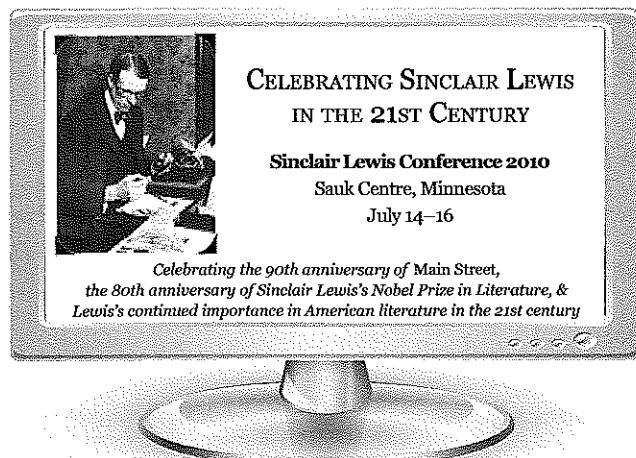


The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME EIGHTEEN, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 2010



SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2010: CELEBRATING LEWIS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be hosting a conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, on July 14-16, 2010 in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation. This conference celebrates the 90th anniversary of the publication of *Main Street*, the 80th anniversary of Sinclair Lewis being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Lewis's continued importance in American literature in the 21st century. The conference will be held in conjunction with Sauk Centre's annual Sinclair Lewis Days. Among the special events will be a world premiere of a new play, *Kingsblood*, by D. J. Jones, based on Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*. This will be a staged reading directed by Marit Elliot. There will also be a variety of panels on Lewis's work, a showing of the feature film *Ann Vickers*, based on the first novel Lewis wrote after receiving the Nobel Prize, and tours of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home and the First Congregational Church, which Lewis attended with his family. The keynote speaker will be James Hutchisson, author of *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920-1930*, speaking on "Carol Kennicott's

— Sinclair Lewis Conference continued on page 10

"I REALLY HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE INDIAN": SINCLAIR LEWIS VISITS NEW MEXICO IN 1926

Gary Scharnhorst
University of New Mexico

From January through March 1926, prior to writing *Elmer Gantry*, Sinclair Lewis toured the southwestern U.S. The trip has been mentioned in passing in the Lewis biographies by Mark Schorer and Richard Lingeman, but I believe a more detailed chronicle of it helps to explain two or three passages in Lewis's novel that have otherwise elicited no comment.

Lewis left New York alone by train for Kansas City in mid-January 1926. After a lecture tour in Kansas and a side-trip to Fort Worth to see J. Frank Norris, a prominent Baptist minister, he arrived in Santa Fe on January 30 and registered at the most luxurious hotel in the city, La Fonda, a Harvey House on the central plaza. The next day he toured "points of interest around Santa Fe as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Huey," local art patrons, and that evening he was hosted by his old friend Mary Austin at a dinner in her home ("People," Feb. 1).¹ He was also interviewed by the city editor of the Santa Fe *New Mexican*, Brian Boru Dunne (1878-1962).

Dunne conceded that he "had to fight to get an interview with Lewis as he tried to rest at La Fonda, after a strenuous speech-making tour through Kansas. There were poets and writers who live all the way from Boston to Alcalde [a village about thirty miles north of Santa Fe] struggling to see him. And he had a sheaf of letters offering him motor trips to the Indian pueblos." But as a former journalist, Lewis took the time to speak with Dunne and, after an hour, Lewis concluded by remarking, "I don't think I've said anything worthwhile; better not print it!" The next morning, when Dunne told Lewis

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The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

Editor: Sally E. Parry
Publications Unit Director: Tara Reeser
Production Director: Sarah Haberstich
Assistants and Interns: Quintus Havis

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

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SINCLAIR LEWIS INDUCTED INTO THE MINNESOTA WRITERS HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2009

The recently established Minnesota Writers Hall of Fame has named its first class of inductees. Sinclair Lewis is one of the ten in this illustrious group. The other members of this initial class are John Berryman, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Wanda Gág, Maud Hart Lovelace, Sigurd F. Olson, J. F. Powers, Charles M. Schulz, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and August Wilson.

Lewis's impact and influence are described as follows:

The first American to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, Lewis remains influential as both a Minnesotan and American writer. His work is often praised for its commentary on social cultures and business practices of the 1920s and 1930s, and usually focuses on the average American citizen, plain speech, and common life. His first novel, *Hike and the Aeroplane*, was published in 1912 under the pseudonym Tom Graham, but it wasn't until 1920 that Lewis gained critical success with *Main Street*. Set in the fictional town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, *Main Street* uses satire, realism, and intricate details to portray small-town life. Many of his works, including *Babbitt* in 1922, employ the same techniques. In addition to penning several novels, many of Lewis's works were turned into plays, movies, or television show episodes. He gained notoriety in 1925 when he turned down the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Arrowsmith*. Five years later, when he accepted the Nobel Prize in Literature, he told the Nobel Society (as printed in Les Prix Nobel):

[M]y life...has been a rather humdrum chronicle of much reading, constant writing, undistinguished travel à la tripper, and several years of comfortable servitude as an editor. The fact is that my

foreign travelling has been a quite uninspired recreation, a flight from reality. My real travelling has been sitting in Pullman smoking cars, in a Minnesota village, on a Vermont farm, in a hotel in Kansas City or Savannah, listening to the normal daily drone of what are to me the most fascinating and exotic people in the world—the Average Citizens of the United States, with their friendliness to strangers and their rough teasing, their passion for material advancement and their shy idealism, their interest in all the world and their boastful provincialism—the intricate complexities which an American novelist is privileged to portray.

His short biography reads as follows:

Although he would eventually travel the world, it was to the Midwestern plains Sinclair Lewis would return most often in his fictional works. Born Harry Sinclair Lewis in Sauk Centre, Minnesota in 1885, Lewis left for an Ohio prep school in 1902. He later attended Yale University, spent a summer in Panama and worked at Helicon Hall, novelist and social critic Upton Sinclair's experimental colony of people rejecting modern society. Upon graduating from Yale in 1908, Lewis moved to New York to work various publishing jobs, and later to Washington D.C. to begin in earnest his career as a writer, which would prove to be prolific. He married twice, divorced twice and had two sons. Following struggles with alcoholism, Lewis died in Rome in 1951.

To see the full site, go to www.mnwritershalloffame.com. ↵

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.

Thanks to the following for contributing to the newsletter: Frederick Betz, Ted Fleener, Roger Forseth, Jackie Koenig, William Kraemer, Joyce Lyng, Roberta Parry, Gary Scharnhorst, Dave Simpkins, Brian Simpson, Ed Tant, and Emily Wooster.

Sinclair Lewis Visits New Mexico *continued from page 1*

“what he had said” the night before, the novelist exclaimed, “My heaven, don’t print that—it is criminally libelous!” Then, seated in silk pajamas, and talking loud to drown the roar of the running waters about to provide him a tub bath, the popular novelist deleted a few words and said with a smile: “All right, you may quote me if you wish.”

The first part of the interview was predictable boiler-plate:

“Why in the devil did Carol, of *Main Street*, marry Dr. Kennicott?” I asked.

“She was tired on the job—librarian,” said Lewis. “Any woman approaching 30 years of age, and tired on the job, can be easily married.”

“Why do you allow Carol to speed along through your book as a bright woman only to collapse as a darn fool toward the end?” was the next question.

“She was a darn fool” snapped Lewis, “a darn fool to go back to that town.”

Then Dunne turned to Lewis’s impressions of the local culture and the novelist was characteristically controversial if not iconoclastic. Like the Canadian Indian guides he depicted in *Mantrap* (1926) who “looked like undersized Sicilians who had been digging a sewer” (37), Lewis denigrated the Indians he had seen in the Southwest:

“I hear you are keenly interested in the Indians?” I remarked.

“Not at all,” snapped Lewis. “The Indian let alone in his pueblo may be all right but I hear a lot of people have been slobbering over the Indians in various parts of the country and that you are getting a ‘patented Indian’ out here. I really have no interest in the Indian; I feel the Indian has added nothing to American life that can interest me. Yes, I do find the Germans in Germany interesting; also the Italians in Italy, and the French in France; and the people of some other European countries which have sent so many emigrants to America.”

Lewis’s comment may help explain a pair of condescending

references to Indians in *Elmer Gantry*. He alludes in chapter 26 to two paintings in the Zenith Athletic Club of “young Indian maidens of Lithuanian origin sitting in native costumes, which gave free play to their legs, under a rugged pine-tree against a background of extremely high mountains” (346) and in chapter 27 to Elmer’s obligation, “unworthy of his powers of social decoration, of preparing a short clever talk on missions among the Digger Indians” (364). Lewis’s implication is that Indians were either frauds or degenerates.

Dunne then turned the interview with Lewis to *Main Street* and the controversy it had provoked:

“You poke a lot of fun at the small town life,” I said, to change the subject. “But is it not true that the people of small towns of 10,000 and 15,000 population in America get more out of life than the big city resident?”

“That may be true,” admitted the novelist.

Dunne asked Lewis whether it was also true that he had been threatened with “assassination” if he revisited the Midwest after the publication of *Main Street*—a persistent rumor—and he denied it: “That story is a fake.” In fact, Lewis had visited Sauk Centre six months earlier although, as he allowed, “I do not think I could make a living in that town today” except perhaps as a writer. “If you want to live on little and do what you want, be a writer,” he insisted to Dunne. Lewis added that his first five novels paid him poorly, but that he regarded *Arrowsmith* as his best book and he attributed his commercial success to his “broad audience.”

To his surprise, Lewis had learned, probably from Austin, that the New Age philosophy of George Gurdjieff (1866?–1949) and his editor A. R. Orage (1873–1934) had adherents in Santa Fe. “Gurdjieff lived near Paris” in Fountainbleau, Lewis remembered, where he had established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. He had “started a cult, some kind of mental science, with a great use of esoteric terms,” whereas:

——— Sinclair Lewis Visits New Mexico *continued on page 6*

NEW MEMBERS

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

Ben Ballengee
Edmond, OK

Ed Tant
Athens, GA

RETURN TO ZENITH

Michael Goodell has written an intriguing novel, *Zenith Rising*, which imagines what Zenith would be like in the present day. He pictures Zenith as an industrial city that has seen better times and wonders if what is left is worth saving.

Sinclair Lewis Society member Ann Lawrence writes:

My 13-year-old niece and I discussed this book about the economic desolation of a city called Zenith and a man called Narrows. She was very interested in both names. Narrows Burton is the main character of the novel who is still interested in his ex-wife, wealthy Cindy Herringbone. The villain is Rob Patterson, a bitter self-destructive businessman who was loved and respected by all, except those who knew him.

The prestigious Zenith Country Club and Zenith Athletic Club is where the action happens. Burton knows the most wealthy and influential people in town but is also intrigued by the gang culture on the other side of town and the greed of both classes. Goodell can string words together and can make one instantly

recall one's own memories of food, weather, beauty, desire, and dreams. Good writing.

What would a 20th-century American novelist like Sinclair Lewis make of this story? I don't know but he would certainly be interested in the third generation of *Babbitt*. Read it and see.

Amazon.com describes it as follows:

The city of Zenith is dying, and only Narrows Burton seems to care. He is trying to rebuild the city, one house at a time, changing lives and fortunes along the way. There's nothing funny about Narrows, except his name. That's why everyone calls him Burt. Everyone except his ex-wife, Cindy, who insists on calling him Narrows. She also says he's "never, ever, done a single thing wrong." If that's the case, why is the Grasslands Alliance trying to destroy his building project? Why are they rioting at City Hall? Why is

Return to Zenith continued on page 10

AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON'S LIFE BECOMES A MUSICAL

Kathie Lee Gifford has written a musical, *Saving Aimee*, with music by David Pomeranz and David Friedman. It premiered at the Signature Theater in Virginia in 2007 and concerns the life and times of Aimee Semple McPherson, who served as the source for Sharon Falconer in Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*.

McPherson was an incredibly popular and controversial tent preacher and healer who eventually preached on Broadway. Born in 1890, she converted to Pentecostalism in 1908, the same year she first started speaking in tongues and married Irish-born preacher Robert James Semple. Two years later she preached for the first time, to an audience of 15,000 at the Victoria and Albert Hall in London. She traveled throughout the United States preaching and performing healings, most often wearing her signature white maid's dress and secondhand military cape. By 1920, the *Washington Post* reported that over 1,000 crippled and sick people were healed by her during a three-week preaching visit.

In 1922, McPherson started preaching on the radio. She enjoyed this foray into the new medium so much that she built her own religious broadcasting station in 1924 and became

the first woman granted a commercial license by the FCC. In 1923, she opened her own Angelus Temple in Los Angeles which seated 5,300 and included nurseries, a Sunday school, an employment program for ex-cons, and a prayer tower. In 1931, Charlie Chaplin secretly designed a proscenium arch for the Temple for religious theater performances.

McPherson became quite notorious in 1926 when she was allegedly abducted for 32 days and brought to Mexico by three people named Steve, Jack, and Mexicali Rose. Nothing was ever proven although her reputation suffered. To repair it, she toured in a show called *The Story of My Life* and later preached on Broadway and the vaudeville circuit. She taught at L.I.F.E. College in the early 1940s and helped in the war effort, selling over \$150,000 worth of war bonds in New York in a single hour on June 21, 1942. She died in 1944 of an overdose of barbiturates and 60,000 people paid homage to her at her visitation. She is buried in Forest Lawn Memorial Park.

For more information on this fascinating woman, see *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson* by Daniel Mark Epstein (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993).

✍

Sinclair Lewis Visits New Mexico *continued from page 4*

Orage, an Englishman, holds forth in New York. He is an exponent of the Gurdjieff philosophy. In my opinion, those philosophers are self-deceived. Orage teaches physical alertness, and dances and dancers. The best dancing I saw at Orage's school was by young Russians. You ought to see the others floundering around. And the disciples? I would call them a group of people who are disinclined to face the world.

Lewis ridiculed the disciples without naming them—"Several rich women have taken up the Gurdjieff-Orage brand of mental culture and are washing dishes for a change of excitement," so he said with a laugh. No doubt he had in mind such figures as Katherine Mansfield, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and Olga de Hartmann. Santa Fe, the "city different," was simply a different type of Gopher Prairie. Finally, Dunne asked what Lewis thought of H. L. Mencken. "He is a great boy," Lewis replied.

A day or two later, Austin took Lewis to a buffalo dance, most likely at the San Ildefonso pueblo about twenty miles northwest of Santa Fe. He regarded the performance as a "damned good spectacle," though the comment should not be construed as praise. Lewis dismissed such "spectacles" staged for tourists by "patented Indians" for the money. All in all, he found Santa Fe "rather cold" and inhospitable in early February. He departed by train on the fourth for San Francisco, as he wrote Alfred Harcourt, to buy a car and "work back...so as to see this country again in warmer weather" (*From Main Street to Stockholm* 193).²

In California, Lewis bought a Buick, was joined by his wife Grace Hegger Lewis, and from February until late March, accompanied by a small entourage including a chef, they explored California and southern Arizona. They spent the first week of March in Tucson ("Sinclair Lewis is Coming to Phoenix"), then slipped across the border into southern New Mexico. Grace asked the editor of the weekly newspaper in Lordsburg whether "the white children and Indians go to the same school here" and she "laughed heartily" when he told her "there were no Indian children in the Lordsburg schools" ("Main Street' Author Visits Liberal Editor"). They attended tribal schools or the Indian school in Albuquerque. More evidence, apparently, that "real" rather than "patented" Indians were nowhere to be found.

After a tour of the Apache Trail east of Phoenix, the Lewises left their entourage behind on March 24 and headed for Santa Fe, normally a mere three-day drive along dirt-packed roads. The first day they reached Williams, Arizona, 180 miles north of Phoenix. However, "the next day we hit trouble," as Lewis wrote his father. They had hoped to reach Gallup, New

Mexico, the second day, on the highway soon to be designated U.S. Route 66. Instead, "it began to rain like the devil, with a cold wind," and it was still "raining so hard that when at dusk we came to the little Indian trading post at Navajo," some 160 miles east of Williams but 55 miles west of Gallup, "and we found that we could get some kind of a room for the night, we put up there" (*Selected Letters of Sinclair Lewis* 33).

The next day was filled with even more travail. First they encountered washboard roads across the border in New Mexico; next:

a fierce snow storm; then about 80 miles of slippery adobe roads, wet from recently melting snow. (Of course we were up at an altitude varying from 5000 to 7000 feet.) So slippery were the roads that we could make only about 15 miles an hour, and even then we were constantly starting to skid. We had hoped to make Albuquerque³ for the night, but at twilight we were still about 35 miles away. Well, says we, we'll make Los Lunas, anyway, and there is a fair hotel there they say. And we turned on the lights—only they didn't turn! (Since then, I have found that the trouble was that a certain spring controlling the lights had a little dust on it.) There we were, in a welter of mud, at dark (for the rising moon, however romantic, didn't give enough light to traverse the ruts in muddy roads) and we had been told there was nothing whatever in the way of shelter for at least 25 miles. It looked very much like sleeping in the car beside the road, and it was by now piercing cold. We kept going as long as we could, and came to the lights of another tiny Indian trading post [at Correo]. The Mexican owner admitted that he had cottages for tourists. Our cottage proved to be a tent, with wooden floor, and ancient cook stove, a bed without mattress or bedclothes, one straight chair, and nothing else whatever. We cajoled the Mexican wife of the owner of the joint into digging up a mattress, some clean sheets, one pillow, and couple of comforters, and into cooking some eggs for us for supper, and we went to bed at 8:30. Gawd how cold that night was! The comforters just stretched across the bed, no selvage to tuck in, and the cold air (it must have been about freezing) kept sliding in; so that though we went to bed with sweaters and most of our clothes on, we just about kept from freezing all night. In the morning the car was covered with frost, and we had one deuce of a time starting it. But we drove on, through Albuquerque, at last leaving the mud which pursued us up the 18 miles

— Sinclair Lewis Visits New Mexico *continued on page 8*

LEWIS IN FICTION WRITERS ON FICTION WRITING

In the early 1920s, magazine editor Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, author of *Fundamentals of Fiction Writing*, decided that “There have been hosts of books, classes and correspondence courses claiming to teach the writing of fiction, but in all but a handful of cases these teachers have been eminently unqualified for the work” (1). Of the remaining writers, most have written as though whatever was good for them as writers was good for everyone else. Hoffmann decided he would do something different. “But here is a book written not by an author of negligible standing, an editor who can not create, a college professor speaking from the outside, or any other theorist whatsoever, but by the successful writers themselves, each telling in detail his own processes of creation” (2).

He contacted 116 writers and sent each of them a questionnaire. The result, *Fiction Writers on Fiction Writing: Advice, Opinions and a Statement of Their Own Working Methods by More Than One Hundred Authors* was published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1923. The authors he surveyed include many who are no longer well known, even to the scholar, such as Romaine H. Lowdermilk and Eugene Manlove Rhodes, but there are some, such as Samuel Hopkins Adams, Algernon Blackwood, Louise Closser Hale, Joseph Hergesheimer, L. M. Montgomery, Kathleen Norris, Booth Tarkington, and Ben Ames Williams, whose writing is still enjoyed. Also among this company was Sinclair Lewis, who with his recent best-sellers of *Main Street* and *Babbitt* was probably considered a major catch for this publication. Hoffman, who had served as editor for such publications as *Adventure*, *Romance*, *Delineator*, *Smart Set*, and *Transatlantic Tales*, probably first knew Lewis as a translator for *Transatlantic Tales*.

In the foreword, Hoffmann writes that these authors include “the tyro and the writer of life-long experience, those little known along with our best and our most popular. There are those who write avowedly for money returns alone; those who make literary excellence their single goal. They come to authorship by various roads from all walks in life, from England as well as America. They run the whole gamut of difference in schooling, method, aim, ability, experience and success” (4–5). Hoffmann’s goal was to encourage writers to break out of the formulaic way of writing that was encouraged by other books and teachers, and let writers speak for themselves. The result is a fascinating look at the way writers responded to twelve general questions about story, character, technique, and narrative, much of which is still apropos today.

Included here are the responses of Sinclair Lewis, who was quite terse and probably not the most helpful respondent.

However, they do give some insight into his writing process.

Question I: What is the genesis of a story with you—does it grow from an incident, a character, a trait of character, a situation, setting, a title, or what? That is, what do you mean by an idea for a story?

Sinclair Lewis: Varies. Usually from character.

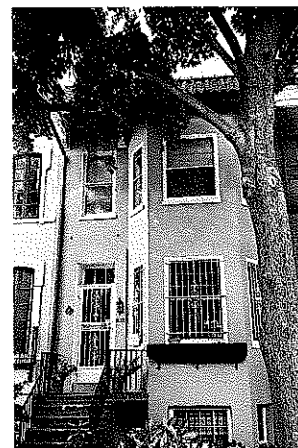
Question II: Do you map it out in advance, or do you start with, say, a character or situation, and let the story tell itself as you write? Do you write it in pieces to be joined together, or straightaway as a whole? Is the ending clearly in mind when you begin? To what extent do you revise?

Sinclair Lewis: Map it out in advance. Straightaway as a whole. I revise enormously—five or six times with great care.

Question III: 1. When you read a story to what extent does your imagination reproduce the story-world of the author—do you actually see in your imagination all the characters, action and setting just as if you were looking at an actual scene? Do you actually hear all sounds described, mentioned and inferred, just as if there were real sounds? Do you taste the flavors in a story, so really that your mouth literally waters to a pleasant one? How real does your imagination make the smells in a story you read? Does your imagination reproduce the sense of touch—of rough or smooth contact, hard or gentle impact or pressure, etc.? Does your imagination make you feel actual physical pain corresponding, though in a slighter degree, to pain presented in a story? Of course you get an intelligent idea from any such mention, but in which of the above cases does your imagination produce the same results on your senses as do the actual stimuli themselves? 2. If you can really “see things with your eyes shut,” what limitations? Are the pictures you see colored or more in black and white? Are details distinct or blurred?

Sinclair Lewis: My imagination reproduces thus occasionally. In colors, details distinct. Less trouble with solid geometry. A mere concept will set me to reproducing just as vividly. No stock pictures. Do not resent abundant images. Imagination is more active in writing than in reading.

Question IV: When you write do you center your mind on the story itself or do you constantly have your readers in mind? In revising?



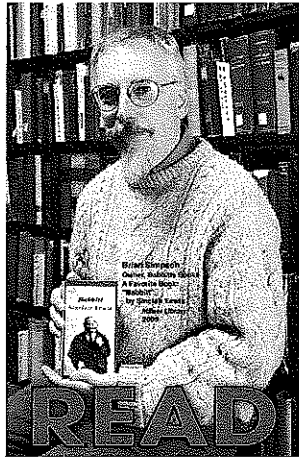
Sinclair Lewis Home
DuPont Circle
Washington, DC
Photo by Ed Tant
(www.edtant.com)

Sinclair Lewis Visits New Mexico *continued from page 6*

of pavement leading into that city [from Los Lunas], and so at last yesterday to Santa Fe—with no fatalities except a sudden snowstorm with big soft flakes falling so fast that even the automatic windshield-clearer scarcely gave vision to the driver. (*Selected Letters of Sinclair Lewis* 33–34)

The Lewises finally arrived at La Fonda in Santa Fe in the evening of March 27, a full day behind schedule.

They remained there for the next several days. They dined the evening of Palm Sunday, March 28, with the poet, lawyer, and art collector Arthur Davison Ficke (1883–1945) and they



Brian Simpson,
owner of Babbitt's Books,
Normal, IL

attended some of the local holy week festivals (“Galsworthy and Sinclair Lewis Local Visitors”). Lewis again visited Mary Austin and renewed his friendship with the British novelist John Galsworthy, who by chance was also in Santa Fe, on March 29 at the canyon home of the painter Randall Davey (1887–1964) (“Galsworthy Lets Lewis Write of American Life; The British Novelist Came Here for a Rest”). The Lewises soon hired a driver for their car and departed for Kansas City by train because the roads north from Santa Fe were

impassible with “good ripe juicy mud” (*From Main Street to Stockholm* 32).

One other noteworthy event in Lewis’s life occurred during these few days. On the top of the front page of the Santa Fe *New Mexican* for March 29, he no doubt read a news article entitled “Baptist Minister in Hospital as Result of a Severe Beating.” The story had been filed by the Associated Press in Pikeville, Kentucky, but never mind: it apparently became a source of the episode in chapter 29 of *Elmer Gantry* in which Paul Shallard travels to “a roaring modern city in the Southwest” to speak on religious tolerance: “He loved the town; believed really that he came to it with a ‘message.’ He tasted the Western air greedily, admired the buildings flashing up where but yesterday there had been prairie” (389). Before he could lecture, however, he is beaten nearly to death by thugs.⁴

Notes

¹See also Witschi 75–90 and Lingeman 271.

²See also Schorer 442. Lewis may also have been offended by the report of a skit mocking *Babbitt* at a meeting of the local Kiwanis Club during his visit (“Babbitt Spills Boosting Extraordinary to Kiwanis”) and/or an editorial in the local paper critical of Lewis’s fiction: “The Lewis Books” (“‘Babbitt’ is one of the greatest misrepresentations in literature, the favorite vehicle of the contemptuists in which to ride over the middle class”).

³Lewis’s apparent misspelling of the name of the city may have been deliberate. The Spanish spelling of the name (Albuquerque) had slowly been corrupted over the years. For the record, Lewis also notified La Fonda that he would be a day late in arriving (“People” March 27).

⁴Lewis encodes a small joke in *Elmer Gantry*, which contains 33 chapters. According to the gospels Christ was crucified at the age of 33.

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ROBBERY ON MAIN STREET

Daybook, a daily essay series written by Steve King on literature for Barnes and Noble, on October 23, 2009 focused on Main Street:

On this day in 1920, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* was published. This was the first of his string of hit novels over the next decade, most of which poked and scolded at the puritan terrors of small town life—knee-jerk conformity, boosterism, “a range of grotesque vulgarity,” says one critic, “which but for him would have left no record.” Lewis said that he expected his satires would spark trouble in home-state Minnesota and throughout Middle America, where they could only be read “with the same masochistic pleasure that one has in sucking an aching tooth.” What Lewis could not have predicted is the novel's role in the larger laugh which Middle America had at his expense at the decade's end when Lewis won the Nobel Prize.

A three-man panel unanimously recommended *Main Street* for the 1921 Pulitzer, but the trustees balked, instead awarding the prize to Edith Wharton for *The Age of Innocence*. Lewis interpreted this rejection as his novel's vindication, a judgment not so much about as from *Main Street*: “I'm quite sure I never shall get the Pulitzer—my books are too critical to please polite committees.... Personally, I don't give a hang.” When Lewis was indeed offered the Pulitzer for *Arrowsmith* several years later, he refused it. Although his letters indicate that his refusal was his return snub for “the *Main Street* burglary,” Lewis took the high road in public. The Pulitzer and all such awards, said Lewis, rewarded “safe, polite, obedient,

and sterile” writing; he wanted no part of them, and he urged other authors to follow his example.

Some applauded this stance as principled, and about time. Others saw it as grandstanding, although for publicity rather than revenge. One Kansas City businessman—a type that Lewis liked to target in his books—saw an opportunity. When the story of his Pulitzer rejection broke on front pages across America, Lewis was in Kansas City doing research for *Elmer Gantry*. This coincided with Kansas City's Straw Hat Day. After the parade, a truck delivered a giant straw hat to Lewis's hotel with a note hoping that the author would find it “an adequate roof” for his swelled head. Then in 1930, when Lewis accepted the Nobel Prize with enthusiasm, many wondered what had happened to his Pulitzer principles. Lewis explained that the Nobel was international and had no strings attached; thinking of what was attached, and smelling a home-state rat, the Minneapolis *Tribune* explained it differently: “It is a good deal easier to reconcile one's artistic conscience to a \$46,350 prize than it is to one which happens to be, under the terms of the Pulitzer award, exactly \$45,350 less.”

Daybook is contributed by Steve King, who teaches in the English Department of Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. His literary daybook began as a radio series syndicated nationally in Canada. He can be found online at www.todayinliterature.com. To see this entry on the web go to <http://bnreview.barnesandnoble.com/t5/Daybook/Robbery-on-Main-Street/ba-p/1592> ☞

Fiction Writers on Fiction Writing *continued from page 7*

Sinclair Lewis: Both, inextricably mixed.

Question V: Have you had a classroom or correspondence course on writing fiction? Books on it? To what extent did this help in the elementary stages? Beyond the elementary stages?

Sinclair Lewis: Yes, classroom in Yale—that *only* (no books, etc.) Classroom of NO value at all.

Question VI: How much of your craft have you learned from reading current authors? The classics?

Sinclair Lewis: I don't know.

Question VII: What is your general feeling on the value of technique?

Sinclair Lewis: I don't know what the question means.

Question VIII: What is most interesting and important to you in your writing—plot, structure, style, material, setting, character, color, etc.?

Sinclair Lewis: How can one segregate them?

Question IX: What are two or three of the most valuable suggestions you could give to a beginner? To a practiced writer?

Sinclair Lewis: Work, work, work.

Question X: What is the elemental hold of fiction on the human mind?

Sinclair Lewis: It affords an “escape”—the reader or hearer imagines himself in the tale.

Question XI: Do you prefer writing in the first person or the third? Why?

Sinclair Lewis: Third, less (obviously) egotistical.

Question XII: Do you lose ideas because your imagination travels faster than your means of recording? Which affords least check—pencil, typewriter or stenographer?

Sinclair Lewis: Rarely. Typewriter. ☞

Return to Zenith continued from page 5

everybody, including three soccer moms, suing him? And why is the SEC investigating him for insider trading? Sometimes when you try to do the right thing, you end up stepping on the wrong toes.

Here are some excerpts from two other amazon.com reviews.

Anne Lebrecht writes:

Zenith Rising is the first novel by author Michael Goodell. The book, released in late 2008, for the perfect timing which coincides with existing conditions all over America. A huge part of the city of Zenith is entrenched in violence, drugs, and gang wars. The infrastructure is in deep trouble. This huge city is dying. The politicians are speaking and preaching the right words but doing little to help. Promoting less government involvement, and better times for the poor and working middle class, while the reality is that the policy of lower taxes are designed to make the rich richer, and less involvement means a cut in most funding, for the poor. The results of these selfish times have resulted in unemployment, loss of confidence, and a loss of hope for the disenfranchised in Zenith. This hopelessness, despair, and desperation have led to murder, drugs, gangs and violence, as Zenith continues to deteriorate. However, there is hope in the name of Narrows Burton. He has a dream of changing all of this by rebuilding his city of Zenith. His struggles with the bureaucracy and typical political bias make this a book you cannot put down. From the first page to the end, you are completely engrossed in the drama and conflict. Mr. Goodell has a great knowledge of our English language and uses it well. He uses an unusual style of writing that is most enjoyable. This is definitely a book worth reading and I highly recommend it.

John L. Daly notes:

Michael Goodell's *Zenith Rising* is a fast-paced, well-written story of Narrows Burton who has a vision for rebuilding a dying city....

Narrows Burton, the main character of the novel, is direly conflicted. His ex-wife, Cindy Herringbone, exposed him to the finest things that money could buy. His memberships at the Zenith Country Club and Zenith Athletic Club have earned him "friendships" with the most wealthy and influential people in town. But Narrows knows in his heart that what these people call happiness does not mesh with his definition of the "right thing."

A drive through the decaying and crumbling neighborhoods of Zenith's inner city causes him to ask "This is America?" Narrows decides he wants to improve the lives of the most undervalued citizens of Zenith. His attempts in that direction are met with patronizing contempt and scorn by Cindy and the rest of Zenith's elite. That; and a personal vendetta against him by the powerful and connected Rob Patterson, are making a shambles of his life....

Zenith Rising evokes thoughts of the great 20th century American novelists like Sinclair Lewis and Ayn Rand, combining intelligent and compelling personal stories with thinly veiled commentary on today's social, economic and political climate. The dialog, vocabulary and cadence of the novel are first-rate. The characters are real, the story is riveting and the subplots are gripping.

Bravo on this fine first work. I can't wait for the next!

Go to www.zenithrising.webs.com to see more reviews and an excerpt from the novel. ☞

Sinclair Lewis Conference continued from page 1

story, Main Street." Papers will span Lewis's writings, including his short stories on Lancelot Todd, *Arrowsmith*, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, the play *Jayhawker*, *Work of Art*, *Main Street Goes to War*, and *Cass Timberlane*. There will be papers on the literary influence of H.G. Wells and Thomas Wolfe as well as on Mark Nolan, one of the main prototypes for Judge Timberlane, Lewis's presentation of weather in the *Minnesota Diary*, and on St. Cloud State's new digital archives on the letters sent to Marcella Powers by Sinclair Lewis. Speakers include: Frederick Betz, M. Ellen Dupree, George Killough, Robert L. McLaughlin, Mark Monn, Susan K. O'Brien, Sally

E. Parry, Constance Perry, Charles Pankenier, Samuel Rogal, Tom Steman, Mitchell Taylor, and J. C. Turner.

The cost of attending the conference is \$125, which includes two lunches, refreshment breaks, admission to the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home, and the play and the film. For Sinclair Lewis Society members, the cost is \$100. Accommodations are available throughout Sauk Centre, including at the Palmer House where Lewis worked as a young man. For more information, please email Sally Parry at sparry@ilstu.edu. ☞

HABEAS CORPUS (PART IV)

Sinclair Lewis

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.

“Mr. Blymer wants to see you at the Federal Building, Gurry.”

“He does, heh? Let him come here if he wants to see me.”

“Cut that! I hold a warrant for your arrest.”

“Me? What do the fool cops think they got on me?”

“This isn’t any police warrant. It’s signed by the assistant secretary of the Department of Labor of the United States of America.”

By working very hard at it and mentally pinching himself Gurazov contrived to look awed, and he choked, “Oh, tach! I’ll come along then.”

“Yes, I guess you will. Maybe you won’t be as fresh as you were the other day. ‘Flat-headed cop!’ We’ll see about that!”

VII

All the way to the office of the inspector in charge Gurazov was silent, while he cautioned himself that he must not let Blymer discover that he wanted to be deported. He must protest, assert innocence. There would be a court; representatives of high Government; a great limelight. It threw him off to find nothing but the same old Blymer with the same old aspect of being in smoking jacket and slippers, alone in the office except for the stenographer, and Klosk, who yawned and leaned against the wall in a tilted chair. Inspector Blymer brought from a cupboard a copy of Gurazov’s pamphlet, one of the posters announcing the parade and a couple of typed sheets. He nodded impersonally.

“Sit down. Your name?”

“Leo Gurazov.”

“Have you ever gone by any other name or names?”

“No.”

“Where were you born?”

“Shumla, Bulgaria.”

“Have you taken out your first citizenship papers?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I didn’t feel like it. I hate——.”

“I hold a warrant for your arrest. Are you ready to show cause why you should not be deported from this country as an anarchist—as an alien who, to quote the immigration laws, ‘believes in or advocates the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States’? Aren’t you such a person?”

“I am not an anarchist! I stand on——”

“Don’t stand, son—sit! I’m sorry I can’t make this hearing impressive and overbearing to please your sense of the dramatic, but I’m not much good at that. Cut that out of the record, Miss Linquist. They’ll think I’m trying to get cute if they read it at the department. Now to go on: Do you wish to waive the right to be represented by an attorney, Gurazov?”

“Now’s my time,” Gurazov coached himself, and he screamed: “I do not! I demand witnesses and a lawyer and everything! I will not be railroaded! I will stay in America! I am not an anarchist!”

“All right, I will give you three days to get counsel and witnesses. Unless you want to furnish bail of five hundred I’ll remand you to the custody of Inspector Klosk. I have arranged with the city prison to keep you there at night.”

It was a confused Gurazov who was hustled into the hall. He had no idea what lawyer to get. There are attorneys in Vernon who are specialists at losing cases, but they do not advertise as such. He spent the afternoon giving directions to the agitated Becky and avoiding the stare of Inspector Klosk, a look as depressing and meaningless as cold beef gravy. At night he was taken to a cell at central station. He snickered as the barred door closed. He did not much care for the dampness, but it was a relief to be alone and to meditate.

He would get hold of the worst shyster lawyer in the city and whisper to him to bungle the case. He would profess to be unable to find his witnesses. In a week he would be headed for

—————Habeas Corpus continued on page 12

Habeas Corpus *continued from page 11*

the Balkans. In Sofia—suppose the ultrareds were overthrown? He would turn into whatever new sort of radical was in power. If the monarchists kept control he would take his certificate of deportation and martyrdom over to Hungary and be a hero there. He couldn't lose.

For hours he sat dumpily on the quivery edge of a thin cot, his fat yet sensitive fingers rubbing the worn greasy nap of a gray blanket, his gaze on the tremulous shadow of bars which an arc light down the corridor cast on the scabrous, scribbled, white-washed wall of his cell. Up and down the spaces between the shadows of the bars marched processions brave with music and banners and their leader was Leo Gurazov. Messages came by wireless from Comrade Lenine to Comrade Gurazov. Beautiful girls in Sofia and Tirnova listened to tales of American tyranny and longed for the smiles of Commissar Gurazov.

Five minutes later he had become dictator of Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania and his armies were in Rumania. Then Russia and the Balkans united—and General Gurazov overthrew Lenine. Why not? See how Trotzky had climbed! Power beyond power, whatever of human honors could be conceived, all opened to him! Successor to Lenine—yes, and czar! Why should there not be a dynasty of Gurazovs loftier than the decadent Romanovs?

As he marched to coronation in the Kremlin and a seat with kings it occurred to him that he was in some ways mixed in his political principles. He recalled that he was not a royalist but a left-wing communist. Oh, well, those things could be arranged! He and Napoleon and Machiavelli were above all theories. And think of the face of Nick Benorius when he heard that His Imperial Majesty Leo, leading his Russian-Balkan troops, had recaptured Siberia from the Japanese!

Before Gurazov fell asleep he had also taken India and China and was considering going on to California. But by one of the most rapid downfalls in history, when he woke he seemed to have left out of all his conquering cohorts nothing but one active cootie. It was depressing to be dethroned and more depressing to eat prison stew and he was quaking with doubt when his clerk, Becky Tchernin, was admitted to talk to him through the bars.

"I want to buy our store," Becky said briefly. "I raised fifty dollars last night and I'll give you that for good will, stock and fixtures."

"Fifty? It's worth a thousand!"

"It's worth nothing—without me. You've driven away every good customer. Fifty, I said. Nobody but me would give you one cent. The new stores are bucking you too hard."

He argued and wailed, beating the bars. But in the end, knowing that she was right and that the Government would

take care of him till he reached Bulgaria, he signed a bill of sale, received the fifty in bills and two suitcases which she had packed with his clothes and books. Save for this cell he was homeless.

Leo Gurazov is no longer a comic egotist as he sits on the gray blanket, looking at the two scaly suitcases and the few creased, filthy bills which are all his possessions, all his friends. Suddenly he is homesick. He does not much want to go to Bulgaria. He wonders if he might not have made himself a part of this puzzling new America; if he might not have come to love it. He wonders if he has not missed something fine and—to him—illusive, and if it is not now forever too late. He sits alone and his imperial triumphs of ten hours before are tawdry and worn brocade on a dusty abandoned stage. He is in that most tragic debacle of the egotist—he wonders if after all he really is superior to the herd he has despised; and doubt breeds a devouring weakness which leaves him feeble in every limb.

VIII

Out of this blur of gray Gurazov was startled by the door man of the cell house rumbling, "Your lawyer and a friend to see you. Lieutenant says they can go in."

Gurazov looked up with a suddenness that cricked his neck. He saw a prosperous, portly, businesslike man, and behind him Nick Benorius. But it was a new Nick. He was yearning, friendly, anxious. He brushed by the prosperous one as the cell door was opened. He thrust out his hand, shouting, "Comrade, by golly, I was a fool! I thought you were kidding me. Last night I learned they really are trying to deport you."

Scrambling from his uncomfortable humility Gurazov mourned, "I don't know—I think it looks bad."

"Not on your life!" Benorius chortled. "Count on old Nick. I have been at work all night. I have a lawyer—and not no socialist lawyer neither, but Mr. Henebry here. And I will have witnesses—myself, Becky Tchernin—devil of a job I've just been having persuading her. And I've raised a fund. You know who Miss Pluma Wilcox is? The daughter of the banker that died? Lots of money but liberal? The old maid that comes to radical meetings in a limousine? I argued it out with her and she's promised a fund of fifteen thousand dollars to keep you from being deported!"

"Habeas Corpus" will be continued in the fall 2010 issue.

OBITUARIES

Long time Sinclair Lewis Society member and retired book dealer **James Lorson** passed away last year. He had an expertise in Lewis material and was very helpful to the Society on many occasions in determining the value of works signed by Lewis.

Budd Schulberg, novelist and screenwriter, died in August 2009 at the age of 95. He wrote the screenplays for *The Harder They Fall* (1956) and *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) and won an academy award for *On the Waterfront*. His novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* about naked ambition in the movie industry was later made into a musical. His life intersected with Sinclair Lewis's when he was a student at Dartmouth and went to hear Lewis speak in 1935. He later talked Lewis into leading a discussion, primarily about fascism and the novel (since *It Can't Happen Here* had been recently published). Lewis was

there "baited" by campus radicals. Schulberg contends that this experience was the genesis for *The Prodigal Parents*. Schulberg's recollection was published as "Lewis: Big Wind from Sauk Centre," in *Esquire* (Dec. 1960: 110-14). It was reprinted in Schulberg's *The Four Seasons of Success* (Doubleday, 1972: 29-53).

Jean Simmons, the British actress who portrayed Sister Sharon Falconer in the movie version of *Elmer Gantry*, died in January 2010. She was nominated for Academy Award for *Hamlet* in 1948 and *The Happy Ending* in 1969. Other notable films included *Great Expectations* and *Black Narcissus* (both 1946), *Guys and Dolls* (1956), and *The Grass Is Greener* (1961). She was married to actor Stewart Granger from 1950 to 1960 and Richard Brooks, who directed her in *Elmer Gantry*, from 1961 to 1977. ✍

TWIN FARMS A TOP SKI RESORT

Twin Farms, the former home of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson, continues to be written up as a top vacation destination. In "Ski Lodges: The Innkeepers of the Tradition" by Amy Virshup (*New York Times* Feb. 1, 2009: 5, 10) it is described as being one of a dwindling number of all-inclusive ski lodges. "At the Twin Farms resort in Barnard, Vt., there are no menus at meals. Instead, before guests arrive they are asked about any food allergies and special diets, as well as their likes and dislikes. Then the executive chef, Ted Ask, builds his offerings around their preferences" (5). Later in the article the skiing available and the rooms are described:

To get to the top of the mountain at Twin Farms resort, you can take a poma lift. But the better way up is the resort's Alpina Sherpa, a souped-up snow machine and trolley that can ferry nine people uphill at a time. And the runs are guaranteed to be wide open: The resort, on 300 acres in Vermont, encompasses the former Ski Sonnenberg, a modest six-run, 350-foot vertical ski hill, which it now runs as a private mountain. Guests craving bigger thrills can head to Suicide Six in Woodstock or the Killington Skyship gondola. On site the resort also offers cross-country skiing, snowshoe hiking and ice skating, all with equipment provided, so you don't even have to remember your skates.

The resort's 20 rooms, each with at least one fireplace, range from suites of about 1,000 square feet

in the main 18th-century farmhouse to individual cottages that, at the largest—the ski-in, ski-out chalet—run 3,000 square feet. All have wireless Internet access and satellite television and come stocked with coffee, tea and snacks.

Weekend rates start at \$1,300 a couple a night and go up to \$3,000. Lower weekday rates are available through March 15 in honor of the resort's 15th anniversary (from \$900 to \$2,100 a night).

For that guests get all meals, all beverages (including alcohol and wine from Twin Farms' 26,000-bottle cellar), ground transportation to and from area airports (Burlington, Vt.; Lebanon, N.H.; or Manchester, N.H.) or to one of the nearby mountains if they want to go off campus to ski (Twin Farms doesn't make snow, so at times that can be a necessity). For breakfast the kitchen will, more or less, cook whatever guests want (and the morning's juices include not just orange, grapefruit and cranberry but selections like mango, carrot or papaya). Those looking to be social can eat in the main dining room; those looking for privacy can dine in their rooms or in front of one of the resort's many fireplaces.

What's not allowed? Children (except on special family weeks) and pets.

[Twin Farms Resort, 452 Royalton Turnpike, Barnard, VT; 800-894-6327; www.twinfarms.com] ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Francis Morrone refers to *Main Street* in his review, "The Glossies," of *The Architecture of Grosvenor Atterbury* by Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker (Norton, 2009) in the *Wall Street Journal* online, August 15, 2009:

Carol Milford, the heroine of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920), dreamily imagines "the fairy-book suburb of Forest Hills on Long Island" as she peruses magazines in her grandmother's Minnesota attic. And little wonder. Forest Hills Gardens had recently taken shape on old Queens, NY, farmland and become the most admired new suburb in America. Its form-giver—the architect of its fairy book houses—was Grosvenor Atterbury (1869–1956), among the least known of America's best architects and the subject of this much-needed monograph by Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker. Atterbury made Tudor houses seem as American as baseball, and his picturesque designs of suburban cottages inspired countless imitations across the country. The dizzying build-out of American suburbia, in fact, drew on Atterbury's mix of traditional aesthetics and constructional innovation. (He pioneered the use of prefabricated building components, mass-produced materials and military-drill precision construction.) Forest Hills is but one of the book's seven chapters. Atterbury was also one of the great designers of grand mansions on Long Island's North Shore, and he led a glorious restoration of New York's City Hall. The writers' descriptions and Jonathan Wallen's superb photographs remind us of one of the great shapers of America's landscape.

For the full article go to <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204409904574349281802574184.html>.

Joseph Finder, in the *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 2009, described five novels on political conspiracy that are worth investigating. Number one on the list is *It Can't Happen Here*. He describes the novel as follows:

A charismatic Democratic senator who speaks in "noble but slippery abstractions" is elected president, in a groundswell of cultish adoration, by a nation on the brink of economic disaster. Promising to restore America's greatness, he promptly announces a government seizure of the big banks and insurance companies. He strong arms the Congress into amending the Constitution to give him unlimited emergency powers. He throws his enemies into concentration camps. With scarcely any resistance, the country has become a fascist dictatorship. No black helicopters here, though. Sinclair Lewis's dystopian political satire, now largely forgotten except for its ironic title, was a mammoth best seller in 1935, during the depths of the Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe. His president, Berzelius ("Buzz") Windrip, is a ruthless phony with the "earthy sense of humor of a Mark Twain"; one of the few who dare oppose him openly is a rural newspaper editor who is forced to go on the run. Lewis's prose could be ungainly, but he captured with caustic humor the bumptious narrow-mindedness of small-town life.

Also on the list are Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), *Libra* by Don DeLillo (1988), *Advise and Consent* by Allen Drury (1959), and *The Matarese Circle* by Robert Ludlum (1979).

Finder, a member of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, is the author of nine novels, including *Paranoia* and *High Crimes*. His suspense thriller *Vanished* was recently published by St. Martin's Press.

The online bookseller AbeBooks on October 27, 2009 posted a list of "Top 10 Ghostwritten Books" by Scott Laming. Number three on the list was *Tennis As I Play It*, ostensibly by Maurice McLoughlin, but ghosted by Sinclair Lewis. Laming writes, "Lewis wrote this book for McLoughlin 15 years before winning the Nobel Prize for Literature."

For the complete list go to http://www.abebooks.com/books/famous-ghostwriters-authors-jfk/top-10-ghostwritten.shtml?cm_ven=blog&cm_cat=blog&cm_pla=link&cm_ite=Top%2010%20ghostwritten%20books.

A new book for people interested in notions of racial passing is Baz Dreisinger's *Near Black: White-to-Black Passing in American Culture* (U of Massachusetts P, 2009). In a review in the *New York Times Book Review* (Jan. 25, 2009: 11), Amy Finnerty praises the variety of examples drawn from literature, film, and history, but notes that too often there are "messy academic dissections of the malleable concept of race." The anecdotes include a white woman sold into slavery, white women who contended they were black so as not to break miscegenation laws, and the "anecdotal tale [which] describes a white woman drinking her black lover's blood, in an effort to become black as measured by the 'one drop' rule." It may have been this story that inspired the similar action in Edna Ferber's *Show Boat* where a showboat performer cuts the hand of his mulatto wife and sucks some blood so that he too will have "black blood" and won't be breaking any race laws.

Nearly Departed, a new book by Michael Norman, recounts ghostly happenings across the state of Minnesota, augmented by interviews with people who have experienced them. Sauk Centre's Palmer House is one of the places featured in the book, according to Bryan Zollman in the article "Scary Encounters Land Family in Ghost Book" (*Sauk Centre Herald* Oct. 27: 3). Members of the Bellefeuille family who have worked at the Palmer House, where Sinclair Lewis worked briefly as a young man, described various paranormal activities that they encountered. One person saw a ten-year-boy whom she could see through while others have experienced lights or a television being turned off and on in an unexplained fashion, or silverware being rearranged, as if by an unseen hand. For more information on the paranormal and the Palmer House, see "Ghosts in the Palmer House" by Rebecca Webb in the Spring 2009 (17.2) issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*.

"Robert Allen Durr and 'The Last Days of H. L. Mencken'" by Lewis Society president Frederick Betz, in the fall 2009 issue of *Menckiana* (1-12), discusses the relationship between Robert Allen Durr, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University in 1955 and Lewis's friend H. L. Mencken. Durr replaced William Manchester as a reader to Mencken for the last six months of Mencken's life. Durr, in an essay on Mencken in 1958, noted carefully the contents of the house and how they reflected Mencken's personality. Betz remarks that this "might have reminded Durr of the 19th-century French Realist Balzac's famous observation [in *Le Père Goriot*]... 'explique la pension, comme la pension implique

sa personne'" (3). This observation is certainly connectable to Lewis's aesthetic where the description of the rooms in a house and the books owned serve as insight into the soul of a character, as in the description of Doremus Jessup's library in *It Can't Happen Here*.

"The 'Wall Street/Main Street' Bug: Curing Symptoms of Synecdoche" by Carlin Romano in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Oct. 17, 2008: B4-5) discusses how we deal with "the disparate images and associations we identify with both phrases" (B4). He recommends several books to help readers make sense of these concepts including *Wall Street: America's Dream Palace* by Steve Fraser (Yale UP, 2008); *The Trillion Dollar Meltdown* by Charles R. Morris (Public Affairs, 2008); and *Panic: The Story of Modern Financial Insanity* by Michael Lewis (Norton, 2008). To understand the Main Street side of the equation though, he recommends Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, "the novel by America's first Nobel laureate in literature that made the other pole of our synecdoche circus a household phrase. Far from endorsing the current sense of the metaphor as a home for good, decent, hardworking Americans abused by Wall Street, Lewis saw his book as denouncing, in Matthew Bruccoli's words, 'the myth of wholesome small-town America.' Indeed, in his 1930 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Lewis declared that he'd meant to oppose the fictional tradition that 'all of us in mid-Western villages were altogether noble and happy.' Rather, Lewis said he had learned from Hamlin Garland that 'mid-Western peasants sometimes were bewildered and hungry and vile.'"

Richard Stern writes of his encounters with famous people in "Glimpse, Encounter, Acquaintance, Friendship" in the Winter 2009 issue of the *Sewanee Review* (117.1: 95-105). There is a long paragraph on an encounter with Lewis in 1942.

I was fourteen and had been reading with great joy novels of Sinclair Lewis—*Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, *Babbitt*, and *It Can't Happen Here*. I was walking home through Central Park... Fifty yards away I spotted the tall, skinny, slouching Lewis himself. With the stalker's savage joy I headed for him. Spotting me spot him, Lewis moved away. I followed. He moved faster, then higher, up one of the small rock cliffs whose every crack, crevice, bulge, and contour was part of my childhood geography. I followed. "Mr. Lewis?" Fedora off, blue eyes weary with submission, he acknowledged the identification. I was gripped, though not repelled, by his notorious

face, its pits and trenches, the sign of some awful engagement with disease or decay. No matter, I had my man. I told him that I was reading and loving his novels. He was polite and, though unsmiling, not unkind. He asked me which books I'd read. I rattled off the titles. There was some other chatter, the only thing remembered now the fact that he was living at the El Dorado six or seven blocks north of our 84th Street Central Park West apartment. We must have shaken hands good-bye, and I went home to dazzle my parents and sister with the fish I'd hooked. I did not invite him home as, two years earlier, I had invited the old pianist Artur Schnabel, with whom I was walking on Central Park West, to use our piano. Schnabel thanked me but said he had one of his own. (96-97)

the Nobel Prize for literature, he called *Main Street* 'my first novel to arouse the embattled peasantry.' With puckish humor, Lewis added that 'hundreds of thousands read the book with the same masochistic pleasure that one has in sucking an aching tooth'" (Athens *Banner-Herald*, July 18, 2009). See page 7 for one of his photos.

I'm translating the novel by Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*, for a Spanish publishing house. I'm making a glossary of characters and events of 1930s America, which will be included in the present Spanish edition. I wonder if there has been any English edition with this kind of contextual historic work or if my edition is the first one. Anyway, I suppose you will be interested in the book, so I would like to send it to you when it will be finished. [The Society has promised to help the translator with references if she needs it.]

WEB NOTES

There's a new look for the Sinclair Lewis Society at <http://english.illinoisstate.edu/sinclairlewis/>. Over 104,000 people visited the old website, and now, with the help of graphic designer Aimée Bullinger, the site has been reimagined and made much more colorful. The images are from editions of Sinclair Lewis's novels that were published in the 1940s and 1950s. The site is also easier to navigate and update. Please let the editor know if you have suggestions for additions to the site. Write her at separry@ilstu.edu. Among those being considered now are pages on teaching Sinclair Lewis and more on his life.

The following comments from readers of the website show a continuing interest in Lewis's life and art.

Sinclair Lewis Society member Ed Tant, who writes a column for the Athens *Banner-Herald*, sent in a piece he wrote after visiting Washington, DC last summer. He and his wife "found and photographed the modest two-story house where the controversial and iconoclastic author Sinclair Lewis lived when he finished *Main Street*, the novel that would catapult him to fame and fortune when it was published in 1920. A decade later, when Lewis became the first American to receive

William Kraemer writes: Recently I spoke with Gary, formerly a pharmacist at and currently one of the owners of the building where Sinclair Lewis's father had a doctor's office. For years this store was on the ground floor of the building and Dr. Lewis's office on the second floor. Not too long ago, the drugstore closed so Gary could retire.

The day we talked, Gary said he and the other co-owners had a couple of prospects possibly interested in buying the building. This is good news for downtown Sauk Centre.

I asked Gary about the pharmacist who had probably been on duty in 1974 when a friend of mine and I had traveled to Sauk Centre to find people who had known Sinclair Lewis. By my description, Gary said that would have to have been Bob, whom Gary worked for in '74 as a teenager. Bob directed my friend and me to the man Lewis's character the Red Swede in *Main Street* was based upon. My friend and I could not find the guy. I believe he was out of town for the week. Anyway, Bob told us that the man still cursed Sinclair Lewis for writing bad things about him under the guise of the Red Swede character.

Mention of the drugstore reminded Gary of Fred Lewis. This third brother of the Lewis brothers was a memorable character Gary said. The guy was so unique, Gary could not define him other than to say that and that he was also unlike either Dr. Claude or Sinclair Lewis. But Gary always enjoyed talking to him anytime, including when he came into the store.

—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

This is a continuation of the list of the collection of books from Sinclair Lewis's library that was begun in the fall 2009 issue of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter in Collector's Corner. The books were being sold by Between the Covers Rare Books of Gloucester City, New Jersey, and give insight into the reading habits and interests of Lewis.

Onions, Oliver. *Mushroom Town*. New York: George H. Doran, 1914.

Green cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper and a few notes on the verso of the half-title. George Oliver Onions (1873–1961) was a significant English novelist who published over forty novels and story collections, in the genres of detective fiction, historical fiction, and science-fiction.

Oppenheim, E. Phillips. *Stolen Idols*. New York: A.L. Burt, 1925.

Reprint. Cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. Edward Phillips Oppenheim (1866–1946) was an English novelist, a major and successful writer of genre fiction including thrillers. He was featured in the 1918 edition of *Time* and was a self-styled "prince of storytellers." Lewis didn't seem to hold this author in high regard, though this novel survived in his library. "On the train, he [Lewis] had armed himself with a whole stack of Tauchnitz editions of the novels by E. Phillips Oppenheimer [sic], and, glancing swiftly through these, he had tossed them one after the other out of the train window" (Schorer 485).

Osborn, Paul. *The Vinegar Tree. A Play*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931.

First edition. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. Made into a movie in 1933, titled *Should Ladies Behave?* starring Lionel Barrymore.

Owen, John. *Many Captives*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1930.

First edition. Cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper.

Pater, Walter. *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. New York: Macmillan, 1908.

Reprint. Cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature and date (Dec. '09) on the front free endpaper. Walter Pater (1839–1894) was an English essayist and an art and literary critic. *Marius the Epicurean*, originally published in 1885, is a philosophical novel, displaying Pater's ideals of the aesthetic life and his theory that beauty should be pursued as an ideal of its own.

[Pavlovna], Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia. *Education of a Princess: A Memoir*. Translated from the French & Russian under the editorial supervision of Russell Lord. New York: Viking Press, 1931.

Fourth printing. Illustrated with black and white photographs, map endpapers. Cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the half-title. A memoir by Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna of Russia (1890–1958) about her life in Russia, which encompassed the Revolution. Pavlovna was the granddaughter of Alexander II.

Seabrook, William B. *Jungle Ways*. Photographs by the Author. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931.

First trade edition. Cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. William Buehler Seabrook (1884–1945) was an American Lost Generation occultist, explorer, traveler, and journalist. He and Lewis were friends and drinking buddies.

Seldes, George. *Can These Things Be!* New York: Brewer and Warren, 1931.

First edition. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. George Seldes (1890–1995) was an influential American investigative journalist and media critic. Lewis and Seldes met in 1928 and were friends and neighbors for years.

Stevenson, Robert Lewis. *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. With a Preface by Mrs. Stevenson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.

Biographical Edition. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. "*Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879) is one of Robert Lewis Stevenson's earliest published works and is considered a pioneering classic of outdoor literature.... *Travels* recounts Stevenson's 12-day, 120-mile solo hiking journey through the sparsely populated and impoverished areas of the Cevennes mountains in south-central France. The character of Modestine, a stubborn, manipulative donkey he could never quite get the better of, is memorable. It is one of the earliest accounts which presented hiking and camping outdoors as a recreational activity. It also tells of commissioning one of the first sleeping bags, large and heavy enough to require a donkey to carry" (Wikipedia).

Tarkington, Booth. *Claire Ambler*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928.

First trade edition. Pictorial endpapers, blue cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his initials on the front free endpaper. Tarkington (1869–1946) was an American novelist and dramatist. Lewis was keenly aware of both Tarkington's financial success as an author and his attempts to portray the American businessman. For example, Lewis saw Babbitt as a kind of American character that no other writer had "touched" except Tarkington, "and he romanticizes away all the bigness" (Schorer 302). In the early years of the Pulitzer Prize, Tarkington was twice given the award (for the novels *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Alice Adams*), a few years before Lewis himself was awarded and declined the prize for *Arrowsmith*. Shortly after Tarkington wrote *Alice Adams*, during the period when Lewis was traveling and lecturing on American literature, Lewis sent Tarkington an apologetic note in which Lewis claimed some printed quotes of his about Tarkington's writing had been taken out of context: "I certainly don't imagine that you care a darn about my opinion, but you see, I do care about yours!"

Topsoe-Jensen, H.G. *Scandinavian Literature: From Brandes to Our Day*. Translated from the Danish by Isaac Anderson. New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation. W.W. Norton, 1929.

First edition. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his signature on the front free endpaper.

Undset, Sigrid. *The Son Avenger*. Translated from the Norwegian by Arthur G. Chater. New York: Knopf, 1930.

First American edition. The concluding volume in *The Master of Hestviken* tetralogy. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. Sigrid Undset (1882–1949) was a Norwegian novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature two years before Lewis, in 1928.

Von Wegerer, Alfred. *A Refutation of the Versailles War Guilt Thesis*. Translated from the German by Edwin H. Zeydel. Introduction by Harry Elmer Barnes. New York: Knopf, 1930.

First American edition. Orange cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. An important volume in the restoration of national German pride which coincided with the rise of Naziism and the Nazi Party's early political victories.

Wells, H.G. *The History of Mr. Polly*. New York: Duffield and Company, 1910.

First American edition. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. Above his signature, in another hand, is the notation: "Cunning Sinclair!" *The History of Mr. Polly* was a direct inspiration for Lewis's first serious novel, *Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man* (1914).

Wilde, Oscar. *Dorian Gray*. New York: Bigelow, Smith, 1909.

From the Library of Classical Romantic Realism series. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature and date ("NY. 5/11") on the front free endpaper.

Williams, Ben Ames. *An End to Mirth*. New York: Dutton, 1931.

Fourth printing. Orange cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper. Ben Ames

Williams (1889–1953) was born in Macon, Mississippi. "Williams graduated from Dartmouth in 1910, worked as a reporter for the Boston American from 1910–1916, and went on to live outside of Boston), and to write over 35 novels and 400 short stories, many set in the mythical village of Fraternity, Maine (similar to his home in the Searsmont area), as well as some histories and other nonfiction works.... Williams received honorary degrees in American literature from Dartmouth College and Colby College" (www.waterborolibrary.org/maineaut/tz.htm#authorw). Several of Williams's novels and stories were filmed, notably *Leave Her to Heaven* with Gene Tierney in 1945.

Wright, Richardson. *The Bed-Book of Travel: Short Pieces to be Read (Preferably in Bed or Berth) by Those Who Have Been Places, Those Who Are Going Somewhere and Those Who Have Wanted To Go. Together with Seven Travelers' Tales*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1931.

First edition. Red cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper.

Wynne, Anthony. *The White Arrow*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1932.

First American edition. Green cloth. Sinclair Lewis's copy, with his ownership signature on the front free endpaper.

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DECEMBER MISCELLANY 2009

105. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. \$1,250.

First edition. Fine copy in beautiful fresh dust jacket (first issue without reviews on front flap) with two minor closed tears at top edge.

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170. Lewis, Sinclair. *A Letter to Critics*. Brattleboro: American Booksellers Association, 1931. \$1,000.

Three-column broadside. One of a total 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 Lewis

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. Rare. Hardcover. A fine copy (with only the very slightest of creasing) in a specially designed cloth portfolio.

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CATALOG TWENTY-SEVEN

128. Lewis, Sinclair. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House, 1947. \$500.

First Edition. One of 1050 numbered copies (this being no. 964) signed by the author on the limitation page. Fine in a Very Good+ paper-covered slipcase with no dust jacket as issued. Slipcase has a split along one edge of the spine panel with some minor flaking and soil to the extremities. An attractive copy.

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A SELECTION FROM OUR INVENTORY (MOSTLY NEW ARRIVALS)

346. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940. \$1,250.

First edition. This copy is inscribed by the author: "To Dorothy Burgess as a lesson in avoiding the wicked actors. Sinclair Lewis. Beverly Hills. April 12, 1940." Hardcover. Fine in a fine dust jacket.

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

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

349. —. *Keep out of the Kitchen*. New York: *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1929. \$750.

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

rendered even scarcer by the presence of the advertisement.

351. —. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$3,750.

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

352. —. *Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1935. \$750.

First edition. Laid into this copy is a 1935 TLS to book critic Gilbert Seldes: "Thanks a million times for your review. I appreciate it like hell." Also laid in is a TLS from Lewis's wife, Dorothy Thompson, declining a dinner at the Seldes' which Dorothy Parker and her husband will be attending. Hardcover. Fine in a near fine dust jacket.

353. —. TLS dated March 20, 1936. \$400.

Written from Bermuda to a professor in Australia on the letterhead of the Elbow Beach Hotel: "No I do not at all mind your using the Elmer Gantry sermon... You know, don't you, that this spasm of eloquence is based upon something by that most florid [sic] of sermonizers, Robert J. Ingersoll? Your sincerely, Sinclair Lewis." About ninety words.

354. —. *Why Sinclair Lewis Got the Nobel Prize* by Erik Axel Karlfeldt and address by Sinclair Lewis before the Swedish Academy. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930. \$400.

First edition, first issue (without the footnote on page 1 and with *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* missing from the list of Lewis's books on page 22). Laid into this copy are two publisher's promotional sheets. One is titled "Special Note" and states that Lewis did not win the Nobel Prize for *Babbitt* in particular but for his work in general. The other begins "In Answer To The Large Number Of Daily Requests..." explaining why this booklet has been published. Printed wrappers.

355. Lewis, Sinclair. *Work of Art*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1934. \$1,250.

First edition. This copy is inscribed by the author. Hardcover. Near fine in a bright dust jacket that is sunned at the spine.

356. Lewis, Sinclair and John C. Moffitt. *It Can't Happen Here*. New York: Federal Theatre Project September 18, 1936. \$2,000.

Original playscript. Mimeographed. Laid in is the original theater program for the WPA production. Adapted from Sinclair Lewis's novel of the same name, along with playscript. Printed wrappers. Copied by MGM's script department on February 4, 1937, this version omits a single scene from the play in anticipation of the writing of a filmscript. Printed wrappers. Both items very good. Housed in a quarter-leather clamshell box.

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

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

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