

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY SPONSORS SUCCESSFUL PANEL AT 1993 ANNUAL AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Society sponsored a well-attended session at the fourth annual Conference of the American Literature Association. The Conference was held Memorial Day weekend at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore on May 28-30. The panel was called "Sinclair Lewis: Author, Craftsman, and Stylist" and featured papers which commented on various aspects of Lewis's creative process. The newsletter is pleased to be able to publish abstracts of the papers to indicate the high level of current Lewis scholarship.

"Lewis on Authorship"

Martin Bucco, Colorado State University

Lewis, of course, not only poked fun at pedantic theories of art, but he ridiculed high-toned theories of composition. The question of why a person becomes a writer intrigued him. He concluded that serious writers were not made by instruction but were born—with the capacity to teach themselves. Thus he often assured enrollees in his occasional college classes that they should be at home trying to write, not wasting their time in class. Though Lewis learned how to type up his early drafts with gutsy certitude, he described composition—revision—as less rapturous: as hard labor, willful servitude, and unremitting toil. For one to succeed, concentration must become habit. Honesty—defined as the writers' own desires—Lewis saw as expressing the truth as they saw it. Besides advising writers never to submit to alien pressures, he encouraged them to stay close to their roots, to realize impersonally and accurately things close at hand—manners, dress, language—that often go unrealized. In advocating the new realism after World War I he preached the close relationship between the writer and life. He wanted writers to write about real people with real problems in real places. Discovering a new setting is far less adequate than 10,000 unconscious experiences of an old one. Often he would go over a young writer's manuscript, suggesting thematic and technical changes. Always he stressed characterization and warned against such literary sins as "kidnapping the plot," "first person singularism," and "subordination of oratory." A bookman himself, Lewis urged writers to read more, for most contemporary writers, he felt, did not know enough about life or about literature. Instead of collecting writing manuals, the aspirant should invest in an encyclopedia. Over the years Lewis not only recommended good reading for writers, but he believed that in the lonely business of authorship both striving and famous writers should come to know one another personally.

"All of Us Americans at 46": The Making of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*," James M. Hutchisson, The Citadel

One of the most significant deficiencies of Mark Schorer's biography of Sinclair Lewis was noted by Jack L. Davis in a 1971 review-essay of Schorer's book. Davis noted that Schorer described "the mechanics by which Lewis acquired authentic and complete data" but offered no "insight into how the novelist's creative faculties selected usable materials and shaped them into a vision capable of touching our imagination." Among Lewis's papers at Yale are several pre-publication materials for *Babbitt* that provide this type of insight into Lewis's creative process; they have never been examined in any detail.

First, there is a 198-page looseleaf notebook that contains Lewis's research on all the aspects of American life that he mythically transformed into *Babbitt*'s world of Zenith; full character "biographies"; demographic data on the fictional state of Winnemac; and clippings and promotional brochures dealing with real estate, New Thought, and other sociohistorical details that figure in the novel. Examination of this material shows how Lewis strived for verisimilitude in the novel, and how he took his observations and turned them into what Schorer called the "set pieces" that form the episodic structure of the novel. They also indicate that Lewis planned for *Babbitt* to inaugurate a series of interrelated novels set in Winnemac—a sequence of works on the order of Hardy's Wessex novels. Helen Batchelor noted this latter point in her 1971 article on the "Babbitt Maps," but she speculated that Lewis was thinking ahead only to the concept of *Dodsworth*; I believe, by contrast, that the materials show he was also planning the never-completed "labor novel."

Second, Lewis left behind a four-and-a-half-page fragment of the "Plan" for *Babbitt*, which Batchelor identified in her essay but did not analyze. The fragment is revealing: it shows that Lewis made at least two crucial changes in the structure of the early chapters in the novel and that he had planned to make the role that the city of Zenith plays in the novel equal to the role played by his eponymous protagonist. (This theory is further supported by some of the notebook material.)

Third, and perhaps most important, the draft typescript of the novel, heavily revised by Lewis, lends much insight into how Lewis felt about *Babbitt*. The revisions are self-contradictory. Lewis cut many passages, mostly near the beginning of the typescript, that portrayed *Babbitt* as clownish and caricature-like. But Lewis also deleted many other passages in which

Babbitt is more "human and individual," to use Lewis's description of the character, and less of a "type." Lewis's changes in the typescript display the main aesthetic problem that he struggled with as he wrote the novel: how to humanize a satirical character.

These deleted passages also suggest that Lewis was trying to develop beyond a satirist into a "novelist"—in the fullest sense of that word. Lewis cut these passages primarily because very few of them were stylistically elegant or precise enough to keep in the text. But Lewis was also discouraged from trying to explore Babbitt's psychology by his wife Grace, who read through the typescript and wrote comments in the margins. She suggested many of these cuts, advice which Lewis accepted. (Lewis also lacked the same sort of encouragement from Alfred Harcourt, his publisher, and especially from his literary confidant, H.L. Mencken—Mencken wanted Lewis only to capture the fantastic surfaces of American life.) However imperfect these deleted passages are, they show that Lewis tried to invest Babbitt with more self-knowledge and complexity of thought than the character seems to have in the novel.

Collectively, these materials are fascinating literary artifacts that show how Lewis took an abstract idea—the Booster living in the medium sized, middle western city—and transformed it into Babbitt, in the process creating an archetype for a way of living and thinking which today remains in the vernacular as well as in the popular imagination.

"Babbitt as Veblenian Critique of Manliness"

Clare Eby, University of Connecticut at Hartford

Lewis provides a valuable chapter of cultural history by tracing Babbitt's rebellion against what he calls "the duty of being manly": a duty to manifest boosterism, clannishness, chauvinism, and anti-intellectualism. The terms of Lewis's definition of manliness and his understanding of the damage it causes the autonomous self point to his correspondence with Thorstein Veblen's works. The stereotypical qualities of Babbitt conform to Veblen's critique of manliness. Contrastingly, the reader sympathizes with Babbitt only insofar as the realtor casts off his "He-man" role which his cohorts rightly perceive as a challenge to the status quo.

According to Veblen, the contemporary American model of manliness rests on the foundation of business enterprise which, evolved from exploit, is predatory, competitive, and destructive. These same traits, Veblen contends, define American male prowess. Lewis also equates manliness with business and exploit, while illustrating the Veblenian sexual division of labor. Veblen finds businessmen as inept at making things as they are skilled at making money. Babbitt, appropriately, is a realtor who knows nothing about architecture.

But Veblen's successful male does not live by individual success alone. Veblen also considers the back-slapping, herding tendency fundamentally masculine. Unlike the celebrated individualism of the capitalistic spirit, clannishness fosters group identification and binds the individual male to his habitat. Lewis's realtor knows that being a He-Man is not only about looking out for Numero Uno. The compulsion to belong to the right groups insinuates itself into all facets of Babbitt's life, from

his business ethics to his enthusiasm for baseball. A deep, insidious peer pressure influences his speech at the Realtors' Convention which is about, appropriately, manhood.

It is against this coercive and clannish model of masculinity that Babbitt briefly tries to assert his individuality. His rebellion lets him peer beyond the clannishness of Zenith men into the subversive territory of independent thought. But Babbitt soon discovers that his "world... , once doubted, became absurd."

Babbitt's rebellion illustrates the explosive potential of what Veblen calls "idle curiosity." As Veblen points out, the skeptical spirit of inquiry challenges the status quo. Veblen's analysis of idle curiosity also accounts for the noticeable anti-intellectualism in Zenith, for Veblen argues that idle curiosity challenges "the current ideal of manhood." Likewise, in *Babbitt*, asking questions about the social order means defiance of the manly ideal. As Babbitt faces retribution for "treachery to the clan," the ceremonial proofs of his identity begin to vanish. Babbitt's rebellion fails once he faces the choice between being a He-man or an individual. He-men, who recognize themselves only by their group identification, *cannot be* autonomous.

Veblen's theory of institutional coercion accounts for both the failure of the realtor's rebellion and for the triumph of the status quo. Veblen emphasizes both the role of the Vested Interests and the part the Common Man plays in sustaining the status quo. Men pride themselves on their affiliation with the expensive, the impressive, the large—with the Vested Interests. Babbitt's retribalization illustrates the ingrained oppositions to change. So petty a character as Babbitt must be reclaimed because he is part of the skeleton to which the muscle of the Vested Interest attaches.

The alleged conflict between the "two Babbitts" vanishes once we recognize the Veblenian analysis of the crisis of American masculinity. Babbitt returns to the sanctuary of "facile masculine advice" and "true masculine wiles." The status quo of Zenith is restored, and Lewis has demonstrated the pressure and even coercion needed to maintain the unruffled surface. He-men marshal the battle to uphold the established order, receiving in return the confirmation of their manliness. *Babbitt* and the writings of Veblen document a concern that

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coercive standards for masculinity were strangling the autonomy of individual males.

* The complete version of this essay is forthcoming in *American Studies*.

"Sinclair Lewis's 'Minnesota Diary' and his Devotion to Thoreau"

George Killough, College of St. Scholastica

Sinclair Lewis's "Minnesota Diary" is an effective antidote to the memory of Lewis as an author with no subtlety. He kept this diary from 1942 to 1946 when he was trying to re-establish a home in Minnesota, first in the Twin-Cities, then in Duluth. It survives as a 160-page typescript in the Yale collection. Mark Schorer published excerpts in *Esquire* (October 1958: 160-162), but the whole text has not been available in print. For several years I have been preparing an edition for publication. I expect readers to find that the Lewis persona emerging from the diary will seem quieter, more lyrical, than the Lewis of public memory.

One thing the diary makes clear is that Lewis was a lover of scenery. There are abundant descriptions of weather, Minnesota landscapes, the moods of Lake Minnetonka and Lake Superior, the best views from the best vantage points on Minnesota highways.

For the most part, the style is not brassy or satiric but calm and appreciative. Details from scenery and society unfold with the gentle disorder of real life, not with an ulterior design of capturing another large epitomizing image in the panorama of America like Main Street or Babbitt or Elmer Gantry. Instead there is just an easy flow of disparate things, charming, concrete, open-ended—the Burma Shave signs on the highway, a pianist who had studied with Liszt, a house filled with gadgetry, a juke box playing "Home on the Range" in Swedish.

More important, the diary helps explain the connection between Lewis and Henry David Thoreau. Lewis claimed Thoreau was the major influence on his writing, a puzzling claim to biographer Mark Schorer, who decided Lewis's debt was only to "the Thoreauvian Ideal of individual freedom," nothing more (*Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961, 811). The diary and the circumstances of its writing show that there is much more.

It covers just the times in 1942-46 that Lewis was in Minnesota, with only a scanty word or two about times elsewhere. He was not in Minnesota continually during these years. He spent whole seasons in New York or on cross-country lecture tours, even one summer in Hollywood. The near exclusive focus on Minnesota, as well as the title Lewis himself chose, "Minnesota Diary," indicate it was designed as a chronicle of a relationship with a special place at a particular time. That Lewis was hoping to have a version of the Thoreauvian experience is borne out by a *Time* magazine "People" section note from May 24, 1943 that reports Lewis departing Manhattan for "rustic life in his home state, Minnesota" carrying a newly purchased complete works of Thoreau and telling a reporter that "a reading of Thoreau would explain all" (82).

The text of the diary shows Lewis emulating Thoreau in at

least four ways. First, it shows Lewis continuing to cut through the mud and slush of opinion and prejudice in search of rock bottom reality, a perennial goal of his novels which he pursues in the diary more through observation of landscape than society. Second and related, it chronicles abundant details of weather and scenery with great sensitivity, like Thoreau observing the changing texture of Walden Pond. Third, it shows Lewis trying to live the dream of a different life; although he persisted in accustomed urban luxuries, he was striving for something more elemental than New York apartment living, for he had targeted the remote and relatively rural state of his childhood. Several passages reveal the enthusiasm of someday reaching for a dream. Fourth, the diary includes instances of ironic ridicule, which was Thoreau's method as well as Lewis's for combating things that are not right.

The diary, of course, is not another *Walden*, nor was it meant to be. It lacks the finish and meaning-expanding style of Thoreau's masterpiece. Neither is Lewis himself a twentieth-century Thoreau; the dream was different and so was the personality. But the diary shows seeds of Thoreauvian inspiration motivating a writer often thought of as distinctly un-Thoreauvian. It shows Lewis in a quieter light, more sensitive, more alive to possibility than the normal public memory allows. It promises to give readers a fresh view. ♦

Treasurer's Report

For the year ending 29 April 1993, the assets of The Sinclair Lewis Society are \$925.00 and the expenses \$252.69, for a balance of \$672.31. The expenses are accounted for (other than \$15.00 for miscellaneous) by the printing and mailing of the Newsletter. The membership of the Society numbers 38.

Submitted by Roger Forseth, Secretary-Treasurer.

CALL FOR PAPERS: 1994 AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be holding a session at the 1994 American Literature conference which is scheduled for June 2-5, 1994 (the Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday after Memorial Day weekend). Current plans call for the conference to again be held at the Bahia Hotel in San Diego.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of Lewis's work. Please send a detailed abstract or a copy of the completed paper by November 30 to Sally Parry, The Sinclair Lewis Society, English Department, 4240/Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240. The fax number is (309) 438-5415. All submissions will be acknowledged. An announcement of session participants will be made before the end of January 1994.

Susan Belasco Smith of the English Department of California State University will be the chief program director of the 1994 conference.

A ROMANCE OF MANNERS AND CLASS

by Roger Forseth

Sinclair Lewis. *Free Air*. Edited by Robert E. Fleming. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993. (Bison Book Paperback. xii + 370 pp. \$11.95).

Three years before the publication of *Free Air*, an article appeared in the *Duluth Herald* under the heading, "Novelist and His Wife Visit Duluth on their Gypsy Trip Across the Continent":

Bronzed by the sun that beats down in the open stretches of Northern Minnesota, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair Lewis of New York city silenced the engine and the rest of their Ford touring car last evening at the Hotel Holland, completing the first unit of an overland trip that will take them through all of the upper Western United States and eventually set them down in golden California...

The reading public of Duluth is familiar with Sinclair Lewis through his many stories that have appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, other prominent American publications, and two of his books, "Our Mr. Wrenn" and "The Trail of the Hawk." Mrs. Lewis, who is also a prominent magazine writer, is known to many Duluth women through her clever stories while a contributing editor for *Vogue* under the pen name Grace Hegger...

Their car is equipped with a new style of hand start which works from the seat, and it looks as if the driver were giving the machine a hypodermic injection.¹

The prose here reflects the rather jaunty style reflected in the accompanying photograph of the Lewises atop their touring car; indeed, the article and the picture together catch the manner of the novel Lewis was to epitomize (in an ad suggestion to Alfred Harcourt): "Whenever you see the sign/FREE AIR/before a garage think of/the one book that makes motoring romantic/FREE AIR."²

Let me say right off that Robert Fleming and the University of Nebraska Press are to be congratulated for bringing out, after all these years, a new printing of *Free Air*. The text is a reprint of the original 1919 edition, published by Harcourt, Brace & Howe, and contains a finely informed introduction by the editor.³ I must confess to being thoroughly entertained and charmed by the novel directly preceding *Main Street* which in its tone and depiction of manners strikingly anticipates that great work. Lewis, with precision and considerable wit, recreates much that I for one experienced growing up in South Dakota during the Depression. One example will have to suffice. The heroine Claire Boltwood and her father are motoring through Minnesota and stop for lunch at Reaper, where they "encountered a restaurant which made eating seem evil":

It was called the Eats Garden. As Claire and her father entered, they were stifled by a belch of smoke

from the frying pan in the kitchen. The room was blocked by a huge lunch counter; there was only one table, covered with oil cloth and decorated with venerable spots of dried egg yolk. The waiter-cook, whose apron was gravy-patterned, with a border and stomacher of plain gray dirt, grumbled, "Whatdyuhwant?" (74)

In 1935, on a trip from Aberdeen to Seattle aboard a Chrysler touring sedan, our family stopped at the only café in Lemmon, SD for dinner. My mother, knowing what Lewis knew, demanded to inspect the kitchen before we ordered; it flunked, so on to Hettinger we went, where we were at least not poisoned. I have made that trip many times since, and can report that Lewis's 1919 description is still as accurate as it is vivid.

What struck me most sharply, however, in this reading of *Free Air*, is the novelist's careful delineation of the manners that give substance to what to this day pass for class distinctions in America. Lewis's analysis is, I think, masterful, and Mark Schorer therefore misses the point by arguing that "the novelist is even less intent here on facing the problems of class difference than he was in earlier novels" (260).⁴ Marxian categories are not particularly useful in the analysis of Lewis's fiction. What Lewis did better, in my opinion, than any other American novelist was to demonstrate that class distinctions in the United States—especially in the towns and cities of the West—are largely artificial if not illusory. In the world of Sinclair Lewis, which is the social reality of America west of the Hudson River, "class" in the European sense is largely the joke that Lewis makes of it. For *that* sense one had best turn to Henry James (can one, by the way, imagine James driving a Model-T from Sauk Centre to the west coast?).

It is true, of course, that groups of people, no matter where they light, will set up a social pecking order based on criteria other than individual merit, based indeed on little more than who got there first or who can afford the largest house. But in America egalitarian pressure tended to cancel class distinctions almost as soon as they formed. Lewis writes, ironically, that the sons and daughters of Seattle and Tacoma, the scions of old families running in an unbroken line clear back to 1880, were amiable to poor outsiders from Yakima valley and the new claims of Idaho, but they did not often invite them to their homes. (272)

Clear back to 1880! Hardly in the same league as the Duke of Ferrara and his "nine-hundred-years-old name." Lewis is describing social snobbery, not a social institution inherited from feudalism. Aunt Harriet, one of the most vivid minor characters in the novel (she's 82, smokes a pipe, and is broke), sums it up:

"This aristocracy west of Pittsburgh is just twice as bad as the snobbery in Boston or New York, because back there, the families have had their wealth long enough—some of 'em got it by stealing

real estate in 1820, and some by selling Jamaica rum and niggers way back before the Revolutionary War...But out here in God's Country, the marquises of milling and the barons of beef are still uneasy. (355)

It is *this* world that the protagonists Claire Boltwood and Milt Daggett escape from. And they do so, since for Lewis, character, in the end, overrides class.

Free Air is not one of Sinclair Lewis's great novels, to be sure, but it is a decidedly engaging one, containing as it does a large number of finely drawn characters, a rich texture of topographical detail, and those signs of stylistic improvisation that do anticipate his great work.

Notes

1. 18 July 1916: 3. The 17 July 1916 date given for this article in *Sinclair Lewis: An Exhibition* (University of Texas Humanities Research Center, July 1960: 14: 3) is a mistake. The article is accompanied by the photograph of the couple in their Ford that is reproduced in Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis and Grace Hegger Lewis's With Love From Gracie*.
2. Sinclair Lewis, *From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Sinclair Lewis 1919-1930* (New York: Harcourt, 1952), 7.
3. This addition contains no editorial apparatus. For textual information, including information on the serialized "Free-Air" that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* (31 May-21 June, 18-25 October 1919), see Martin Bucco, "The Serialized Novels of Sinclair Lewis," *Western American Literature* 4 (Spring 1969): 29-37; and his "The Serialized Novels of Sinclair Lewis: A Comprehensive Analysis of Serial and Book," Diss.: Missouri, 1963.
4. For more perceptive analyses of Lewis's work during this period, see John T. Flanagan, "A Long Way to Gopher Prairie: Sinclair Lewis's Apprenticeship," *Southwest Review* 32 (1947): 403-13; and Glen A. Love, "New Pioneering on the Prairies: Nature, Progress, and the Individual in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis," *American Quarterly* 25 (1973): 558-77.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR LEWIS SOCIETY

The Sinclair Lewis Society is accepting nominations for officers and advisory board for the next two years. If you are a member and would be willing to serve, or would like to nominate a member (see membership list in this issue), please write to the Society and let us know by November 30. Elections will be carried out in connection with the Spring 1994 issue. The next official meeting of the Society will take place at the American Literature Association Conference in San Diego in May 1994.

THE REVIEWERS REVIEWED: PART II

by Robert L. McLaughlin
Illinois State University

In the last issue of this *Newsletter* I looked at two review-essays, one by Gore Vidal in the *New York Review of Books* and one by Thomas Mallon in *GQ*, that greeted the publication of The Library of America Lewis volume. I argued that while both essays flirt with interesting critical positions from which to interpret Lewis's novels, disappointingly, they end up accepting and reinforcing the same New Critical assumptions that Mark Schorer uses to attack Lewis's work throughout his massive biography. My attitude toward these essays was generally negative, but had I known that as the *Newsletter* was going to press another, even more wrongheaded review-essay was about to appear, I would probably have been more generous. Indeed, John Updike's "Exile on Main Street" in the *New Yorker* is depressing in its repetition of tired critical assumptions that do not do justice to Lewis's novels and annoying in the sloppiness of its thinking.

Like Schorer (Updike relies heavily on Schorer throughout; we really need a new Lewis biography), Updike insists that art is created out of the life experiences of its creator. So in discussing *Main Street*, he emphasizes its biographical origins: Sauk Centre, Isabel Warner Lewis, Grace Hegger Lewis. Like Schorer, he is less comfortable with *Babbitt* because it is one of Lewis's "researched" books. He writes of Lewis, "From 'Babbitt' on, his technique was to assemble pages of thumbnail portraits, expert testimony, detailed plans of fictional houses and locales—'Sheer data!'—before he began to write, not trusting to his powers of improvisation or to an invisible silent mulling. In artistic procedure so methodical, the method tends to take over; his characters do sometimes seem animated notes, with their best bits left back in the notebooks" (97).

This critical bias that "real" art comes from real life results in two of Updike's oddest assertions. First is his explanation of *Babbitt's* conclusion. He notes that "The reader, against all the doctrinal trends of this most celebrated satire of Middle American values, finds himself rejoicing that Babbitt will be after all allowed into the right-wing Good Citizens' League and will resume his petty rounds of professional chicanery and family-bound numbness" (93-94). I have always thought that this sense of a happy ending was the result of a masterful manipulation of the reader through a complex stylistic and rhetorical strategy. Updike, however, argues that this ending was written by a man sated by the financial success of *Main Street*, a man "much better positioned to extol the joys of conformity and humble drudgery" (94). In other words, in his effort to account for *Babbitt* biographically, Updike assumes that Lewis authorially endorses Babbitt's return to Babbitry. Am I alone in thinking that this is a mighty naive reading of the text?

The second odd assertion is that Updike had put off reading *Babbitt* because he thought it might hit too close to his own

parents and their life. He writes, "When at last I came to read 'Babbitt,' it was because its central character's name rhymed with that of a fictional character of my own" (96). Perhaps I'm just skeptical, but Updike's going out of his way to tell us that Babbitt had nothing to do with Rabbit strikes me as an attack of the Anxiety of Influence. Updike's assumption that good literature comes from experience is clearly untenable: texts are always inextricably connected to other texts, discourses, and voices; no author creates a text *ex nihilo*. In Lewis's case, while the biographical approach is particularly unrewarding, the exploration of intertextual connections and dialogic interaction can, I think, reveal a generally unexplored complexity.

Another critical assumption underlies Updike's discussion of Lewis's characterization. Like Schorer, Updike is disappointed that the characters do not transform: Carol goes back to Gopher Prairie and Babbitt goes back to Babbitt. And like Schorer, Updike attacks the relationship between Lewis's characters and their sociohistorical context: he argues that this context "however clearly made on the map of society" does not "sink into the fabric of his characters' lives and determine their dooms" (96). In other words, both Schorer and Updike, operating out of liberal humanist assumptions, look for characters who are placed in conflict with their sociohistorical context and then triumph over it or are defeated by it. Lewis's characters, however, do not relate to their societies in this way; they are presented as subjects constructed out of their societies' values, beliefs, and standards.

This misunderstanding leads to some confused thinking. Updike leans toward a feminist reading of *Main Street* when he argues that its success was the result of "the identification of many female readers with the heroine" (92). But he goes on to write that Carol is "sexless" (93) and frigid and faults Lewis because "the defiant, yea-saying, ruinous affair the reader awaits never develops" (93). He concludes that while other characters "find their life's meaning in their relations with a man . . . Lewis's feminism disdains any such resolution of his heroine's discontent. Yet he knows no more what to do with her than she knows what to do with herself. Unable to conceive of any better fate, the author brings her back, her burden of motherhood doubled, to Gopher Prairie" (93). But surely Carol's frigidity is not an inherent quality of her character but is based in her sociocultural environment and is also a comment on the quality of the men around her. Carol's relationship with her society is more complex than Updike realizes, and her "fate" is not a matter of Lewis the author not knowing what to do but a comment on the social construction of character and the interconnection of societal context and subject position.

A last faulty critical assumption is in the notion of "realism." Updike complains that Lewis's realism is not real enough: "the reader moves through a world lifelike in its brilliant parts yet in sum lacking life's total resonance, and faintly tepid and inconsequential therefore" (96). This charge seems to ignore the problem of what makes texts realistic, as if some texts are successfully representational, capturing the feel of real life, and others are not. But realism in fiction is the result of certain literary conventions. The convention Lewis makes most skillful use of, the dialogue, discourses, and voices of America, is dismissed by Updike as "bright motley" (97). I would argue that

it is in Lewis's presentation of the various American discourses of his time that the various ideological assumptions of his characters' societies are manifested and put in conflict. They are, I think, the very mechanism that makes the novels work.

The critical response to *The Library of America* volume, Updike's and the others', makes clear that the primary job of Lewis studies needs to be the reframing of the terms of the critical debate about Lewis. Popular reviewers (and some scholarly ones) perpetuate Schorer's out-dated judgments of Lewis's novels because they do not examine the interpretive assumptions behind them. We need to reexamine them and redefine them in order to reveal convincingly the value of Lewis's work.

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H.L. MENCKEN AND SINCLAIR LEWIS'S WIVES

H.L. Mencken: My Life as Author and Editor, edited by Jonathan Yardley, has recently been published by Knopf. Mencken started this book in November 1942 and worked on it off and on until 1948. Because of the amount of detail, Mencken was only able to write about the period from 1896 to 1923 before he suffered a paralyzing stroke which rendered him unable to write for the last seven years of his life. Yardley reports that the unfinished manuscript runs 1,025 double-spaced pages plus 34 appendices of 717 pages and a 56-page single-spaced index. Although Yardley claims to have cut about 60% of the material, primarily juvenile work, financial records, footnotes, and book reviews which are easily obtainable elsewhere, the text is 450 pages including an index.

In the book, Mencken reflects on many people he knew, including Sinclair Lewis. The section focusing on Lewis is about twenty pages long and concentrates on Mencken's opinion of Lewis's wives, Grace Hegger and Dorothy Thompson, as well as Marcella Powers. "All the while I knew Sinclair Lewis," Mencken wrote, "he was either a drunkard or a teetotaler, so my

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Membership in the Sinclair Lewis society is for the academic year. If you joined prior to June 30, 1993, your membership dues for the 1993-1994 academic year are due. Thank you for renewing

relations with him never became what could be called intimate, for I am ill at ease with any man who is either" (329). Mencken has few kind words for any of the women, partially because he felt that Lewis acted in a subservient manner to all of them. He calls Gracie a "poisonous woman" (330) with a terrible temper. She was "a good-looking and well-turned-out woman, but I could never discover any evidence that she was of superior mentality" (330). He also discusses her infidelity with Telesforo Casanova long before her divorce from Lewis.

Mencken had a slightly higher opinion of Dorothy Thompson. Contradicting the romantic story of Lewis chasing her across Europe, as written about by Vincent Sheean and Mark Schorer, Mencken contends that Thompson chased him. He considered her "far more intelligent than Gracie, but almost equally pretentious and cocksure" (333-334). He claims that it was because of her urging that Lewis accepted various honors that Mencken disapproved of, including the Nobel Prize and membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Mencken disliked *Ann Vickers* because of Thompson's influence and wrote in the March 1933 *American Mercury* that it was "surely no great shakes" (339). He also felt that Dorothy, while not totally responsible, "certainly helped him down the hill" (339) in terms of his career and his health.

Marcella Powers is also mentioned, but in a very dismissive manner. He describes her as a "faintly good-looking young Jewish girl" (345) which is in keeping with his obsession with Jewish ancestry in any person he met. Mencken thinks he made it clear to Lewis that Powers was "a piece of trash" (346) and saw him little after that. Although Lewis was sober during much of the period with Powers, Mencken found him boring rather than amusing. His closing comment is on *Cass Timberlane* which he felt was more in Lewis's old style but not very interesting. "All that remained of him was a melancholy reminder that he had once been a first-rate man" (349).

AN AMERICAN CLASSIC RETURNS

by David Ramsey

Sinclair Lewis. *Main Street and Babbitt*
(Library of America; 898 pp. \$35).

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Sinclair Lewis is one of the untreasured treasures of American literature.

He wrote with fearless fire, ripping at the lies and pettiness of his homeland. That fire gives his books an eerie relevance, a staying power.

Lewis wrote his best books 70 years ago, but the pages live, an endless reminder of how little America has really changed.

He wrote, in *Elmer Gantry*, about a sleazy, money-grubbing

preacher. Remember, the book was written before Jim Bakker was born.

He wrote, in *Babbitt* and *Dodsworth*, about men and women grappling with spiritual, emotional, total emptiness decades before Jimmy Carter preached about a national malaise.

He wrote, in *Main Street*, about a bright, educated woman who was expected—virtually forced—to sit around the house and do nothing all day while waiting for her husband to return home from work. Lewis saw this was absurd long before the word "feminism" became popular.

It is apt that The Library of America has chosen to honor Lewis with a collection, though the nod comes after an unseemly delay. This Lewis volume comes 10 years after The Library of America's founding, after collections by dimmer lights such as Jack London, Frank Norris, and U.S. Grant. The publisher said it had no immediate plans to print Lewis's other works.

Even before he died, Lewis saw his reputation crumble. He reeled off one of the most astounding decades ever in American literature. Between 1920 and 1929 Lewis roared with *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry* and *Dodsworth*. All masterful. All in nine years.

But in the end he was haunted by his early success and, in a way, caged by it. In his final years Lewis was pegged as yesterday's writer, a man who perfectly understood one era but was lost in any other. He died in 1951.

In many ways, the criticism was valid. Goofed up by an amazing thirst for alcohol and left a stumbling wreck after numerous advances into painful romance, Lewis never came close to matching his run of the '20s.

But his late struggles should not lessen his early brilliance, a fact lost on many of Lewis's detractors.

Lewis is often dismissed because he committed the literary sin of clarity. Many believe cloudy writing is a necessary element of brilliance. Lewis, simple and unadorned, is then left out.

That's not right. You read a Lewis sentence, a Lewis paragraph, a Lewis chapter, a Lewis book, and you know what he's saying. There's no mystery, no hidden picture, little symbolism. Unlike Faulkner and Melville, both rightly recognized as geniuses, Lewis got to the point, got to it quickly and got to it clearly.

It was, perhaps, his greatest gift, and he should be applauded for his clear, graceful, frank style.

He should be recognized, as he is with this collection, as a giant.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

George Babbitt serves as an exemplar of the middle-class American who has fallen prey to the "new power of advertising in American life," in Lori A. Strauss's article, "The Anti-Advertising Bias in Twentieth Century Literature," featured in the Spring 1993 issue of *Journal of American Culture* (16.1: 81-

85). For Strauss, "Lewis's novel serves as a summary of many of the antibusiness themes (82) in American literature. "Babbitt believes most of the advertising he sees. To him, the big national brands symbolize excellence, giving life meaning and purpose" (82). More recent characters, including Steven Robbins in Avery Corman's *The Old Neighborhood*, still draw on the Babbitt stereotype although sometimes they are able to "recognize his deficiencies and take steps to correct them" (84).

Norman Podhertz, Editor-in-Chief of *Commentary*, wrote "On Reading for Pleasure Again: A Tribute to the Library of America" for the December 1992 issue (37-42). In it he devotes nearly a column to Sinclair Lewis and notes in a surprised and rather condescending tone, "Even Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* turned out to be very much worth rereading (and Lewis himself turned out to be an elegant—yes elegant—prose stylist)" (41). Podhertz prefers *Main Street* to *Babbitt* because Lewis, like Willa Cather and Sarah Orne Jewett, "retained a degree of respect, affection, and even love for the world out of which they came" (41). Despite this preference, Podhertz seems to find himself in some agreement with George Babbitt about the cultural elite.

Marsha Mason, the well-known actress and Academy Award nominee for the *The Goodbye Girl*, has spent the last few years appearing in radio theater across the country, including a 14-part adaptation of *Babbitt* for the Los Angeles Theater Works. The newsletter would welcome a review or comments on the production.

Douglas Brinkley, an assistant professor at Hofstra University, has devised a course called "An American Odyssey: Art and Culture Across America," which is designed literally to take students across the country to see important sites and meet interesting people. According to an April 8, 1993 story in *USA Today*, Brinkley has offered this course for two years, visiting Monticello, Abraham Lincoln's house in Springfield, the Harry S. Truman Library, and Graceland among other places. The students have met William S. Burroughs, Chuck Berry, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Hunter S. Thompson. The books of required reading include *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather, *Blue Highways* by William Least Heat-Moon, and *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis.

The legacy of *Main Street* is alive and well in the Midwest. Our correspondent Lara Mondragon of Frankfurt, Illinois, notes that there are still a number of women's clubs in her town sponsoring such events as Mother-Daughter banquets and historical society tours.

Frederick Busch, in his review of Jon Hassler's new novel *Dear James*, compares Hassler's creation of the Midwestern town of Staggerford to Lewis's creation of Zenith in *Babbitt*. "It is possible to see the arc of this novel's story as something like Lewis's: Agatha's (the protagonist) tearing-away from, and outraging, the populace of Staggerford, Minn., and then returning from the great emotional adventure of her life to, in Hassler's words, draw 'on this other, older source of strength, this home-

town connection.' Staggerford is Hassler's triumph: he clearly delights in populating the town, in creating a history in it that he then applies to the lives of the characters" (*Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1993, sec. 14, 7). The shared concerns of these fellow Minnesota writers seem caught up in the relationship between people and their sense of place.

In his review of *God's Salesman: Norman Vincent Peale and the Power of Positive Thinking* by Carol V. George for the April 5, 1993 issue of *Newsweek*, Malcolm Jones, Jr. comments that Peale "had more in common with George Babbitt than Elmer Gantry" (59). John Skow, in his review of *Nobody's Fool* by Richard Russo, in the May 31, 1993 issue of *Time*, also makes a Lewis reference. He notes that Russo writes about a contemporary Gopher Prairie located on the New York-Vermont border, but unlike Lewis, does so in a very benign fashion. Part of the reason for his genial approach may be that "Gopher Prairie doesn't have many young to suffocate and embitter these days" (67).

Gore Vidal also mentions Elmer Gantry in his July 13, 1992 *Nation* article, "Monotheism and its Discontents." His concern is with monotheist religions that strongly try to affect government policy. Part of his evidence is that "the electronic pulpit was soon occupied by a horde of Elmer Gantrys, who took advantage of the tax exemption for religion. Thus, out of greed, a religious revival has been set in motion and the results are predictably poisonous to the body politic" (57). The descendants of Gantry are numerous.

Frank Norris (not the American Naturalist writer) of Anchorage, Alaska, writes in the May/June 1993 *Sierra* that any northern community "has its share of Babbitts, 'greenies,' and shades of intervening gray" (12). This may be the first time Babbitt was specifically linked to antienvironmentalists.

Barnes and Noble has published a book, *Murder on Main Street: 40 Tales of Small Town Crime*, edited by C. Manson. It includes stories by Simon Brett, Donald Westlake, and Charlotte Armstrong.

Sinclair Lewis is mentioned as one of the aspiring writers who took up residence in Carmel prior to World War I in *Country Living's* August 1993 article "Seaside Sanctuary" by Leslie Martin. The story mentions numerous authors and artists including Joaquin Miller, George Sterling, Mary Austin, Jack London, Lincoln Steffens, and Robinson Jeffers, who made Carmel either a temporary or permanent home.

The American Studies Association *Newsletter*, in its December 1992 issue, had a short note on the formation of the Sinclair Lewis Society (13). Also David Wood, the Book Editor of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* mentioned the society as well as *Dionysos*, the journal on addiction and literature, which is edited by Roger Forseth, Secretary/Treasurer of the Sinclair Lewis Society. ♦

THE FANNIE HURST NEWSLETTER/SOCIETY

A contemporary of Sinclair Lewis, Fannie Hurst, has recently become the focus of a new society, The Fannie Hurst Society and its publication, *The Fannie Hurst Newsletter*, are devoted to promoting the work and life of Fannie Hurst (1885-1968). Susan Koppelman sent the first three issues of the newsletter to interested friends and colleagues. In October 1991 close to a dozen Fannie Hurst scholars met at the Midwest Popular Culture Association annual meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, for four panels on Hurst and a discussion of future directions in Hurst scholarship. Most of the presentations at this conference will be included in an upcoming collection of essays to be edited by Susan Koppelman and published by the University of Illinois. Koppelman will also edit a selection of Hurst stories for the same publisher.

It was at the meeting in Cleveland that the Fannie Hurst Society was conceived; it was also at this meeting that Temma Berg invited the newsletter to move to Gettysburg College.

If you would like to join the Fannie Hurst Society and receive a subscription to the newsletter, please send \$6.00 (\$3.00 for students and others who need a reduced rate) to Temma Berg, Department of English, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA. 17325, along with your address. Please make checks payable to Gettysburg College. Your subscription will start with the next issue published after receipt of your check. If you wish to buy back issues from the second year, include a \$6.00 check and indicate that it is to pay for back issues (or include \$2.00 for each issue desired).

If you are interested in receiving the first year's issues, send your request and a \$6.00 check to Susan Koppelman, Editor, *The Fannie Hurst Newsletter*, 6301 Washington Ave., St. Louis, MO 63130.

The Fannie Hurst Newsletter welcomes contributions about Hurst's work, life, and times. It also welcomes contributions about teaching Hurst's novels and short stories. Send articles to Susan Koppelman, Editor, 6301 Washington Ave., St. Louis, MO 63130. Send books for review, request for exchange subscriptions, notices for upcoming conferences, calls for papers, reports on presentations and publications recalling Hurst, discoveries of materials (correspondence, manuscripts, etc.) in and descriptions of collections in libraries, and all other items for inclusion in the *Newsletter*, and all other correspondence to Temma Berg, Managing Editor, *The Fannie Hurst Newsletter*, Department of English, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

Sinclair Lewis and Fannie Hurst knew each other and were familiar with each other's work. *The Fannie Hurst Newsletter* would welcome essays which discussed both of them.

Send hard copies of articles and other items for inclusion and/or IBM compatible disks using WordPerfect. Use whatever citation form you are most comfortable with. ♦

LEWIS NOTABLES

Screenplay on Lewis Planned

Margie Burns, an independent screenwriter, is planning a film version of the life of Sinclair Lewis. She would appreciate any contributions in the way of information about him including specific details, anecdotes, or other material which contribute to the building of a scene or at least the texture of his life. In particular, if anyone knows of any lectures, interviews, or other material that was filmed or audiotaped, she would be especially appreciative. Her approach to Lewis's life will be political, rather than melodramatic, and although she is aware of major critical works about Lewis, she is not at all in sympathy with Mark Schorer's approach. She can be reached at 6113 Lombard Street, Cheverly, Maryland 20785, (301) 386-5615.

Discount on Library of America Sinclair Lewis Volume for Members

Members of The Sinclair Lewis Society are able to receive a 20% discount when purchasing the Library of America volume of the works of Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. Members should write to The Library of America, 14 East 60th Street, New York, NY 10022 and enclose a check for \$28.00 for each copy plus \$3.50 postage for one copy and \$.50 for each additional copy.

Teaching Sinclair Lewis

Anyone who has successfully taught a Sinclair Lewis novel or short story is invited to submit a short essay for consideration for publication. Please use MLA style. Send to the Sinclair Lewis Society, Dept. of English, 4240/Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

Sinclair Lewis Bibliography

The Sinclair Lewis Society is planning to update Robert Fleming's annotated bibliography of Lewis. We would appreciate receiving citations or entire articles from 1977 on. If anyone would like to volunteer to survey a full year, please write and let us know. Depending on the number of volunteers, we would like to have it ready by next summer. Joan Bennington, and undergraduate at Illinois State University, is presently working on an honors independent study collecting material for the bibliography.

Russian Edition of *It Can't Happen Here*

Dmitry Urnov writes that his father, Mikhail Urnov, a professor of literature in Russia, worked on the first unexpurgated Russian edition of *It Can't Happen Here* in the late 1980s. The novel was translated and published in the Soviet Union as early as 1937, but was very much expurgated at the expense of the passages that were too allusive in connection with the situation there. The *Pravda* Book Division brought out the complete text several years ago and Professor M. Urnov was consulted as a member of the Advisory Board.

Descriptive Bibliography Query

Daniel Chabris, one of our founding members, has written to ask about the possibility of a complete descriptive bibliography of Sinclair Lewis texts, including all possible editions and printings, both domestic and foreign. This bibliography would ideally include introductions, prefaces, magazine articles, and other occasional writings. If anyone is interested in this project or knows if someone is preparing one, please write and let us know.

Jeopardy Time

Sinclair Lewis questions and answers keep popping up on the syndicated program *Jeopardy*. Here's a recent sample.

From July 21, the Seniors Tournament: "He dedicated *Babbitt* to fellow Pulitzer Prize winner Edith Wharton." This \$1000 answer in the Books and Authors category was answered correctly.

From June 23: "This Sinclair Lewis title character seduces an evangelist named Sharon Falconer." This \$800 answer in American Literature caused some trouble because *Babbitt* and *Dodsworth* were guessed before Elmer Gantry was given by the third contestant.

From June 9: "Sinclair Lewis won a 1926 Pulitzer Prize for this novel but refused it." This \$1000 daily double question was answered correctly as *Arrowsmith*.

From April 22: "Unimaginative conformists came to be called 'Babbitts' after a character he introduced in 1922." A contestant gave the right answer to this as well.

Sinclair Lewis News from Japan

One of the Sinclair Lewis Society's newest members is Mamoru Takahashi, an assistant lecturer at International Budo University in Japan. To aid our call for bibliographical material, he has sent three recent articles published in Japan on Lewis. The following are abstracts of his work.

Takahashi, Mamoru. "The Creation of Polyphonic Text: Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and its Translations." *Rikkyo Review* 53 (1993): 155-74.

Takahashi compares the 1937 translation of *Main Street* by Koichiro Maedako with the 1970 translation of *Main Street* by Tadatoshi Saito. The forty-year difference between them is especially noticeable in the dialect used for conversation. Maedako uses the dialect of middle-class housewives in downtown Tokyo which makes for a "wilder" translation than Saito's refined one which uses the dialect of typical uptown people of Tokyo.

_____. "On Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*." *International Budo University Journal* 7 (1991): 69-76.

Contradicts the popularly held view that Martin Arrowsmith is a man who does not consider love for family important. Arrowsmith, although often thought of as a hard-boiled scientist like Max Gottleib, at several points in the novel places the good of human beings above science. This is especially true in

passages dealing with the death of Leora and their child.

_____. "A Study of Sinclair Lewis's Narrator: A Bakhtinian Reading of *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*." *International Budo University Journal* 8 (1992): 83-94.

Applies a Bakhtinian approach to *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* with a focus on the double-voiced discourse. It is a "burlesqued and parodied discourse" (91). What "draws our attention is the alternation of the types of discourse. There are transitions from open dialogue to burlesque, from burlesque to parodistic narration, and finally to open dialogue. What is important in *Coolidge* is the various transitions of discursive types and the predominance of double-voiced discourse" (92).

SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY TO SPONSOR SESSION AT SYMPOSIUM ON AMERICAN REALISM AND NATURALISM

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be organizing a session at the Cabo San Lucas Symposium sponsored by the American Literature Association. The 1993 Cabo Symposium will focus on American realism and naturalism and will be coordinated by the editors of *American Literary Realism*, Robert Fleming (member of the Board of Directors, Sinclair Lewis Society) and Gary Scharnhorst, both of the English Department, University of New Mexico. The conference will be held November 11-13 in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

The Lewis Society panel will be called "Sinclair Lewis: Cultural Critic or Commentator?" and take place on Saturday, November 13. The following papers will be presented;

"Sinclair Lewis and William Faulkner: The Quest for Integrity," Dimitry Urnov, Adelphi University, and Julie Palievsky, Nassau Community College, SUNY

"A Scarlet Tanager on an Ice-Floe": Women, Men, and History on *Main Street*," Caren J. Town, Georgia Southern University.

"Boundary Ambiguity and Abortion: Women's Choices in Sinclair Lewis's *Ann Vickers* and *Kingsblood Royal*," Sally E. Parry, Illinois State University.

Robert L. McLaughlin will also be presenting a paper on Lewis at the conference on November 12 entitled "American Voices in Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*."

PEROT AND WINDRIP?

James Lundquist, author of *Sinclair Lewis: Literature and Life* among other books, wrote "Perotmania Wouldn't Surprise Author of *It Can't Happen Here*" for last July 13's *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (9A) about the connections some people were

drawing between Ross Perot and Buzz Windrip, the demagogue of Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. He says that although there are some similarities, "Perot is no Buzz Windrip, despite the 'Ross for Boss' T-shirts and bumper stickers." Some of the physical descriptions of Perot and Windrip are similar, but "This American tendency toward hysteria may be the main thing Perot has going for him. The danger is not so much Perot himself as it is the American willingness to swallow either raw or overcooked ideas," something that hasn't changed in the fifty years since *It Can't Happen Here* was published. "The fascist takeover Lewis writes about...is the result of temporarily crazed emotions. And this is the real warning the novel still conveys. Lewis believed that the enduring struggle is not of liberalism and conservatism, but against the incendiary bigotry preached by extremists of whatever species....Saying this in the midst of the dogma-deliriousness of the 1930's, when most writers found it necessary to endorse some sort of drastic solution, was a brave and independent thing to do. It still is, Perotmania to the contrary."

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 Margie Burns, Clare Eby, Roger Forseth, Laura Hapke, James Hutchisson, George Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Susan Koppelman, Robert McLaughlin, Lara Mondragon, Judith Myers, David Ramsey, Mamoru Takahashi, Dimitry Urnov, and Ray Lewis White.

IN MEMORIAM

We note with sadness the deaths of two people involved in Sinclair Lewis studies. Idwal Parry, a founding member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, was an advocate of studies in American Literature, especially through the support he gave the postgraduate career of his daughter, Sally Parry, editor of this newsletter.

Mikhail Urnov, a professor of literature in Russia and former head of the Fiction Department for the Publishing House for Foreign Literature, worked on the first unexpurgated Russian edition of *It Can't Happen Here* in the late 1980s. He was a member of the Advisory Board who consulted on various American authors including Lewis and Upton Sinclair. His son is Dmitry Urnov, a member of this society.

BOOK NOTES

Laura Hapke's new book, *Tales of the Working Girl: Wage-Earning Women in American Literature, 1890-1925* (Twayne/Macmillan, 1992), devotes part of one chapter to feminine economic ascension novels of the Post-World War I era including two Lewis novels, *Main Street* and his important but neglected earlier book *The Job*.

Novelist John Blades gave a good review of the Library of America *Main Street & Babbitt* for the October 4, 1992 book section of the *Chicago Tribune* (3). He sees Lewis as a "perverse antidote to all the campaign bluster about the decline and disintegration of the American family." Although he is cognisant of Lewis's own "streak of Babbitry as wide as Main Street," he is also aware of "the author's subversive, almost blasphemous mockery of family and community values in both small-town and urban America." These contradictions he finds, "drove Lewis both in his life and in his work." On the whole, he notes that "what makes these two novels so eminently readable today is their corrosive satire and comic vigor. In addition, they're timely—and timeless—reminders that the American family was just as susceptible to malfunction then as now, that many of our values were just as deeply rooted in greed, vanity, sexual repression, and hypocrisy...when it came to detecting the tragicomic faults and fissures in the American character, well, by George, he got it right."

•••

MEMBERSHIP

Many thanks to all of you who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the Spring newsletter. We would especially like to thank our founding members who have provided needed seed money for the Society. They are David D. Anderson, Daniel R. Chabris, Robert Coard, John Feaster, Robert Fleming, Roger Forseth, Barry Gross, Jacqueline Koenig, Glen Love, Robert L. McLaughlin, Clara Lee R. Moodie, Judith Myers, Idwal Parry, Sally Parry, and Thomas H. Roberts.

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter welcomes short contributions about Lewis's work, life, and times. We also welcome essays about teaching Lewis's novels and short stories. Send books for review, notices of upcoming conferences, reports on presentations and publications relating to Lewis, discoveries of materials (correspondence, manuscripts, etc.) in and descriptions of collections in libraries, and all other items to Sally Parry, Editor, *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, English Department, 4240/Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

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