

# The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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FALL 2010



*Sally Parry and Robert McLaughlin as Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis in the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade (photo courtesy of Roberta Olson)*

## 2010 SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE A GREAT SUCCESS

*Sally E. Parry  
Illinois State University*

The Sinclair Lewis Society, in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, held an intriguing and invigorating conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, July 14–16, 2010. The conference, which celebrated the 80th anniversary of Lewis winning the Nobel Prize for Literature and the 90th anniversary of the publication of *Main Street*, had participants from all over the country. Evening highlights included a keynote speech by James M. Hutchisson, a showing of the film of *Ann Vickers*, and the world premiere of *Kingsblood*, a play version of *Kingsblood Royal* by D. J. Jones.

The conference started out in an unanticipated and exciting manner with a thunderstorm and a tornado warning. A tornado was spotted near town and everyone in the Palmer House was asked to go to the basement until the danger had passed. Conference participants recognized each other right away and so the

## CAROL KENNICOTT'S STORY: *MAIN STREET*

*James M. Hutchisson  
The Citadel*

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF THE 2010 SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE

Sinclair Lewis. Where to start? It has been almost 15 years since I wrote *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis*, and I continue to be amazed by the historical uniqueness of Lewis's stratospheric success, especially in the 1920s. In an amazingly productive ten-year period, Lewis produced five classic novels that satirized American society and questioned entrenched American values: *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*. He systematically worked his way through the pantheon of American myths, from the piety of the small town to the sanctity of the church, smashing shibboleths left and right and permanently lodging an element of cynicism and doubt in the American imagination. The topics that he tackled with his blend of realism and satire still resonate today. As we well know, he gave the words "Main Street" and "Babbitt" special meanings which they still possess.

Probably the book that everyone knows, or knows of, however, is *Main Street*.

Its influence on later American writers was profound—and sometimes surprising. In his autobiography, *Black Boy*, Richard Wright recalls the moment when reading became his passion, and he cites *Main Street* as his first "serious novel." Others would follow suit.

To say that it took America by storm when it was published in 1920 is a vast understatement. In the media-driven world in which we live today, we must sometimes work hard to imagine the impact that such a book had on American so-

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## The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Author, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*

## DODSWORTH PERFORMED IN NEW YORK

The Metropolitan Playhouse in New York produced the stage version of *Dodsworth* by Sidney Howard, May 15–June 6, 2010. The play, which had not received a production in New York in decades, tells in episodic fashion the life of Samuel Dodsworth after he retires from his automobile company. It originally starred Walter Huston and Ruth Chatterton, who repeated their roles in the 1936 William Wyler film.

Sinclair Lewis's novel of 1929 was adapted to the stage by playwright Howard in 1934. Later incarnations include William Wyler's popular film, a 1943 radio play with Huston and Bette Davis in Chatterton's part, and a 1950 television version with Walter Abel as Dodsworth and Ruth Chatterton repeating her role as Fran Dodsworth. Despite its pedigree and enduring popularity as a film, the play has been little revived since its initial Broadway run.

Sidney Howard was one of the most popular playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s. His works include the Pulitzer Prize-winning *They Knew What They Wanted* (1924), which became the musical *The Most Happy Fella* (1956); *Lucky Sam McCarver* (1926); *Ned McCobb's Daughter* (1926); *The Silver Cord* (1926); *The Late Christopher Bean* (1932); and *Yellow Jack* (1932). He also adapted Lewis's novel *Arrowsmith* for film, earning an Academy Award nomination, and his work on the screenplay of *Gone with the Wind* earned him a posthumous Oscar in 1939.

Metropolitan's revival was directed by Yvonne Opffer Conybeare, and starred Michael Scott as Dodsworth, Lisa Riegel, Wendy Merritt, and Michael Hardart. The mission of the Metropolitan Playhouse is to explore "America's theatrical heritage to illuminate contemporary American culture. The playhouse produces early American plays, new plays drawn from American culture and history, and plays from around the world that resonate with the American canon."

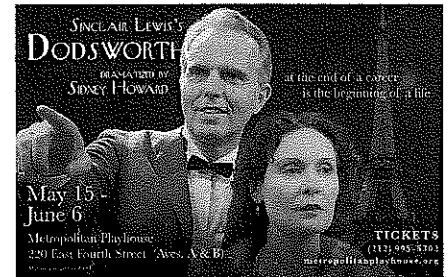
Two members of the Sinclair Lewis Society attended this production. Here are their responses.

**Charles Pankenier:** I recently attended *Dodsworth*, presented by the Metropolitan Playhouse in Greenwich Village,

which has as its mission "performing plays from America's literary past." Having never seen the production or the film, and with only the novel as a standard, I found that the essentials of Lewis's themes, characters, and their relationships are all present in bold relief and in a dramatically compelling way, a tribute to Sidney Howard's artful adaptation (with Lewis's collaboration). My wife, who has never read *Dodsworth*, was as engaged as I was in the relationship between Sam and Fran and in Sam's crisis of identity and purpose. Ironically, precisely because of Lewis's keen ear for the vernacular, some of the dialogue has a slightly dated quality, but that is never a distraction. The play does full justice to some of Lewis's most fully realized and psychologically interesting characters and some of his recurring themes.

A note about this particular production: the performers, all veterans of the New York theater, were polished and often provided considerable depth and nuance to their roles. The venue itself was a 54-seat arena theater, with an approximately 20-by-15-foot usable performing surface, leaving room for only the most minimal furniture and props. Whether by happy accident or design, these elements combined to concentrate attention on the dialogue, and the intimacy meant it was more overheard than performed.

**Susan O'Brien:** *Dodsworth*, the play by Sidney Howard, was presented at New York's Metropolitan Playhouse in lower Manhattan May 15–June 6, 2010. Although no actors could possibly compete with the 1936 film performances of Ruth



Advertisement for the Metropolitan Playhouse production of *Dodsworth*

————— *Dodsworth Performed continued on next page*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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

Carolyn Arthur, Frederick Betz, Yvonne Opffer Conybeare, Barnaby Conrad, Barnaby Conrad III, Roger Forseth, James M. Hutchisson, D. J. Jones, George Killough, Michael King, Jacqueline Koenig, Betsy McLaughlin, Robert McLaughlin, Susan O'Brien, Roberta Olson, Charles Pankenier, Alex Roe, Dave Simpkins, Todd Stanley, Tom Steman, and Kirk Symmes.

*Dodsworth Performed continued from previous page*

Chatterton and Walter Huston, the roles of Fran and Sam were ably performed by Lisa Riegel and Michael Scott. The play's structure was difficult, involving a daunting number of successful set changes, and, as it was a small production, actors performed multiple roles, always staying in the character of the moment. Wendy Merritt (Matey Pearson, Renée de Pénable) and Suzanne Savoy (Edith Cortright) were superb. The costumes deserve a special note for great detail and authenticity of the time.

The *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* also heard from both the director of the production and the artistic director of the Metropolitan Playhouse. Here are their reflections on their experiences.

**Yvonne Opffer Conybeare, Director:** I directed a production of the original script of *Dodsworth*... Even though the play publishing company forbade us from inviting reviewers or paying for publicity (we assume because of the upcoming Lincoln Center adaptation), word got out about the production of the original, and it is being well attended, blogged about, and enjoyed.

I was determined to be utterly faithful to the playwright, which meant I spent a lot of time getting to know the world of Mr. Lewis. Mr. Lingeman's biography was especially inspiring. My casting choices drew on both the play and the novel. Scene transitions were scored with popular music from the period from the U.S., England, France and Germany, as well as a Christopher Sinding piano sonata and waltz for the scene in which Kurt and Renée play together offstage. The waltz reprises as transition music when Fran is in Berlin.

I worked with an extraordinary cast of experienced actors (Michael Scott as Sam Dodsworth is a Broadway veteran) and they were all as excited as I was to have the opportunity to delve into such a wonderful script. Nine actors played all 10 roles marked "principal" by the author, plus 26 of the bit parts. The only actors who did not play multiple roles were the two playing Sam and Fran. Not a word was cut or changed except to combine some of those minor roles (rather than cut them as

recommended by the playwright), which I did in order to keep as much as possible (given my small cast) of the wonderful lines, humor, and atmosphere those bit parts lend to the world of the play...

We also had a lively talk back, where the audience shared experiences they've had with Lewis's novels and film adaptations and compared and contrasted them with our production. We became downright raucous while discussing Lewis's support of early feminists, the differences between the Frans and Sams of the novel, movie, and play, and how the real life relationship between the author and his muse was different from all three. I think Lewis would have enjoyed the fact that he still creates a stir!

**Alex Roe, Artistic Director** (courtesy of Susan O'Brien): Our commitment is to see American culture more clearly through its theater, and I am always pleased to know that our audiences appreciate the work we do, not merely for its craft, but for the perspectives the various productions give on the plays we select.

On that theme, I am publicly supposing the play has not been performed in New York for these many years because we can find no notice of it. Privately, I find it hard to believe! However, it may be so, and indeed, finding a copy of the script is not as easy as you might think (the provenance of ours comes below). As you may know, we were granted the rights to present the play only on the condition that it not be reviewed. One would think that the agent for the play has been discouraging productions.

Another interpretation would follow the rumblings of a new adaptation being prepared for Lincoln Center by none other than Alfred Uhry [a reading of this adaptation was done this past spring with John Lithgow in the title role]. Larger theaters' plans often interfere with our getting rights to properties at all, so regardless of the review prohibition, we were pleased to be able to present it, and it has been very successful for us.

*Dodsworth Performed continued on page 6*

## NEW MEMBERS

*Welcome to the new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the last issue.*

Jeff Baumgartner  
Pequot Lakes, MN

Priscilla P. and William Chester  
Tunbridge, VT

Jennifer Love  
Eugene, OR

Barbara Paetznick  
Center City, MN

Jean Remes  
Center City, MN

Nancy and Katie Wurtzel  
Westlake Village, CA

## IDA COMPTON PAPERS ARCHIVED

*Tom Steman  
St. Cloud State University*

The St. Cloud State University Archives has recently reprocessed and created an archival index to the Ida Compton Papers. The index can be found at: <https://libsys.stcloudstate.edu/archon/?p=collections/findingaid&id=32&q=>

### SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE MATERIALS

The Ida Compton papers contain mostly letters written by Ida Kay Compton to Sinclair Lewis and others, dating from 1947 to 1985. Also included are newspaper clippings about Sinclair Lewis, including some written by and about Ida Kay Compton, and audio recordings of Lewis in the 1940s. The large vinyl records have been reformatted onto reel-to-reel tape and audio cassette.

Lewis wrote 18 letters and one telegram to Ida Kay Compton between 1947 and 1950. While writing these letters, he mostly lived or was traveling in Europe. He described the people he met and his home in Florence, Italy, as well as his new secretary, Alec Manson. The remainder of his letters discussed Ida's upcoming visit to Europe in the summer of 1950.

Other correspondence includes letters from Claude and Helen Lewis dated mostly around the death of Sinclair Lewis in 1951. These letters chronicle Ida's trip to Minnesota for the

memorial service, as well as the disposition of Sinclair Lewis's personal property. Letters written by Mark Schorer, who was writing a biography of Lewis, asked Ida for her memories of Lewis, while letters from Bennett Cerf and Harry Maule discussed an incident involving a confrontation with Lewis over *World So Wide*, a book published posthumously in 1951. Especially noteworthy are letters written by and to Barnaby Conrad, detailing Ida's friendship with Lewis.

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ida Kay Compton was born on June 14, 1917, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. While a graduate student at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, in 1947, she met Sinclair Lewis who had recently moved to Williamstown from Duluth, Minnesota. Compton, who was known as Ida Kay, wrote a book review of Lewis's 1947 novel, *Kingsblood Royal*, and was summoned by Lewis to his farm, Thorvale. Here began a friendship that lasted until Lewis's death in 1951. She married Williams College chemistry faculty member Charles Compton in 1953. Her career included stints at the University of Chicago Press and Time, Inc. She passed away on September 22, 1985, in Bradenton, Florida. ✍

## New President and Board of Directors Needed to Serve Five-Year Term

### President:

*Will work with the  
Executive Director to help  
set policy and provide leadership  
in the Society's work.*

### Board of Directors:

*Will collaborate on policy  
and provide help in the  
various activities connected  
with the Society.*

### Nominations:

Nominations are due by **January 30, 2011.**

You may nominate others or yourself for positions.

Please send a **short statement of interest** in the Society to be used on the ballot.

Please e-mail Sally Parry at [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu) with nominations or questions.

**Call for Officers**

## LEWIS'S VOICE ON CD

George Killough  
College of St. Scholastica

Sinclair Lewis's voice can still be heard loud and clear. It occurs in a four-minute segment on a three-disc CD set titled *The Spoken Word: American Writers*, issued by the British Library Sound Archive in 2008. In addition to the Lewis bit, the set includes clips of the voices of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill, James Thurber, Eudora Welty, Vladimir Nabokov, Ralph Ellison, Arthur Miller, and Toni Morrison, among others. The four-minute Sinclair Lewis clip is from a political speech promoting FDR for a third term. Plumping hard for Roosevelt, Lewis dismisses Republican candidate Wendell Willkie as "appallingly young and pure of heart." As

the author of *It Can't Happen Here*, Lewis presents himself as an expert on dictatorship who sees no danger in giving the president a third term. The occasion for the speech was the 1940 Writers' Conference for Roosevelt. Credit for the recording is given to the Voice of America and the Special Media Archives Services Division of the National Archives and Records Administration. Lewis's tenor voice comes through with crystal clarity, the recording being much sharper than any other I have heard. [This audio clip was played at the Sinclair Lewis Conference and the quality of the recording was excellent.] ✍

*Dodsworth* Performed continued from page 4

As to my interest in *Dodsworth*, the script was first brought to my attention three or four years ago by Martin Denton, who runs the comprehensive listing and reviewing site [nytheatre.com](http://nytheatre.com). He had a photocopy of an acting edition, which, as far as I know, is out of print, and gave it to me thinking our theater would do well by it.

Though the dramaturgical pithiness of Sidney Howard's dramatization was apparent—his skill with dialogue and scenic rhythm, while a bit obvious for my taste, is undeniable and undeniably satisfying—I was not so taken with the Dodsworths' personal story. Perhaps it is the loss of subtleties in the translation to the stage (Mr. Howard's fault?), but I remember muttering a "ho-hum" to myself.

This season, though, we devoted to plays with themes of "Starting Over." Every year, I seek a theme to follow, the more loosely the better, but by way of setting our productions in a contextual relation to one another, even while they stand on their own. With the change in Administration, the various "re-boots" in domestic and foreign policies, and continual shocks to the core of our public life—an oil spill and Facebook privacy leaks being recent examples—plays that address redefining our personal or public identity seemed the thing for '09-'10. In this light, *Dodsworth* was much more interesting to me!

Attractive this year are the play's reflections on American values, whether applauding or slighting; its portrayal of the enchantments and disappointments of moneyed leisure; its embrace and ultimate rejection of the desire to simply hide away from the world in simple comforts. A self-consciously post-Great War play, it shows an America redefining its

identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world with a new sense of technological accomplishment and political power, which certainly resonates for us today, even if only because we see the tables turning. Written as the Depression set in, which the novel barely predated, the play portrays a detached and ironic respect for wealth. And the personal relationship which did not mean much to me a few years ago is far more compelling when I think of the Dodsworths as comfortable Americans forced to reckon with blows to their fundamental assumptions. It works onstage because it is a story of emotional life, but it resonates because it speaks to our sense of security on many levels. Here are the Dodsworths, iconic successful Americans, having enjoyed a life of accomplishment on familiar terms, now re-examining what they thought were the immutables in that life once they change their routine. It may be more Sam than Fran who is taken by surprise, but I like to think that both of them are given many discoveries as they head into their journey, and the dramatic questions that are asked to the end of the play are how they will see themselves and one another, and what will they do with that information at each turn. These are timeless concerns, but singularly pertinent in the lives of most everyone who comes to the Metropolitan these days.

Perhaps this makes the selection of a play seem more calculated than it truly is. These are my reflections on why I chose it, but the choosing is always a more gut-level act at the time. It felt like this was the right year to do it—that it would be relevant this year, and I am delighted to say that many audience members have said exactly that! ✍

## ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY AND MINNESOTA REFLECTIONS WEBSITE PUBLISH COLLECTION OF LETTERS BY SINCLAIR LEWIS TO MARCELLA POWERS

Michael King  
St. Cloud State University

The world now has a closer look into the personal life of Nobel Prize-winning author and Sauk Centre, Minnesota, native Sinclair Lewis through a newly published collection of 262 letters and one poem written between 1939 and 1947 to his most intimate friend at the time.

This is the first time this collection has been published and it is the first comprehensive collection of primary source text material of Sinclair Lewis available on the web. This large body of Lewis's private writings offers scholars, historians, and others interested in Lewis new insight into the day-to-day life and creative processes of the world-famous writer and important figure in Minnesota's history. February 7, 2010, marked the 125th anniversary of his birth.

The letters, owned by St. Cloud State University's Archives and Special Collections, were digitized and published on the web through the Minnesota Digital Library. They are available and fully searchable on the Minnesota Reflections website <http://reflections.mndigital.org> and can be accessed by browsing by collection under St. Cloud State University Archives—Sinclair Lewis Letters to Marcella Powers.

Lewis wrote the letters to his mistress, Marcella Powers, whom he met in Cape Cod during rehearsals of *Ah, Wilderness!* in 1939, when Lewis was 54 and Powers 18. He wrote them between 1939 and 1947, detailing experiences ranging from his travels to his time at the University of Wisconsin, University of Minnesota, and University of Minnesota–Duluth. He discussed the articles, short stories, and novels he was writing, especially his novels *Cass Timberlane* (1945) and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947).

The collection provides glimpses into the author's everyday life and insight into his emotions and dreams, including his wish to settle down with Powers on a small farm. Many of the letters address his longing and love for Powers. Their correspondence ended shortly after she married Michael Amrine in 1947.

St. Cloud State University purchased the letters in 1996 from Mary Branham, who inherited them as part of the estate

of Marcella Powers. Powers died in 1985. By making the letters publicly available, the university is providing an important collection of primary source documents for Sinclair Lewis scholars worldwide. The letters serve as a valuable resource of information about Lewis as a person through his own words. They are viewable as text and as JPEG 2000 files in their original hand- or type-written forms.

Lewis wrote more than 100 of the letters while in Minnesota cities including Albert Lea, Brainerd, Duluth, Excelsior, Grand Marais, Minneapolis, and St. Paul. The others were written in places such as

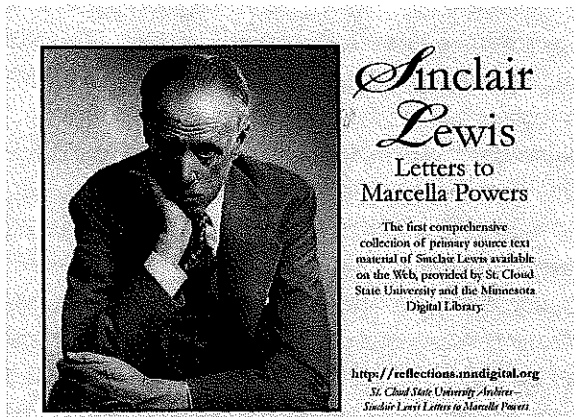
Madison, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Seattle, and New York City.

The letters are governed by copyright by the estate of Sinclair Lewis. People may read the letters online and may use them for educational purposes, but any other use will require permission from Lewis's estate.

The St. Cloud State University Archives maintains the corporate memory of St. Cloud State by preserving and making available university records and publications of long-term value. The University Archives also makes available special collections such as the Minnesota Authors Manuscripts Collection and the Don Boros Theatre Collection. To access archives information, visit <http://lrts.stcloudstate.edu/library/special/archives>.

The Minnesota Digital Library Coalition works with organizations across the state to help them digitize their photo, map, document, and sound collections. Then the Minnesota Digital Library makes those digital copies freely available through Minnesota Reflections, a constantly growing collection of more than 40,000 digital objects. To learn more visit [www.mndigital.org](http://www.mndigital.org).

[For more information contact Marian Rengel, Minnesota Digital Library Coalition outreach coordinator, at (320) 308-5625, [mrrengel@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:mrrengel@stcloudstate.edu), or Tom Steman, St. Cloud State University Archivist, at (320) 308-4753, [tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu).]



2010 Sinclair Lewis Conference *continued from page 1*

conference began unofficially a little earlier than planned. We also had a chance to explore the basement of the Palmer House where traveling salesmen used to store their display cases. There is also supposedly paranormal activity in the basement but none



*Sally Parry presents gift from Dan Chabris to Colleen Steffes, President of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation*

took place while we were there. Owner Kelly Freese quipped that she normally charges \$20 for ghost hunters to visit the basement. The official part of the conference kicked off with Hutchisson's talk, "Carol Kennicott's Story: Main Street." He discussed Carol's uneasy relationship with her husband's hometown and both the accommodations she had to make and the frustrations she had. The keynote, which set the tone for the conference, took place in the First Lutheran Church and was open to the public. There were a variety of questions afterward which contributed to the excitement of two more days of talking about Sinclair Lewis—both his life and his works.

The first morning began with words of welcome from president of the Sinclair Lewis Society Frederick Betz and president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation Colleen Steffes. Following that was a presentation of a framed picture of Lewis and Dorothy Thompson at their wedding, and a copy of the wedding announcement that had been sent to Lewis's secretary Lou Florey. The gift was from longtime Sinclair Lewis Society member and collector Dan Chabris. Joyce Lyng was then recognized for all her help in coordinating the on-site aspects of the conference and was made an honorary member of the board of directors.

The first academic panel was on Lewis's novels of the 1920s and 1930s. George Killough, College of St. Scholastica, presented "The Art of *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*: Notes toward the Study of the Literary Shaggy Dog Story," an analysis of one type of humor in this little-known Lewis novel. M. Ellen Dupree, University of Nevada-Reno, followed with "The Scientist and the Saving of American Culture in *Arrowsmith*," which considered the novel in light of medical discussions of the time, especially that of eugenics. The panel was rounded out by Sally E. Parry's "'It's an Art': *Work of Art and Aesthetics*," which argued for the novel as an unlikely exploration of aesthetics through hotel-keeping rather than decorative or literary arts.

Susan K. O'Brien presented "Influences: Sinclair Lewis, Judge Mark Nolan, and Cass Timberlane." This presentation, attended by a number of Judge Nolan's relatives, including

his daughter, gave insight into the man who was the primary model for Cass Timberlane. O'Brien had actually covered one of Judge Nolan's trials when a young reporter and this gave her talk a unique connection to her subject. She had access to material from the family and the Minnesota Historical Society and was able to give an interesting character study of this progressive judge. The material that she collected will be presented to the Minnesota Historical Society.

After lunch there was a presentation by Charles Panke- nier, "Twice-Told Tales: Interpreting Sinclair Lewis's Appropriation of H. G. Wells," in which he contended that Lewis borrowed much from Wells's *The History of Mr. Polly* and *Ann Veronica* in the creation of *Our Mr. Wrenn* and *Ann Vickers*. The *Sauk Centre Herald* reported that this assertion created a bit of scandal at the conference. This presentation was followed by an auction of Lewis materials, a tradition established at the last conference by Martin Bucco. The money raised was split between the Sinclair Lewis Society and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation. We were then given a tour of the First Congregational Church (now called the First United Church) by Muriel Besser and other members of the congregation. Lewis attended this church as a teenager, his brother Fred was a member of the congregation and an usher, and Fred's wife was a member of the Women's Federation. When the church celebrated its 75th anniversary, in 1942, Sinclair Lewis returned to speak at the ceremony.



*Joyce Lyng receives honorary Sinclair Lewis Society board membership from Sally Parry*

The afternoon ended at the Palmer House with a meet-

ing of members of the Sinclair Lewis Society. We brainstormed about the future of the Society, ideas for the website and the newsletter, and a call for officers for the Society.

*Ann Vickers* was shown that evening at the First Lutheran Church. This film from 1933 was completed before the Production Code went into effect and was considered quite racy for the time. Based on the first novel Lewis wrote after receiving the Nobel Prize, the movie starred Irene Dunne in the title role with Walter Huston, Bruce Cabot, and Edna May Oliver. Considering the complexity of the novel, it is relatively short, but it included Ann's life as a prison reformer, as well as allusions to illicit sex and abortion. A great discussion followed.

The final day of the conference started with presentations

————— 2010 Sinclair Lewis Conference *continued on next page*



2010 Sinclair Lewis Conference *continued from previous page*

on Lewis and drama. Robert L. McLaughlin spoke on "Drama, Community, War, and Mr. Lewis," focusing on the radio play "Main Street Goes to War," and how this drama seems to be contrary to some of the ideas Lewis expressed earlier on war, including the play that he directed in 1941, *The Good Neighbor*. J. C. Turner, Mark Monn, and Tom Steman, all from St. Cloud State University, then presented on "Jayhawker: From Broadway Play to Interactive Website." They discussed how the donation of the materials connected with *Jayhawker* were turned into a fascinating website which shows the revision process of Sinclair Lewis and coauthor Lloyd Lewis, including a reading of a scene in several different forms.

The morning rounded out with an examination of Lewis's writings early and late in his career. Samuel Rogal, from Illinois Valley Community College, spoke on "Lancelot Todd: A Case for Fictional Independence," an examination of Lewis's unscrupulous businessman from the World War I era. These stories, which are both satire and social commentary, are in some ways an early version of *Mad Men*. Frederick Betz, of Southern Illinois University—Carbondale, presented "'Another perfect day': Weather, Mood, and Landscape in Sinclair Lewis's *Minnesota Diary*." He reflected on the descriptive aspects of Lewis's 1940s diary, connecting landscape to Lewis's aesthetic sensibilities.

The afternoon featured a multimedia presentation by Constance Perry and Tom Steman from St. Cloud State University on "Sinclair Lewis and Marcella Powers: A Virtual Portal to the Past." They included a PowerPoint section of photos of Lewis and Powers as well as an explanation of the extent of the collection on the website (see page 7 for more information). Perry talked about the relationship between Lewis and Powers, and indicated that one piece of correspondence seemed to imply that Powers may have had an abortion of a child that she and Lewis conceived. A lively discussion followed on their lives, as well as thoughts from various participants about new directions in Lewis research.

The conference was capped off in terrific style by a staged reading of *Kingsblood*, a play by D. J. Jones based on *Kingsblood Royal*, which received its world premiere in Sauk Centre. Playwright Jones, who is from Colorado, attended the conference and seemed very pleased by the dramatic reading. Director Marit Elliott enlisted 17 actors, mostly from Sauk Centre and the surrounding area, to bring life to the play. The actors included Bill Leraas as Neil Kingsblood and Kim Schneider as his wife Vestal, along with Bob Hare, Roger and Jean Paschke, Herman Lensing, Richard and Nathan Sand, Bill McDonald, John Steffes, Chris Notch, Bob McLaughlin, Darryl Oja, Jennie Schmidtke, Mike Schaab, Barbara Ennis, and Andrew Engel. Over 50 people attended, including both

conference participants and members of the community. At a reception afterward at the First Lutheran Church Jones was able to talk about the play with both the performers and the audience. All in all, a great way to end a great conference.

## REFLECTIONS ON *KINGSBLOOD*

*D. J. Jones*

Driven to prove that he is worthy of his country-club wife, Vestal, Neil Kingsblood aspires to the vice-presidency of the Second National Bank of Grand Republic, Minnesota. His father-in-law, Morton Beehouse, constantly reminds him that Vestal has married beneath her. But when Neil's father insists that the name "Kingsblood" refers to royal ancestry, Neil vows to investigate the family tree. It is August 1945, when he concludes his investigation at the office of the Minnesota Historical Society. While the streets of Minnesota erupt in jubilation at the news of Japan's surrender and the end of World War II, a new war suddenly confronts Neil Kingsblood. Instead of proving that the family name refers to royal British ancestry, the young banker has just discovered that Negro blood flows through his veins. If the secret gets out, it will ruin his family, his career, and his standing in the community. And what will become of his marriage? Throughout the play, Neil agonizes between his sense of integrity and his sense of family loyalty—even as he struggles to forge a new identity.

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*Kingsblood* explores racial bias in a supposedly enlightened mid-twentieth-century Northern society, where the social elite disdain the ignorant prejudices of the Southern states, while indulging in their own brand of casual bigotry.

Even more than this, the play is about the struggle for identity. Not merely racial or cultural identity, but one that reaches to the core of one's humanity. And, in the play, the struggle is not limited to Neil, himself, but engages everyone around him.

Although *Kingsblood Royal* is considered by some critics to be one of Lewis's more obscure and less-acclaimed works, my hope is that this adaptation will highlight its merits. And further awaken us to the pet prejudices and false identities we all hold dear. ☞



*Bill Leraas (Neil Kingsblood), Kim Schneider (Vestal Kingsblood), Playwright D.J. Jones, and Director Marit Elliott (photo courtesy of Roberta Olson)*

Carol Kennicott's Story *continued from page 1*

ciety, where even a hint, a whisper, or a murmur or sotto voce dissent could paralyze a community into a miasma of angst. (Nowadays, our senses—and sensibilities—are so used to being stormed on both the right and the left—that we tend to take most things in stride and not get very upset.)

*Main Street*. Its unflinching look at small-town life seemed perfectly timed to meet the postwar need for cultural reflection. The travails of Carol Kennicott, the novel's heroine, were somewhat modeled on Lewis's own experiences growing up in a small Midwestern town. Lewis, as we know, was the ultimate outsider, ostracized for being different. Carol, too, is an outsider who by turns grows despondent over the town's small-minded ugliness, and is inspired to introduce the new and the "strange" to it. Her efforts at culture—Chinese-themed dinner parties, theater groups, and building initiatives among them—all fail, and she falls victim to the paralyzing "village virus." But she revives herself after narrowly avoiding an affair with a romantic young tailor. Her brush with the social annihilation risked by such an affair prompts her to move east to reevaluate her life. Her husband accepts her move and waits for her decision on the future. After a year and a half, she returns, strengthened and still determined to improve the town, but humbler and more realistic about people's capacity for change.

The novel crystallized in Lewis's imagination when in 1916 he returned to Sauk Centre for a visit with his new wife, Grace, a sophisticated woman with upper-crust tastes who reacted peevisly to the narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy she observed in the so-called "wholesome" middle American village in which Lewis had grown up. She (and Lewis's stepmother, whose attitudes she shared) in part became the model for Carol Kennicott. In *Main Street* Lewis permanently altered Americans' perceptions; the book became a byword for iconoclasm and the questioning of long-held social attitudes, especially about the American Midwest.

*Main Street* was a media sensation. Lewis's savvy publisher, Alfred Harcourt, shrewdly assessed the market for such a book and ordered a huge first printing, which sold out almost immediately. *Main Street* became the number one selling novel for the entire period from 1900 to 1925. Small towns across the country, including Sauk Centre, wondered aloud whether they were the "real" Gopher Prairie, the fictional village that Lewis mocked in the novel.

The rest, as they say, is the stuff of legend, for from there, for Lewis, it was a straight shot upward to literary stardom that Lewis sustained for many, many years to come. "I expect to be the most talked-of writer," Lewis once boasted—before he was—and his prediction came true.

## SMALL-TOWN AMERICA

Mostly, but not entirely, before Sinclair Lewis the image of the American small town was sacrosanct. Floyd Dell had taken some potshots at it in *Moon-Calf* and, of course, Sherwood Anderson had dissected its grotesqueries in *Winesburg, Ohio*. But for the most part American writers still hewed to the genteel (and gentle) tradition of honoring the village as a place of piety and innocence, of what in political parlance we today hear called "family values." Such novels as Edward Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* and Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-master*, as well as many of the novels of William Dean Howells, perhaps the most famous mythologizer of American values, all depicted the village positively. The 1920s ushered in an era where it became popular to bash and berate small-town values rather than paint them in Rockwellesque images. This movement, of which Lewis was a part, was called "the revolt from the village."

Today it is hard to revolt against any village, for there aren't that many left. Walmart America and the big box model of commerce have stepped on and virtually obliterated such places, except for those that are preserved by virtue of their "quaintness." But the ordinary Midwestern village is in some ways as dry and arid and empty as when Lewis drove through this part of the country on his "research magnificent," gathering material for the novel. Moreover, the symptoms Lewis associated with the "village virus"—parochialism, intolerance, and an unthinking orthodoxy—exist in all kinds of settings, both small and large.

The sociohistorical importance of the novel, then, is not subject to question. My feeling is, in fact, that its importance has overshadowed what I believe to be the emotional core of the novel: the journey of Carol Kennicott. Like most journeys, it's one that begins innocently enough but is marked by trauma, recovery, and acceptance. And that's what makes it, and her, and the book, valuable for all of us as Americans, as men or as women—as humans.

Carol's humanness. It's often overlooked that the novel has a subtitle (hence the title of *my* talk tonight): "The Story of Carol Kennicott." And let's remember that those early readers of the book—the ones who thronged bookstores in 1920 and enthusiastically talked about the book with their friends and made Lewis an overnight celebrity—were talking about Carol more than they were the anatomy of the small town.

Among Lewis's papers at Yale University are a sheaf of letters written to him by women who'd read and loved the

————— Carol Kennicott's Story *continued on page 12*

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## BARNABY CONRAD WRITES NEW NOVEL

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Barnaby Conrad has written a new book, *The Second Life of John Wilkes Booth*, a gripping historical novel based on the often-advanced theory that Lincoln's assassin was not killed in a barn in Virginia but escaped to a second life in the Wild West. The book was published by Council Oak Books/Kanbar & Conrad Books in November. A press release from the publisher notes:

Conrad was told the plot in 1947 by Sinclair Lewis while serving as the personal secretary to the Nobel Prize-winning author. They agreed to coauthor the book, but only one of them lived to tell the tale.

Conrad follows Booth as he secretly makes his way to Robert E. Lee's headquarters, expecting to be received as a hero. Instead Lee believes him an imposter and drives him away. The penniless Booth flees on a riverboat up the Missouri River to Montana Territory and assumes a new identity in a rough frontier town. Just as Booth falls in love with a kind woman, a bloodhound-like reporter appears, the truth is revealed, and justice is delivered à la Greek tragedy.

Conrad is the author of 30 books including *Matador*, the best-selling novel of 1952, which sold over 3 million copies. John Steinbeck called it "The best book of the year." While serving as a diplomat in Spain from 1944–1947, Conrad became an amateur bullfighter, known as "El Niño de California," and his next five books of non-fiction, including *La Fiesta Brava*, *Gates of Fear*, and *The Death of Manolete*, were inspired by his experiences. In 1957 Conrad opened El Matador, a night club in San Francisco's North Beach that attracted celebrities as varied as Norman Mailer, Orson Welles, Marilyn Monroe, John Steinbeck, Noël Coward, and Truman Capote. Over the years Conrad wrote many other books, such as his 1962 novel *Dangerfield* an homage to his mentor Sinclair Lewis and his 2003 international thriller *Last Boat to Cadiz*. Barnaby Conrad founded the Santa Barbara Writers Conference, which he and his wife Mary ran for 40 years. He also was the keynote speaker at the Sinclair Lewis Conference in 2000.

A review of *The Second Life of John Wilkes Booth* will be published in the spring 2011 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. *z*

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## HABEAS CORPUS (PART IV)

*Sinclair Lewis*

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*Parts one, two, and three of this short story by Sinclair Lewis were published in the fall 2008, spring 2009, and fall 2009 issues (17.1, 17.2, and 17.3) of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter. In the first three installments, would-be revolutionist Leo Gurazov, a Bulgarian who lives in the Middle-Western city of Vernon and owns a tobacco shop, acts the part of a fierce revolutionary so that he will be deported and become an important leader in Bulgaria. This story, originally published by the Saturday Evening Post on January 24, 1920, was transcribed by Todd Stanley. Thanks to him for his work in bringing this lesser-known Lewis story to light.*

### "HABEAS CORPUS"

"Fifteen thousand—Henebry—to keep me—from—from going to Bulgaria!" gagged Gurazov.

If he had only a fifth, only a tenth of that sum, he could go back by steamer, first-class, and not have to crawl through cells and insults. He sat dumb, his head shaking.

Nick boisterously pounded his shoulder and clamored, "Yes, sir, got it all fixed." He briskly pushed out a stool which the door man had brought and hustled, "Sit down, Mr. Henebry." He pulled out of his pocket a confused mess of pencils and fountain pens and rather smeary old envelopes. He buzzed, "Now we must get busy—get busy. Oh, we'll keep you in America, all right, old sport! Now, Mr. Henebry, my idea for the witnesses is to claim that Gurazov always has been reactionary, and I think I can get a university professor to prove that his statements in his pamphlet have been misconstrued."

Gurazov watched Henebry, one of the leaders of the Vernon bar, get his fingers into the case, occasionally chirruping, "Yes, there's a good fighting chance to acquit him."

Gurazov's plump shoulders slid down in his coat like hot dumplings shrinking in the ice box and his black-edged nails

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Habeas Corpus *continued on page 13*

Carol Kennicott's Story *continued from page 10*

novel, identifying with Carol Kennicott's plight. "I have lived every page of *Main Street* for fifteen years," one said. Another wrote to tell him, "you have done the biggest thing yet for women"; still another sent him a poem she had written, entitled "Carol" in which she identified with the aesthetic heroine, "hemmed in by unconquerable environment."

(Many even asked Lewis what they should do. A woman in San Antonio bared her soul to the author: "I have been an actress, a Little Theatre, so to speak. Three years ago I left dear New York, and Washington Square, to marry a salesman, and came here to *Main Street*. . . Will you please tell me what people are doing and saying in New York? Every day I repeat: 'I must go on.' I have sat on the slippery edge of a bathtub and privately wept, many and many a time. Dear tender treasured longings which cause us who hunger to weep!")

### THE BILDUNGSROMAN

What these readers were reacting to was more than just an emotive portrait of trial and tribulation. There is a pattern in *Main Street*, a literary notion that stretches back way before Lewis and examples of which he consumed in a steady diet of reading as a little boy, a young man, and finally as an apprentice novelist before breaking through with *Main Street*. These books were called bildungsromans, a German word that literally means "novel of maturation." The bildungsroman is a rite of passage story—the classic novel of growing up, of making the transition, often, from callow youth to mature adult. In general terms, the pattern of the bildungsroman fits any character who develops and learns throughout the course of life's journey.

The typical bildungsroman features a sensitive protagonist (usually male, but not always), often an orphan, in a perpetual search for a father, or father figure, or some sort of authority figure who can be looked to for guidance and advice. In *Main Street*, Carol has lost her father. Carol often thinks about her dead father in brief episodes. To her, he represents love, understanding, and an aesthetic appreciation. She idealizes her father and longs to return to her animated childhood, and she feels disappointed whenever she recognizes that Kennicott is nothing like him. We recognize that her father's death was a traumatic loss from which she has never really recovered.

At different times in the novel Carol regards the male characters as sorts of father figures: Will, Guy Pollock, Miles Bjornstam, and Erik Valborg.

This pattern applies to the female bildungsroman as well, of which the best example may be Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a book Lewis also knew quite well.

Jane Eyre's story, providing a pattern for countless others, is a story of enclosure and escape, a distinctively female bildungsroman in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood toward an almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome, just as Carol does in Gopher Prairie.

The novels of Balzac and Dickens—of which more in just a minute—were another model of this kind.

This type of novel also has as its central plot paradigm the instrument of the journey—the travel that will take the protagonist down a metaphorical trip through life in which the people and situations encountered will impart moral lessons that will develop the person's progress toward selfhood. This instrument is reversed in *Main Street*. Mobility is what Carol desires, but confinement is, instead, what she gets. In fact, she seems to test the boundaries of the village in certain ways, both literally and metaphorically. When she seems to reach the limits of what the town will allow her to think and do, she pushes and stretches too much in an attempt to achieve release. This is the cause of her consternation and ultimately, depression, I think, almost like an adolescent boy who will try to peel away a strip of bark from the trunk of a tree for as long as he can without breaking it, until the resistance becomes too much, and the strip crumbles in his fingers from the force of too much pressure.

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "The American Fear of Literature," Lewis spoke for a whole generation of writers involved in the revolt against gentility in literature. He said:

I had realized in reading Balzac and Dickens that it was possible to describe French and English common people as one actually saw them. But it had never occurred to me that one might without indecency write of the people of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, as one felt about them. Our fictional tradition, you see, was that all of us in Midwestern villages were altogether noble and happy; that not one of us would exchange the neighborly bliss of living on *Main Street* for the heathen gaudiness of New York or Paris or Stockholm. But in Mr. Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* I discovered that there was one man who believed that Midwestern peasants were sometimes bewildered and hungry and vile—and heroic. And, given this vision, I was released; I could write of life as living life. (15–16)

— Carol Kennicott's Story *continued on page 14*

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## OPERA OF *ELMER GANTRY* PERFORMED IN HOUSTON AND MILWAUKEE

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The opera of *Elmer Gantry*, with music by Robert Aldridge and libretto by Herschel Garfein, which premiered in 2007, has proved to be a compelling new work for opera companies across the United States. This past spring productions were done in both Houston and Milwaukee to great acclaim.

The Houston production, starring Gabriel Preisser and Ashly Evans, was performed in the Moores Opera Center in April 2010 and was the first presentation at a university opera company. Buck Ross directed the production. "I saw the premiere in Nashville," Ross said, "and the response was very positive. I immediately thought this was a work we could do here. I didn't think we'd get to do it so soon, but it happens we have the right people for it now."

Everett Evans, in his article, "Opera *Elmer Gantry* makes Houston debut" (*Houston Chronicle*, April 7, 2010), notes that the novel is "such natural source material for an opera it's surprising there hadn't been one sooner." Director Ross told Evans:

This is much more accessible than contemporary opera usually is. It's very American in flavor. While you wouldn't mistake it for a musical, there is a lot of memorable melody and a lot of rousing gospel music. The choral music is spectacular.... But the opera is not a piece that's anti-religion. It acknowledges the need for spirituality. What it's against is hypocrisy....

*Elmer Gantry* strikes a timely note, as its depiction of an evangelist threatened by scandalous revelations from his private life echoes a number of recent news stories. "But since those things are always happening," Ross says, "I suspect it will always be timely."

The *Milwaukee Express* reviewed the Florentine Opera Company's production in March at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. Baritone Keith Phares starred as Elmer with other original cast members from the opera's Nashville debut.

The rave review, "*Elmer Gantry* Comes to Town: The Florentine Opera's Modern Classic" by Steve Spice (*Milwaukee Express*, March 11, 2010), praised the score:

an appealing work in styles ranging all the way from the infectious melodic beat of a Broadway musical to the more subtle harmonies of Gershwin, Copland, or Barber—with some Puccini-like lyricism thrown in for good measure. *Elmer Gantry* is a full-bodied contemporary operatic achievement with an exciting, richly dramatic, uplifting score.... It's important for the doubtful reader to note that the compositional milieu is of boisterous early Americana, yet the beautiful score never sounds piecemeal or fragmented. Nor is the music dissonant or pretentiously avant-garde. *Elmer Gantry* is first and last a lyric opera. The gospel interludes are original compositions giving the work a solid enervating punch, never hokey with artificial knee-bending hymnal piety, but brilliantly conceived, sophisticated music straddling satire and sentiment...

The final act is very impressive. Sharon's faith in her tabernacle is too great and we feel early on that Elmer's marriage proposal will not work out. A great revival scene in the new tabernacle, magnificently scored, reaches fever pitch as Sharon again asserts her undying faith in a stunning musical exclamation that would have done *Turandot* proud. A great fire interrupts the proceedings, concluding in Elmer's efforts to save Sharon, still torn between her love for Elmer and her curious bent for martyrdom. Elmer, however, will remain a self-serving survivor and behave accordingly....

Certainly, *Elmer Gantry* makes a strong case for moving beyond the continuous recycling of the standard repertoire. The *New York Times* hailed it as "an operatic miracle." Indeed, it's quite a gem. ✍

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Habeas Corpus *continued from page 11*

mechanically scratched at his trousers as he saw his visions of glory also acquitted. Only once did he try to save them. After vast mental effort he interrupted the conference.

"I don't know, Nick—maybe I go so far now that it's too late. Maybe we better let 'em deport me and not take your time, comrade."

"No, sir, we'll stick! Got to! If you were deported it would be a bad precedent for other cases. Good Lord, you don't want to be deported, do you? If I thought that—well, I'd make it

hot for you."

"Oh, no, no, no; of course not! I oppose deportation with the last drop of my blood," asserted Gurazov as feebly as though he had shed that last drop at least fifteen minutes before.

Sitting back with the patience of complete ruin, he saw them save him from being Emperor of Eastern Europe. Several

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Habeas Corpus *continued on page 16*

Carol Kennicott's Story *continued from page 12*

To return to the bildungsroman: the classic Victorian novel that comes most readily to mind here must be Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, which is similar to *Main Street* in some ways. Lewis greatly admired Dickens, spoke of him and his novels frequently, and numerous critics have compared some of the comic elements in Lewis's broadly-drawn caricatures to those of Dickens himself. Lewis's small-town Gopher Prairie is not at all unlike some of Dickens's provincial English villages and all that gossip that circulates through them and how the weight of public opinion can quickly lead to marginalization of the character being targeted and even outright ostracized.

One notable similarity is that the endings of both novels have a certain ambiguity to them. In *Great Expectations*, in fact, Dickens wrote two endings—the first a rather sad one in which the central character, Philip Pirrip, or “Pip,” as he is called in the book, never reunites with his lost love. The alternate ending, which Dickens ended up using in the published version, has Pip seemingly reuniting with Stella, his ideal woman, but the wording leaves room for doubt. In the same way, readers have always questioned whether Carol's retreat and giving in to a kind of happiness in Gopher Prairie is really a victory. Like Dickens, however, Lewis unquestionably sympathized with his protagonist and felt that in her final decision she did, in fact, win her battle for self-actualization.

The character is at least once exposed to pure evil and then redeemed. This is not so apparent in *Main Street* because there seems to be no malevolence in the book, but one could think of Fern's exile in contrast to Will's saving a life as a type of negation and affirmation, or evil versus good.

There are also foils for the protagonist—doubles of the character who have misfortunes visited on them. One thinks of Fern, again, but also of Vida and Bea Sorenson.

## IDENTITY

To achieve selfhood is to examine one's fundamental identity—identity, that mainstay theme of so much of the world's literature.

Ralph Ellison called identity *the* theme in American literature. And it's Carol's identity that is at stake in the novel. She says, in a well-known speech to Guy Pollock in chapter 16:

I think I want you to help me find out what has made the darkness of the women. Gray darkness and shadowy trees. We're all in it, ten million women, young married women with good prosperous husbands, and business women in linen collars, and grandmothers that gad out to teas, and wives of underpaid miners,

and farmwives....What is it we want—and need?...I believe all of us want the same things—we're all together, the industrial workers and the women and the farmers and the negro race and the Asiatic colonies, and even a few of the Respectables. It's all the same revolt, in all the classes that have waited and taken advice. I think perhaps we want a more conscious life. We're tired of drudging and sleeping and dying. We're tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We're tired of always deferring hope till the next generation. We're tired of hearing the politicians and priests and cautious reformers (and the husbands!) coax us, “Be calm! Be patient! Wait! We have the plans for a Utopia already made; just give us a bit more time and we'll produce it; trust us; we're wiser than you.” For ten thousand years they've said that. We want our Utopia *now*—and we're going to try our hands at it. All we want is—everything for all of us! For every housewife and every longshoreman and every Hindu nationalist and every teacher. We want everything. We sha'n't get it. So we sha'n't ever be content— —. (201-02)

Lewis was speaking to the changing roles of women in early 20th-century America. Selfhood is a journey, however, and I would like to suggest some stages that the modern woman Carol Kennicott goes through. It is instructive to see what she learns about herself at each stage.

**Carol as Prairie Princess:** Carol is a young bride full of romanticized notions about the happiness associated with small-town life. She is content and, of course, beautiful in a pure and innocent way. However, she soon rebels against being a mere housewife, an appendage to her husband Will.

A good example is Carol's frustration at having to ask her husband for money: “Well, hereafter I'll refuse your money, as a gift. Either I'm your partner, in charge of the household department of our business, with a regular budget for it, or else I'm nothing. If I'm to be a mistress, I shall choose my lovers” (170).

Early in the novel, Carol realizes that her marriage is not a fairy tale. Although she loves her husband fondly, she catches herself fantasizing about a “Prince Charming” in chapter 14. Although Carol and Kennicott clearly love each other throughout the course of the novel, they have about as much in common as night and day. We often wonder whether the two are really compatible. While Carol supports social reform and embodies change, Kennicott embodies Gopher Prairie's resistance to

————— Carol Kennicott's Story *continued on next page*

Carol Kennicott's Story *continued from previous page*

change in his preference for maintaining the status quo. While Carol yearns for what she considers beautiful and noble—noble architecture, Yeats's poetry, modern theater—Kennicott scorns what he sees as her highbrow attitude.

Lewis seemed to believe there was a *more noble type of love*—one that combined the domestic with the spiritual or intellectual. Carol desires a type of relationship that liberates and deepens the personality, that inspires one to noble deeds and great achievements. She cannot find this in Will.

Just as Gopher Prairie is a microcosm for America as a whole, so too are Carol and Kennicott representative of the American husband and wife. In many ways, their struggle represents the eternal conflict between the sexes, which Carol sums up in chapter 24: "There are two races of people, only two, and they live side by side. His calls mine 'neurotic'; mine calls his 'stupid.' We'll never understand each other.... [We are] enemies, yoked" (294).

**Carol as Carol d'Arc:** The martyr. Carol attempts to reform Gopher Prairie when she sees the stultifying quality of life there. She becomes a true progressive in her social and political attitudes.

Carol heroically tries to maintain individuality in a society that demands her conformity. She remains friends with many outcasts of the community, such as Miles Bjornstam, Fern Mullins, and Erik Valborg. Carol reflects the spirit of the Progressive movement in America in the early 20th century, under the banner of which many people took an interest in social issues such as the labor movement and the suffrage movement (which Lewis very prominently did too). As a career woman before she marries Kennicott, Carol reflects the position of the modern "emancipated woman." Reflecting the spirit of the Progressive era, Carol represents change. It is not surprising, then, that she finds herself out of place in Gopher Prairie, a place that steadfastly resists change.

"Her 'reforms,'"—Lewis writes—"her impulses toward beauty in raw Main Street, they had become indistinct. But she would set them going now. She would! She swore it with soft fist beating the edges of the radiator. And at the end of all her vows she had no notion as to when and where the crusade was to begin" (85).

She despises everyone's resistance to change and presents herself as a role model for what "thinking" people are supposed to be like. She even evangelizes for her cause and thinks herself a martyr to it.

**Carol as Village Intellectual:** Carol grows increasingly estranged from Will as she notices the extreme provincialism of the villagers and their extreme nationalism and xenophobia.

Here she flirts, both politically and otherwise, with Miles Bjornstam and his proto-socialistic notions about government.

Miles Bjornstam's opinion of Gopher Prairie is perceptive: "Miss Sherwin's trying to repair the holes in this barnacle-covered ship of a town by keeping busy bailing out the water. And Pollack tries to repair it by reading poetry to the crew! Me, I want to yank it up on the ways, and fire the poor bum of a shoemaker that built it so it sails crooked, and have it rebuilt right, from the keel up" (116).

Guy Pollock, of course, is her other temporary "soul mate." Yet Guy, too, eventually disappoints. As Lewis writes, Carol comes to realize:

That for all Guy's love of dead elegances his timidity was as depressing to her as the bulkiness of Sam Clark. She realized that he was not a mystery, as she had excitedly believed; not a romantic messenger from the World Outside on whom she could count for escape. He belonged to Gopher Prairie, absolutely. She was snatched back from a dream of far countries, and found herself on Main Street. (202)

**Carol as American Bovary:** This stage marks the turning point for Carol. She enters into an "affair," with the callow youth Erik Valborg (whose name connotes European socialism as well as Valentino-esque decadence). Erik is an interesting, but somewhat ambiguous, character.

A townswoman soliloquizes about Erik: "They say he tries to make people think he's a poet—carries books around and pretends to read 'em...said he didn't find any intellectual companionship in this town.... And him a Swede tailor! My! And they say he's the most awful mollycoddle—looks just like a girl. The boys call him 'Elizabeth'" (326–27).

The failure of the affair is an analogue for Carol's all-encompassing disillusionment. She constantly struggles with disillusionment in the novel, in her marriage and in her interactions with the community of Gopher Prairie. While she romantically daydreams about turning Gopher Prairie into a beautiful, sophisticated place, she meets only opposition and gradually realizes that she cannot achieve any reforms. Lewis conveys her disillusionment brilliantly in chapter 3, in the scene in which she tours Gopher Prairie for the first time: After traversing the entire Main Street of Gopher Prairie, "She was within ten minutes beholding not only the heart of a place called Gopher Prairie, but ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego" (34).

(In reading these famous descriptions, I am reminded of Edward Hopper's painting, *Early Sunday Morning*, which

— Carol Kennicott's Story *continued on next page*

Carol Kennicott's Story *continued from previous page*

seems almost a visual analogue or even representation of this description—just as other settings in the novel must have influenced Grant Wood in *American Gothic*.)

One of Carol's most painful lessons occurs when she learns of the pettiness and narrow-mindedness of the townspeople for the first time. Whereas she had believed that the townspeople warmly accepted her, she learns from her friend Vida Sherwin that in actuality they constantly watch and criticize her.

Yet she cannot be the adulteress, either.

Carol's rejection of this identity leads her to her final stage.

**Carol as Passionate Pilgrim:** Her exile and return to Gopher Prairie—a reaction to confinement and even a sense of entrapment—becomes her salvation. She finds that she really is heroic, by virtue of being an ordinary, middle-class woman, just like those people she had earlier presumed to look down upon—and, this is crucial, just like Lewis's readers.

She begins with a reckless sense of adventure, telling little Hugh as they depart for Washington, DC: "We'd get sick on too many cookies, but ever so much sicker on no cookies at all" (424). Life in the East, however, is not so different from life in the Midwest, and Washington, she finds to her chagrin, is little more than a collection point, a station on a journey, for thousands of people just like her from small towns across the country. She returns chastened, but her hegira has made her a pragmatist:

"I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be!... I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women!" (451).

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Habeas Corpus *continued from page 13*

times he considered telling them to go to the devil, but he was afraid that Benorius might get damaging stories about him into Bulgaria. And he was awed and depressed by Henebry. The lawyer was extraordinarily like a gold bond, with oblong feet like a pair of unclipped coupons, a mustache undoubtedly modeled on the best engraved scrolls and a stiff shirt which crackled like heavy paper. The only characteristic he lacked was the vignette of the honest husbandman, who on all properly designed bonds is plowing with a mud-scow anchor.

When Nick and the human bond were gone Gurazov thought a long time, and the best the Emperor of Eastern Europe could do was, "Huh! Yankees! I'll show 'em!"

As we look at the chart of Carol's development, it's interesting to notice that the themes of Lewis's later novels are in evidence here as well. Lewis began the 1920s with a book about a woman's quest for identity and ended it with *Dodsworth*, about a man's quest for identity.

Lewis's own quest for identity, perhaps, continued on as well, just like Carol. As we know, he led a restless, nomadic existence—as if he were always on the run from his prairie beginnings. Yet ironically, from time to time he would end up back in Minnesota for brief stays; the long arm of the small town always seemed to keep its grip on him.

Lewis's restless travelling was also a search for human companionship—humanness. In spite of (or because of) his loud, barking satire, Lewis had an almost morbid fear of loneliness that he sought to assuage by travelling and by making new acquaintances. But his impetuous personality and his tendency to make snap judgments often killed off these nascent friendships even before they had a chance to take root and thrive.

Perhaps that is why, at the end of *Main Street*, Carol is happy to put down roots—knowing that their shoots and branches will spread and multiply—in the little world of Gopher Prairie. It is a compromise, to be sure, but it's a type of compromise with humanity, and Carol recognizes that that's what makes up who we all are.

### Works Cited

- Lewis, Sinclair. "The American Fear of Literature." *The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings: 1904-1950*. Ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. New York: Random House, 1953. 4-17.
- . *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920. ⚡

It was two days after—following Henebry's demand on Inspector Blymer for bail—that Gurazov was released. He was perfectly free—to starve. He had about seventy dollars in the world. He tried to buy the cigar store back from Becky. She refused. He begged her to take him on as clerk. She negligently said that he was a cranky, nagging, four-flushing old hog and that she wouldn't give him a job sweeping the sidewalk. He tried to get from Nick a loan out of the fund promised on his behalf by Miss Pluma Wilcox. Nick waved his hands and told him that the fund was sacred to fighting the case as a

————— Habeas Corpus *continued on next page*



Habeas Corpus *continued from previous page*

precedent. And so at forty-six, after many years of sitting around, Leo Gurazov had to go to work. He found a job with a gang cleaning up the yards of the Minnesota and Dakota Railroad. Groaning and wincing as he tore his padded hands on slivers of steel, mocked by rugged young micks who thought his beard an object of humor, retiring at night to a shack behind the wheat elevators, he waited in a hell of sweat and exertion while the leisurely Henebry made ready to save him from his empire.

He had read in fiction that a man gets used to toil after the first hardening, but he saw that this was incorrect. Each day made him more convinced that work was absolutely the worst way in the world for a gentleman to put in his time. For an occupation that had been so much discussed, working had less sport to it than anything he could think of. And as for carrying one end of a rotten oak tie under the glare of a large red Irish section boss it was an amusement absolutely not worth going to jail for. Ab-so-lute-ly!

After two weeks of these and much less respectable meditations he decided to borrow from Miss Pluma Wilcox. She lived on the Boulevard of the Lakes, Vernon's most expensive section. On a spring evening, with weariness poisoning his bones and sucking the colors from the afterglow, he crept out along the unending Boulevard. Two months ago he would have sneered at the hulking granite piles, but in his smeared working clothes he was timorous and his heart was the heart of a beggar. There was in him no lasting defiance, but only a desire for ease without effort and power without responsibility.

## IX

The mansion built by David Janson Wilcox, the late president of the Midstates Trust and Security Company, was a graystone barracks so large and intolerant and foursquare that it resembled a grammar school planned by an ill-natured contractor. The comfortably cynical Gurazov of the cigar store would have called it a "symbol of capitalism," but Roosian Gurry of the section gang thought only of getting his hands on a few hundred out of the thousands which the house represented. He would rest his cramped back then. He would lie in bed and read. He besought the birdlike maid in her black and white:

"Please could I see Miss Wilcox? Tell her I am Leo Gurazov."

The maid let him wait in a tiled entrance with walls of something like linoleum and an umbrella jar of something like brick and a smell of something like a Christmas tree and a feast of chocolate creams. Miss Wilcox snatched open the inner door to greet him. From neck to feet she was a smart, horsy, slim, active twenty-eight; from chin to faded auburn hair she was a

tired, bewildered, uneasy forty. She was bubbling.

"Such a shame—keep you waiting—maid didn't understand—do come in—very glad you came to see me—do come in—here on the right, please."

It was a reception room of stiffness, gilt and chill. No one would have dared to build a fire in that fireplace of white enamel columns, gold wreaths and fainting blue molding.

Miss Pluma curled on a bleached brocade chair, her knees crossed, her chin in her hands, her whole manner breathless, and she pattered, "You don't know how grateful I am to you for giving me the chance to express myself against the conventions openly. I have always vaguely felt that something was wrong with the social system, but I have never come out boldly till now and faced the world. We are going to beat these bureaucrats who would deport you."

Gurazov did not care for it at all—and he certainly hadn't come here to talk about the social system. It was his digestive system in which he was interested.

"Miss Wilcox, it is terrible—all they did to me. I had to give up my store to meet the expenses. I have not got a cent. What you think? I am working on a section gang with common dirty workmen!"

"Now isn't that fine! I do envy you so."

"Eh? They are micks! They make me pick up railroad ties."

"Isn't that splendid—to show that a man of intellect and European culture can labor with his hands!"

"Oh, sure—fine! But I ain't on the regular pay roll. I just get laborer's wages—special job cleaning up the yards—and I had to buy heavy shoes and everything. I can't hardly afford more than beef stew and hash. Oh, terrible!"

"Isn't that wonderful—a scholar living the simple free life! You don't know how I wish I could get away from the senseless, tedious luxury of life on the Boulevard—course dinners and that kind of rot."

"B-but—but—I was just wondering. Maybe if I could have more leisure I could watch my case better."

"Don't worry about that one bit. Mr. Henebry is a splendid lawyer—in fact he is my own attorney and I told him to take your case."

*"Habeas Corpus" will conclude in the spring 2011 issue.*

## OBITUARIES

**Anthony Arthur**, author of *Literary Feuds: A Century of Celebrated Quarrels—From Mark Twain to Tom Wolfe* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2002) died December 17, 2009, of cancer. *Literary Feuds* contained a chapter on the tempestuous relationship between Lewis and Theodore Dreiser. Arthur's last book, *Jo Shelby's March*, was published by Random House in August. It was selected as the main selection of the History Book Club and an alternate by Book of the Month Club. Among his other books were *Radical Innocent: Upton Sinclair* (2006); *The Tailor-King: The Rise and Fall of the*

*Anabaptist Kingdom of Muenster* (2000); and, with John Broesamle, *Clashes of Will: Confrontations that Have Shaped Modern America* (2006).

**Kathryn Marlowe**, who played Emily Dodsworth in the film *Dodsworth* in 1936, died in January 2010 in Tampa, Florida. She had small roles in *Sea Devils* (1937), *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (1939), *Girls of the Road* (1940), and *Ride 'Em Cowboy* (1942). She also appeared on Broadway in the musical *Two for the Show* before retiring. ✍

## DEPARTMENTS

### SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

*Classic Images* published an interview with the late Jean Simmons in their May 2010 issue (6–15, 70–71). The interview, by James Bawden, was done in the summer of 1988. There was a question connected with *Elmer Gantry* (she played Sister Sharon).

Q: How did you prevent Burt Lancaster from overpowering you in *Elmer Gantry* (1960)?

JS: He was too busy being Elmer. Burt had spent a lot of years angling for the Oscar. This time he really felt he had it. I met my future husband Richard Brooks on that one. He shot very slowly but with all due speed. He knew what to look for and kind of expected actors to take in his detailed direction. Burt was in his glory and Richard got fine performances out of Arthur Kennedy and particularly Shirley Jones who got a supporting Oscar. It's very long for a drama, over two hours. And nobody expected it would be such a money maker. Richard's home studio, MGM, declined to make it, and United Artists stepped in (14).

In September 1991, *Firsts*, a magazine for book collectors and dealers, ran an article, "Collector's High Spots: The One Hundred Most Rapidly Appreciating Literary Titles of the Last Decade," in which it was noted that the price for a first edition, first state copy of *Main Street*, in very good plus to fine edition in like dust jacket had appreciated from \$200–\$300 in 1981 to \$750–\$3,000 in 1991. The list was updated 10 years later for the December 2001 issue, at which time *Main Street* was valued at \$20,000–\$30,000. Who knows what it will be when the list is updated next year!

Director Victor Fleming has finally received his due in a new biography *Victor Fleming: An American Movie Master* by Michael Sragow. In an article in the *New York Times* (Feb. 28, 2010: AR 15–16), Sragow writes about this brilliant director from the Golden Age of Hollywood who has been somewhat forgotten. But Fleming, the director of such great movies as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Red Dust*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Virginian*, *Captains Courageous*, and *A Guy Named Joe*, died young, at the age of 59 in 1949. Among his early films is the silent *Mantrap* with Clara Bow. Sragow mentions Fleming's "erotic, satiric take" on this adaptation of the Sinclair Lewis novel.

Attention all readers who have a first edition of *Main Street*; the price for it has increased exponentially over the past 30 years.

Anthony Di Renzo, editor of *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, has just had his collection *Bitter Greens: Essays on Food, Politics, and Ethnicity from the Imperial Kitchen* published by the State University of New York Press. Praised by such writers as Michael Parenti, Sandra Gilbert, Tony Ardizzone, Lucia Perillo, and Peter Selgin, this title is available online and in book stores. For more information, consult the following links: State University of New York catalog: <http://www.sunypress.edu/p-5080-bitter-greens.aspx>. Podcast of August 3 radio interview on WSKG's *Off the Page*: <http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wskg/jukebox?action=viewPodcast&podcastId=278>

## WEB NOTES

*The redesign of the website with its bold graphics and easier navigation has received positive feedback. In the works are more links and some new features, including ones on teaching Lewis and a virtual tour of the Boyhood Home.*

I am an adjunct professor at the College of Staten Island and am writing a paper on *It Can't Happen Here*. I was wondering if you might enlighten me with some information regarding Mr. Lewis's relationship with women in general. How did he regard women? Were his relationships good, bad, or typical of the day? [Actually Lewis was very enlightened about women both in his life and in his literature. His female heroines in *The Job*, *Main Street*, and *Ann Vickers*, for example, are incredibly progressive. I can recommend my "The Changing Fictional Faces of Sinclair Lewis's Wives," *Studies in American Fiction* 17.1 (Spring 1989): 65-79 for more information.]

I have a copy of *Tennis As I Play It* ostensibly by Maurice E. McLoughlin dated 1915 published by George H. Doran Company in NY. The book is in its original dust-jacket (edge frayed and small portion absent from the spine). One of my U.S. customers tells me that the book was actually written or ghost written by Sinclair Lewis. Is this correct and does the book, in what is an early example of dust jackets, have any value to Lewis collectors?

I have just bought a copy of Dorothy L. Sayers's *The Nine Tailors*. On the back cover there is part of a quote, attributed to Sinclair Lewis: "In the realm of mystery stories there are four books which everyone should read...*The Nine Tailors* is the best." Do you think Sinclair Lewis wrote this? If so, do you know which are the other mystery stories he considered to be the best? [I wouldn't be surprised if he wrote it. Lewis was a voracious reader—of all kinds of things, novels, poetry, fiction, history, and in German and French as well as English. He wrote a note on book collecting for the Limited Editions Club in 1941 and mentioned that his favorite authors were Dickens, Scott, Milton, and Goethe. I don't know that he ever wrote on the mysteries he liked or owned. There was a recent sale of 45 books from Lewis's collection by Between the Covers Rare Books in New Jersey. The mysteries that were part of the collection were: *The Sloane Square Mystery* by Herbert Adams (1925) and *Pillar of Salt* by Peter Gray (1934).]

I'm wondering if you can help. I used a particular story in a paper I wrote about *Main Street* and its obvious similarity to *Madame Bovary*. Lewis was offended after a Frenchman in a Paris tavern declared Carol Kennicott to be the Madame Bovary of the wheat elevators. Did this really happen? I cannot find the original source. [Charles Pankenier writes, "For what it's worth, in an interview with Allen Austin published in the *University of Kansas City Review* (24 (Spring 1958): 199-210), Lewis remarked that, 'One time a critic had me influenced by *Madame Bovary*. He sounded very logical and convincing. But I'd never read the book.' Still, it's a charming anecdote."]

## SAUK CENTRE NEWS

### COUNCIL VOTES TO SELL VALUABLE LAND: ASKING FOR \$1 MILLION FOR INTERPRETIVE CENTER SITE

Bryan Zollman

(reprinted with permission from Dave Simpkins, Editor of the *Sauk Centre Herald*)

The city council voted [this past spring] in favor of putting a valuable chunk of city-owned land up for sale. The 4.1 acre parcel is located on the south end of town where Highway 71 and Interstate 94 intersect. It currently houses the Sinclair

Lewis Interpretive Center where the Chamber of Commerce has its offices. The recommendation came from the city's Economic Development Authority (EDA). The EDA is a committee made up of area business leaders who look to enhance the Sauk Centre area through business and economic development.

Councilman David Thomas said the land was appraised at \$500,000, but the city is asking \$1 million to help curb any potential buyers from sitting on the land as an investment. "We weren't interested in pricing it in such a way that it would be snapped up by somebody who is going to sit on it for two years and make a half million dollars," Thomas said. "We wanted to price it so anybody who thought they were going to hold onto it would really have to do something with it."

The council's approval to market the property will come with stipulations set by the policy committee. Such stipulations may require development to occur within a certain time frame and could also require a certain amount of jobs. "If it's going to be sold we want it to be developed and become some type of a tax-paying business with employment," said city administrator Vicki Willer.

The council voted 4-1 in favor of marketing the property. According to Thomas, a real estate professional estimated the property would likely be on the market for up to two years at the price of \$1 million. The land will be sold as one lot, but a buyer could subdivide the property after purchase. Councilman Al Coenen voted against selling the land. "It's been part of this city's identity for over 30 years," he said. "We don't have to have a hot dog stand on every corner."

The council did not indicate where the Interpretive Center would be relocated to if the land does sell.

*Several members of the Sinclair Lewis Society, as well as many members of the community, have weighed in on this issue. The following is a commentary from the Sauk Centre Herald on August 10, 2010 by Al Coenen, the only Council member to vote against the sale.*

## **SELLING INTERPRETIVE CENTER ULTIMATE BETRAYAL**

*Al Coenen*

I would like to respond to several "Letters to the Editor" and offer some of my own opinions on the subject. At one of the June meetings, I suggested the sale of the Interpretive Center land be put up to a vote of the people. So the city administrator did some research into special elections and discovered a state statute explicitly giving local voters the authority to vote on certain topics. The key word here being "certain." Without specific legislative authority, city councils may not hold a special election, nor does the city council have the authority to spend public funds on an

unauthorized election. I guess that answers the question on why the citizens never got a chance to vote on the new City Hall. Once again government restricts our freedom of speech. Our next recourse is to make our voices heard in November when the mayor and two council seats are up for re-election.

Another writer suggested moving the Interpretive Center to the downtown area or the Sinclair Lewis home itself. This would not be practical or even feasible, primarily because of the parking situation. We need to keep the downtown area viable, and for businesses to have to compete with a tourist attraction for the available parking spots would create a hardship for everyone. Sinclair Lewis's home is unique as it is in its original location and it adds to the allure of Sinclair Lewis's life. However, his home is in a heavy residential area and the privacy and sanctity of the residents must be preserved. I have seen as many as four tour buses from Iowa State University parked by the home.

Another comment I read was that the city is in bad financial shape. The city is not in great financial shape, but we are far better off than a lot of other cities. Mainly by reducing the budget considerably and putting a tight lid on capital expenditures the last four to five years, we were able to weather the cut in state aid in relatively good shape. The city does have over \$3 million in CDs, which is not a lot of money when you have a \$5 million annual budget and the city is slowly getting its outstanding debt whittled down. Six to eight years ago it was a runaway freight train. And I most certainly am not advocating spending our reserves. One storm like what hit Wadena this summer and that money would be gone in a heartbeat. The city is not in the position of being forced to sell the Interpretive Center property because we are destitute.

The property is the perfect spot for anyone wishing to visit the Center or pick up some lunch and enjoy the picnic area. There is sufficient and non-intrusive parking for all types of vehicles including travel trailers, motor homes, motor coaches, and tour buses.

Take the time to stop at 12th and Getty Street and take a long, hard look at the site. It is one of the most beautiful areas in the city. And it is right at our front door. Other cities and towns would give their right arm to have such a gateway to their community. Eight to ten thousand people walk through the Center's door every year, plus another 800 inquires in 2009 through *Explore Minnesota*. These contacts leave a more positive impression of Sauk Centre than any business you could ever have there.

The industrial park has been in existence for 35 years, and yet is not even half occupied. Why? Because we're competing with every other city up and down the interstate. Look at Freeport. They created an industrial park, gave away free land, and now they have the highest tax rate in the county. Just because a business locates here doesn't mean the employees will move here and if they don't, their paycheck goes out of town with them.

So why not go with something that has been working: **TOURISM!** Tourism is good for the entire community.

One of the council members stated that the right business at the Interpretive Center site could attract upwards of 40,000 people to town. That's hogwash. Walmart doesn't bring in that many people. Let's say a restaurant went in there. That would affect the business of every restaurant in town and it's already a highly competitive market.

Sure, selling this property may bring in a million dollars and increase the tax base, but if anyone thinks that alone would reduce our property tax, think again. No doubt there are a lot of infrastructure projects where this money could be used, so that would be gone in two years or less. So then what do we sell next? How about selling Sinclair Lewis Park? I imagine some developer would love to build some condos on the south end of the lake. The bottom line is it all boils down to greed.

Sauk Centre has an extremely rich history, going all the way back to the original settlers, being a railroad hub for central Minnesota, to being the birthplace of America's first Nobel Prize winner in literature. Doesn't this mean anything? Stop at the Interpretive Center and look at the map with all the pins in it, indicating where the people were from that have stopped here. They're from around the world. It's mind boggling. No one else can lay claim to all this history, no one!

Then we have the Historical Society. They're crammed into the back of the basement in the library. Over half of their historical items are in storage for a lack of space to display them. These two organizations complement each other.

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation and the Historical Society along with the Chamber of Commerce need to join hands and form an alliance and start an all-out effort to construct a new building to house these three entities.

Our young people have lost sight of their heritage and their roots. Very few have any idea what brought us to where we are today. They have little insight into what it took our forefathers to settle this country from ocean to ocean, and I don't mean by driving cross-country on the interstate.

To sell the Center property would be the ultimate betrayal to all the volunteers who donated time and money to make the Center a reality.

Sometimes you don't realize what you have until you lose it!

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Sauk Centre High School students published a newspaper, the *Voice*, in spring 2010, that was distributed with the *Sauk Centre Herald*. One of the topics was a debate on whether the Interpretive Center should be sold. There were ten pro and ten con comments made on facing pages from James Schreiner's Current Issues class. The photo to illustrate the comments against selling was captioned "The Sinclair Lewis Museum offers a place for people to stop in for information about the man who possibly put Sauk Centre on the map. Do we want to possibly lose that?" The other photo had a less compelling caption, "Part of the relocation of

the property would include the Little Red School House, which serves as another attraction for visitors."

The reasons for keeping the Interpretive Center were more varied than one might expect. Most were aware that the Interpretive Center was important for presenting the history of Sauk Centre to visitors and especially the legacy of Sinclair Lewis. Several students spoke more about the property as a great place for sledding in the winter and picnics in the summer. One visionary student suggested a large restaurant like Applebee's but with a Sauk Centre/Sinclair Lewis theme. Even those students who were for selling the property weren't really against the Interpretive Center. Some suggested moving it to another site. In general the opinions for selling it were primarily economic, a need for an increased tax base which would lead to more money for schools, more jobs, and an additional restaurant.

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### Highlights of the 2009 Sinclair Lewis Foundation Annual Report

Colleen Steffes, as president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, reported on the uncertain future of the Interpretive Center (see related article). They did receive several generous donations, from the Stearns History Museum and the Sauk Centre Lions Club for repairs to Interpretive Center displays, photocopies of Lewis's diaries from Richard Lingeman, an antique phone for the Boyhood Home, courtesy of Doug Peterson, and a suitcase owned by a former maid of the Lewis family.

Over 300 people visited the Boyhood Home and Museum in 2009, representing over 40 states and Canada. Foreign visitors came from France, England, Austria, Norway, Peru, Germany, Sweden, and Japan. The Japanese visitors included 28 middle school students who were brought by St. John's University.

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### Sinclair Lewis Days Remain Popular

Sauk Centre's annual Sinclair Lewis Days, of which this year's Sinclair Lewis Conference was a part, remained popular with residents of central Minnesota. There were the usual races, sidewalk sales, softball games, and a street dance, as well as the highlight for many, the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. As Bryan Zollman noted in the *Sauk Centre Herald*:

Krystal Heinen proved the Interpretive Center might be worth its weight in gold. She used the site of the Sinclair Lewis Museum, which is currently up for sale, to prepare for her interview during the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant Thursday. It paid off in the form of a crown—the Miss Sauk Centre crown. Heinen emerged amongst 10 contestants to win the

35th annual pageant. Mariya Lawinger and Rebecca Macey were crowned 2010 princesses. Heinen was also voted Miss Congeniality and shared the best talent award for her vocal performance of the song "Defying Gravity."

The other best talent award went to Danielle Kerfeld, "who performed a self-defense demonstration that brought roars of laughter from the crowd." The contestants all expected to ride in the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade, but it was cancelled due to a thunderstorm.

Robert McLaughlin and Sally Parry were invited to ride in the parade dressed as Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson. When the parade was cancelled because of the storm they attended the First Lutheran Church's pie social along with other participants of the parade (see page 1 for photo).

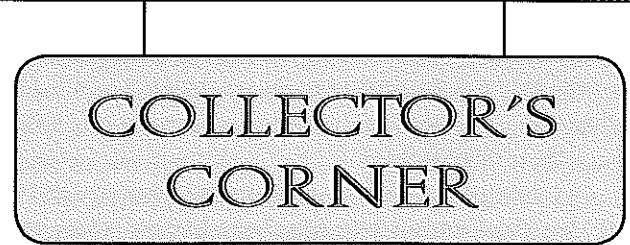
### Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference Celebrates 21st Anniversary in 2010

One of the longest-running, most respected writers' conferences in Minnesota was back in Sauk Centre for its 21st year. The conference has attracted such renowned keynote speakers as Frederick Manfred, Robert Bly, Jon Hassler, Carol Bly, Douglas Wood, Leif Enger, Bill Holm, and Gary Paulsen. This year's keynote speaker was Kevin Kling, internationally famous playwright and storyteller. Joining him were three other professional writers who shared their writing and marketing expertise: Thomas R. Smith on "How Poetry Can Get Us Through Hard Times," Ellen Stanley, also known as "Mother Banjo," on song writing, and Dave Simpkins on "Sinclair Lewis's Writing Habits."

The day-long gathering focused on the process of writing as well as selling what you write. Both beginning and established writers were welcome at the conference and had the chance to hear the three different presentations, the keynote talk, and a panel discussion.

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



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#### JUNE MISCELLANY 2010

71. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Innocents*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$8,500.

First edition. A fine, tight book in a very good example of the scarce dust jacket, with a new price sticker of "\$1.50" over original price on spine panel. A few tiny chips at extremities, some overall soiling with rubbing along joints, front flap fold beginning to split in two places. Despite minor flaws, an attractive example of a scarce jacket with only minimal paper loss.

#### MARCH MISCELLANY 2010

71. Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$1,850.

First Edition. Review copy with rubber stamp on front flyleaf: "Advance Copy." A fine book in an unusually bright, crisp dust jacket that has had two long tears to rear panel and one shorter tear to spine panel expertly repaired with Japanese paper. Splits at front and rear flap folds have similarly been reinforced. Nonetheless, an exceptionally fresh copy of a scarce jacket with virtually no paper loss.

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## CATALOGUE 194

95. Lewis, Sinclair. Original Commemorative 1937 Ten-Cent US Postage Stamp Signed by Sinclair Lewis. 2 5/8" x 3 1/8," 1937. \$125.

Original commemorative 1937 US postage stamp signed by the writer, Sinclair Lewis. The stamp's art work (7/8" x 1 7/16") is printed in dark green ink and shows a mountain landscape with the text "Great Smoky Mountains" at the top edge and "10 cents, United States Postage" at the bottom edge.

## CATALOGUE 193

80. Lewis, Sinclair & Albert Payson Terhune. *Dad*. By Albert Payson Terhune. New York: W.J. Watt, 1914. \$5,000.

First edition. In this 307-page Terhune Civil War novel, Sinclair Lewis anonymously wrote chapters 21 through 23 for his friend Terhune who was facing a deadline. See Mark Schorer's classic biography of Sinclair Lewis for details. Fine, tight copy in a bright dust jacket with a small bit of restoration at head of spine. The front panel of the dust jacket is a striking full-color painting by W.D. Goldbeck of a Civil War officer and his horse before the steps of his house where his wife is standing (the image is used inside the book as a black-and-white frontispiece). A scarce book in decent condition, its dust jacket is so very rare that it is lacking from almost all Sinclair Lewis collections.

81. Lewis, Sinclair. (Ghostwriter). *Tennis As I Play It* by Maurice E. McLoughlin. New York: Doran, 1915. \$450.

First edition, first issue of a book ghostwritten by Sinclair Lewis. Accompanying the book is documentation about Lewis's authorship. Very slight cocking, else a fine, clean copy with the gilt-stamping unusually bright and gleaming. Illustrated with photographs. Very scarce in this condition.

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22229. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1975. \$1,750.

First English edition. Hardbound. A fine copy in a lovely example of the pictorial dust jacket that depicts Gantry stumping against the Devil. A finer copy we have never encountered.

22230. —. *Mantrap*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. \$850.

Salesman's sample. Comprised of the first 64 pages of the novel. The back cover announces the book's publication date, July 8, 1926. Pictorial wrappers. Fine. Housed in a quarter leather clamshell box. Rare.

### Bibliotopus

120 South Crescent Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212

Phone: (310) 271-2173

Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$7,000.

Raw proof of the first edition. Printed on proofing paper (7 7/8" x 6 1/2") on one side of the page (rectos) only, and hand bound by the publisher in brown paper wrappers tied with snips of shoelace (all original). Small control numbers "8476" neatly inked on spine and fly-title, else very good (unrepaired). A one-off, preceding every other surviving setting in type. A real movie book, produced with haste, in house, for Jesse Lasky (Famous Players) who was anxious to secure the film rights. On the eve of the Depression and past his prime, Lasky wavered and then declined, keeping this copy as a souvenir of the opportunity. *Dodsworth* was ultimately purchased by Sam Goldwyn after he saw the 1934 play scripted by Sidney Howard with his understated realism. He asked Howard to write the screenplay, and gave the direction to William Wyler, with his notorious multiple retakes. The film starred Walter Huston as the world weary Sam Dodsworth, with supporting performances from Ruth Chatterton, Mary Astor, David Niven, Paul Lukas, and Maria Ouspenskaya. The seriously adult film was released two years later to lasting acclaim, and Wyler, Huston, Ouspenskaya, and the picture itself, were all nominated for Oscars. Our humble book is the precursor of it all, a drab and plain object, but with great charm and authenticity, preceding (and not to be confused with, or compared to) any other pre-publication issue, the only recorded ones being those 500 (900?) copies of the regular book hardbound in orange cloth as an advance issue, which is still a common item, as are the 49,500 copies of the first edition in dark blue cloth and dustjacket.

Lewis declined a Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* in 1926 because it was not awarded for literary merit but rather for the best presentation of "the wholesome atmosphere of American life," a major target of Lewis's satire and the reason why so many sleepy books have won it. *Dodsworth* was his most ambitious and intricate novel, written at the height of his powers. With it Lewis's stature became irrefutable, securing for him a solemn triumph as the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1930). He accepted it and the big bucks that came with it, breaching the Swedish citadel for the likes of Eugene O'Neill, Pearl Buck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow (an American born in Canada), Isaac Singer, and Toni Morrison.

The quintessence of *Dodsworth* is too considerable and complex to capture in a book catalog entry except perfunctorily, and it's too brave a novel for me to dismiss it with superficialities. It's not a satire in the manner of his earlier books, yet it is filled with satirical techniques. It contrasts Europeans and expatriate Americans, yet it eclipses Henry James. And it is filled with travel metaphors, yet to say it is a travel novel is to say *Moby-Dick* is an insanely overwritten book about fishing. The primary copy. Important. Appealing. Consequential. Unique.

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