

# The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME SIXTEEN, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 2008



Detail from the cover of volume one of Samuel J. Rogal's  
*The Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*

## SEVEN-VOLUME COLLECTION OF LEWIS SHORT STORIES PUBLISHED

Sally E. Parry  
*Illinois State University*

Samuel J. Rogal, emeritus chair of the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts at Illinois Valley Community College, has assembled and edited a seven-volume collection of all of Lewis's short stories, published by Mellen in 2007. It's a terrific accomplishment since most of Lewis's short stories have been out of print since they were first published in a variety of popular magazines such as *McClure's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Cosmopolitan*. Back in 1971, Clara Lee R. Moodie, in her dissertation, "The Shorter Fiction of Sinclair Lewis and the Novel—Anatomy," called for their publication as a service to readers and scholars everywhere, so this publishing event has been a long time in coming.

— Collection of Short Stories Published *continued on page 4*

## THE CROSS, THE FLAG, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

As the campaign for the presidency has heated up, politicians are turning to Sinclair Lewis to express their concerns with America. As seems to have been the case for the last couple of years, the quote attributed to Lewis, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross," is still very popular.

Ron Paul cited this apocryphal Lewis quote in a speech in December 2007, and that led to many e-mails and phone calls to Sinclair Lewis Society headquarters by various members of the media including the *Atlantic Monthly*, NBC, and *USA Today* looking for confirmation. Although the quote certainly expresses the sentiments of Lewis, no one has yet located this specific quote. Here are the two closest correlations with Lewis's writing. If anyone has other information about this quotation, please contact the Sinclair Lewis Society. Many thanks to all who weighed in on this.

### Similar Statements by Lewis

From *It Can't Happen Here*, chapter 36:

But he saw too that in America the struggle was befogged by the fact that the worst Fascists were they who disowned the word "Fascism" and preached enslavement to Capitalism under the style of Constitutional and Traditional Native American Liberty.

From *Gideon Planish*, chapter 1:

I just wish people wouldn't quote Lincoln or the Bible, or hang out the flag or the cross, to cover up something that belongs more to the bank-book and the three golden balls.

In the 1979 play *Strangers*, by Sherman Yellen, which starred Bruce Dern as Sinclair Lewis and Lois Nettleton as

— The Cross, the Flag *continued on page 10*

## IN THIS ISSUE

### FEATURE ARTICLES

- 1 Seven-Volume Collection of Lewis Short Stories  
Published  
by Sally E. Parry
- 1 The Cross, the Flag, and the Presidential Elections
- 3 Elmer Gantry Sings Again
- 5 St. Cloud State University Receives Gift of the  
Manuscripts for Sinclair Lewis's Play *The Jayhawker*  
by Tom Steman
- 7 The Sinclair Lewis-Claude Washburn Friendship
- 9 Weird Minnesota
- 11 *S.O.S.: Slips of Speech*

### DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Contributors
- 4 New Members
- 8 Call for Papers
- 13 Sinclair Lewis Notes
- 14 Sinclair Lewis Scholarship
- 15 Web Notes
- 16 Sauk Centre News
- 17 Collector's Corner

## The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

Editor: Sally E. Parry

Publications Unit Director: Tara Reeser

Production Director: Sarah Haberstick

Assistants and Interns: Andrew Farnsworth,  
Joanna Pierce

Please address all correspondence to: Sinclair Lewis Society, c/o Sally E. Parry, Department of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

### OFFICERS OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY

#### PRESIDENT

Frederick Betz  
Southern Illinois University  
at Carbondale

#### SECRETARY-TREASURER

Robert L. McLaughlin  
Illinois State University

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Roger Forseth  
University of Wisconsin-Superior

George Killough  
College of St. Scholastica

Todd Stanley  
Reynoldsburg School System  
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Sally E. Parry  
Executive Director  
Illinois State University

---

## ELMER GANTRY SINGS AGAIN

---

The larger than life character of Elmer Gantry must appeal to composers. There have been two musicals based on Lewis's novel. The first one, which opened in 1970 starred Robert Shaw and Rita Moreno, lasted less than a week on Broadway. A second version never made it to Broadway, but has had several productions around the country including Washington, DC, and Chicago (see the Spring 1998 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 6.2 for a review of the Chicago production).

Now Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein have written an operatic version of *Elmer Gantry*. Jesse Green, in "Behold! An Operatic Miracle," writes of the long road of development of the opera, starting with a workshop production of the first act by the Boston Musical Theater Project in 1992. The focus of the opera, like the two musicals and the 1960 film version, is on the relationship between Gantry and Sister Sharon Falconer. Garfein, Green writes,

gives us Elmer as a godless hunk willing to manipulate faith for personal advantage and then gives us his real conversion in the face of Sharon's purity. How the two characters influence each other, for better or worse, is the drama. "We wanted to show how evangelism moves from frontier to city by taking on the techniques of American business," Mr. Garfein explained dryly. He might also have said they were showing how ambition enables and then pollutes faith.

Although Lewis scholars might argue that Elmer never really converts, the theme of faith running amok is one that still certainly resonates in American society. The world premiere of

the opera, staged at the Nashville Opera (<http://www.nashvilleopera.org/>) on November 16, 2007, was very well received. The opera, a coproduction with Montclair State University in New Jersey, was performed there in late January 2008 ([http://peakperfs.org/performances/Elmer\\_Gantry](http://peakperfs.org/performances/Elmer_Gantry)). The composer and librettist have also developed a website (<http://www.elmergantryopera.com/>).

The Sunday after Green's review ran, David Hurst wrote a letter to the *New York Times* about the article:

It was surprising that Mr. Green, in his exhaustive piece on the gestation of Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein's opera *Elmer Gantry*, omitted a musical version that's been kicking around the country for twenty years.

Not *Gantry*, the Broadway flop from 1970, which Mr. Green mentions, but *Elmer Gantry* by John Bishop (book), Mel Marvin (music), and Robert Satuloff (lyrics). It has had at least four major productions, including two at Ford's Theater, 1988 and 1995, one at La Jolla Playhouse, in 1991, and one at the Marriott Lincolnshire in Chicago, in 1998. Though the musical has been produced more than the opera, they all seem to have similar problems with the source material.

### Works Cited

- Green, Jesse. "Behold! An Operatic Miracle." *New York Times* Jan. 20, 2008, Arts and Leisure: 1+.
- Hurst, David. Letter. *New York Times* Jan. 27, 2008, Arts and Leisure: 4. ✉

## CONTRIBUTORS

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

*These people include Frederick Betz, Suzanne Broderick, Lisa Campbell, Ted Fleener, Mitchell J. Freedman, Ralph Goldstein, David Goodman, Rob Hardy, Patrick Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, William Kraemer, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Malcolm McLean, Roberta Parry, Samuel J. Rogal, Dave Simpkins, Todd Stanley, and Tom Steman.*

Collection of Short Stories Published *continued from page 1*

There have been several collections of Lewis short stories, starting with *The Selected Stories of Sinclair Lewis* in 1937 that contained stories chosen by Lewis himself along with a short introduction. Other collections include "Sinclair Lewis: 7 Selected Short Stories" (*Avon Modern Short Story Monthly*, 1943); *I'm a Stranger Here Myself and Other Stories*, edited by Mark Schorer (1962); *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, edited by Anthony Di Renzo (1997); and *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis and Go East, Young Man: Sinclair Lewis on Class in America*, both edited by Sally E. Parry (2005).

Lewis, especially before he hit it big with *Main Street*, supplemented his income by writing for a variety of popular magazines like many of his contemporaries including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, and Katherine Anne Porter. Short stories of the time tended to be a little less edgy than collections or novels, primarily because the audience for magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, and *Everybody's* looked for some sort of closure at the end of these stories, such as a happy ending, the guilty being punished, and or least some sort of moral uplift.

Rogal has also written the three-volume *Guide to the Characters in the Novels, Short Stories, and Plays of Sinclair Lewis* (Mellen, 2006). The short-story collection includes a brief introduction by him. He also provides notes at the bottom of the pages to provide explanations for terms and references that might be unknown or confusing to a modern audience. The price per volume averages around \$129 dollars or over \$900 for the whole set, so it's more likely that the primary audience for this set is libraries. It's an invaluable collection for scholars and readers of Lewis though, so I encourage all our readers to ask their libraries to purchase this collection.

The seven volumes of *The Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis* are divided up as follows:

Volume I: June 1904–January 1916

Volume II: August 1916–October 1917

Volume III: January 1918–February 1919

Volume IV: February 1919–May 1921

Volume V: August 1923–April 1931

Volume VI: June 1931–March 1941

Volume VII: September 1941–May 1949

Professor Rogal kindly agreed to answer some questions about his work on the collection.

*What drew you to this massive project on Lewis?*

As with a number of readers of my generation, I introduced myself to Sinclair Lewis's novels as a high school freshman, and have attempted to teach, on five or six occasions since 1960, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Elmer Gantry* to college students whose interests in his work rarely approached my own level of appreciation. In addition, I have, within the past decade, expanded my collection of Lewis novels, and thus my reading of them, as public librarians have seen fit to jettison them from their shelves and to sell them at a rate of twenty-five to fifty cents per volume. After I read Mark Schorer's 1961 biography of Lewis, I became aware, for the first time, of the many short stories, and I immediately set myself to read those relatively few pieces that, prior to the 1960s, had been published in collections. After that I returned to my principal interests—John and Charles Wesley, eighteenth-century Methodism, and English and American hymnody. However, I did, in 1972, while on a sabbatical leave, dip into the hymns that Lewis sprinkled about in *Elmer Gantry*, producing a piece that found a place in an issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Newsletter* (published at St. Cloud State University).

Since my retirement in 1998, I have continued to focus on the eighteenth century, but I have also permitted myself the luxury of committing the once scholarly sin of stepping, gingerly and temporarily, outside of the areas of my competence and pursuing other interests. Although never claiming myself to be a Lewis scholar—not even a student of Lewis, perhaps—I have always sensed the need for as many as possible of those short stories of his to be published in a single collection, both the ones that demonstrated a fairly high degree of literary quality and those that (as Lewis, himself, had indirectly admitted)

— Collection of Short Stories Published *continued on page 5*

## NEW MEMBERS

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

William J. Bly  
Broken Arrow, OK

Leslie Bryon  
Miami, FL

Eileen Derry  
Union, NJ

---

## ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY RECEIVES GIFT OF THE MANUSCRIPTS FOR SINCLAIR LEWIS'S PLAY *THE JAYHAWKER*

Tom Steman  
St. Cloud State University

---

The family of Hubert Irej Gibson has donated to St. Cloud State University materials associated with Sinclair Lewis and Lloyd Lewis's (no relation) play *The Jayhawker*. Gibson served as Sinclair Lewis's personal secretary in the fall of 1933 in Chicago at the Hotel Sherry while *The Jayhawker* was written. The play was performed in Washington, New York, and Philadelphia in the fall of 1934, and was novelized in 1935.

Included in the collection are several drafts of the play as it evolved, including the final draft autographed by the authors

and given to Gibson. Other materials include letters from 1933 between Lloyd and Sinclair regarding the plot, letters from Hubert Gibson to his daughter Barbara regarding his time with Lewis, and contemporary newspaper clippings highlighting the collaboration of Sinclair Lewis and Lloyd Lewis. The collection is now ready for use and the finding aid is available at <http://lrts.stcloudstate.edu/library/archives/gibson.asp>.

St. Cloud State University, with 16,500 students, is the largest of seven universities in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. ✍

Collection of Short Stories Published *continued from previous page*

probably should have been left in the typewriter. Thus, the publication of those stories, particularly in chronological order, allows the reader, as well as the committed Lewis scholar, to observe the artistic progression, stumbling, and decline of a major American writer of a truly *American* fiction. The observation of that progression becomes even more meaningful if the observer will insert a novel at the appropriate chronological point, thus allowing for the necessary comparison/contrast between the novels and individual pieces of short fiction.

Finally, recognizing that Lewis's stories required extensive editorial notation to be understood by those readers (numbering myself among them) who attended the University of Winnemac or Plato College, as opposed to Oberlin or Yale, I wanted to lay bare before those inquiring minds both the extent of Lewis's own erudition, the variety of his own interests, and his heavy reliance upon sources—both printed and human. In so doing, I enjoyed the exercise of pursuing my own self-education while treading the historical, social, political, and cultural waters that flowed through Lewis's own imagination. For those readers who believe that I overindulged myself in peppering the pages of Lewis's texts with notations, I make no apologies. After all, I pounded every letter of every word of every sentence of those stories onto the screen of my word processor, and those notations stand as testimonies to the single pound of emaciated flesh that I have contributed to the project.

*How long did it take you to find all the short stories? Having edited two collections of Lewis short stories myself, I found it very difficult to locate some of them.*

I began my search for Lewis's short stories in early February 2005, relying principally (but not totally) upon the "Checklist" set down at the end of Mark Schorer's biography. By August 2006, I had managed—with the help of a local college library clerk and a local public librarian, both of whom submitted requests for interlibrary loans—to corral copies of the 124 or so stories that appear in this collection. Delays occurred because Schorer's checklist does not always include page numbers; obscure and discontinued periodicals had to be located; certain librarians faxed copies in unreadable condition; certain librarians sent microfilm from which I had to copy; a small number of demon librarians or their equally demonic clerks omitted entire pages or parts of pages from the copying process; cash-strapped libraries such as Yale and Michigan demanded \$10 per page for copying and would not listen to my pleas for mercy upon one with an empty purse.

*Have you any favorites among the stories and why?*

The Lewis stories that I most appreciate focus upon those in which the writer evidences an understanding of, and a sincere reaction to, *true* human conditions—situations that the writer both knew and comprehended—and thus he did appear to struggle with attempts to extend his art beyond his own capabilities. In "The Loneliness of Theodore" (1905)—among the early stories that the academic critics decree ought not to be worth our critical consideration—a lonely little boy cannot play with the boys down the street, and thus must confine

— Collection of Short Stories Published *continued on page 6*

Collection of Short Stories Published *continued from previous page*

himself to stick-figure playmates. He receives a quarter and a piece of cake from his father for his birthday, and blows the former away in its entirety by treating the pompous little girl next door to ice cream and candy. Afterward, she rejects him, and, in the end, Theodore must return to his loneliness. Sidney Dow, in "Land" (1931), a mediocre dentist who wants only to function as a farmer, cannot convince his father or his wife to allow him to pursue that dream. Thus, Sidney wonders why he cannot become, in the materialistic mind's eye of those closest to him, ambitious and worthy. A string of veteran actors and actresses—Cushman Bland and his wife ("Little Eva" [1918]), Lily Layton Gooch ("They Had Magic Then" [1941]), Matt and Milli Carnival ("Is This a Dagger—So What?" [1940] and "Fellow Trooper" [1941])—uncover for the reader the realities that lie behind the scenes created by their professional roles; they fully understand the relationship between the facades of their own careers and the actual scenarios that comprise peoples' needs and ambitions. Through all of his manufacturing of sophomoric language and equally sophomoric plots and characters, and through all of his attempts to fit himself with an ill-fitting suit of H. L. Mencken sarcasm, Lewis cannot always calm the romantic beatings of his own heart. In these stories, the reader knows when he has written with feeling, and thus with truth. Brief moments do arise, in Lewis's short fiction, when he appears to have done well by respecting, and reflecting upon, the memory of Jane Austen.

*Sinclair Lewis is better known and appreciated for his full-length novels. Do you think that any of his stories are on par with his novels?*

W. Somerset Maugham, 11 years older than Lewis and an ocean removed from him, nonetheless had proven, well before World War I, to the British and American literati of the day that a writer could indeed achieve financial independence (or at least enough money sufficient for food, clothing, and lodging) through pen and ink and typewriter ribbon. Lewis followed the Maugham trail; the money from the production of short stories kept him afloat financially and allowed him the time to work on novels. Unlike Maugham (and Hemingway and Faulkner as well), however, Lewis could not sustain the artistic consistency in both of those forms of fiction, and thus his short stories—even the best among them—cannot fit comfortably upon the same critical page with the novels.

The short story, from all appearances, proved difficult for Lewis because it did not provide him with sufficient room to complete the task at hand. Lewis appeared to encounter problems with plot—with developing a fictional direction and

bringing it to a clear, meaningful close. For example, even if the likes of *Work of Art* (1934), *Bethel Merriday* (1940), or *Ann Vickers* (1933) do not march in the front ranks of Lewis's novels, the characters and the backdrops of their thoughts and actions prove strong enough by themselves that the readers really do not have to concern themselves with what happens when those pieces arrive at their final pages. In other words, the business and professional worlds of Ann Vickers; the hotel lobbies and hotel rooms and hotel restaurants surrounding Myron Weagle; the stages and the backstages through which Bethel Merriday and her fellow troupers walk—the people, the places, the supporting characters, the relationships between and among characters, the strong descriptions of places and people—all prove strong enough to carry and even obscure rather simple plots. Reread the first section of chapter 3 of *Main Street*, as well as the first six lines of the second section of that chapter, and the point will have been carried home.

At best, Lewis's short stories represent fictional circles, and the reader can experience difficulty in uncovering any form of resolution. Harrietta ("Harri") Braham-Raffish emerges as a 1940s variation of a control freak—beginning with her arrival in New Kotka, Minnesota, fresh from Seattle, Washington, proceeding through two marriages and a host of self-initiated projects intended to benefit only herself, and ending on a train back to her initial point of origin. Another fictional pain in the posterior, Henrietta Flint ("Joy-Joy" [1917]), in company with her two devilish children, moves into an affluent suburban neighborhood, preaching the gospel of joy and gladness and inflicting that notion upon her neighbors. Fortunately, the antics of the two children alleviate, momentarily, the drowsiness of an obvious plot and more obvious ending. The lonely Julian Oliver ("The Hidden People" [1917]) discovers, in New York, the equally lonely but more experienced and sagacious Rhoda Quinn. When Julian loses his job, Rhoda provides him with a short course on job hunting, and the former goes off to Ohio to sell cars. Rhoda will join him when she, herself, can rise to a better state in life—and at that point Lewis throws away his pen and paper, leaving the reader to determine when and where that union will occur. Essentially, the space limitations of short stories in popular periodicals did not permit Lewis the fictional time and the fictional room to parade characters across a wide stage and to paint strong descriptive scenes for their backdrops. Thus, at the risk of generalization, Lewis's short stories emerge as mere fragments of what, within the larger arenas of time and space (the novel, obviously), might have driven his art to higher levels. ✍

---

## THE SINCLAIR LEWIS-CLAUDE WASHBURN FRIENDSHIP

---

Malcolm McLean, a nephew of the talented writer Claude Washburn, who died quite young, has sent the Sinclair Lewis Society some additional information about the friendship and collegial relationship that Washburn shared with Sinclair Lewis. Readers of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* may remember that John L. (Larry) Washburn, Claude's son, sent in some information on his father that was published in the 9.2 issue of the *Newsletter*.

Since that time Larry Washburn has prepared a couple of volumes on his father, about which Mr. McLean writes:

In that [the second volume] appears this letter from Sinclair Lewis following Claude's sudden death at all too young an age. I couldn't understand the provenance of the letter from International Falls, Minnesota, a small, far northern town in this state, right on the Canadian border. I learned from a friend that Lewis was a friend of Ernest Oberholtzer. Oberholtzer is famous in Minnesota history as a dedicated conservationist long before the environmental movement took center stage. He had a kind of compound, I think, on Rainy Lake, a large body of water separating Minnesota from Ontario. Lewis apparently liked to fish and was a friend of Oberholtzer who presumably was a young man at the time, at least ten to 15 years younger than Claude and Lewis. Claude, so far as I know, who had no interest at all in fishing and outdoor sports, had visited Lewis at Oberholtzer's place in 1926 on a trip back from Europe. He returned from far northern Minnesota to Duluth and died quickly and unexpectedly in the home where he spent most of his boyhood years. As I understand it, he had a streptococcus infection, which simply took him rapidly, in two days, Larry recounts in his first volume. I am assuming that "Mrs. Washburn" to whom Lewis's letter was directed was Larry's and my grandmother, Alma Pattee Washburn, wife of Jed L. Washburn who supported Claude's writing faithfully for many years. It would not have been Claude's wife who was in Europe then. And why not "Mr. and Mrs. Washburn," and just our grandmother? I don't know. [The Oberholtzer information was provided by Patrick Coleman, Acquisitions Librarian, Minnesota Historical Society.]

The letter from Sinclair Lewis to Mrs. Washburn, following Claude Washburn's death:

Dear Mrs. Washburn:

I know from my own sensation how

dreadful must have been your shock in the death of Claude. But I know too how inevitably he will go on living. With me, his personality will always be a living thing: his extraordinary courtesy, his sense of honor, his inability to do anything shabby or mean. And in my writing I shall be conscious always of his fastidious hatred of the glib, the easy, the time-serving. I have loved Claude ever since I first saw him, & never more than recently, when he was my guest. It is my prayer that the pride all of you must have in him may in some tiny way soothe your grief. And we his fellow writers want to be permitted to share that pride.

I'm sorry this stationery isn't of a soberer sort but there is no other at hand. Please let me send you all my love, & please do not take the trouble even to acknowledge this.

Yours most sincerely,  
Sinclair Lewis (signature)

Here is an excerpt from a volume that Larry Washburn has prepared:

### CLAUDE

Today, with so many good reviews, *Order* would have been promoted nationwide and no doubt would have become a best seller. Unfortunately its publisher, Duffield and Co., gave it little advertising, and, as mass marketing by means of radio and television did not exist, the novel-buying reader had for the most part only his local newspaper to give him news of new books. In fact, an old friend of Claude who lived in Rochester, New York, wrote to him in November, 1920, eight months after *Order* was published, to ask "when do you expect to have your novel placed—I wonder if it's anything like *Gerald Northrop*?"

At some point in his life and, unfortunately, nowhere noted in my father's papers, Claude had become a good friend of his fellow Minnesota writer, Sinclair Lewis. In the summer of 1920 Lewis had just

————— Washburn-Lewis Friendship *continued on next page*

Washburn-Lewis Friendship *continued from previous page*

completed *Main Street*, and he wrote to Claude:

2 August, 1920: Dear Claude—After a last lap in revising the new novel, which consisted of six weeks of working till midnight every day, I've finished the year or so of work I've put on it, and incontinently fled to Maine. The first thing I did after a little sleep, a little fishing, and the climbing of a mountain, was to read *ORDER*.

I think Peter and Elsie are extraordinary characters (Annette doesn't strike me as so real) and equally well I like the realization of the growth of the Midwestern city—the smug suburb (it *is* a suburb no matter what they call it), the unspeakable selvage of the city, then the sleek granite and cement center. Peter wins the greatest affection—in no place more than in that beautifully simple line-and-half end. And I'm glad you are with Peter in rebellion against our paralysis of order: My own novel, 'Main Street,' is most interested in the same theme; and the protagonist is constantly in rebellion against order as it is found in the small town.

I think that Duffield is handling *Order* damn badly. They're neither advertising nor selling adequately. It was I who first called the attention of that small but thoroughly excellent book-shop, the Wayfarers, of Washington, to the book; and entirely upon my suggestion that the chief owner of the shop read the book. (She liked it immensely, she told me, and has ordered it.) You better change publishers on your next book, and come over to mine—Harcourt....

Where shall we live next?... Would we best like Florence or some other part of Italy?... Speak, O Herodotus in the vocative of strange lands, of figs and honey and the rents of villas, to the folk who, humble and home-keeping in the bee-long groves, yet would set timorous foot in the galleys and from the poluplusboios sea behold the marvels of distant strands and the folk with one eye midmost of their brows.... And—Do we drink together once or twice in Florence in the autumn?

The affection of the Lewises to the Washburns. Sinclair Lewis

Another important event in Claude's writing life in 1920 was that his father, who had great faith in his son's future, decided that his writing efforts should not be burdened by the problem of earning a living and supporting his family. To give him creative freedom, Jed transferred enough dividend-paying stocks and bonds to Claude's account to provide an annual income that started at \$3,600 and within a year grew to \$4,500. When one considers that in *Order* we are told that Annecy Blake lived on a salary of \$1,000 per year and could afford both a small house and a servant in a fashionable American suburb, obviously our small family of three should have managed quite well on four times that amount.

Jed was by now a millionaire or well on the way to becoming one, and his investments were diverse and widespread. What if he had gone to Claude's publisher and said: "My son's book has excellent reviews and deserves a much bigger sales effort. I'm willing to advance a substantial sum to pay for the added advertising and public relations costs. I'm sure you'll be able to pay me back out of the increased sales. If not, I'll put it down as a bet I didn't win." One wonders? ✍

## CALL FOR PAPERS

*The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter is always interested in various perspectives on Sinclair Lewis. If you would like to submit an article, please send it to the Sinclair Lewis Society, c/o Sally Parry, Department of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240 or e-mail [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu).*

*We are also looking for information or references to Sinclair Lewis in scholarship or the popular press. If you see a mention of Lewis, please send them to the address above. Many thanks.*



## WEIRD MINNESOTA

Sinclair Lewis gets several mentions in *Weird Minnesota: Your Travel Guide to Minnesota's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets* by Eric Dregni, published by Sterling in 2006. His loving, if slightly skewed, travel guide to his native state includes descriptions, with pictures, of such tourist sites as the Spam Museum, the Museum of Questionable Medical Devices (now part of the Science Museum of Minnesota), and the Minnesota Historical Society's collection of underwear, the nation's largest. The sections that include Lewis are "Local Legends," "Ancient Mysteries," "Collected Exhibitionism," "Fabled People and Places," as well as "Unexplained Phenomena and Curious Occurrences."

Lewis's first mention is in the section, "Fabled People and Places": "some of our most well-known places can't even be found on a map! Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon was, according to the author, left off the state map by a cartographer's error. Sinclair Lewis's Gopher Prairie never even came that close to being real" (44). This comment is juxtaposed with a picture of the dust jacket of *Main Street* and a very nice watercolor of downtown Sauk Centre, with the Main Street Theater in the background. There is also a short description of Lewis's grave at the Greenwood Cemetery in Sauk Centre and a picture of the family gravestone, rather than his own.

There is a whole page devoted to Lewis and his writings, focusing on *Main Street*, mostly concentrating on the response to the novel by people in his hometown and the nearby area:

While Sauk Centre took offense at Lewis's *Main Street*, the Alexandria Public Library banned it outright because it assumed that Alexandria was the town being satirized. The *St. Cloud Journal-Press* mocked this move in a 1921 article:

*Main Street*, which eminent literary judges decided was the best contribution to letters of last year and which brought Sinclair Lewis the Pulitzer Prize of a couple thousand dollars [*sic*—the Pulitzer Prize committee wanted to give Lewis the Pulitzer Prize that year, but they were overruled. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Literature for *Arrowsmith* which he refused. Dregni has this right in his section on Lewis's grave], has been ousted from the public library of Alexandria, Minnesota. Possibly somebody up that way read the book and came to the passage where Gopher Prairie was located a



Image of Big Ole provided by Christopher Rowland

day's journey for an ox team from Sauk Centre, which might fit Alexandria. The library board of that city is taking itself too seriously, and there is always humor in asinine solemnity. (61)

For those who live in Minnesota or just love to visit it, this book gives a unique perspective on the state. Don't miss the "Roadside Oddities" section, with photos of such huge statues as the World's Largest Dala Horse in Mora, the forty-foot cement otter in Fergus Falls, Smokey the Bear in International Falls, and the giant Big Ole Viking statue in the heart of downtown Alexandria.

### Work Cited

Dregni, Eric. *Weird Minnesota: Your Travel Guide to Minnesota's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets*. New York: Sterling, 2006. ❧

The Cross, the Flag *continued from page 1*

Dorothy Thompson, there is a similar exchange between the two characters as Lewis is working on *It Can't Happen Here*:

you don't need jack boots and a swastika just to become a Fascist. Hell, it can be done just as easy in a white bedsheet, a pair of red suspenders and a straw hat. Christ, if Fascism comes to America, it'll arrive wearing an undershirt and speakin' like an ole boy from down home—jest folks.... You can warn the folks about the dangers abroad, but somebody's got to tell them that it can happen at home.

### The Political Controversy

Here's a sampling of the controversy and the people who e-mailed the Sinclair Lewis Society about it.

The *USA Today* On Politics blog, written by Mark Memmott and Jill Levine, posted the following on December 18, 2007:

Asked about Republican rival Mike Huckabee's Christmas-themed ad, which we wrote about yesterday and has attracted attention in part because of the image of a cross that many see hovering over Huckabee's shoulder, GOP presidential candidate Rep. Ron Paul said this morning on *FOX & Friends* that:

"It reminds me of what Sinclair Lewis once said. He says, 'when fascism comes to this country, it will be wrapped in the flag, carrying a cross.' Now I don't know whether that's a fair assessment or not, but you wonder about using a cross, like he is the only Christian or implying that subtly. So, I don't think I would ever use anything like that." (Fox has put video from some of the interview here [<http://www.foxnews.com/foxfriends/index.html?loc=interstitialskip>]. To see Paul talking about the Huckabee ad, though, you need to check this clip at YouTube [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CHb8CWw-Q4>].)...

Paul's linking of Huckabee's ad to fascism is certainly an attention-getter.

So too is a presidential contender quoting Sinclair Lewis, winner of the 1930 Nobel Prize in Literature and author of books including *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, and *Elmer Gantry*. That doesn't happen too often.

Out of curiosity, we did some checking to see if Lewis did actually say or write what Paul attributed to him.

The answer:

According to the executive director of the Sinclair Lewis Society, Illinois State University English Department associate dean Sally Parry, "it sounds like something Sinclair Lewis might have said or written...but we've never been able to attribute it to him." We spoke to her by telephone this morning.

After the conversation, Parry sent us an e-mail with passages from two books Lewis wrote that at least hint at the words Paul attributed to him....

According to Parry, the Lewis Society's website "must get a query about this (quote) every week." She doesn't know how it originally came to be attributed to Lewis.

Does anyone reading this have any insight to add on the quote's origins?

And, what about Paul's critique of the ad? Fair or not?...

[A shortened version of this blog appeared in the December 19, 2007 *USA Today* on page 6A.]

Ralph Goldstein responds:

In one of the many moments Tim Russert made Ron Paul feel uncomfortable on today's *Meet the Press*, he questioned the candidate about a disapproving comment he'd made about rival Mike Huckabee's weaving religion into the campaign. Paul gave the line about fascism coming to the U.S. wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross, a quote he attributed to Sinclair Lewis. After making Paul squirm awhile about the harshness of the charge against Huckabee, Russert told him the Sinclair Lewis Society claims the quote cannot be attributed to Lewis. Paul changed the subject.

Another Listserv member wrote:

I just watched *Meet The Press* with Tim Russert and guest Ron Paul. Russert asked Paul about his reaction to a Mike Huckabee political commercial in which Paul misstated the above quote as "When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross."

Russert goes on to say that the Sinclair Lewis Society claims that Lewis never actually said this. Since the quote as stated by Paul is in fact not *exactly* the quote attributed to Sinclair Lewis, with the word "cross" replacing "Bible." I'm wondering if Russert is playing word games, as he often does, to suit his own agenda. Or maybe Lewis didn't say the original quote but wrote it, again making Russert technically correct but disingenuous nonetheless.

So my question to you is did Lewis ever say or write the quote that is often attributed to him? I'll repeat it again for clarity: "When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a Bible." [This is a fascinating variation on the quote.]

## S.O.S.: SLIPS OF SPEECH

A fascinating little booklet has been obtained by the Sinclair Lewis Society entitled *S.O.S.: Slips of Speech and How to Avoid Them* by Frank H. Vizetelly, Litt.D., LL.D, managing editor of the *Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary and Its Abridgments*; and author of *Essentials of English Speech*

and *Literature*. This booklet seems like something that Ted Babbitt would have ordered since on the page facing the title page is the following full page ad. Helpful hints on language will be in forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter*, including tips for George F. Babbitt. ⚡

### HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF WORTH MORE

*Through*  
APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Another man—another woman—started even with you in life, no richer, no more talented, no more ambitious. But in the years that have passed they have somehow managed to move far ahead. Why should they, apparently, have the power to get so easily the things they want while you must work so hard for all that comes to you?

#### *Scientists Have Found the Secret*

They can show you how you too can obtain the better things of life. How you can arouse the hidden powers of your mind and make them bring you more influence, a larger income, greater happiness.

### APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

*Direct Method to Attain Success*

Recognizing the need for a popular understanding of its priceless truths, an organization was founded by Mr. Warren Hilton some years ago to coordinate the principles of Psychology and apply them to every-day life—thus the Society of Applied Psychology came into being. Among the well-known men who have contributed to the Course through its supplementary booklets are George Van Ness Dearborn, M.D., Ph.D.; Smith Ely Jelliffe, M.D., Ph.D.; Mark E. Penney, Ph.D., and others.

Because of the very great value of the Society's Basic Course of Reading to the average man and woman *The Funk & Wagnalls Company* is cooperating to bring it within the means of every earnest seeker for self-betterment.

### FREE "HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR POWER OF ACHIEVEMENT"

A large illustrated descriptive circular packed with information on such topics as: Psychology Reduced to Easy Simple Language; How to Apply Psychology; Your Undiscovered Resources—Source of Will Power—How to Avoid Worry—The Ability to Read Men, etc.

Just ask, on a post card, for "How to Develop Your Power of Achievement." It will be sent by mail, FREE.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY, Publishers  
Dept. PP, 354-360 Fourth Avenue, New York

# S.O.S.

## Slips of Speech

and

## How to Avoid Them

By

**FRANK H. VIZETELLY, Litt. D., LL. D.**

*Managing Editor of the Funk & Wagnalls New  
Standard Dictionary and Its Abridgments;  
Author of Essentials of English Speech  
and Literature, etc.*



FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY  
NEW YORK and LONDON

The Cross, the Flag *continued from page 10*

If he didn't, how and/or why do you believe the quote got attributed to him in the first place?

Bill Kraemer wrote:

Last night, Lewis's fascism wrapped in the American flag quote was mentioned on the 7:00 p.m. Bill O'Reilly newscast. The story was about a Mike Huckabee campaign commercial that featured a cross in the background as he delivered his spiel.

One of O'Reilly's interviewees regarding the Huckabee story mentioned the quote, but it had a reference to a cross, as well, which the original Lewis quote did not have, as I understand.

Mitchell J. Freedman wrote to the *York County Heritage Trust* website to track down a lead. He copied the Society on the following:

A person wrote to the *USA Today* daily blog claiming to have found Sinclair Lewis's supposed quote about how fascism would come to America. The person wrote:

I did a little digging and the quote definitely came from him. In early February of 1948, Sinclair Lewis was quoted in the *Gazette and Daily*, a York, Pennsylvania periodical, as saying, "When fascism comes to the United States it will be wrapped in the American flag and will claim the name of 100-percent Americanism..."

I write to you because your website link (<http://www.yorkheritage.org/>) contains information about the editor/owner of that newspaper, J. W. Gitt, who apparently knew such luminaries as I. F. Stone, Henry Wallace, Linus Pauling, and Gifford Pinchot, among others. There is a book on the life of J.W. Gitt that sounds very interesting, I must say!

But in the meantime, my hopefully not-too-intrusive-and-time-consuming question is this: Is there a way to find that issue from "early February 1948" of the *Gazette and Daily* to see whether there is a quote from Sinclair Lewis akin to the quote above, and whether this was from an interview with Lewis? My sense is that the author or reporter in the article merely said something akin to "As Sinclair Lewis once wrote or said..." If that is the case, and there is no showing the author or reporter heard Lewis make the statement, then it is merely one more second (or more) hand hearsay that doesn't prove Lewis truly uttered the statement.

We who are members of the Sinclair Lewis Society (yes, I am a member) have been unable to find the quote in any Sinclair Lewis book. There are plenty of references to the quote around the Internet, mostly

with "and the cross" added to the quote, but the trail has so far been a dead end as to where the quote first appears and whether there is a reliable source for the quote. I have copied on this e-mail Dr. Sally Parry, who has been a leading member and officer of the Sinclair Lewis Society. Parry, an English literature professor at Illinois State University, has compiled quotes with similar sentiments in *It Can't Happen Here* and *Gideon Planish*, two of Lewis's novels, but those quotes do *not* contain most of those words strung together into the quote circling round the Internet. She is very interested in finding the source of the quote as a common question directed to her has been about the quote's authenticity.

Finding that issue of the *Gazette and Daily* could help solve the mystery—or deepen it.... [The historical society said that they would research the quotation, but would charge for it.]

Richard Lingeman:

I applaud the move. We need to nail this thing down or it will proliferate forever. Seriously, there was at my office a bio of J. W. Gitt floating around. I'll try to check it out. The York paper was a great left-leaning, very independent paper in its day, a model small journal.

David Goodman wrote:

Been following this discussion with interest. I'm afraid we're far from "the last word" on this quote. A discussion thread about the Pennsylvania newspaper says this:

[From "This Week," *New Republic*, Feb. 16, 1948: 8.]

"When fascism comes to the United States it will be wrapped in the American flag and will claim the name of 100-percent Americanism..." The York, Pennsylvania, *Gazette and Daily* thus commented two weeks ago on an appeal from the Pennsylvania wing of the Civil Air Patrol (an official arm of the US Air Force) asking industrialists and businessmen to help set up a secret spy system to engage in industrial espionage.

Read closely: This clip is *not* quoting Lewis on "when fascism comes to America..." It just appears to be a statement made in either the *New Republic* or the York newspaper.

There is an interesting chronology about how this "fascism in America" quote took on a life and attribution here: [http://shii.org/knows/Fascism\\_comes\\_wrapped\\_in\\_the\\_flag](http://shii.org/knows/Fascism_comes_wrapped_in_the_flag).

If this chronology is accurate (and it seems reasonable), the quote was invented out of hazy recollections about the spirit of what Lewis thought and said. ✍

## DEPARTMENTS

### SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

In *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* by Graham Russell Gao Hodges (Palgrave 2004), Sinclair Lewis is mentioned during a discussion of all the parties that Wong attended in the 1930s. Wong was very friendly with writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten and his wife Fania Marinoff, as were many progressive intellectuals of the time. At one of the Van Vechten parties, Wong socialized with Fredric March, Blanche Knopf, Ethel Waters, Zora Neal Hurston, and Sinclair Lewis. Wong also shared with Lewis an affection for the Algonquin Hotel, which she often stayed in while in New York.

The reader in the "Web Notes" section of the last *Newsletter* is correct in her suspicion that Dorothy Thompson is the model for Dorothy Cowell in Franz Werfel's *Höret die Stimme* (1937), translated as *Hearken unto the Voice* (1938).

Frederick Betz found confirmation in Peter Stephan Jungk's *Franz Werfel: A Life in Prague, Vienna, and Hollywood* (translated from the German, 1987), New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990, p. 283 (in a footnote to the chapter on the novel): "FW's unpublished notebook (UCLA) also contains other references to models of various minor characters: he intended to model a female journalist in the frame story after Dorothy Thompson...."

That unpublished notebook is in the Franz Werfel Collection in the Department of Special Collections in the Research Library of UCLA.

According to the footnote just above the one already cited, the frame story was apparently inspired by a novella by Irene Untermeyer-Richter (see Alma Mahler-Werfel's unpublished diary in the Mahler-Werfel Papers in the Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania), but this frame displeased Alma particularly, and, after her husband's death (in 1945), she republished his novel (1937) without the frame story, and without even mentioning that it had existed (see *Jeremias: Höret die Stimme*, 1956).

In the recently published *Journals 1952–2000*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., explains why he left the presidential space blank in the 1976 general election. He could not vote for Carter,

"a man who believes that Adam and Eve once existed and that Eve was literally made out of Adam's rib...and believes he has seen flying saucers" (423).

The longtime liberal Democrat couldn't bring himself to vote for Ford. He continues: "What a dismal election! Sinclair Lewis should have covered it: Babbitt vs. Elmer Gantry" (424).

Although Edward Hopper's paintings often seem desolate and emotionless, Michael Dirda in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes that Hopper:

has always seemed deeply, essentially American.... Ours is a nation of what Melville called "isolatoes," and our heroes are troubled pilgrims, solitaires, lost souls, and broken hearts. The darkness surrounds us. Oh, we may glad-hand at corporate barbecues and grin at family get-togethers, but in the still quiet of the empty hours, we are as anguished as Pascal confronting the silence of the stars. Emily Dickinson speaks of "my letter to the world / That never wrote to me"; F. Scott Fitzgerald reminds us that "in a real dark night of the soul, it is always three o'clock in the morning," day after day; even Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*—the very epitome of the crass American businessman—confesses that in his entire life he was never able to do anything he truly wanted. (Nov. 9, 2007: B17)

These musings on writers and Hopper's paintings are connected with the Edward Hopper show that originated in Boston, traveled to Washington, DC, and is currently in Chicago.

"The Man Who Cleaned Up the Silver Screen," a review of Thomas Doherty's *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (Columbia UP, 2007), by Dennis Drabelle of the *Washington Post* (Dec. 12, 2007: C4) is an excellent review of the man who was the chief enforcer for the Production Code Administration, and who is at:

the center of Doherty's knowledgeable, entertaining history of the Code during its heyday from 1934 to the mid-1950s....

Doherty, who teaches American studies at Brandeis University, makes too little of the ingenuity with which writers and directors got around the Code..., but until reading this book I'd never realized how

many controversial movies the Code smothered in the crib, among them a version of Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here*. *Hollywood's Censor* is a stinging portrait of a cultural strongman who made it his business to baby his fellow citizens.

On the occasion of the death of Norman Mailer, prolific American author, most famous for his World War II novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), the *Washington Post* noted (Nov. 11, 2007: A1) that Sinclair Lewis once called Mailer the "greatest writer of his generation." Mailer won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* (1968), based on his participation in the 1967 march on the Pentagon against the Vietnam War and one for *The Executioner's Song* (1979) about Gary Gilmore, the first convict to be executed in the United States in more than a decade.

Sinclair Lewis was certainly ahead of national trends when he sent Neil Kingsblood on a genealogical hunt in *Kingsblood Royal*. In Virginia Heffernan's essay, "Ancestral Allure," (*New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 13, 2008: 16+), she notes that there are now hundreds of online services that will track your genealogy, all for a price. Sites such as <http://www.thefamily-historystore.com>, <http://www.genealinks.com>, and <http://www.rootsweb.com> offer not only tracking of your background, but also souvenirs—maps, certificates, etc.

Alex Beam and Christopher Beam provided readers of the *New York Times Book Review* (Sept. 16, 2007: 31) with "Name Check," a handy-dandy guide to authors who have been confused with other authors. Among the pairs confused by readers were William Golding (Nobel Prize-winning author of *Lord of the Flies*) and William Goldman ("screenwriter extraordinaire, once confessed that he graciously accepts compliments intended for Golding") and Upton Sinclair ("muckraker/author/founder of utopian community that briefly employed Sinclair Lewis") and Sinclair Lewis ("booboisie-basher/novelist who offered a shout-out to his former boss in Nobel acceptance speech").

Even those at Harvard are vexed by the flag and cross quote. In the alumni *Harvard Magazine*, a section entitled "Chapter & Verse: Correspondence on Not-So-Famous Lost Words," Kenneth Kronenberg writes that he "seeks the definitive source for 'When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross,' attributed variously to Upton Sinclair, H. L. Mencken, and Huey Long, and to Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. (On-line searches of two texts of the novel yielded nothing, he says)" (Sept.–Oct. 2007: 32).

John Updike's new book, *Due Considerations: Essays and Criticism* (Knopf, 2007), carries "No Brakes," a reprint of Updike's review of *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* by Richard Lingeman (539–47). There are other mentions of Lewis as well, but mostly grouping him with other authors to make a point.

## SINCLAIR LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

*The American Village in a Global Setting: Selected Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference in Honor of Sinclair Lewis and Ida K. Compton*, edited by Michael E. Connaughton and Suellen Rundquist was published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing at the end of 2007. This collection contains many of the papers that were first presented at a conference with the same name that took place at St. Cloud State University in October 2005. All told, there are 31 papers included in the collection, with seven of them focusing on the work of Lewis. Here is a short summary of the articles related to Lewis.

"'This is America': Gopher Prairie in War and Peace" by Sally E. Parry examines the impact of the two world wars on Gopher Prairie and, to a lesser extent, Grand Republic, and Lewis's ambivalence about our country's participation in wars.

"Sauk Centre, Real and Ideal: The Town as Viewed in Painting, Architecture, and Literature, 1858–1903" by William Towner Morgan looks at the history of Sauk Centre and discusses some of the "parallels between Sauk Centre and its imaginative reconstruction in the mind of the author."

"The CBS *Babbitt* Documentary: Case Study in Confusing Fact with Fiction" by George Killough critiques a documentary produced by CBS in 1968 that sought to answer the question whether "the visions of two great American writers still live in this country today [the other was John Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath*]. Killough notes that producer Arthur Barron filmed the Duluth Lions Club in a variety of activities, including listening to actor Pat Hingle deliver part of *Babbitt*'s speech to the Zenith Real Estate Board, but imposed his ideas on the material so that "successful middle-class life [was seen] as anguished, unfulfilled, and gripped by the pressure of conformity."

"It Can Happen Here: Lewis and Roth as Holocaust Literature" by Joseph Edelheit, Steve Klepetar, and Chris Gordon, compares *It Can't Happen Here* and *The Plot against America* and discusses how these texts can be used in a class on Holocaust literature.

"'This Mick Agitator': Sinclair Lewis and the Irish" by Michael E. Connaughton discusses how the Irish are portrayed

in Lewis's writing, especially in *Our Mr. Wrenn*, *Main Street*, and *Babbitt*.

"Cooperation and the Architectural Landscape of Village Improvement, 1900–1925" by Diane Shaw connects the village improvement movement to the work that Carol Kennicott and others did in *Main Street*.

"Tripping over the Border: The American Wilderness Myth in Sinclair Lewis's *Mantrap*" by Jeffrey Swenson argues that "Lewis understood the myth of conquering the wilderness, subsuming the Indian, and becoming a real American. Unfortunately, he believed in the myth too strongly to effectively write about it."

There is also an essay on Lewis in another recent collection, *John Steinbeck and His Contemporaries*, edited by Stephen K. George and Barbara A. Heavilin and published by Scarecrow in 2007. "Into the Heart of Darkness: Travels with Sinclair and John," by Sally E. Parry (145–51). Parry looks at both authors as social critics, primarily in view of their late writings on race in American society, Lewis most especially with *Kingsblood Royal* and Steinbeck with *Travels with Charley* and *America and Americans*: "Throughout their writing careers but especially towards the end of their lives, both Steinbeck and Lewis—when they had little to lose but their good reputations—jeopardized them by their stiff criticism of American society. Clearly, it was courageous moral stand for both men to take."

## WEB NOTES

*Over 90,000 people have accessed the Sinclair Lewis website in the last two years since the website was revamped. Most of the queries received by the webmaster since the last Newsletter have been connected with the cross and flag quote. In general, these are covered in a separate article in the Newsletter (see page 1). Below are a sampling of some other e-mails, including one person who mistook Lewis as the author of Oil!*

You're probably aware that in today's *USA Today* there is an article on Ron Paul and the quote he attributes to Sinclair. One of the references they cite that may have association with the quote also mentions "the three golden balls." What does that mean, is a metaphor for, or is about? Thank you for your time. [The three gold balls reference is to a pawn shop. In earlier days, if a person hung the three gold balls outside a shop window, even illiterates would know that they could pawn goods there.]

I am a literary researcher in China. I am interested in Sinclair Lewis, one of the greatest novelists in America, and have chosen Lewis as my researching subject. I am collecting Lewis's material for my doctoral dissertation now. Lewis is not as popular in China as other American Nobel Literary Prize-winners, so researching material about Lewis is limited. I would be grateful if you could provide me with some information about Lewis.

I read several years ago that Lewis was giving an interview just before receiving the Nobel Prize. He was asked to give some "solutions for society's ills that he had documented so well in his writing." Lewis is said to have responded, "not only do I not have any solutions, I don't even care." Can you verify?

I am coteaching an honors class here at Arkansas State University on the 1920s (with a colleague in the English Department) and working hard on my *Babbitt* lecture today. I wanted to tell you that I love your website and have gleaned much interesting, useful and helpful information from it.... I was wondering if you have ever considered posting an FAQ about sales figures from Lewis's books. I think that would be really interesting, and, from what I understand, he sold very well. Thank you again for your wonderful website.

And here's a quotation for you that I found in Dorothy Canfield's 1939 novel *Seasoned Timber*. (As you probably know, Dorothy Canfield's 1921 novel *The Brimming Cup* was second on the bestseller list for that year, after *Main Street*.) Here, Canfield's hero, a private school headmaster from Vermont, is listening to and inwardly pondering the bloviations of a wealthy trustee of the school: "Really Sinclair Lewis is a phonograph record! When you read him, you think he's laying it on too thick. Not at all. He doesn't exaggerate a hair."

Do you happen to know of a Sinclair Lewis novel or short story that features some version of a fountain of youth in the narrative through line? The only other notable feature I recall is that the main character wears bottle-green glasses. Some years ago I read an oblique reference to this work. Unfortunately, I can't recall where I read or heard about it. Recently I've been trying to find other references to this work using the available tools (*Google*, etc.), but I haven't been able to uncover anything. I'm hoping you or someone at the society might happen to know the title. [Board member Todd Stanley, who has studied the short stories at length, could not recall any Lewis story with this theme.]

I understand that Sinclair Lewis wrote a novel (or a book) entitled *Oil Men*. I have tried locating a copy to no avail. Can

you please confirm to me that he did or did not write a book on that subject, and if so, where I might find a copy?

Please ignore my earlier message about Sinclair Lewis and his *Oil!* I found the book on *Amazon*, but only after I got the correct title from your website. My interest in the book was sparked by the film *Let There Be Blood* [The person was e-mailed to confirm that the author of *Oil!* was Upton Sinclair.]

Recently, I posted to the Listserv about *Window on Main Street*, a failed TV series based partly on the writings of Sinclair Lewis. It would have starred Robert Young, who starred in *Father Knows Best* and *Marcus Wellby*. I thought someone may want to look into it and research it for an article. Many Lewis scholars and people who know his work well are unfamiliar with *Window on Main Street*. I saw and was very taken by the first (pilot) episode and was disappointed when it was discontinued. I do know from those who lived in small towns and who were roughly contemporaries of Lewis that in most small towns, there were "a whole lot of layers of nonsense going on."

I am attaching a copy of a letter Mr. Lewis wrote in response to a letter he received from a Mrs. Helen Satterlee sometime in 1931 concerning some sort of controversy at the time (are you still with me?) about the title *Main Street*. While Mr. Lewis's thoughtful reply is probably of no great literary moment, it is something Mrs. Satterlee (my late mother-in-law) treasured among other letters, and something that has provoked a deep curiosity on my part for many years.

The curiosity is: What was the content of the letter she wrote?

I am not sure whether, among what must be a voluminous horde of manuscripts, papers, and letters-from-luminaries-of-the-day, the Sinclair Lewis Society might not still have a copy of that letter. I am equally unsure of whether it would be worth your while to go searching for it, what with your workload, studies, and other things of true importance.

Still, if you could find it in your heart (or schedule) to see if you have it and send me a scan, I will be your best friend for life. Well...

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

To simplify things, I'd appreciate one of three replies:

1. We're on it.
2. No chance.
3. Get lost.

The letter is from Twin Farms, dated June 19, 1931 and reads:

Dear Mrs. Satterlee:

Thank you very much indeed for sending me the

clipping and the account of the controversy over the name of Main Street, of which I had known nothing whatever. My chief objection to that name in any town is the practical one that it throws away the chance to give a distinctive and memorable name—like Broadway, Riverside Drive, Pennsylvania, or Peachtree Avenue—or it might be just plain Sludge Way, and yet be distinctive and interesting.

Sincerely yours,

Sinclair Lewis (a signature)

[I rarely write real short replies to questions about Lewis. Thank you for a copy of the letter. I don't know offhand what controversy Lewis is referring to, especially a decade after *Main Street* was published. There were a number of people who claimed to have used the term prior to Lewis and there were also a number of satires about it, including my favorite, *Ptomaine Street*, which was a real novel.

Would that your description of my office and the Sinclair Lewis Society accurate. I teach and am associate dean at Illinois State University and manage the affairs of the society from my office. I have a few odd pieces signed by Lewis, and all of his novels but one, but not very much correspondence. The holdings of Lewis are in about four different places, and I expect that the answer to your question lies in one of them. Lewis left most of his papers to his alma mater, Yale University, and there are boxes and boxes of material there, including Christmas cards that he was sent. Syracuse University also has holdings, especially from the late 1920s to early 1940s, because that is where his second wife Dorothy Thompson went to school. Since the date is 1931 that is a possibility. The University of Texas at Austin has Lewis material, but it's earlier stuff, connected with his first wife Grace Hegger. And, finally, the Minnesota Historical Society has quite a collection of Lewis material and might know the answer to the controversy even if they don't have the letter that your mother-in-law sent.

This may be a longer reply than you had in mind, but I hope it helps.]

## SAUK CENTRE NEWS

As you're reading this, Sauk Centre will be gearing up for the 38th Annual Sinclair Lewis Days in July 2008. Joyce Lyng graciously provided the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* with information about the 2007 Sinclair Lewis Days, including a



copy of the official *Gopher Prairie Gazette* and a program from the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. The *Gazette* published a story on Sinclair Lewis, an article on the twentieth anniversary of the Sauk Centre Area Historical Society, and an article on *Sauk Centre: The Story of a Frontier Town* by Ivy Hildebrand, a book that focuses on the first fifty years of Sauk Centre, 1855–1905.

The events at Sinclair Lewis Days 2007 included the Meet the Ms. Sauk Centre Candidates Waffle Breakfast; Sinclair Lewis Days Treasure Hunt; Softball, Horseshoe, and Girls Team Basketball tournaments; Historical Society Open House/History Mystery; Jimmy's Pizza Third Annual Turtle Races; Kiddie Parade; Sauk Centre Seniors' Ice Cream Social; fireworks; 36th Annual Collectibles/Craft/Miscellaneous Show/Sale; the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade; Sinclair Lewis Days Street Dance; and a pie social.

The Miss Sauk Centre Pageant included a group production number, talent productions, an evening gown competition, the 2006 Royalty Farewell, and the Crowning of the 2007 Royalty. The contestants were Nicole Brinkman, Kirsten Bromenshenkel, Jill Felling, Jill Gruber, Abby Heinze, Amber Indieke, Samantha Miller, Monique Schaeffer, Amanda Thorson, and Cassondra Winters. Jill Gruber, who performed a comedy routine, and Cassondra Winters, who danced to the song "Stand-Out," were named princesses and Jill Felling, who both played the piano and danced, was crowned queen. Among the other talents displayed by the contestants were singing, lyrical dancing, poem recitation, cooking, and a pogo-stick routine.

The 18th Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference was held October 13, 2007 in Sauk Centre. This year's conference featured a world famous young adult novelist, a historical nonfiction author, a cross-genre novelist, and a self-published teenaged author. The keynote speaker, Gary Paulsen, spoke "On Writing." Paulsen's life has been an interesting one as he has been a farm worker, ranch hand, truck driver, construction worker, engineer, satellite technician, and sailor before becoming a writer. He has written over 175 books and more than two hundred articles and short stories for children and adults. Three of his novels, *Hatchet*, *Dogsong*, and *The Winter Room*, were Newberry Honor Books. His most recent novels are *The Legend of Bass Reeves* and *Lawn Boy*.

There were three other speakers. John Koblas, who spoke on "Writing History for Print and TV," is known to Lewis scholars for his writings on Sinclair Lewis. His current writing specialties are on outlaws, Civil War history, and Native American history. He is considered the foremost authority on the James-Younger Gang's exploits in Minnesota. Lois Greiman discussed how to span writing genres. She has written mysteries, historical romances, and children's stories, and talked about not only how to switch writing gears, but how to incorporate various elements into any novel, and how to manage one's time to "actually get a finished book to the editors." Victoria Kasten is a 16-year-old young writer who wrote her first book, *Mighty Stallion*, at the age of 12. She has since published three more books in the *Mighty Stallion* series, two of which are in their second printing. She spoke on character development at the conference and has taught at several Young Writer conferences.

---

—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.]



## COLLECTOR'S CORNER

**Between the Covers Rare Books, Inc.**  
35 West Maple Avenue, Merchantville, NJ 08109  
Phone: (856) 665-2284 Fax: (856) 665-3639  
Email: mail@betweenthecovers.com  
www.betweenthecovers.com

CATALOGUE 136:  
MODERN FIRSTS & NEW ARRIVALS

101. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921. \$750.

Twenty-first printing, published six months after the first printing. Rear hinge slightly tender, still a nice and bright, near fine copy in a nice, very good plus dust wrapper with a split at the bottom of the front spine fold. Lewis's first major success, a realistic portrayal of Midwestern life, and the first of several important novels for which he became the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. A relatively early jacketed copy, and scarce thus. The first printing in original jacket is a rarity.

**Robert Dagg Rare Books**

3288 21st Street, #176,  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
Phone: (415) 821-2825  
Email: mail@daggrarebooks.com

LABOR DAY MISCELLANY 2007

104. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. \$450.

First edition. Later printing with imperfect folio on page 54. Very good to near fine copy in a fine, as new dust jacket from a later, but early printing (after the publisher had changed to Harcourt, Brace & Company).

141. —. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1924. \$300.

Photoplay edition. Illustrated with scenes from the *Photoplay*. Fine copy with cloth particularly bright and clean, in a fine bright dust jacket with one minor scrape to rear panel. Beautiful copy of this edition, which retains the artwork of the original printing.

**Joseph the Provider Books Bought & Sold**

P.O. Box 90  
Santa Barbara, CA 93102  
Phone: (805) 683-2603  
Email: joepro@silcom.com

LIST 65

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

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

153. —. "A Letter to Critics." Brattleboro: American Booksellers Association, 1931. \$1000.

Three-column broadside. Elephant folio. One of a total edition of 375 copies printed by the Stephen Daye Press. Designed by Vrest Orton. These broadsides were given away and few seem to have survived. Included is a letter from Lewis (TLS dated October 5, 1931) in which he grants the Stanford University Press permission to reprint the broadside. It is unlikely that such an edition came to pass because Lewis bibliographer Harvey Taylor was unable to locate a copy and Lewis asks specifically in his letter that five copies be sent to Taylor. A fine copy (with only the very slightest of creasing) in a specially designed cloth portfolio. Rare.

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

First edition. This copy bears the author's personal presentation

inscription on the dedication page to newspaper columnist Leonard Lyons and his wife. Above the dedication Lewis has written "To Len & Sylvia" and below it "Red / Sinclair Lewis." This novel is dedicated to drama critic Cornelius Traeger. The placement of the inscription on the dedication page and the lack of any added sentiments suggests that Lewis may have wanted to convey to this critic a similar sense of gratitude for his support (there were certainly many critics in Lewis's later career who were not in his camp). There is glue residue to front pastedown and endpaper, probably from a clipping (a book review?) or letter that was once attached, but this is otherwise a fine, fresh copy in a near-fine dust jacket.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Ralph Sipper Books Bought and Sold**

10 West Micheltorena Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Phone: (805) 962-2141 Fax: (805) 966-5057  
Email: ralphsipperbooks@cox.net

474. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith* as published in *The Designer and Woman's Magazine*, June 1924 to April 1925. \$1000.

Pictorial wrappers. These 11 issues of the magazine serialize *Arrowsmith* in its entirety—this classic novel's first appearance in print. In overall fine condition.

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

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

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

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

477. —. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$6500.

First edition. Walter Huston memorably conveyed the world-weariness of the title character in the 1936 William Wyler movie. Laid into this copy is a 1946 TLS from Huston to Laurence Olivier in which he thanks Olivier for "inviting me to the showing of 'Henry V.' It took great courage to make this picture and Shakespeare as interpreted in this production will be understood by the masses. It is as modern as today's newspaper; a truly great achievement beyond criticism; the finest acting I have ever seen in any picture." A fine, fresh copy in a fine, first issue dust jacket.

### James Pepper Rare Books, Inc.

3463 State Street, Suite 271  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Phone: (805) 963-1025 Fax: (805) 966-9737

Email: pepbooks@aol.com  
JamesPepperBooks.com

#### CATALOGUE 160

87. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. Illustrated with scenes from the Motion Picture. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931. \$1500.

First edition thus. Signed by the author, Sinclair Lewis, on the flyleaf. *Photoplay* edition issued to coincide with the release of the early sound film directed by the great John Ford and starring Ronald Colman, Helen Hayes, and Myrna Loy. A little darkening to gutters as usual, else very good in a very good dust jacket. The front panel of the jacket shows a striking color painting of a pensive Colman staring at his laboratory equipment and seeing the face of Hayes in a beaker. One of the more striking photoplay dust jackets, and very rare signed by the author.

### Peter L. Stern & Co., Inc.

55 Temple Place  
Boston, MA 02111

Phone: (617) 542-2376 Fax: (617) 542-3263

Email: psbook@aol.com  
info@sternrarebooks.com

#### JANUARY 2008

232. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. \$3500.

First edition; first binding. A fine copy in a dust jacket with some tiny chips and tears and very light soiling. A film adaptation wasn't made for 33 years, until the 1960 production of the same title, which starred Burt Lancaster and Jean Simmons. This delay allowed a more realistic version than might have been possible nearer publication. It might be interesting to see it made yet

again, set in the present when the Gantrys have moved indoors to mega-churches and fly around in jets to praise the Lord and pass the hat.

233. —. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$2000.

First edition; trade issue (there was an advance issue bound in orange cloth). A fine, unusually fresh copy in a similar first printing dust jacket with just a couple of minute nicks. An exceptional example. Supposedly, 50,000 copies of the first edition were printed, but, given that it was issued on the eve of the Depression, it seems very possible that this number might not have been produced or issued, or perhaps not all were sold.

234. —. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House, 1947. \$375.

First edition. One of 1050 numbered copies, signed by Lewis. A fine copy in the publisher's slipcase, which is cracked and has some wear.

#### FALL 2007

232. Sherman, Stuart P. *The Significance of Sinclair Lewis*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. \$35.

First edition; original wrappers; very good.

*Bob and Peggie Dobson of Blackpool are British booksellers who e-mailed the Sinclair Lewis Society with some of the books they have for sale. They can be reached at peggie@peggiedobson.wanadoo.co.uk.*

Lewis, Sinclair. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House, 1945. £10. First printing.

—. *Kingsblood Royal*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1948. £10. First U. K. printing.

[—]. *The Man from Main Street: A Sinclair Lewis Reader. Selected Essays and Other Writings, 1904–1950*, edited by Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. £8.

Lundquist, James. *Sinclair Lewis*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973. £8. Very good in torn dust wrapper.

Schorer, Mark. *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961. £8. Torn dust wrapper.

Sheehan, Vincent. *Dorothy and Red*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1964. £8.

Smith, Harrison, ed. *From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Sinclair Lewis 1919–30*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952. £10. Very good dust wrapper and cellophane.

# Join Today...

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY.

MEMBERS RECEIVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE *SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER*.

PLEASE CHOOSE A CATEGORY BELOW:

A.  \$50<sup>00</sup> sustaining member

C.  \$10<sup>00</sup> individual member

B.  \$15<sup>00</sup> family/joint membership

D.  \$5<sup>00</sup> student/retiree membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Sinclair Lewis Society  
4240/Dept. of English  
Illinois State University  
Normal, IL 61790-4240