lewis story with that title.]

2) That's okay - thanks anyway. Maybe it wasn't written by Lewis. Which of course will make it next to impossible for me to find it again! How I wish I could have kept my high school textbooks!!!!

————— SLSN —————

I'm trying to find a story written by Sinclair Lewis about the Devil writing a letter to his nephew, Wormwood. I can't remember the name of the story or book. [This person is referring to *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis.]

————— SLSN —————

[The following two entries obviously are thinking of *The Jungle*, a continuing, common mistake.]

1) I enjoyed perusing your site. Can you tell me the name of the work that Mr. Lewis wrote that had as its setting the Chicago meat packing industry?

2) I'm looking for some literature that I think Sinclair Lewis wrote on the lives of migrant workers living in NY in the 1920s. They worked in a sausage factory under grueling conditions trying to make quotas on production of sausage. I was hoping you could advise me to a short story or a book with this content. I read it years ago and can't remember the work but only that Sinclair Lewis might have written it.

————— SLSN —————

Hey there, I have a question about Sinclair Lewis. Did he write any short stories? If so, please say what they are and where to find them. [There are several collections of short stories available, including Lewis's *Selected Short Stories* published by Ivan R. Dee and *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, edited by Anthony Di Renzo.]

————— SLSN —————

I was watching a program on television the other morning and a quote by Sinclair Lewis was presented. Unfortunately, I could not get a pen fast enough to jot it down, nor can I remember it com-

pletely. It had something to do with people and 1/4 being your friends. I would like to find this quote.

————— SLSN —————

Hello, I have two Sinclair Lewis 14 cent postage stamps in perfect condition, not cancelled. Are there any collectors to your knowledge that may be interested? [These stamps have little more than face value.]

————— SLSN —————

I have five books by Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* 1920, *Babbitt* 1922, *Arrowsmith* 1924, *It Can't Happen Here* 1935 and *The Prodigal Parents* 1938. The books are in supposedly in mint condition. I would be interested in any information you could provide on these books, as well as their value.

————— SLSN —————

Is there a gift shop or group that sells Sinclair Lewis T-shirts?

STUDENT QUERIES

I am a French Student in third year English Studies at the University in Nantes and at the present time I have to write a text analysis about an extract from a book by Sinclair Lewis, which does not seem to be very well known. In fact, I have searched the whole Library at the University and have found no biography or bibliography about this work. I have also searched the whole internet, but in vain: I have found no results.

The title of this work is "Virga Vay and Allan Cedar" and apparently it was published in 1945. It seems to be a story about an optician who is in love with a girl. Well, I think it is a short story but I am not very sure. In fact, I just would like to know if you could help me find out what is the real nature of this work (novel, short story) and what is the story about.

Among all the internet sites that I have visited, yours is the most complete and the most interesting one about Sinclair Lewis's life and for me, you seem to be just the right person to be able to answer such a question. That's why I allow myself to send you this wee e-mail. Thank you in advance for your precious help. I send you all my sincere salutations.

P.S.: Forgive my bad English writing but I have no English dictionary beside me at this precise moment. Hope you will understand my inquiries despite all my weaknesses in your so beautiful language. [The story she refers to is an interchapter in *Cass Timberlane*.]

————— SLSN —————

I have to write a thesis on Sinclair Lewis for my Masters at University. The books I need are the following:

1. *Ann Vickers*
2. *It Can't Happen Here*
3. *Kingsblood Royal*
4. *Gideon Planish*

And also

D. J. Dooley's *The Art of Sinclair Lewis*
Martin Bucco's *Critical Essays on Sinclair Lewis*
James Hutchisson's *Sinclair Lewis: New Essays in Criticism*
Martin Light's *The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis*
James Lundquist's *Sinclair Lewis*

Thanks for your help, please answer and give me all information i.e., how I can get the above material, the delivery time and payment terms. I'm in Italy. [The editor referred this person to amazon.com and abebooks.com.]

————— SLSN —————

Please send me the bibliography of Mr. Lewis.

————— SLSN —————

Hi, I'm a high school senior doing a research project on Sinclair Lewis for my final in AP English. I've been having some difficulty finding literary criticism on his work and I was wondering if you might be able to help. Thanks so much.

————— SLSN —————

I am doing a project on Sinclair Lewis. If you have any information that could be sent to me at my email address.

————— SLSN —————

I want to know about the life of American middletown society in 1920. It is related to the story of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. Nowadays, I am making of the thesis about this novel. So, I hope you help.

—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.]

Steven C. Bernard
First Editions

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Fax: (301) 948-8223
E-mail: scb.books@erols.com
www.scb-firsts.com

CATALOGUE 101
2002

134. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$35

This issue states "Published March, 1929" on copyright page, but underneath that is the numeral "2." The 1936 film adaptation was directed by William Wyler and received six Academy Award nominations, winning one. Name and date on flyleaf o/w vg (no dw).

135. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$35

First edition in second issue binding. The 1960 film adaptation starred Burt Lancaster, Jean Simmons, Shirley Jones, and Arthur Kennedy and won three Academy Awards of the five for which it was nominated. Spine edges slightly rubbed; name on flyleaf o/w vg (no dw).

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116. Lewis, Sinclair. *Novels by Sinclair Lewis*. London: Jonathan Cape (No date – c. 1928). \$85

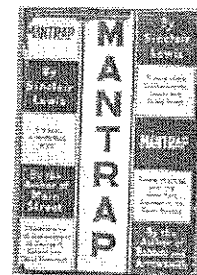
First edition. 16mo. One page folded to make four. Small promotional brochure for the English editions of Lewis's novels, with a caricature of Lewis on the front wrap. Fine.

Collector's Corner

CATALOGUE 95

48. Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$3500

First edition. Fine in an edgeworn, but very good dustwrapper with chipping at the extremities, particularly at the crown and with a large, but relatively faint dampstain. Author's eighth book under his own name, and exceptionally scarce in jacket.



49. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$4000

First edition. Fine in an exceptionally bright and fine dustwrapper, with just the faintest crease on the spine. Lewis's classic novel of a staid, retired car manufacturer who takes a trip to Europe with his wife and learns more about her, and their relationship, than he did in twenty years of marriage. Basis first for a stage hit, and then for the excellent 1936 William Wyler film featuring Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas, Mary Astor, David Niven, and Maria Ouspenskaya. Wyler, Huston, Ouspenskaya, and the picture itself were all nominated for Oscars. Laid in is a brief typed letter **signed** from Walter Huston to Morris Frank, about an engagement. Frank was the founder of The Seeing Eye, the first school for guide dogs for the blind in the United States. A lovely copy.

CATALOGUE 96



39. Tom Graham. [Sinclair Lewis]. *Hike and the Aeroplane*. New York: Stokes, 1912. \$6500

First edition. Contemporary gift inscription on the front fly, hinges starting, moderate rubbing to the spine, front board

lettering, and illustration: a solid, very good copy. When encountered, this cheaply produced children's book is generally found with the lettering and painted pictorial cover very worn. This is a considerably better than usual copy, lacking the rare dustwrapper. The very scarce, pseudonymous first book by the first American author to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, printed in an edition of only 1000 copies.

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CATALOGUE 33

281. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1850

First edition. First issue binding with G on spine resembling a C. A nearly fine copy in a bright dust jacket with some restoration at edges including a piece at base of spine which affects the first few letters in the publisher's name.

282. Lewis, Sinclair. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933. \$275

First edition. A fine copy in a fine dust jacketed (minutely soiled).

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

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

284. Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1935. \$225

First edition. A fine copy in a near fine dust jacket (a few tiny nicks).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CATALOGUE 119

MODERN LITERATURE

130. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Trail of the Hawk*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915. \$2500

The third book, second under his own name, by the first American to win the Nobel Prize. Inscribed by the author in the year of publication: "To Joseph Margulis/ with the regards/ of his friend/ Sinclair Lewis/ Aug. 31, 1915." Spine greatly faded, near fine, lacking the dust jacket. Color frontispiece by Norman Rockwell. Uncommon. Of the response to his first five novels, Lewis has said, "all of them dead before the ink was dry. I lacked sense enough to see that, after five failures, I was foolish to continue writing." The comments were made in an autobiographical statement for the Nobel Foundation after Lewis won the Prize in 1930 for his continued writing, including *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, *Babbit*, and *Elmer Gantry*.

131. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Job*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$9500

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

Larry Moskowitz

121 Embarcadero West #2104

Oakland, CA 94607

Phone: (510) 891-2312

E-mail: loblollybks@yahoo.com

374. McLaughlin, Maurice E. [Sinclair Lewis]. *Tennis as I Play It*. New York: George H. Doran, 1915. \$1000

First edition. 8 vo. Illustrated with photographs. Though nowhere cited in this book, this volume was ghostwritten by the then 30-year-old Sinclair Lewis only three years after he had published his first book. This copy bears a contemporary inscription by McLoughlin on the front endpaper. McLoughlin was considered the first great tennis star of the modern era. He was the number one-ranked American player from 1912-1914, captain of the winning Davis Cup team in 1913, and is enshrined in the Tennis Hall of Fame. An envelope containing three lengthy printed obituaries of McLoughlin from 1957 is pasted to the half-title page; otherwise this is a fine, bright, tight copy of this book, which usually comes to market these days in woeful condition.

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CATALOGUE 113

140. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$75

First edition. Art Deco bookplate. Very good plus copy without dust jacket. Clean, tight copy with the stamping bright. The basis of the William Wyler directed film starring Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Mary Astor, David Niven, and Paul Lukas.

141. Lewis, Sinclair. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1934. \$300

First edition. Near fine in a lightly used dust jacket with a few tiny chips and light wear. Much better and brighter than usually found.

CATALOGUE 114

157. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$1850

First edition, first issue binding. Fine clean copy in a bright dust jacket, with some mends by an expert paper conservationist.

158. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$75

First edition, second issue binding. Fine, clean, and fresh copy without dust jacket.

159. Lewis, Sinclair. "Sinclair Lewis on *The Valley of the Moon*." [N.p.] Harvey Taylor, 1932. \$250

First edition. One of 100 numbered copies signed by Harvey Taylor. A French folded leaflet. The first separate edition of Lewis's review of Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon*. Fine copy.

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MARCH 2002

120. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920. \$400

First edition; first state. Very good plus.

121. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. Chicago: Limited Editions Club, 1937. \$400

Illustrations by Grant Wood. First edition, thus. With a new introduction by Lewis. One of 1500 numbered copies signed by Wood. Spine a little darkened, else fine in a worn publisher's slipcase.

APRIL 2002

116. Graham, Tom. [Sinclair Lewis]. *Hike and the Aeroplane*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1912. \$6500

First Edition of Lewis's first book, a juvenile adventure; only 1000 copies were printed. Some cloth wear; hinges cracked; gift inscription; very good.

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