

# The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY SPONSORS PANEL AT 1994 AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Society sponsored a well-attended session at the fifth annual Conference of the American Literature Association at the Bahia Resort Hotel in San Diego, California on June 2, 1994. The panel was called "Sinclair Lewis: Culture and History" and featured papers on the early Lewis writings including *The Trail of the Hawk*, *Free Air*, and *Arrowsmith*. The newsletter is pleased to be able to offer abstracts from the papers.

### Paul De Kruif and the Composition of *Arrowsmith*

James M. Hutchisson  
*The Citadel*

*Arrowsmith*, Lewis's novel about a young research scientist, marks an important stage in Lewis's artistic development during the 1920s. It is his only novel from that period in which idealistic themes are not subordinated to satire and parody of popular culture. Indeed, *Arrowsmith* was Lewis's breakthrough novel because it successfully answered those critics of *Main Street* and *Babbitt* who had praised Lewis only as a social analyst and not as a true artist. I believe that Lewis was able to make this significant shift in his technique and point of view because of the help afforded him by Paul De Kruif, a young bacteriologist whom Lewis befriended. One role that De Kruif played in the making of *Arrowsmith* was his providing Lewis with the technical data for the book. A significant portion of Lewis's notebook for the novel, preserved in the Lewis papers at Yale, contains scientific information: there are notes on the operation of a public health office, descriptions of Arrowsmith's experiments, even drawings of laboratory equipment and various strains of bacilli.

De Kruif did more than provide the scientific ballast for *Arrowsmith*, however. He also assisted with the nonscientific portions of the narrative—the "human" story. Unpublished letters that De Kruif wrote to Grace Lewis in the 1950s reveal that he assisted Lewis by drawing up character sketches of various figures in the novel and also writing a "treatment" of Arrowsmith's career. De Kruif was in fact in many ways an actual model for Martin Arrowsmith. Evidence in Lewis's notebook shows that there are close parallels between the early career of De Kruif (and even elements of his personal life) and that of the fictional Arrowsmith to the point where he joins the McGurk Institute. (When he met Lewis in 1922, De Kruif, of course, had just been fired from the Rockefeller Institute, the model for the fictional McGurk.)

De Kruif's values also contributed to the themes of the novel. Insofar as *Arrowsmith* is a commentary on medicine and biological research, it clearly reflects De Kruif's own attitudes. A series of four essays that De Kruif published pseudonymously in *Century* magazine that predate his work with Lewis deeply influenced Lewis's views toward the reciprocal processes of scientific research and medical practice. The language in these *Century* essays is actually echoed in various episodes of *Arrowsmith*—notably in the depiction of Gottlieb, whom De Kruif suggested in his autobiography was based largely on Jacques Loeb, the scientist/philosopher who espoused the doctrine of mechanistic behavior and whom De Kruif much admired (Gottlieb: "the God Loeb").

This is not to say that De Kruif wrote *Arrowsmith* or told Lewis what to write. It is to say instead that Lewis needed a person or persons around him during the long process of thinking and planning a novel, people he could draw from and absorb their personalities, mannerisms, speech patterns—and also their beliefs or philosophies. Like Zola on his fact-gathering missions through Paris, Lewis had done this in researching *Main Street* and *Babbitt* by immersing himself in the environment of the Midwest about which he wrote. In *Arrowsmith* he took this method one step further and literally lived with his character, or his model for the character, during the creation of the book, in order to absorb him and his point of view then reproduce them fictionally.

Finally, De Kruif also made important suggestions about the rough draft of *Arrowsmith* (in the Lewis papers at the University of Texas). De Kruif steered Lewis away from making the novel predominantly satiric and guided him instead toward more idealistic material. In marginal comments, De Kruif urged Lewis to condense or cut altogether several satiric scenes in the book and also suggested at least once that Lewis change his narrative direction when a chapter in the latter portion of the novel seemed to digress from Lewis's focus on Arrowsmith's struggle to remain professionally pure and not sacrifice his integrity to political ambition and commercialism.

One suspects that *Arrowsmith* would have been a much different novel had Lewis not had De Kruif around him to talk with, absorb, and use as a source and a sounding board. Without De Kruif, *Arrowsmith* probably would have been a novel mostly of caricature rather than of character—a novel that debunked and satirized in the manner of *Main Street* or *Babbitt*, but probably gave less of an affirmative view of the idealistic in modern man.

## The Mine of Lost Souls: Generational History in Sinclair Lewis's *Free Air* and Douglas Coupland's *Shampoo Planet*

Edward Watts  
Michigan State University

In their book, *Generations* (1990), historians Neil Howe and Bill Strauss postulate that the "Lost" generation, born 1880-1900, and the current "Blank" generation, 1960-1980, share tremendous demographic commonalities. Most importantly, each was born in the shadow of a larger and more idealistic generation: the Progressives and the Baby Boomers. As a result, each has been chided for its lack of idealism and criticized for its cynical detachment.

Sinclair Lewis was a bellwether novelist of the Lost generation. Before Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner, he was publishing novels that reflected the experience of Americans coming of age after the First World War. His novels are large and inclusive, straining to encapsulate the entirety of cultural forces which defined his generation's attempt to define itself in the loud and self-righteous noise of the Progressives. Martin Arrowsmith and Carol Kennicott particularly embody this pattern.

Similarly, Douglas Coupland is the first novelist of the Blank generation. Best known for *Generation X* (1989), his novels are likewise broad and inclusive. Like Lewis, he seems to hope to re-assemble a fragmented world between the covers of a novel by collecting and interweaving individual stories. Like Lewis's, his characters are often lost, seeking their own place on a complex landscape.

In this paper, I examine an early novel from both figures to show how each generation viewed itself as it emerged from adolescence: Lewis's *Free Air* (1919) and Coupland's *Shampoo Planet* (1992) share a vision of young Americans as rootless, looking for their own place and language and discontent with the inherited ideologies and conventions of their elders. Although very different in language and technique, these novels reveal crucial thematic similarities which suggest that Howe's and Strauss's intergenerational connections will exist in the sphere of literature.

This is also to suggest that Lewis's role as the harbinger of a literary generation may also serve as a model for Coupland. Lewis did better work than *Free Air*, and Coupland promises to improve on *Shampoo Planet*. Nevertheless, these works mutually inform each other in ways that expand our readings of each.

## Sinclair Lewis and William Faulkner: Quest for Integrity

Dmitry Urnov, Adelphi University  
Julia Palievsky, Nassau Community College (SUNY)

Together with the prophetic H.G. Wells's *The War in the Air* (1912), Sinclair Lewis and William Faulkner in their aviation novels, *The Trail of the Hawk* (1915) and *Pylon* (1935), gave a comprehensive artistic treatment of the problems that accompa-

nied the birth of the new technological era. They were responding to the age which was to become an epoch of even greater scientific and engineering "wonders" (A.-R. Wallace) than the previous century had been. Separated by twenty years of American experience, they presented two different stages in the development of "the romance of the machine."

To Lewis the subject matter for his story was suggested by the environment he found himself in when he moved to Long Island—"the cradle of American aviation" (Schorer 221). For Faulkner flying, since childhood until the death of his pilot brother in 1935, was an enchantment, typical for the time. In *The Trail of the Hawk* Lewis describes the young hero's and his friends' attempt to make a glider out of willow rods. The description bears a remarkable resemblance to Faulkner's similar bold and abortive attempt (Lewis 74-77, Faulkner 97-103). Faulkner was doing his best to become an air-man, and one of the first personal myths he created about himself was—Faulkner—a combat-pilot shot down over Europe. He even started limping as if it had really happened. He produced a whole series of works about pilots and flying ("Landing in Luck," 1919; *Soldiers' Pay*, 1926; *Sartoris*, 1929; "Honor," 1930; "All the Dead Pilots," 1931; "Death-Drum," 1932). *Pylon* was the last one, and its message was rather pessimistic and critical in regards to the new technology and man's dream to conquer the "fifth ocean."

It would be an oversimplification to claim that Lewis's position in *The Trail of the Hawk* is nothing but optimism. Still there is in the book that young energy, the feeling of new horizons opening up before the daring and the young. Lewis dedicated it to "the optimistic rebels through whose talk at luncheon the author watches the many colored spectacle of life." The main figure in the novel, suggestive of young Charles Lindbergh, is "a divinely restless seeker of the romance that must—or we die!—lie beyond the hills" (5). The central episode is the hero's flight all the way across Long Island and the Sound to Connecticut. "The sun was ever brighter; the horizon ever wider, rimming the saucer-shaped earth. When he flew near the Sound he saw that the fog had almost passed. The water was gentle and colored like pearl, lapping the sands, smoking towards the radiant sky" (Lewis 196). Carl Ericson wins the race and lands triumphantly on the green of Yale. On several other

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occasions he narrowly escapes death by managing to land in strong wind, on a half-broken plane and under all sorts of circumstances that work against him.

There is some evidence that Faulkner knew Lewis's novel (Blotner 873). But the enthusiasm of the witnesses of the dawn of the aeroplane era in Faulkner's main work portraying pilots is substantially mitigated by his concern over the human price man has to pay for the progress. Faulkner questions man's ability to survive against his own self-destruction in the new mechanical world. The beautiful dream to help man "sprout wings and become a superman" (167) which is very much present in *The Trail of the Hawk* and is treated there as almost an untarnished ideal, in Faulkner's *Pylon* turns into a bad dream. Faulkner's supermen pilots, even his Shumann who is somewhat reminiscent of young Ericson, lack essential human qualities and are treated as almost a human. "They were as ephemeral as the butterfly that's born with no stomach and will be gone tomorrow" (Gwynn 36). With all the admiration for his pilots' courage Faulkner sees that they are single-purposed people who seem to have more concern about their machines than about each other.

The comparison of Lewis's and Faulkner's imagery associated with planes and flying, too, reveals a striking difference. With Lewis it suggests freedom and joy, with Faulkner—death and frozen, almost animallike aggression. There isn't much joy in that book about the daring and the young: the characters are lonely, frustrated and compulsion ridden.

Lewis's hero is, as the writer puts it, "overwhelmingly American." He is "American-born, American in speech, American in appearance" and he carries within himself the spirit of heroes, of makers of a new land (6). Conversely, the major characters in *Pylon* are anational. *Pylon* is one of the very few works of Faulkner that is not set on his "little patch of native land"—Yoknapatawpha.

In his later years Faulkner explained what he meant by the ambiguous message of his novel: "They [pilots] were outside the range of God. Not only of respectability, of love, but of God too. They have escaped the compulsion of a past and a future, they were—they had no past" (36). It is here that the main division line between Lewis and Faulkner seems to pass. Early enough Lewis expressed strong doubts as to whether ethics and religion had any impact on each other. At the time of writing of *The Trail of the Hawk* his belief that conventional religion was among the most active foes of progress still remained part of his worldview. "Is there no joy, no greatness in living," he asked in 1927, "Is it the fear of God that makes us good?" (Schorer 447). By his *Pylon* Faulkner seems to say: No, there is no joy or true greatness in living if you reject God.

"Christian religion is a crutch," Sinclair Lewis wrote as early as 1904, "until it is taken away we never can begin to walk well" (92). Faulkner objects that once the "crutch" was taken away the allegedly liberated man is left helpless, unable to cope with the compulsions of his own nature and the pressures of the new mechanistic environment. ♦

At the business meeting that followed, the results of the election were announced. (See box, page three, for the new officers and board of directors.) The panel for the next American Literature Association Conference was discussed (see the call

for papers, page three) as was the ongoing development of the annotated bibliography. The role of the new executive director was considered and it was decided that the responsibilities would be editing the newsletter, maintaining the membership and mailing lists, and other business of the Society, including depositing checks. A lifetime membership fee was also approved. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the upcoming Lewis biography by Richard Lingeman. ♦

## NEW LEWIS BIOGRAPHY ANNOUNCED

*The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* is delighted to announce that Richard Lingeman is working on a new biography of Sinclair Lewis. Lingeman, who has also written a biography of Theodore Dreiser, has signed a contract with Random House and says he is looking forward to the work.

This biography will mark the first full-fledged look at Lewis's life since Mark Schorer's 1961 *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. Recent scholarship has indicated a need for a new biography both in terms of methodology and approach.

The spring newsletter will feature an interview with Richard Lingeman.

## THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY FINANCIAL REPORT 1993-1994

For the year ending June 1, 1994, The Sinclair Lewis Society had credits of \$650.00 and expenditures of \$340.10. The Society's assets, including the previous year's balance of \$672.31, are \$982.21. The expenses are accounted for by the printing and mailing of the Society Newsletter except for \$45.30 for the Society's Annotated Bibliography of Lewis Criticism. The membership of the Society stands at 53, an increase of 15 from last year.

### Call For Papers The Sinclair Lewis Society American Literature Association Conference

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be holding a session at the 1995 American Literature conference, scheduled for 26-28 May 1995 in Baltimore.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of Lewis's work. We are particularly interested in topics dealing with gender, economics, and the environment. Contextual and new historicist approaches are welcome. All submissions will be acknowledged, and session participants will be notified before the end of January 1995.

Send an abstract or a copy of the paper by 15 December 1994 to James M. Hutchisson, Department of English, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409, or by e-mail to [hutchissonj@citadel.edu](mailto:hutchissonj@citadel.edu). The fax number is (803) 953-7084.

# AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION TO HOLD ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN BALTIMORE, MAY 1995

The sixth annual conference of the American Literature Association will be held at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore on May 26-28, 1995 (the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend). Preregistration conference fees will be \$40 (with a special rate of \$10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of \$79 a night (single) or \$89 (double).

The conference director is Gloria Cronin of the English Department of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602. She reminds everyone that no one may present more than one paper at the conference and chairs may not give papers on the panels that they are moderating. Papers should be suitable for a twenty-minute presentation (about ten typed, double-spaced pages). The normal format is an hour and twenty minutes with

three speakers and a chair.

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be sponsoring a panel. See the call for papers on page three of the newsletter.

The American Literature Association will be sponsoring two other conferences at the end of 1994. On November 10-13, 1994, the ALA will hold a symposium on American Autobiography at Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, Mexico. The conference director is Michael Kiskis, English Department, Elmira College, Elmira, New York 14901. On December 8-11, 1994, the ALA will hold a symposium on American Humor in Cancun, Mexico. The conference director is David E. E. Sloane, English Department, University of New Haven, West Haven, CT 06516. This conference is co-sponsored by the American Humor Studies Association and the Mark Twain circle.

## ORIGINAL MAIN STREET BECOMES HISTORIC DISTRICT

The *Sauk Centre Herald* reported on August 23 that Sauk Centre's Main Street has been added to the National Registry of Historic Places. Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, wrote "Sauk Centre's Original Main Street is a reminder of the pivotal role such main streets served the nation as settlement crossed the nation. We support residents who are private stewards of their homes and businesses on behalf of all Americans."

National Register Historian Susan Roth of the Minnesota Historical Society said that *Life* magazine is planning to write a follow up article to their 1947 photographic spread on Main Street now that the designation has come through.

City Councilman Jim Fish, a driving force to put Main Street on the Register, said "This is tremendous for Sauk Centre. This is all part of an overall program to save the 10 blocks of Main Street. This will improve tourism by drawing more attention to our town."

When the designation went before the Minnesota State Historical Society Review Board in May, it was met with the most opposition the Board has ever seen from a community. Of 89 affected property owners, 44 were against it. Opposing property owner Gary Mueffelman was quoted by the *Sauk Centre Herald* as saying, "Our letters shocked them just like Sinclair Lewis shocked everybody with his book *Main Street*. The ghost of old Sinclair was there. . . . You know, Lewis left the United States for a while because he didn't like government interference and neither do we." (This bit of literary history is unknown to the *Newsletter* editor.)

The move to designate Sauk Centre's Main Street began after the state Department of Transportation proposed upgrading the street. Roth said the project would permanently alter the street that came to represent small-town culture in Lewis's book, *Main Street*.

## LEWIS IN LITERATURE

In the mystery *The Long Search* (1990) by Isabelle Holland, a professor (and eventual victim) is compared to Sinclair Lewis. "Because if Sinclair Lewis had achieved fame by stripping the American small town of any ray of the illusion in which it was once held by the American public, Paul had done the same for American politics" (9).

The short story "The Joker's Greatest Triumph" in the collection *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* by Donald Barthelme is a strange tale about Batman and Robin which ends with Bruce Wayne describing the Joker.

Consider him at any level of conduct . . . in the home, on the street, in interpersonal relations, in jail—always there is an extraordinary contradiction. He is dirty and compulsively neat, aloof and desperately gregarious, enthusiastic and sullen, generous and stingy, a snappy dresser and a scarecrow, a gentleman and a boor, given to extremes of happiness and despair, singularly well able to apply himself and

capable of frittering away a lifetime in trivial pursuits, decorous and unseemly, kind and cruel, tolerant yet open to the most outrageous varieties of bigotry, a great friend and an implacable enemy, a lover and an abominator of women, sweet-spoken and foul-mouthed, a rake and a puritan, swelling with hubris and haunted by inferiority, outcast and social climber, felon and philanthropist, barbarian and patron of the arts, enamored of novelty and solidly conservative, philosopher and fool, Republican and Democrat, large of soul and unbearably petty, distant and brimming with friendly impulses, an inveterate liar and astonishingly strict with petty cash, adventurous and timid, imaginative and stolid, malignly destructive and a planter of trees on Arbor Day—I tell you frankly, the man is a mess.

Although Bruce is admired for his perceptive analysis, he says, "I was paraphrasing what Mark Schorer said about Sinclair Lewis" (157).

# EDITH WHARTON AND GRACE LEWIS

James M. Hutchisson  
*The Citadel*

The extent of Edith Wharton's influence on Sinclair Lewis's novels has been well documented. Although Mark Schorer seemed baffled by these two authors' interest in each others' work and wondered whether Lewis's dedicating *Babbitt* to Wharton was the sign of a genuine indebtedness or just a publicity maneuver (347), Robert L. Coard has amply demonstrated that Wharton's satiric style, characterizations, and themes profoundly affected Lewis's writing.

What is not known is that Wharton also apparently made a strong impression on Grace Hegger Lewis, Lewis's first wife. A series of unpublished letters between Grace and Wharton, which are today preserved in the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, sheds some light on their relationship and provides some information on Grace's activities after the Lewises divorced. (Grace seems to disappear from the biographical record after 1930 or so.) These letters show that Grace's own short-lived, though moderately successful, writing career was encouraged and aided by Wharton, and that Wharton thought well of Grace's *roman à clef*, *Half A Loaf* (Liveright, 1931). The correspondence also suggests that the Lewises may have had a closer relationship with Wharton than Schorer supposed.

The Lewises first met Wharton in 1921, when they called on her at her home in St. Brice-sous-Forêt, in France. Soon thereafter, Grace began exchanging notes with Wharton by mail, updating her on Lewis's career, which Wharton was greatly interested in. In the spring of 1925, the Lewises visited the ailing Wharton again, this time at her winter home in Hyeres. The Lewis marriage was by this time showing visible signs of strain, but Wharton evidently did not think so (a minority opinion, to be sure). Grace recorded in her memoir, *With Love From Gracie*, that Wharton "did not bestow friendship lightly" and that she "really had an affection for us" (307). When the Lewises divorced in 1928, both Grace and Lewis wrote separately to Wharton with this news; but it was to Grace that Wharton responded, warmly and "with much sympathy" (Letter of 20 August 1929). Wharton was genuinely saddened by the divorce:

I am so glad to hear from you again after such a long silence! Mr. Lewis wrote to me last winter to tell me of the divorce, but I have not had the heart to answer him, for I kept so pleasant a memory of seeing you both together, here and at Hyeres, that I was very much saddened to think that your partnership had ceased to exist. For his case, especially, I wish it had been otherwise.

Wharton's last comment perhaps rings the truest: she indicates that Grace had a stabilizing effect on Lewis, something that he often needed.

Several months later, on 24 February 1930, Grace wrote Wharton to say that she was "now writing seriously" and that some time ago she had had a publisher interested in a novel she

had begun in Bermuda (apparently this novel was not *Half A Loaf*), but that she had had to shelve it in order to take a publicity job with Elizabeth Arden. Grace had always had literary ambitions. She did freelance journalism for such magazines as *Vogue* (where she was working when she met Lewis in 1912) and the *Woman's Home Companion*. Although she assisted Lewis editorially with his novels by critiquing characterization and checking for inaccuracies or stylistic awkwardnesses, some of the advice that she gave Lewis may not have been in his best interest, and she was probably always slightly resentful of having to be subordinate to her famous husband. Wharton evidently took an interest in Grace quite apart from her interest in Lewis, and Grace was surely gratified by this. The two women continued to correspond; Grace may also have visited Wharton in St. Brice the following summer (Letter of 24 February 1930).

*Half A Loaf*, Grace's lightly fictionalized account of her marriage to Lewis, appeared in 1931. Contemporary reviewers evidenced interest in the book, but mainly as additional gossip to add to the growing apocrypha about the personal life of Sinclair Lewis than as a novel in its own right. (The title of the book makes little sense until one reads it as an acrostic: "HAL"—Grace's name for her husband. In the novel, the Lewis character is called Timothy Hale.) Grace sent a copy of *Half A Loaf* to Wharton, intending it probably as both a gift and a request for a critique.

On 28 January 1932, Wharton wrote back with a lengthy and highly favorable analysis of the book. Although most readers would judge Grace's novel to be amateurish, Wharton thought the novel "really remarkable." She began by saying that she "fell upon" the book and read it right away when she received it—read it "with the greatest interest," and then passed it on to her neighbor, the novelist Louis Bromfield, who also praised it. Wharton continues: "Since then it has traveled from hand to hand among the friends who have been staying here this winter, and everywhere has aroused the same admiration of your powers." Following that, Wharton lists the strengths of *Half A Loaf*: an "admirable narrative gift," dialogue that is consistently "good," and characters who are "alive." Such praise as this, coming from so esteemed a source, must have gratified Grace immensely. In fact, in 1951, while searching through her correspondence for material to use in her memoir, Grace penciled the following notation on this letter: "It was like hearing from God."

Why was Wharton so impressed with this novel? She obviously judged Grace's narrative skills more favorably than posterity has judged them; but it may also be that Wharton's interest in the book stemmed from her interest in the psychology of the Lewis marriage and her own absorption at the time with the autobiographical element in fiction. Wharton sensed that Grace had accurately diagnosed her marital difficulties with Lewis. It should be remembered that Wharton herself was once involved in a doomed marriage (she divorced Edward Wharton in 1913) and that she drew on the emotions of such stored experience for some of her best work, such as *The House of*

*Mirth* (1905) and its alter-narrative, *The Age of Innocence* (1920). Wharton was also at the final stage in her career, when she was re-translating autobiography and life experience into a series of novels—*The Children* (1928), *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), and *The Gods Arrive* (1932) (these last two books bear some resemblances to Lewis's own *Dodsworth* [1929]). In 1933, she began writing autobiography proper in *A Backward Glance* (1934).

Wharton spoke at length of the autobiographical element, telling Grace that as she matured as a writer, she should "put away subjectiveness" and deal indirectly rather than directly with "yourself and your own affairs."

Many people have written one brilliant autobiographical novel, but the real novelist will never depend on his own private experience for material for his books. I should not say this if I did not feel sure that you have an exceptional gift for fiction.

Wharton seems to have thought that Grace had the talent that would enable her in a next novel to move beyond direct autobiography. Little did Wharton know that Grace would only finish one other book, *With Love From Gracie*, which was in essence the same book as *Half A Loaf*, this time presented without the veneer of fiction.

It would seem, however, that Grace took Wharton's advice and attempted to write another book. Her last extant letter to Wharton, dated 16 August 1932, speaks of an announcement of a publishing date for "a new book" (perhaps the Bermuda novel), which had to be temporarily postponed, because Grace was hired to report on the 1932 Democratic convention for *The Delineator*. Wharton, of course, was associated with this magazine off and on for much of her career; she had just had a contretemps with its editors over the serialization of *Hudson River Bracketed* and had told Grace about it in her letter critiquing *Half A Loaf*.

These last bits of information raise questions which cannot be answered, but one wonders whether Wharton provided Grace with any assistance in getting work as a writer—perhaps with *The Delineator*. At the very least, we may now assume that these two women were better friends than has been supposed and that Wharton both took an interest in Grace's personal life and seriously encouraged her to pursue a writing career. Finally, one must also wonder whether Grace did write another book after *Half A Loaf* and whether it transcended that novel that Edith Wharton found so "remarkable."

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## FAY WRAY AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

Rita Kempley, in the *Washington Post*, February 1994 (B1, B4), interviewed actress Fay Wray, best known for her performance opposite a giant ape in the 1933 Hollywood classic *King Kong*, in connection with "American Cinema's Golden Age: A Celebration of the 1930s," sponsored by the American Film Institute. What few people are aware of is that Wray was a writer as well as an actress and co-wrote the play *Angela Is Twenty-Two* with Sinclair Lewis in 1939. Wray described Lewis in the interview: "He was pretty homely and he had this pinkish-red skin. That was because he had red hair, I suppose, but he was pockmarked and then his teeth were yellow from smoking and his hands were yellow from holding cigarettes. . . . It was only when he started talking that he was interesting. And I don't understand how he ever got married to any lady. Oh God, I don't understand that."

However, she found him "intellectually so stimulating that it was easy to respond to his thoughts and make remarks and contributions. I suppose in a way he was impressed with things that I had to say . . . and he decided when I went back to California he would write me and then he would send me material that he had written and ask me to make comments. [The play] was really a collaboration in that way by letter."

Lewis acted in the play in a Midwest tour in the early 1940s. Marcella Powers, his lover for nearly ten years, played Angela.

## "THE POST-MORTEM MURDER" RETURNS TO PRINT

Sinclair Lewis's "The Post-Mortem Murder," originally published in *Century Magazine* in May 1921, has been brought back into print in the anthology *Nobel Crimes*, edited by Marie Smith. The volume features "stories of mystery and detection by winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature" including Pearl Buck, Albert Camus, William Faulkner, John Galsworthy, Nadine Gordimer, Ernest Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling, Gabriel García Márquez, Luigi Pirandello, Bertrand Russell, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and John Steinbeck.

The short story is an entertaining one, focusing on a young associate professor of literature who, through mysterious circumstances, is introduced to the work of an unknown and presumably deceased poet. His quest, to make known the brilliant poetry of this seemingly Byron-like man and to discover the circumstances of his death, is thwarted in an unusual way.



# IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE, AGAIN

By Robert L. McLaughlin  
Illinois State University

## Sinclair Lewis. *It Can't Happen Here*. Introd. Perry Meisel. New York: Signet, 1993.

Over the last three-and-a-half decades there have been by my count three paperback editions of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, each with its own introduction. On the one hand, it seems strange that *this* novel, with its depictions of European fascism, the 1936 American presidential election, and American characters like Huey Long and Father Coughlin, a novel so wed to the world of 1935, should be the only novel of Lewis's beyond the big five of the twenties to remain continually in print, to be available for students, subway riders, and bookstore browsers. On the other hand, many of us would make the case that the novel has an ongoing relevance to American society—a relevance perhaps signified by the paperback remaining in print—and that the dystopian door Lewis saw opening in 1935 has stayed ajar, sometimes more open, sometimes less, through the subsequent years. At any rate, one challenge any teacher of *It Can't Happen Here* faces is how to guide the student through the specificities of Lewis's world to a position where Lewis's accomplishment in defining fundamental movements in American society and culture can be seen. The introductory essay to the novel is one tool we have in meeting that challenge.

Mark Schorer's introduction to Dell's 1961 paperback reads like a ten-page abstract of his Lewis biography. Lewis's "miserable" life and his artistic "failures" are quickly sketched, discussions of the big five command most of the space (I assume that this was a common introduction Schorer wrote for a series of the big five and *It Can't Happen Here*), and in two paragraphs *It Can't Happen Here's* achievement is credited primarily to Dorothy Thompson. Jay Richard Kennedy's introduction to Signet's 1970 edition is much more satisfying in several ways: Kennedy focuses exclusively on *It Can't Happen Here*; he is enthusiastic about Lewis, Lewis's art, and this novel; he defines the historical context for the novel; and he makes a case for the novel's relevance to contemporary America. Unfortunately, by 1992, the last time I used this edition in class, Kennedy's contemporary America and his references to Medgar Evers and the Kerner Report were for my students as much a part of the confusing morass of history as Lewis's references to Francis Townsend and Father Divine. Kennedy also writes in a sort of cultural and critical shorthand; I suspect one needs to be already familiar with what he's writing about to understand it. Both Schorer and Kennedy make factual errors—Did you know Lewis won the Nobel Peace Prize?—but Kennedy makes up for everything with my favorite Lewis blurb: "Not knowing Sinclair Lewis's main body of work is an ignorance almost as fatal as not knowing why fire burns. . . ."

Late last year Signet finally brought out a new edition of *It Can't Happen Here* with an introduction by Perry Meisel. This introduction, which is infinitely more enthusiastic than Schorer's and less timebound than Kennedy's, proves a usable instrument to help students and readers generally appreciate the artistry and ongoing relevance of the novel.

Meisel briefly establishes a context for the novel in Lewis's life and career. Refreshingly, he argues not only that *It Can't Happen Here* is "among his best" but that it "marks a singular advance in Lewis's art as a novelist that transforms the assumptions of his earlier work into the problems of the new, and that leads to a startling self-assessment that crowns his career." Where in the twenties Lewis used satire to judge America, in this novel he uses a realistic technique that becomes a process of discovery, leading to a more complex analysis of American society. Meisel also helpfully connects *It Can't Happen Here* to other "negative utopian" texts, most interestingly, Nathanael West's *A Cool Million*.

Meisel alludes briefly to Ronald Reagan and the New Right, but he mainly bases his case for the novel's relevance in its use of language. He asserts that the novel demonstrates the interdependence of language and politics: the political is articulated by means of language and narrative; language and narrative conventions shape our understanding of the political. The conflict of the novel is between totalitarians (of either the left or right) who insist on the ability of language to contain absolute Truth and those who see reality as constructed by various truths stated in various language positions. As Meisel writes, "The world is dangerous not because people don't mean what they say, but because they do. Belief is somehow inevitable; theocratic piety even attends the use of language as such, since grammar presupposes a stability of relation between subject and object that the world itself may not possess, but in whose name it gets transfigured nonetheless." The novel and its protagonist, Doremus Jessup, end up on the side of multiple languages and truths, a position analogous to a vision of America as a multicultural society, a "patchwork quilt" threatened by the impulse to homogeneity.

For Meisel, then, *It Can't Happen Here* is valuable not because of the picture it draws of Depression-era America or because of its parallels to contemporary politics but because it shows "the similarities between reading the world and reading a text." In Lewis's time and in ours, in the world and in fiction, our sense of the real is shaped by a continual dialogue among worldviews and by a continual play between the forces of dominion and the forces of defiance. Meisel concludes, "If *It Can't Happen Here* is still real to readers more than half a century after it was written, it is because Sinclair Lewis has

identified the precise tensions that structure both democracy and the art of fiction.”

I usually discourage students from reading critical introductions or afterwords because I fear that they will cause more confusion than help. Meisel’s introduction, however, will be required reading the next time I teach *It Can’t Happen Here*: it both establishes contexts for the novel and suggests a theoretical strategy for understanding it.

## INTRUDER HEROINES: CAROL KENNICOTT AND ANN VICKERS

Review of Carol Wershoven’s *Child Brides and Intruders*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993. 311pp.

by Francesca Sawaya  
Illinois State University

In *Child Brides and Intruders*, Carol Wershoven lays out an ambitious and promising critical project: to re-interpret American realist fiction and its representations of women by examining the “social context” (9) in which this fiction appears. However, while Wershoven covers an impressive range of “classic” and “second tier” (9) novels, including Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street* and *Ann Vickers*, her schematized readings do not chart a new course; rather, they affirm the need for historically grounded feminist interpretations of realist fiction.

Wershoven begins with an account, somewhat derivative of Nina Baym and Judith Fetterley, of the exclusion of women from definitions of classic American literature. She argues that the myth of American individualism developed to “conceal the implications . . . [of] the sovereignty of acquisition” (6). “American women,” she claims, “subverted the myth” (10). Because the American woman remained in society and could not “flee to a wide world” (10) as the American hero did, the novel about the heroine “repeatedly explores confinement and its consequences and is highly critical of society” (10).

Two kinds of heroines, Wershoven claims, emerge: the passive and unquestioning “child bride” and the rebellious resisting “intruder.” Both figures undermine American myths: the “child bride” reveals that “the consequences of living by the American code” are a “diminished identity and a corresponding diminution of adult and loving connection” (12), while the “intruder” creates “beginnings—visions of a new design for adult marriages” (13). To understand American realist fiction, then, Wershoven argues, we must explore the “missing element,” namely “the social context, the place where the heroines are and where [sic] what happens to them says something about American life and how it was, and is, actually lived” (9).

In her section on Sinclair Lewis, Wershoven sees both *Main Street* and *Ann Vickers* as presenting “intruder” heroines. The difference between the novels, she argues, is that while Carol Kennicott succeeds as an “intruder,” Ann Vickers fails. Kennicott, says Wershoven, starts out the novel desirous of pleasing others

and “deeply afraid to look within” (248), but after leaving Gopher Prairie, she loses her dependence on others and “becomes capable of impersonal thought” (250), and with her husband, arrives at “a new place . . . [as] a new person” (251). By contrast, while Vickers also engages in a “quest for identity” (252), the novel simply reverses the “conventional bond of strong man and weak woman” (252), a reversal that does not lead Vickers and her lover Barney Dolphin to “a new place.”

While it is refreshing to read a serious analysis of gender in Sinclair Lewis’s work, Wershoven’s analysis has two serious flaws. While criticizing the claims to “universal truth” (6) of masculinist myth critics and promising contextualized readings of the American “heroine,” Wershoven, in fact, relies on the claims of these very myth critics, and hence presents feminist readings as decontextualized as those of any myth critic. She presents two ahistorical models of femininity and fits everything into those models. In the case of Lewis, for example, her discussion of “social context” is limited to an analysis of the relative mental strengths of his heroines, and of the ways in which they qualify as “intruders.”

Such an analysis cannot account for the larger questions of why Lewis represents women the way he does, and why his heroines change shape in the decade between the writing of the two novels. Relatedly, and more troubling for a feminist reader, is how Wershoven conflates gender, race, and class issues in order to make her argument cohere. Ignoring years of black and Marxist feminist criticism, Wershoven reduces all social struggle to the conflict between white men and women. Despite the fact that she analyzes only white authors, she asserts, that “slaves” (5) and “black people” (6), are in a position “like [that of] women” (5-6). Such conflation of differences enables her to ignore the way race, in fact, problematizes her argument about women in realist fiction, as an examination of black realist writers would easily show. As in this case, Wershoven’s argument throughout *Child Brides and Intruders* coheres frequently at the price of careful, patient scholarship.

Wershoven’s book highlights the need for feminist readings of Lewis’s work and of realist fiction more generally. In Lewis’s case, one thinks of how Wershoven’s feminist myth criticism prevents her from exploring the nuances of circumstance that Lewis depicts. His detailed representations of women and men’s daily lives mitigate against reading his characters, as Wershoven does, as succeeding or failing *outside* of the situations in which they find themselves. A feminist analysis of realism needs to examine how what Michel de Certeau calls “the practice of everyday life” is represented, how authors depict people making and imagining “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.” In Lewis’s case, feminist critics can find clues to debates about and within feminism in what Stephen Conroy calls Lewis’s “sociological” descriptions of daily life. To trace these changing representations of women and their “social context” (9) will help us to understand “American life and how it was, and is, actually lived” (9). Wershoven’s reliance on myth criticism prevents her from doing the kind of careful historical work she promises; nonetheless, she has opened the field for others to do so.



# TEACHING SINCLAIR LEWIS MAIN STREET STILL MAINLY MAIN STREET

By George Killough  
*The College of St. Scholastica*

Small-town high school principals say *Main Street* is alive and well. In July, twenty-eight of them studied Lewis's 1920 novel and heard the gong of recognition clang in their minds.

The occasion was an NEH-sponsored summer institute for secondary principals from small towns in Wisconsin, Minnesota, upper Michigan, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Organized by two colleagues of mine, John Schifsky and Leo Hertzell, it ran three weeks at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. The theme was Words and Place: Reading Literature of the Upper Midwest.

Seeking to cover the range of upper-midwestern literature from Hamlin Garland to Louise Erdrich, the institute invited me to lead a discussion of *Main Street* for one of its all-day sessions. I added also an excerpt from Lewis's 1940s journal, "A Minnesota Diary," to illustrate his writing on Minnesota in another mode. With permission from the Lewis estate, I used photocopies of my edition of this document, still in preparation.

The principals reacted with enthusiasm to *Main Street*. They thought it reflected much of small-town life in the Upper Midwest today. Outsiders, they say, are still regarded forever as outsiders. Outsiders who try to initiate reform are considered upstarts.

Although many principals came from small towns themselves, they now work in different towns. The insider-outsider conflict affects them personally. This must be especially true for the principal who wrote in his journal, "I married Carol Kennicott."

Another principal explained that small towns still accept a low standard of artistic creativity, still applaud any equivalent of "The Girl from Kankakee." He noted as well that, though laws now enforce more tolerance for the underprivileged and more due process for employees, the old attitudes that hurt the Bjornstams and Fern Mullins still persist.

Several principals noted that new teachers are often told not to drink in local bars.

A woman principal observed that, despite the increase of women working outside the home, the struggle for "a more conscious life" (as Carol Kennicott called it) is still harder for women in small towns today than in cities. Small towns are still, she thought, more distinctively men-centered than cities.

Of course some changes have occurred. Not only have new laws forced a higher degree of tolerance and due process, but the center of economic power has shifted, especially in the Dakotas. The few families who still farm are often large landholders with extensive capital investment, far wealthier than village-dwellers—just the opposite of Gopher Prairie.

Also, as Lewis himself noted in the 1940s, chain stores have improved the style of merchandising in small towns and the

quality of available goods.

What I thought remarkable about our discussion was the intensity of interest in the book. This may be true because the participants were mature readers or because they work as professional administrators (and outsiders) in small towns.

A further surmise is that *Main Street* speaks in the voice of the village and is therefore more appealing to the village-bred than the city-bred. The principals originated mostly in small towns, as I did and as did large numbers of the vast readership in the 1920s. If the appeal of the book has waned, so has the number of village-bred readers. An urban contempt for provincialism may not be enough to make you like the book. Perhaps you need the small-town perspective, an ability to recognize not only the village but also its distinctive voice.

I hope to pursue this idea. Others have suggested it before, like T. K. Whipple ("Sinclair Lewis," 1928; rpt. in *Sinclair Lewis: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Schorer, Prentice-Hall, 1962, pp. 71-83).

My kindred-spirit principals were reluctant to follow me in this surmise, not being sure how to define a village-bred voice. As a village-bred person, I have to admire their scholarly caution, but I want to chase the idea anyway.

I also wish I could keep the principals around for more talk. They were probably the largest group of mature, literate, well-adjusted, small-town professionals with whom I will ever have the privilege to discuss Lewis.

## JEOPARDY TIME

Here's another chance to test your Sinclair Lewis knowledge from the syndicated game show *Jeopardy*.

From April 25, 1994: "Background for Dr. Kennicott in his 1920 novel 'Main Street' was supplied by his father, a country doctor." This \$600 answer in *American Literature* was given correctly.

From May 26, 1994: "He wrote good later novels like 'Cass Timberlane,' but earlier ones like 'Babbitt' are more famous." This \$200 answer in *American Literature* was also successfully given.

## SAUK CENTRE'S SINCLAIR LEWIS DAYS A SUCCESS

Although Sauk Centre's 24th annual Sinclair Lewis Days seems to have little connection with their most famous son, the celebration, held July 14-17, drew crowds of over a thousand to watch the parade and participate in the events. Sinclair Lewis Society member Joyce Lyng sent in clippings of the highlights of the festival. Among the activities were volleyball, golf and softball tournaments, a spaghetti supper, a dance with "Old Tyme Music," a fishing contest, a bike tour, a production of *Alice in Wonderland*, a craft sale, a water ski show, and the crowning of Miss Sauk Centre at the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. The ad for the event advises "The talent part of the pageant is back again this year!" Would that Sinclair Lewis were alive to cover these days named in his honor.

# SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

*Western American Literature* (Vol. 28.4, Feb. 1994) lists under its Reprints of Note the University of Nebraska Press's new edition of *Free Air* with the introduction by Robert Fleming.

The *Chicago Herald Tribune*, in its short review of *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, edited by R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, on June 19, 1994, notes that among the letters included are some by Wharton to Sinclair Lewis who dedicated his 1922 novel *Babbitt* to her.

*Babbitt* was also mentioned in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on June 26. In the Sunday Punch section, page 1, Burt A. Folkart wrote of the "Blue Hairs' Desert Mecca: Prescott has become an Old West mecca for escapees from the cities." Folkart contends that "Sinclair Lewis also would have loved Prescott; there is a tribe of Babbitts entwined in the city's past whose descendants include Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt."

Garrison Keillor was compared to Lewis in the article "A Prodigal Son Makes his Way Home" by Neal Karlen in the *New York Times* on March 27, 1994 (Arts and Leisure, 39+). Karlen writes that Keillor was "lionized by the Minnesota civic boosters who'd remained remarkably unchanged in the two generations since Sinclair Lewis lampooned them in 'Main Street.' Like Lewis, however, Mr. Keillor was convicted in the local court of opinion for violating the ancient dogma encompassed in the Norwegian word 'janteloven' which means not acting better than anyone else."

Richard Russo's novel *Nobody's Fool* (Vintage, 1993) was compared to Lewis's work in a short review of the paperback edition in the *Chicago Tribune Books* on July 31, 1994 (sec. 14, p. 2). Drawing on a review of Annie Proulx of the hardcover, the note said it "is a rude, comic, harsh, galloping story of four generations of small-town losers, the best literary portrait of the backwater burg since *Main Street*."

In a review of the Peter Matthiessen novel *Killing Mister Watson* for the *New York Times*, Ron Hansen wrote that it is "fiction in the tradition of Joseph Conrad, as fiercely incisive as the work of Sinclair Lewis, a virtuoso performance that powerfully indicts the heedlessness and hidden criminality that are part and parcel of America's devotion to the pursuit of wealth, to its cult of financial success."

Barnaby Conrad, who was Sinclair Lewis's secretary for several years in the mid 1940s, was one of the judges for this year's International Imitation Hemingway Competition, along with writers Ray Bradbury and Paul Keye, and William Faulkner's niece, Dean Faulkner Wells. The winner, "Here's to You," by Bernice Richmond, as well as several of the finalists, were published in *The American Way*, the American Airlines magazine, for August 1994. The winner of the Faux Faulkner contest, "Quentin and Shreve on Football," by Samuel Tunney, and several other Faulkner finalists were also published in the same issue.

The First Edition Library is reissuing 20th-century American classics in their original form including the dust jacket artwork, hardcover bindings, type faces, end papers, title pages, illustra-

tions, and dedications. The copies have cloth covers with sewn bindings and only depart from the originals in one major respect: they are printed on acid-free paper. *Main Street* is among the first of the books being offered and the promotion copy reads "you'll find the works of Nobel Prize-winners William Faulkner and Sinclair Lewis." For more information write the First Edition Library at 88 Long Hill Cross Road, Shelton, CT 06484-9864 or call 1-800-367-4534. The regular subscription price for volumes is \$29.95.

Insight Media is offering a 48 minute video called "Exploring the Novel." The program "provides an introduction to the novel" and includes excerpts from the works of J. D. Salinger, Aldous Huxley, Upton Sinclair, Ernest Hemingway, Jane Austen, and Sinclair Lewis. Originally produced in 1976, the video sells for \$219. For more information contact Insight Media at 2162 Broadway, New York, NY 10024, (212) 721-6316.

The Herrington catalog is offering "The World's 100 Greatest Books," a collection of 50 cassette tapes with one book on each 45-minute side. "You'll hear background on the author and the plot; and concise yet full discussion of the book's themes; a detailed analysis of the characters and plot; and a concise yet full discussion of the book's relevance" all in 30-45 minutes! Lewis's *Babbitt* joins the august company of *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Billy Sunday, described in the July 1994 issue of *The Progressive* as "the Elmer Gantry-like evangelist who preached fire and brimstone and was a forerunner of today's televangelists," had a derogatory poem written about him by Carl Sandburg in 1915. Alfred Harcourt, then an editor at Henry Holt, thought the poem was too "raw" for inclusion in *Chicago Poems*. The poem was retitled "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter" and all specific references to Sunday were deleted before being included in *Chicago Poems*, writes Herbert Mitgang in "Sandburg vs. the Televangelists," a review of *Billy Sunday and Other Poems*, edited by George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick and published by Harcourt, Brace. The collection reprints the unexpurgated "Billy Sunday" as well as other poems concerned with causes such as social justice and racial equality.

The Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City presented "It Can't Happen Here: Anti-Fascist Performance in New York" last spring. In addition to Lewis's play, the exhibition focused on anti-fascist work created by performing artists in New York City in the 1930s including Maxwell Anderson's *Gods of Lightning*, written in response to the Sacco and Vanzetti execution, the Federal Theatre Project's *Coriolanus: Autocracy versus Democracy*, and other projects by individuals and groups such as the Rebel Dancers of Newark, the Ladies' Garment Workers Union, Paul Robeson, Zero Mostel, Will Geer, Anna Sokolow, and Marc Blitzstein.

Shirley Jones, the actress who won an Academy Award for her role in *Elmer Gantry* in 1961, has been named as one of the hosts for the Sunday programming segments for American Movie Classics. Known for roles in the movies of *Oklahoma* (1955) and *The Music Man* (1962), as well as her role in the television comedy *The Partridge Family*, she will introduce Family Classics starting in October.

## RECENT LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

Roger Forseth has had his article "That First Infirmity of Noble Mind: Sinclair Lewis, Fame—And Drink," published in *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics*. ed. Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell, and Tim Armstrong, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 216-24. This article was first given as a paper at the University of Sheffield Conference on Literature and Addiction (Sheffield, England, April 1991).

James Hutchisson's article "'All of Us Americans at 46': The Making of Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*," was published in the *Journal of Modern Literature* 18.1 (1994): 95-114. A version of this article was presented at the Sinclair Lewis panel at the American Literature Association Conference last year.

Clara Lee Moodie presented a paper, "Rereading Sinclair Lewis" at the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature at Michigan State University on May 14, 1994.

Sally E. Parry has published "Upton-Sinclair-Lewis: The Crossed Paths of Two American Reformer-Novelist" in the *Connecticut Review* 16.1 (Spring 1994): 81-92.

## COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Joyce C. Lyng, 1725 Sinclair Lewis Avenue, Sauk Centre, MN 56378, (612) 352-2624, and a new member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, has a number of Lewis novels for sale either in a first edition or a first printing. Titles include *Bethel Merriday*, *Kingsblood Royal*, *Gideon Planish*, *The Prodigal Parents*, *It Can't Happen Here*, *The God Seeker*, and Mark Schorer's biography of Lewis. Prices range from \$15 to \$34.95. She also has hardcover copies of *Arrowsmith*, *Babbitt*, *Cass Timberlane*, *Dodsworth*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Work of Art*, and *Lewis at Zenith* for sale at prices from \$15 to \$29.95. She should be contacted directly for more information.

Quill & Brush, Box 5365, Rockville, MD 20848, (301) 460-3700, in Catalogue 100, offered three Lewis books for sale. "BABBITT Harcourt, Brace New York (1922). First issue with 'Purdy' for 'Lyte' on p.49:4. Faint contemporary gift inscription on endpaper, small stain on rear cover, few light scratches on front cover, otherwise very good or better in nice clipped dustwrapper, darkened on spine with half-inch chipped away at head of spine, small hole in front panel, few small chips and one short, creased tear. Some wear but in relatively nice condition (for this book)." \$450. A copy of WORK OF ART "Jonathan Cape London (1934). First U.K. edition. Cloth covers slightly darkened, owner's inscription on endpaper, still very good. Edgeworn dustwrapper is aged and a bit soiled with a few half inch chips in spine extremities, still good. Scarce." \$75. A copy of IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE "Doubleday, Doran, Garden City 1935. Near fine in lightly soiled dustwrapper with few rubbed spots on spine, some tiny, closed tears and a full-length flattened crease (not very noticeable) on the front panel - still a fine dustwrapper." \$75.

Pacific Book Auction Galleries in San Francisco sold the Library of Arthur M. Applebaum on July 28, 1994. He was a lawyer, author, director, stage manager, and book collector. Two Lewis books sold very well. "*Arrowsmith*. Half cloth & boards, spine label. No. 77 of 500 large paper copies First Edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace, [1925]. Signed by Lewis on limitation page. Also with two 2-page typed letters signed from Lewis to Vincent Sherman, aspiring playwright, dated 1937 & 1938. Letters are stained, thus good, vol. fine (with extra spine label laid-in), slipcase cracked, thus good." Estimated to sell for \$300 to \$500, this volume sold for \$862.50. "*Kingsblood Royal*. Cloth, slipcase. No. 1029 of 1050 copies on laid paper. First Edition. New York: Random House, [1947]. Signed by Lewis on the limitation page. Also with T.L.s from Lewis laid-in. Letter stained, else fine in about very good slipcase." Estimated to sell for \$200 to \$300, this volume sold for \$258.75.

Swann Galleries, 104 East 25th Street, New York, NY 10010-2977, (212) 254-4710, held a sale on June 16 on Modern Literature featuring first editions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *King Solomon's Mines*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*, as well as letters from Sinclair Lewis, William Carlos Williams, and T. S. Eliot.

Second Lite Books, P.O. Box 242, Lansborough, MA 01237 (413) 447-8010, offered two Lewis autograph copies in their spring catalog. "ANN VICKERS. London: Cape (1933) Second impression. 8vo, pp. 460. Some soiled publisher's cloth, a VG copy. Inscribed by the author: 'To Elizabeth Farmer/ with the gratitude/ for all the trouble/ you have taken over/ my mail/ Sinclair Lewis/ London/ February 23, 1933' with the bookplate of author Barbara Howes." \$750. (Does anyone have information on Elizabeth Farmer?) A copy of ARROWSMITH "NY: Harcourt (1935) First printing, One of 500 large paper copies, Signed by the author. 8vo, Pp. 448. Cloth back board. Johnson p. 311. Fine." \$400.

Between the Covers - Rare Books, 132 Kings Highway East, Haddonfield, NJ 08033, (609) 354-7665, offered a copy of BABBITT this spring: "a fine, bright copy in an attractive near fine dustwrapper with some small, internally mended tears and a very small spot on the rear panel. A nice copy of this twentieth-century American highspot." \$1500.

Bromer Books of Boston, Massachusetts recently offered a copy of *Our Mr. Wrenn*, NY, Harper, 1914, First edition, stamped "advance copy" on the title page. A fine copy. \$350.

*The New Yorker* included in a feature on rare books Sinclair Lewis's *Hike and the Aeroplane* written under the pseudonym of Tom Graham. The June 27-July 4 1994 issue claims that there is only one known copy with the original dust jacket in existence, and that it was auctioned off recently for \$17,500 to Carter Burden. Burden admitted that he thought the children's novel of "no literary merit" (42), but that he was glad that he beat out the singer Michael Jackson for ownership of the book.

# WILL THE GOPHER PRAIRIES OF AMERICA SURVIVE?

A panel discussion held in June in Columbus, Indiana considered the problems of decaying downtowns in small towns across the country. A committee of architects presented ideas about how good architecture can affect the viability of the downtown area. In the article "Main Street Revisited: Architects Seek Creative Solutions for Troubled Small Towns," in the June 26, 1994 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* (sec. 13, page 28), author Blair Kamin writes "Americans have long recognized the small town as a repository of values as wholesome as an ice-cream social—decency, common sense, neighborliness, community. On the other hand, the small town has been viewed as unbearably dull, provincial, ugly, even hopeless—the insufferable Gopher Prairie portrayed in Sinclair Lewis's 'Main Street' versus the idealized River City featured in Meredith Willson's 'The Music Man.'" The author, and many of the participants, seem dedicated to recreating the mythic small town of another era despite idealized manner in which it is usually discussed.

## Call for Papers

American Literature Association Annual Convention, Baltimore, MD, May 26-28, 1995, Theodore Dreiser Society. The Dreiser Society seeks 10 double-spaced page papers (20 minute presentations) on "New Approaches to Dreiser's Fiction: Discussions from the Perspectives of the Deconstructionists, New Historicist, Feminist/Gender Critic, and/or Cultural Critic." As for the texts of *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, both the original and new editions shall be considered. Please send a copy of your paper, not an abstract, by December 31, 1994 to: Yoshinobu Hakutani, Department of English, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44424.

## BURT LANCASTER

The Sinclair Lewis Society notes with regret the recent death of the actor Burt Lancaster. A distinguished leading man, Lancaster appeared in dozens of movies but may best be remembered for his role as Elmer Gantry for which he won an Academy Award for best actor in 1961. The movie *Elmer Gantry*, which was released in 1960, was written and directed by Richard Brooks, who won an Academy Award for best screenplay. The movie also starred Jean Simmons as Sharon Falconer, Shirley Jones as Lulu (an Academy Award winner for best supporting actress), and Edward Andrews as George Babbitt. Among Lancaster's other major films were *From Here to Eternity*, *The Rainmaker*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, and *Seven Days in May*.

## The Mariorie Kinnan Rawlings Society and Illinois State University announce *THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA LITERATURE*

*The Journal of Florida Literature* is devoted to the promotion of the life and writings of Rawlings and of literature about Florida. The journal considers for publication scholarship on any nineteenth- or twentieth-century writer whose focus, locale, or subject involves Florida, including the works of writers as diverse as James Branch Cabell, Ernest Hemingway, and Zora Neale Hurston. The journal also considers for publication the papers delivered at the annual Rawlings Conference, held in April. Recent issues include fiction by George Garrett and articles on Rawlings, Hurston, Edith Pope, Key West writers.

Members of the Advisory Board are Patricia Acton (University of Iowa), Richard Adicks (University of Central Florida), Matthew J. Bruccoli (University of South Carolina), Jackson R. Bryer (University of Maryland), Charles B. Harris (Illinois State University), Robert Middendorf (San Diego, California), Gabriel Miller (Rutgers University, Newark), Joel Myerson (University of South Carolina), David Nolan (St. Augustine, Florida), David Nordloh (Indiana University), Peggy Whitman Preshaw (University of Southern Mississippi), Anne Rowe (Florida State University), Edna Saffy (Florida Community College), Ray Lewis White (Illinois State University).

Article-length manuscripts and short notes are considered. A hard copy and another on disk are desirable. All submissions must include a self-addressed stamped envelope, and should be sent to the Editor: Rodger L. Tarr, Department of English, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois 61790-4240. Inquiries about the annual spring meeting and membership in the Rawlings Society should be addressed to the Associate Editor: Kevin M. McCarthy, Department of English, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

*The Journal of Florida Literature* (ISSN: 1052-7583) is published annually in the spring. Subscription price: Institutions, \$10; Individuals, \$5. Subscription checks should be made payable to *The Journal of Florida Literature* and sent to the Editor.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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# SINCLAIR LEWIS WRITERS' CONFERENCE

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation of Sauk Centre sponsored the fifth annual Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference on Saturday, October 8, 1994 at the Sauk Centre Junior High School. The keynote speaker was novelist Jon Hassler, author of *Staggerford* which was chosen Novel of the Year in 1978 by the Friends of American Writers. He gave an address entitled, "My Shelf of Friends: Books that Mean the World to Me." Other participants included Bill Meissner, Director of Creative Writing at St. Cloud State University, on Short Stories; Edith Rylander, Newspaper Columnist, on Poetry and Essays; and Leonard Witt, Editor, *Minnesota Monthly*, on Feature Writing. For more information, write Jim Umhoefer, Coordinator, Sinclair Lewis 1994 Writers Conference, 950 Lilac Drive, Sauk Centre, MN 56378, (612) 352-2735 (evenings).

Lewis was a mentor to many aspiring writers during his career and the conference is a tribute to a writer who took the time to help other writers hone their craft.

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