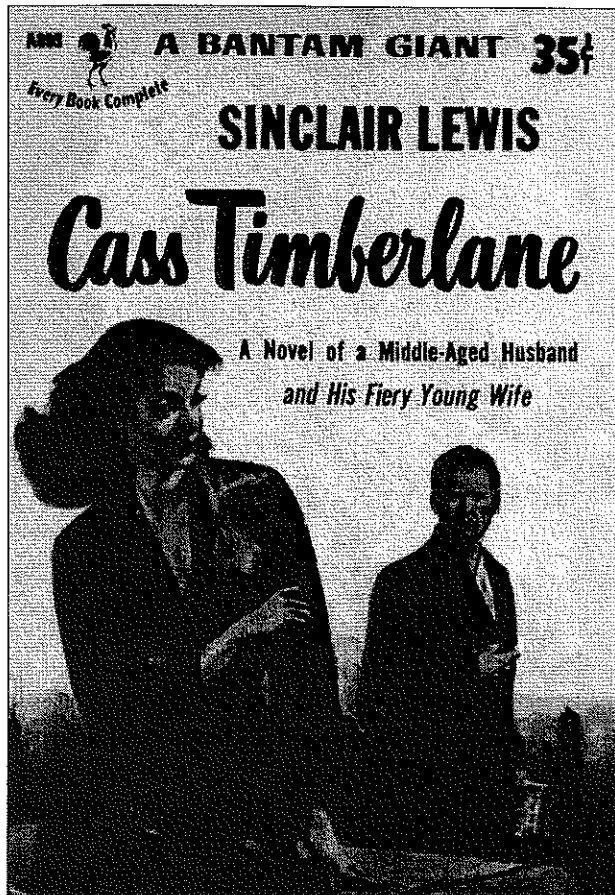


The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME SEVEN, NUMBER ONE

Fall 1998



Cover of *Cass Timberlane* (1951 Bantam edition)

SINCLAIR LEWIS— MINNESOTA RUSTIC

By George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

American author Sinclair Lewis arrived in Duluth on Wednesday, May 17, 1944, with the idea of settling down. The weather in Minneapolis that morning was hot. Here, as he wrote in his diary, it was 20 degrees cooler with a stiff wind. He liked the change. The next day the *Duluth News Tribune* published his picture and announced he was house-hunting. By Saturday he had rented the neo-Tudor mansion at 2601 East Second Street, and a week later, May 27, he moved in. This was to be his main residence for almost two years.

He was fifty-nine years old and world-famous. He had gained enough wealth from his writing to live handsomely. Though his literary reputation was fading, he had been America's most well-known novelist during the 1920s. Born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, in 1885, he had his first big hit in 1920 with *Main Street*, the novel about small-town America. More successes followed, which led in 1930 to his becoming the first American ever to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. Wherever he went,

Minnesota Rustic by Killough continued on page 9

THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY ELECTS NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 1998-2001

The Sinclair Lewis Society elected a new board of Directors to serve a term from 1998-2001.
The following people were overwhelmingly voted in:

President: George Killough, College of St. Scholastica;

Secretary-Treasurer: Robert L. McLaughlin, Illinois State University;

Board of Directors: Martin Bucco, Colorado State University; Margie Burns, University of Maryland-Baltimore County; H. Brooke Hessler, Texas Christian University; James M. Hutchisson, The Citadel (Past President); Jacqueline Koenig; Sally E. Parry (Executive Director), Illinois State University; Stephen R. Pastore, Deerfield Books.

Our congratulations to the new board and thanks to the previous board for all their hard work. Among the issues that the new board will talk about is the upcoming conference scheduled to take place in Sauk Centre in the year 2000 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the publication of *Arrowsmith* and Lewis's winning of the Pulitzer Prize (even though he turned it down).

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 1 Sinclair Lewis—Minnesota Rustic
By GEORGE KILLOUGH
- 1 The Sinclair Lewis Society Elects
New Board of Directors for 1998-2001
- 3 The Anniversary Editions of
Sinclair Lewis Novels
By JEFFREY M. HALPERIN
- 3 Lewis Novels Named Among The Top 100
- 4 Sinclair Lewis on Western Writers
By MARTIN BUCCO
- 5 Teaching *Babbitt*
By RALPH GOLDSTEIN
- 6 Sinclair Lewis Panel at 1998 ALA
- 9 Sinclair Lewis and *Travels with Charley*
By JACKIE KOENIG
- 10 Backwoods Isolationism versus Medical
Imperialism in Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*
By STEPHANIE BROWNER
- 10 Lewis and the Jack London Society
By JACKIE KOENIG
- 15 The Minnesota Historical Society and the
Improvement of Main Street

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 Call for Papers
- 15 New Members
- 16 Lewis and the Web
- 20 Sinclair Lewis Notes
- 22 Collector's Corner

BOOK REVIEWS

- 7 On the Road to *Babbitt*, CLARE EBY reviews
*If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of
Sinclair Lewis*, edited by Anthony Di Renzo
- 8 Uncle Hal, GEORGE KILLOUGH reviews
Sinclair Lewis Remembered
by Isabel Lewis Agrell

This is the original wording on the Main Street sign that stands at the Lewis Interpretive Center—noting that Sauk Centre's Main Street is the original Main Street USA and is listed on the National Register's Historic Places.

MAIN STREET SIGN
ERECTED BY THE MINNESOTA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1997

Nearly every small town has a Main Street—a town center where residents gather to conduct their business, greet their neighbors, and exchange news of the day.

Today the concept of main street is suffused in a nostalgic glow, as we remember the virtues and simplicity of small-town life. But it wasn't always so. The publication of Sinclair Lewis's novel *Main Street* in 1920 jolted Americans out of their sentimental view of their hometowns.

Lewis, a native of Sauk Centre, set his novel in the fictional town of Gopher Prairie, whose residents he depicted in an unflattering light. Soon the term "Main Street" took on a negative meaning, becoming synonymous with narrow-minded, small-town provincialism.

Although Lewis intended Gopher Prairie to represent the American village in general, it quickly came to be associated with his own hometown of Sauk Centre. The local newspaper expressed its displeasure by waiting six months before acknowledging any connection to the nation's most talked-about novel. As the book gained popularity, however, Sauk Centre came to appreciate its celebrity status.

Gradually the phrase "Main Street" lost its negative meaning as American filmmakers and writers in the 1930s and 1940s returned to the glorification of small-town virtues. Sauk Centre's association with Lewis's novel, which had at first brought ridicule, eventually conferred on the town a special dignity.

Now Sauk Centre's Main Street stands as the living symbol of the American small town. In 1994, to recognize its importance in our cultural history, this Main Street was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the nation's official list of properties worthy of preservation.

CONTRIBUTORS

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

These people include: Frederick Betz, Stephanie Browner, Martin Bucco, Clare Eby, Robert Fleming, Roger Forseth, Ralph Goldstein, Jeffrey M. Halperin, H. Brooke Hessler, Catherine Jurca, Bill Jennings, George Killough, Jacqueline Koenig, Joyce Lyng, Robert L. McLaughlin, Roberta Parry, Steve Pastore.

THE ANNIVERSARY EDITIONS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS NOVELS

By Jeffrey M. Halperin

Anniversary issues of books which have become famous, sold well, or both are a fairly common phenomenon in the publishing business. Sinclair Lewis, despite the huge success of many of his books, had only two of his works celebrated with "anniversary editions": *Main Street* and *Babbitt*.

The *Main Street* "Anniversary Edition" was published not by Harcourt, Brace and Howe (or its successor, Harcourt, Brace & Co.) but by the famed reprint house of Grosset and Dunlap. Known more for their inexpensive editions of books that were established best-sellers, G&D (as it is known in the book trade) usually used inferior but serviceable materials to produce books from the original plates, which were aimed at what would soon become the paperback market. G&D usually, but not always, reproduced the jacket design as well (using the front panel only; the rear panel and flaps and even the jacket lining were used as promotional space for other G&D titles). Convincing authors to take lower royalties and offering percentage points to primary publishers instead of flat fees, G&D promoted their books in drug stores, 5 and 10s, and similar "lower end" retail outlets. It was a standard form of promotion dependent on posters and signs that often proclaimed that because the author reduced his royalties, the book could be sold at a lower price.

Main Street was something of a departure for Grosset & Dunlap. The book was issued in 1945 bound in a lavish, all silver-coated cloth cover with navy blue printing and no dust jacket, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1920 original. Blind stamped lines and a wreath on the front panel with a reverse printed blue circle stating "Anniversary Edition" complete an extraordinary presentation from a company whose publishing reputation was synony-

Halperin continued on page 14

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter

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LEWIS NOVELS NAMED AMONG THE TOP 100

The Modern Library recently (July 1998) ranked the top hundred English-Language novels of the 20th century. *Main Street* was named 67, right between Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*. Although the list was criticized for having few women (8) and only six books written in the last twenty-five years, it is still a great acknowledgment of Lewis's work.

In another listing, this one by students in the Radcliffe Publishing course (also July 1998), two books by Lewis were listed, *Babbitt* (94) and *Main Street* (99). *Babbitt* was between *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles and *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling. *Main Street* was lodged between *Where Angels Fear to Tread* by E. M. Forster and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie.

Daniel Boorstin, a Pulitzer-Prize winning historian and former Librarian of Congress, joined the act and nominated his top ten books that every American should read in the July 12 issue of *Parade*. *Main Street* also made this list.

SINCLAIR LEWIS ON WESTERN WRITERS

By Martin Bucco
Colorado State University

Toward the end of *Dodsworth* (1929), Sam receives a letter from his self-centered and pretentious wife, Fran, who has run off with Kurt Obersdorf, a poor Austrian nobleman. Fran praises the *thickness* of European life, as opposed to the thinness of American existence. Sam thinks of tradition, "of pioneers pushing to the westward, across the Alleghenies, through the forests of Kentucky and Tennessee, on to the bleeding plains of Kansas, on to Oregon and California, a religious procession, sleeping always in danger, never resting, and opening a new home for a hundred million people." During his long writing career, Sinclair Lewis recorded his literary opinions in a variety of forms as easily and as readily as he expressed his other opinions. A great reader, Lewis delighted in good Western writing—in writing by natives of the Middle West and the Far West. He relished especially the clash between Beacon Street and Main Street, between Greenwich Villagers and what he called the Out-o-Doors Bunch.

Among an earlier generation Lewis extolled Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Jack London, and the early Hamlin Garland. Though Lewis esteemed Mark Twain as "perhaps the greatest of our writers," he actually wrote little about him. Unlike Hemingway's "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mr. Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," never quoted is Lewis's "take out Tom Sawyer and [*Huckleberry Finn*] is the greatest book ever written." By and large, Lewis uses Mark Twain (whom he saw through the eyes of Van Wyck Brooks) as a club to beat on the genteel head of William Dean Howells (whom he saw through the eyes of H.L. Mencken). However instrumental we know the Dean of American Letters to have been in educating the public to the high worth of his friend Mark Twain by designating him the "Lincoln of our literature," Lewis, in his Nobel Prize Address in 1930, did much to damage Howells's reputation by referring to him as "a pious old maid" who managed to put "that fiery old savage" Mark Twain "into an intellectual frock coat and top hat." In his amusing auto-obituary "The Death of Arrowsmith" (1941), Lewis pictured himself as a forgotten novelist writing essays on, yes, such little-read authors as Mark Twain.

If *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) are household American titles, not so *McTeague* (1890) and *The Octopus* (1901), but Lewis thought very highly of Frank Norris. Lewis thought nothing better in the California writer than the "galloping adventurous portion of *McTeague*"—the big chase scenes, culminating in the hand-cuffing of hunter and hunted in the desert. As "broad and visualizable" as Death Valley in *McTeague* is Norris's picture of the San Joaquin Valley in *The Octopus*. Here, Lewis maintained, Norris penetrated into the hearts of men and women

crushed by the railroad's "dirty little agents," with social injustice, for Norris at least, the necessary friction of progress.

Thanks to Walter Scott and Joseph Conrad, Lewis early learned to love stories and novels of adventure, even some by Rex Beach and Stewart Edward White. But Lewis decried the popular Western story, especially Zane Grey. In his review of Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), Lewis notes that Golden Gate youths go tramping, no longer seeking gold but freedom, the Valley of the Moon. Lewis himself spent part of 1909 with the literary colony at Carmel. If Jack London's athleticism was beyond Lewis—London ran the 100-yard dash in high school in 32 seconds—the young man from Main Street and the revolutionary from Oakland could find satisfaction, at least, in vilifying *le maître*, Henry James. In an early letter to his father, Lewis mentioned London "as a wonderful short story writer." As we all know, London bought 27 plots from young Lewis for \$137.50, of which London used perhaps 5. In 1914, Lewis pronounced London's seven rugged stories in *The Strength of the Strong* "vivid and dramatic." A born storyteller, London offered readers "no mental strain and no trick endings." Like "most sizable writers" he produced too much, said Lewis, but the judicious selection in *The Strength of the Strong* makes for—what else?—a "very strong book." In 1926 Lewis recommended to Alfred Harcourt that he send George Sterling a contract to write a volume on the golden days of California literature, featuring such personalities as Ambrose Bierce, Joaquin Miller, Gertrude Atherton, and Jack London. "It's not so much that any of these people, except London, were very important," Lewis added, "as that the old life was peculiarly brilliant, gay, and romantic, against a romantic background."

But "the real romance of the land" (as Lewis put it) was first revealed to him not by Twain, Norris, London, or any of the Carmel Out-o-Doors bunch. Rather, it was revealed to him by Hamlin Garland—during the summer of 1905, when the Yale sophomore, back home in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, found "vastly exciting" *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891) and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895). Although Lewis had read about ordinary people in Dickens and Balzac, not until he read Garland had he realized fully the possibility of writing about Sauk Centre. Garland's characters, young Lewis discovered, could be both vile and heroic, his villages both blissful and cursed. Thus Garland liberated Lewis, freeing him to try translating his hometown into prose. Perhaps out of respect for Garland's early work, Lewis reviewed *The Forester's Daughter* (1914) kindly. He described this tale of wholesome Amazonian Berrie McFarland who falls in love with a health-seeking tenderfoot as "pure romance, a love story without a moral." Lewis then went on simply to quote several purple passages about piney Colorado scenery. Not unaware that Garland as chairman of the recommending committee blocked the satiric *Main Street* from winning the Pulitzer Prize,

Bucco continued on page 18

TEACHING *BABBITT*

By Ralph Goldstein

I first read *Babbitt* just a few years ago while sitting under a tree beside a public swimming pool where my children were taking lessons. The pool is within sight of a budding gated community that came into being after a long fight between conservationists and developers. Those of us who wanted to preserve the rustic, uncrowded character of the area, a place where hikers and equestrians could roam freely and encounter a variety of wildlife, were no match for the real estate interests eager to exploit some of the last available land within thirty freeway minutes of downtown L.A. New homes are now available starting at a mere \$299,000. Reading about George Babbitt and his efforts to transform similarly "underused" land into Glen Oriole and other developments had me shaking my head and exclaiming, "Wow! Sinclair Lewis sure had it right."

The reading lists during my undergrad and grad school days omitted Lewis. Instructors preferred the later American Nobel laureates (mainly Hemingway and Faulkner) over our first recipient, or magic realism over social realism, or that which could be easily anthologized over lengthier texts, or theory over anything else. For those and other reasons, Lewis was missing. Nevertheless, I decided to assign *Babbitt* to the Advanced Placement English classes in the all-boys Catholic high school where I teach. Even if it didn't work well, the book would at least help my colleagues in the History Department better explain American life between World Wars I and II.

But *Babbitt* worked. After a semester that included comparing Holden Caulfield with John of *Brave New World*, wondering what brought Willy Loman down (and contemplating with horror a return at age 32 or 34, like Hap or Biff Loman, to the bedrooms they now use), and considering Gregor Samsa as a victim, my students—many of whom fancy themselves as rebels—were ready to study George Babbitt's conformity and short-lived rebellion. I was pleased to witness them enjoying Lewis's irony and sarcasm; to notice that the Babbitt house was not a home, that Glen Oriole lacks trees and birds, that Warren Harding was "appointed" President of the United States, that pillars of a religious community might be corrupt, that bigoted remarks can come from people who would deny that they're racists. Alongside the novel I asked students to read sections of *Walden*. The contrasting values of the two books, particularly Thoreau's notions that houses can own us and railroads ride us, made George Babbitt stand out in even sharper relief. Students could clearly see George's identity formed by his business and what he could buy. George seemed even more pathetic in the Maine woods when held up to Thoreau's reflections about being in tune with nature.

Particularly instructive for my Catholic high school boys were Thoreau's allusions in "Civil Disobedience" to the Book of Matthew concerning the necessity of losing one's life in order to save it (225) and rendering to Caesar and to God that which is theirs (232). It was beneficial for the students to regard one of American literature's most notorious conformists next to one of our staunchest individualists.

Three projects came out of our study of *Babbitt*. In a salute to America's "true genius" (the creator of the Prince Albert tobacco ads), adman Chum Frink, and the ridiculous correspondence course ads Ted Babbitt finds so appealing, I asked students to analyze an ad they found in a newspaper or magazine. After identifying the ad's main idea, purpose, and

Goldstein continued on page 14

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society is planning to hold a session at the 1999 American Literature Association conference that is set for May 27-30, 1999, at the Renaissance Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore. Margie Burns, English Department, University of Maryland-Baltimore, will be chairing the session.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of Lewis's work. Please send an abstract by January 15, 1999 to:

Sally Parry, Department of English,
Illinois State University, Box 4240,
Normal, IL 61790-4240 or by fax at
(309) 438-5414 or by e-mail at
separry@ilstu.edu

All submissions will be acknowledged. An announcement of session participants will be made by late January 1999. 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 hotel will be offering special conference rates. Pre-registration information will be mailed to program participants about two weeks before the general mailing to all ALA members. Additional information is available on the ALA Website: <http://english.byu.edu/cronin/ala.htm>

SINCLAIR LEWIS PANEL AT 1998 ALA

Sinclair Lewis was well represented at the 1998 American Literature Association Conference which took place in San Diego in May. A panel devoted to Lewis and chaired by new Sinclair Lewis Society board member H. Brooke Hessler featured three panelists, including the founder of the Sinclair Lewis Society, Bob Fleming. Abstracts of their presentations are reprinted below:

Sinclair Lewis and the Revolt against the Suburb

Presented by Catherine Jurca, California Institute of Technology

This essay focuses on *Babbitt*, tracing the process by which Lewis replaced standardization with discontent as the paradigmatic feature of Babbitt's middle-classness. Babbitt has every material advantage that his civilization has to offer but is haunted by a vague feeling of disquiet. Babbitt's rebellion is not significant primarily as evidence of an incipient radicalism; rather, it is about learning to feel good about himself and his culture again.

The Roots of *Dodsworth*: Lewis and Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Presented by Robert E. Fleming, University of New Mexico

By the end of the 1920s, his fabulous decade, Sinclair Lewis had critically examined four major facets of American life—the small town, the tired businessman, the medical profession, and the business of religion. It remained for him to create a definitive work that would transcend his earlier topical novels and to claim a place for himself among the great writers of America, as opposed to the great satirists of the American scene. Just as he had turned to the literature treating the revolt from the village while writing *Main Street*, Lewis turned again to earlier American writers, allying himself with the literary tradition of the previous century.

The character of Sam Dodsworth can be traced back as far as the Ben Franklin of the *Autobiography*, but his most immediate antecedents can be found in the nineteenth century, in novels by W. D. Howells and Henry James and in Emerson's "The American Scholar." Basically, the question Lewis poses treats the difference between the businessman

and the man. Faced with early retirement, Sam Dodsworth, creative automotive engineer and designer, must meet Emerson's challenge to leave behind his specialization and become what Emerson had called Man Thinking.

Burkeian Piety at Work: Symbolic Labor in Sinclair Lewis's Early Business Stories

Presented by H. Brooke Hessler, Texas Christian University

For the protagonists of Lewis's early business stories, Business is not a job but a state of being. These incipient Babbitts engage life's obstacles and opportunities as a series of transactions reflecting a cosmic order of profit and loss. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke describes this intense identification with work as "symbolic labor," for the worker expresses his principal values and ideals through his occupation. Such labor can be most "pious" in that it demonstrates the individual's devotion to his vocation. Yet, while Lewis's businessmen are clearly devoted to a Business ideal, these characters appear to benefit from their transgressions as well as their piety. Applying Burke's theory of symbolic labor to "Number Seven to Sagapoose," "Jazz," and other short stories enables us to consider how Lewis's antithetical descriptions of each businessman's success mirror the author's own ambivalence toward the Vocation of Business.

THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WELCOMES CONTRIBUTIONS

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter welcomes short contributions about Sinclair 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:

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Review ON THE ROAD TO *BABBITT*

If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis, ed. Anthony Di Renzo, Southern Illinois UP, 1997.

By Clare Eby
University of Connecticut

This collection of fifteen of Lewis's early works, collected for the first time since their original appearance in popular magazines from 1915 to 1921, is necessary reading for fans of *Babbitt*. These stories feature salesmen of both the traveling and stationary varieties, managers, advertising men, bank tellers, con men, and would-be entrepreneurs—but the emphasis is definitely on “If I were boss. Lewis effectively shows the average individual’s belief that superiors are inevitably inhuman—yet that he could do the job better himself without forfeiting his own humanity. If the collection can be said to have a moral, it is that once a person gets to be boss, he or she will be seen by employees as sarcastic, arbitrary, and bullying—and will feel that he or she is a noble person, grossly misunderstood.

As should be expected from apprentice work, these stories are uneven. They range in tone from the humorous to the poignant to the nasty. While Lewis aficionados will be pleased to see early signs of his eye for telling detail, many of the stories are poorly plotted. One of the most promising, “The Good Sport,” features impressively well-developed characters and inaugurates a powerful study of a disastrous marriage—only to run aground because of Lewis’s inability to figure out what to do with the plot. The primary merit of this collection is thus not that it provides new evidence of Lewis’s literary genius, but rather that it shows him testing out material that he would handle more fully and effectively in *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, and other novels.

Many of these tales are at least in part satirical. As will be familiar to veteran readers of Lewis, when he wants to expose vices either petty or serious, he often lets the sinner damn himself. Lewis’s recounting of a newspaper reporter who quoted a particularly obnoxious character verbatim might stand as a description of the storyteller’s own method: “The reporter did not write a humorous account; he did something worse—he quoted Mr. Small’s indignations word for word, so that Mr. Small thought he had been grossly misrepresented” (“Commutation: \$9.17,” 18). Many of the satirical tales, such as “The Whisperer” and “Snappy Display,” follow the fairly predictable pattern of the bad guy finally getting his just desserts.

The most winning stories, however, move beyond satire to sympathy. One of them begins, “This is not the history of the bland Professor Tonson, but of a man who became flamboy-

antly ridiculous and then became human . . .” (“Nature, Inc.,” 22). That description, which predicts what Lewis will do in *Babbitt*, also characterizes several other stories in which Lewis demonstrates his fondness for the human race. Not surprisingly, then, some of the best stories take a setting or cast of characters drawn from the business world and examine the question of romance within that world. For instance, “Nature, Inc.” is a touching story of the attraction a stodgy older businessman has for a younger woman. “A Story with a Happy Ending” daringly takes up the scenario of a woman as boss and asks whether such a supervisory role destroys a woman’s “femininity” and ability to feel. (Lewis is progressive enough to answer that question in the negative.)

The satire is also tempered by Lewis’s admission that business is not entirely bad. “If I Were Boss,” for instance, ends up manifesting considerable sympathy for the boss. In “Honestly—If Possible,” the office turns out to be an enabling setting for an otherwise ordinary young middle-class woman. And as proof that Lewis is not confined to any particular point of view on business, in “Way I See It” he cleverly follows a lengthy first-person account of a firing as told by an employee who has an inflated sense of his own importance with the boss’s version of the same story.

In several of the stories, Lewis describes his role as that of a historian, and indeed these tales comprise a useful history of office culture. Lewis is particularly insightful about advertising: several of the stories provide hints of how advertising came to be such a dominant force in the United States. “The Whisperer” even takes a peek at the revolutionary decision on the part of businessmen to hire professional psychologists to help market their products, a decision that continues to inform all of our lives.

As is often the case with history well told, Lewis’s stories will no doubt surprise many people by their continuing relevance today. Lewis touches on the monotonous emptiness of work for many people, examines office flirtations and sexism on the job, recounts the strangely edifying nature of inter-office gossip, and even takes up the question of smoking on the job. The repeated emphasis on women in business, in particular, makes the stories seem surprisingly contemporary. While it is often difficult to work Lewis into a syllabus because his books tend to be bulky, a selection of these short stories could be welcome in many an American literature class, particularly the stories with a contemporary feel.

Anthony Di Renzo has performed a welcome service by collecting these stories. His introduction combines biographical, literary-historical, and sociological details effectively so as to contextualize Lewis’s early work. Di Renzo appropriately emphasizes Lewis’s complicated relationship with *The Saturday Evening Post*, which originally published some of these tales and “single-handedly created the market for business fiction” (xx). Di Renzo also comments suggestively about some of the stories—particularly those about the deeply unpleasant copywriter Lancelot Todd—being fueled by Lewis’s own self-hatred. The collection as a whole supports Di Renzo’s claim that Sinclair Lewis embodied the contradictions of the business culture that he so famously wrote about. *LE*

Review

UNCLE HAL: ISABEL LEWIS AGRELL'S SINCLAIR LEWIS REMEMBERED

By George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

Isabel Lewis Agrell has put together a Lewis family scrap book with an emphasis on her Uncle Hal entitled *Sinclair Lewis Remembered*. Born in 1916 as the youngest child of Sinclair Lewis's revered physician brother Claude, Isabel is now the last surviving member of her generation of Lewises. The scrapbook, reproduced in multiple copies by photocopy machine and bound with a plastic ring binder, contains 71 pages of narrative text and 71 pages of documentary material, including 23 pages of photos.

The book is a delight for any fan interested in Lewis's roots. Not only does it contain reproductions of three or four dozen photos and documents never published before, but it also shows the point of view of a family member who knew Lewis. The text reads quickly, emphasizing facts and memories, leaving analysis mostly to the reader. Organization is in short topical chapters with headings like "The Home of Dr. E. J. Lewis," "Sinclair and Claude," and "Sinclair Lewis and Gifts." The bibliographic design and layout are pleasing. As private family memoirs and scrapbooks go, this one seems unusually well put together.

Mrs. Agrell's memories have a positive flavor. She feels pride and wonder about the whole Lewis family, including the generations before her and after her. She has happy memories of her Uncle Hal's two wives, who were respectively her Aunt Grace (Hegger) and Aunt Dorothy (Thompson). Her grandfather, Dr. Edwin J. Lewis who died when she was ten, she also recalls fondly. He was "a kind, distinguished-looking white-haired grandfather. He even smelled like a grandfather! I remember only a quiet dignity about him" (34).

She thinks of her father, Dr. Claude Lewis, as a happy man living in an unusually happy time. An outdoorsman, Claude enjoyed a land free from pollution and rife with wildlife. He

had a sense of humor that expressed itself in youth in pranks, none of which sounds particularly cruel. Especially charming is the decision of his high school graduating class in Sauk Centre in 1895—twelve girls plus Claude—for each of them to bring a rocking chair to sit in during the graduation ceremony.

Isabel portrays the relationship between her Uncle Hal and Claude as comfortable and easy. If Uncle Hal feared he could never impress older brother Claude, she thinks Uncle Hal feared in vain. Claude, she says, was "very proud of his younger brother." The two of them had "great respect and affection for each other."


Her recollection of Sinclair Lewis's appearance is also pleasantly positive. Though she concedes that by 1949 the X-ray treatments had taken a heavy toll on his face, she had never before then thought of him as homely. He simply had, she says, "the delicate pinkish skin of a redhead" (36).

One of the most interesting memories of her famous uncle is from 1926 when she was ten years old and he had invited her older sister Virginia and her to Pelican Lake for a week while he worked on *Elmer Gantry*. There she met the family of the Rev. Mr. Birkhead, in attendance as consultant for the novel. Her main memory is of having fun. The Birkheads had a son her age, and there were two puppies to play with and a lake to swim in. She includes photos of the place, including one of the hut where Lewis did his writing.

And she does not leave out the emotional upset in midweek. For some unknown reason, Uncle Hal became angry, fired his Hawaiian cook, and had him driven immediately to the closest bus station. She remembers later seeing Uncle Hal sobbing at the dining room table, filled with remorse.

This memory of a remorseful Sinclair Lewis will attract the attention of future biographers. Even if fueled by drink, the remorse suggests a side to Lewis that scholars have not explored enough.

Among the interesting pictures in the large appendix to this memoir are photos that show two Kermott uncles of Sinclair Lewis (his mother's brothers), some attractive photos of Grace Hegger, good photos of Isabel as a child with her older siblings Freeman and Virginia, and a page of photos of Sinclair Lewis's son Michael, his two wives, and his children. A reader may wish for clearer images than photocopying can produce, but the reader will also recognize that these images would not be available if it were not for photocopy.

You may order the memoir from Isabel Lewis Agrell, P. O. Box 10114, Prescott, Arizona 86305. Her phone is 520-445-1790. Ten dollars will cover the cost of photocopying and mailing. 



The Lewis Family Dining Room

SINCLAIR LEWIS AND TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY

By Jackie Koenig

The Western Stage production world premiere of John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* was presented at Hartnell College, in Salinas, California, during Steinbeck Festival XVIII, August 6-9, 1998.

My excitement mounted as I spotted the character of Sinclair Lewis on the program. We hear only his disembodied voice; the voice of Jerry Gill, a veteran 25-year actor.

In the play, as in the book, Steinbeck, in trying to get to Sauk Centre, becomes lost in Minneapolis. He is on Highway 10; Sauk Centre is on 52. When he was asked why he wanted to go to Sauk Centre, Steinbeck replied because Sinclair Lewis came from there. Steinbeck explained, "He's the first man who told me about this part of the country. He's dead

Minnesota Rustic by Killough continued from page 1

the press paid attention.

He had made a career of gaining this attention, sometimes through deliberate public cantankerousness. In 1926, for example, he refused the Pulitzer Prize. That same year, while researching for *Elmer Gantry*, he led a church meeting in Kansas City, where, in refuting the idea of a personally vindictive God, he defied this God to strike him dead. Because his main talent was for satire, his novels had gained notoriety for debunking American culture. His life seemed bumpy and noisy. By the time he got to Duluth, his public persona revealed few hints of any quiet recesses in his heart.

But the man who arrived here on May 17, 1944, had a deep sensitivity to the American landscape and American ideals. His private papers show a quiet voice, self-aware, reflective, appreciative. One of his motives for returning to Minnesota to live was, in fact, to have an experience like Thoreau's, to get close to a Midwestern equivalent of Walden Pond.

Given Lewis's public image, this desire is hard to believe. Also, his advancing years, diminishing health, inescapable celebrity status, and determination to keep writing novels would seem to get in the way of a full-fledged Walden retreat.

Still, he would do what he could. He had started the experiment in April 1942, when he arrived in Minneapolis to spend the summer and look for a permanent home. He began a new diary and titled it "A Minnesota Diary." As a teenager in Sauk Centre, he had kept a diary from 1900 through his student years at Yale until 1908. Now he was beginning anew and putting the focus on his home state, especially its landscapes and weather. He was chronicling the changing surface of his own version of Walden Pond and trying to derive vitality from it. During the four years of this Minnesota experiment, 1942-46, he kept the diary going when he was in the state, making only a handful of entries during many months spent elsewhere.

now. Sauk Centre is the birthplace of Sinclair Lewis. I didn't know him well."

Then, in a ghostly voice from above, talking about his home town, we hear Sinclair Lewis say, in effect, that he doesn't drink any more. "I'm back. You see, John, the only good writer is a dead writer. I think I'll move to Italy. I'd rather die in Italy. I'm always cold here."

Steinbeck responds, "Lewis is a good writer. He was good for the town."

John Steinbeck and Sinclair Lewis had in common that their writings about their home towns were looked upon, during their lifetimes, as shameful exposure, and neither man could go home again.

Sinclair Lewis died in 1951. Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* was published ten years later. Steinbeck visited Sauk Centre and was greeted at the town limits by a sign "Birthplace of Sinclair Lewis," prompting Steinbeck to write, "And now he's good for the town. Brings in some tourists." A decade after Steinbeck's death, he, too, was being heralded in his home town, Salinas. ☞

In spring and summer 1942 he lived in a big house on Lake Minnetonka, and between bouts of work on the novel *Gideon Planish* motored around the state to rediscover its beauty. He moved into Minneapolis in the fall and taught a creative writing course at the University of Minnesota. Wintering in New York, he was all set to plunge back into his Thoreauvian experiment in the spring but got sidetracked by an invitation from Hollywood to work there on a screenplay. Before this diversion, he headed off to Minnesota, the *Walden* idea still very much in mind. The "People" section of *Time* magazine reported his departure from New York as follows:

Bolstered by the complete works of Henry David Thoreau, newly bought, novelist Sinclair Lewis abandoned his Manhattan duplex for rustic life in his home state, Minnesota. He told a reporter that a reading of Thoreau would explain all, but admitted: "I don't mean I want to go around in a sheet like Ghandi." Next fall, he will do some public debating on rusticity, said he. (24 May 1943)

Characteristically Lewis's public voice here takes center stage, in this case to protect the private ideal. With a glib joke, he exaggerates his own romantic aspirations in order to preempt the mockery of the worldly-wise gossip columnist. Lewis also knows a Thoreauvian experiment will include compromise. By ridiculing purism, he opens up room for private aspiration to develop in its own way. His motive remains clear—a deep interest in Thoreau, Minnesota, and provincial connections.

To these goals he made a firmer commitment in spring 1944 when he showed up in Duluth, planning to settle down. Since he had been restless and impulsive all his life, he knew how difficult settling down would be. Still, he liked it here well

Minnesota Rustic by Killough continued on page 11

BACKWOODS ISOLATIONISM VERSUS MEDICAL IMPERIALISM IN SINCLAIR LEWIS'S *ARROWSMITH*: AN ABSTRACT

By Stephanie Browner
Berea College

Sinclair Lewis's novel *Arrowsmith* is, of course, a sweeping study of progressive-era medicine. The novel follows the idealistic Martin Arrowsmith from medical school to country practice, from well-to-do urban practice to laboratory research at a privately funded New York institute. Most obviously, the novel tells a typical Lewis tale: crass commercialism and petty power struggles thwart the true man of science. But embedded in Lewis's version of this tale are the tensions in U.S. foreign policy between imperialism and isolationism, a tension made evident if the novel is read against the background of U.S. military medical work in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 1900 human experiments were conducted in Havana, Cuba, upon U.S. military and Cuban civilian volunteers by the American Army Commission in an effort to investigate the theory that yellow fever was transmitted by mosquito. By September 1901, under the direction of William Crawford Gorgas, U.S. occupational forces had eradicated yellow fever from Havana. In 1904 another campaign was led by Gorgas in Panama in an effort to make the area safe for U.S. military and civilian engineers who would soon arrive to begin building the canal. In 1913 the Rockefeller Foundation established an International Health Commission and, upon the suggestion of Gorgas who was now Surgeon General of

the U.S. Army, the Foundation dedicated personnel and money to eradicating yellow fever in other Latin American cities. Between 1918 and 1920, campaigns were undertaken in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Mexico. These campaigns testify to the intimate connection between medical research into tropical diseases and U.S. imperialist interests in Latin America.

Lewis's novel interrogates this history. The climax of *Arrowsmith* centers on the hero's efforts to prove through human experiments the effectiveness of a bacteriological cure for bubonic plague during an epidemic on a fictional island in the West Indies. In these scenes Lewis satirizes the most obvious symbols of imperialism—foppish British officials and naive American missionaries. And Lewis acknowledges the awkward connections between medical research and imperialism. It is, no doubt, a humanitarian deed to save the West Indians from plague, but such a deed is also an imperialist act that protects the trade interests and local power of the British. In his desire for scientific purity, Lewis can envision no solution to this entanglement other than isolationism. Lewis ends the novel with the hero's retreat to the Vermont woods to pursue research untainted by worldly demands.

Written at the height of U.S. expansionist activities and only a few years after victory in World War I, *Arrowsmith* opens questions it cannot answer and finds closure only in an anachronistic nineteenth-century literary trope: the retreat to the wilderness. ♪

LEWIS AND THE JACK LONDON SOCIETY

By Jackie Koenig

Sinclair Lewis's literary friendship with Jack London was more conspicuous than was any other authors at the Jack London Society 4th Biennial Symposium held at The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, October 7-10, 1998. The symposium is sponsored by the Jack London Society at the University of Texas-San Antonio.

Dr. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, University of Ottawa, gave a paper, "A Little-Known Collection: The London Papers at Utah State University." She listed among its holdings originals of plots purchased from Lewis, some in Lewis's hand.

Sara S. Hodson, Curator of Literary Manuscripts at the Huntington, co-sponsor of the event, assembled a Jack London exhibit to coincide with the symposium. She displayed what she called Jack London's Invoice to Sinclair Lewis. It appeared to me to be Lewis's invoice to Jack London, Lewis listing the plots he had available for sale to Jack London. Jack London checked off the plots he wanted and sent a check to

Sinclair Lewis for \$52.50 on October 4, 1910.

In her note, alongside the invoice, Sara Hodson points out that London admitted to his friend Cloudesley Johns that he couldn't construct plots worth a damn. Hodson goes on to say that

Mary Austen suggested a different, humanitarian reason for fellow writers. This is supported by Sinclair Lewis's letter to London, prompting the business-like invoice: "I hope to gawd that you will feel like taking a considerable part of [the plots], because, if you do, it will probably finally give me a chance to get back to free lancing—nothing but writing—which I haven't done for over a year; can the job and really get at decent work."

The Invoice and letter from Sinclair Lewis to Jack London are held in the Jack London collection at The Huntington Library. Sara Hodson also mentions Sinclair Lewis in her cover story about the exhibit in *Calendar/The Huntington* September-October, 1998. ♪

enough to stay through the summer as a renter at 2601 East Second Street. He was away in fall and winter but bought the house in January 1945, invested in redecorating, and moved in for the spring and summer. In fall 1945 he was away again but returned in December and stayed until March 1946.

His interest in Thoreau had endured many decades. In August 1907, as a temporary Yale dropout doing hack writing in New York, he enjoyed reading *Walden* in a park on his lunch hour. He imagined feeling the vitality, even there in the city, that Thoreau felt. In his "Book Week" column in *Newsweek* in the late 1930s, he gushed about the ideals of *Walden*, portraying them as a remedy to the Babbitry of Dale Carnegie and hailing Thoreau as the best symbol of American freedom for counteracting menaces like Italy, Germany, and Japan (22 Nov. 1937).

During the Duluth years, ideals from *Walden* persisted in Lewis's thinking, even though he was living in a mansion with servants. His loyalty was to deeper values. In accord with the mandates of *Walden*, he had always pursued his dreams, always tried to dig through the mud and slush of opinion in search of rock bottom reality, and now he was paying closer attention than usual to land and sky. People who corrupted these Thoreauvian principles brought down his wrath. In October 1945, he blasted writer Louis Bromfield's book about country living, *Pleasant Valley*, in a review in *Esquire*. The trouble with Bromfield, wrote Lewis, was that "with the power to make an enduring book, a true *Walden*, he should have cluttered . . . it with all the pert vanities of the money-grabbing, socially-climbing, Paris-Broadway-Hollywood literary gent. He did not listen to the quiet of his own fields and of his own heart."

Lewis himself may not have listened always to the quiet of his own heart, but he clearly wanted to and during this period he was concentrating quite deliberately on the quiet of his own fields. The diary shows a rich interest in Minnesota landscapes and weather, set down lovingly. Here are sample views from the Duluth home:

[August 7, 1944] Mountain ash berries are reddening for autumn now; already are yellow and orange. From this house, not only incredibly beautiful prospect, soft brilliance of the demure hills, radiance of the lake, trees hiding the houses below, but also delightful sounds: train whistle, deep demand of the steamers, rustle of leaves, idle dogs not too close.

[February 18, 1946] Sunrise with trails of light seemed to turn frozen Lake Superior back into open water. First light on Eastern horizon now at six AM. By 6:10: at top darkish sky, then pale blue strip against which are pine silhouettes with streak of apricot below. The pale blue turns into luminous gray; the apricot to purple robes. Neighbor: "The back of the winter ought to be broken by now."

In passages like these, and the diary is full of them, Lewis shows the quiet joy of a poet. His voice is not agitated or aggressive but calm and appreciative. He is not straining to entertain the target audience, as in the novels, but communing in private with the land of his birth.



Though Lewis's reputation is rising in the 1990s, it endured a long decline. Most egregious of the attacks it suffered was from Hemingway in *Across the River and into the Trees* in 1950. The protagonist observes a writer drooling in a bar, a "caricature of an American," a "pock-marked jerk," "who has never worked at his trade" and "is presumptuous in some annoying way." This is fiction, of course. Lewis is not named, and the protagonist observer may not be a fully reliable witness, but Hemingway certainly had Lewis in mind. Witnesses from the 1940s always recall Lewis's pitted, inflamed face. He had a chronic skin ailment that Hemingway unfairly made symbolic of decadence.

The anecdotal record about Lewis in Duluth has not enhanced his reputation. Addressing the Chamber of Commerce, he said Duluth needed a half dozen funerals. He behaved rudely to hostesses who gave dinner parties for him. He cut friends over imagined slights. At a large party at his house, he was stingy with the liquor—ironic in view of his known history of excessive drinking. Sensitive observers attribute his erratic conduct to loneliness and the struggle with alcoholism. Mrs. Frances McGiffert, who still lives in the neighborhood where Lewis did, recalls that by the time he bought the house, "He had failed at two marriages, lost a son in the war, and was trying to stay dry. He was doing pretty well, considering." She also noted, "He was a very good neighbor."

No doubt many of the stories are true about the alcoholic behavior he exhibited from the 1920s forward, but judgments against him mount up higher than against other heavy-drinking American authors of the twentieth century, like F. Scott Fitzgerald or Hemingway himself. These judgments against Lewis's character helped propel the negative criticism of Lewis's work, climaxing in the massive biography by Mark Schorer in 1961, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. This book claimed that Lewis had no ability to feel or express lyric joy and that he was short on self-knowledge and subjective understanding. Schorer notoriously concluded that Lewis "was one of the worst writers in modern American literature."

Partly due to this verdict and partly to a diminishing appetite for social realism, Lewis's readership shrank enormously during the 1970s and 1980s. Literate Americans over forty remember him dimly for his satire on the small town. Most literate Americans under forty have not read him.

He had phenomenal talents. Although he preferred not to think of himself as a satirist, he was a master of the fictional exposé that would attract public attention. Recent scholarship

has shown that, in revising drafts, he had consummate ability to adjust for market appeal. The books sold very well. His first big hit was *Main Street* in 1920, one of the earliest literary texts to reveal small-town America as less than paradise. *Babbitt* in 1922 portrayed the loudness and shallowness of the American businessman. *Arrowsmith* in 1925 championed good medical research but also exposed the unheroic side of medicine. The most bitter satire, *Elmer Gantry*, 1927, attacked the charlatan preacher. Another big attention-getting exposé, *It Can't Happen Here*, 1935, imagined a native-born fascist takeover in the USA.

More than any other novelist of his generation, Lewis created a typology by which to explain America. His types survive in our vocabulary today—Main Street, Babbitt, Elmer Gantry—even among people who have not read the books.

Lewis was also ahead of his time in finding causes. He wrote three novels about the situation of women: *The Job* (1917), *Main Street* (1920), and *Ann Vickers* (1933). While in Duluth, he started his novel on northern race prejudice, *Kingsblood Royal*, which for a white author in 1947 was revolutionary.

A further strength lay in his prodigious discipline. By the time he died in Rome in 1951, he had written a total of twenty-three novels plus numerous short stories and articles. Before *Main Street*, he wrote six books. During the 1920s, he wrote seven, five of which had blockbuster sales. He continued to turn out a novel every two or three years for the rest of his life.

Scholars are giving him fresh attention today. Publishers have issued new editions of several novels. Random House is sponsoring a new biography.



Associated with Lewis's love of *Walden* was his sense of himself as a country boy. Pride in being a rural Midwesterner from Sauk Centre helped bring him back to Minnesota. He liked his roots and he wanted to strengthen the connection. In public debates on the Country vs. the City, Lewis took the side of the Country during three national speaking tours he undertook in the early 1940s with his friend Rabbi Lewis Browne.

Given the reputation of *Main Street* as a denunciation of small-town life, Lewis's preference for the country may seem surprising. But careful readers have always known the satire in this book and others is complex, ambivalent, the troubled view of someone who belongs, not scornful belittling from an outsider.

"A Minnesota Diary" reveals the private Lewis as very aware of his own provincial character. In the entry for May 3, 1942, he records a dinner conversation with Twin Cities journalists and academics at Lake Minnetonka on the theme "What is a Provincial?" The first illustration is Lewis himself. Unapologetically he writes, "I am." He notes that "our fathers kept the daily temperature" but New Yorkers never think of doing this. Lewis habitually records temperatures in the diary.

He also worries, when a storm hits, about the effect on crops.

In other ways he thought like a small-town Midwesterner, even like his own fictional *Main Street* villagers. For example, he believed the great world of affairs did not necessarily produce greater people. On October 11, 1942, he wrote in his diary that Billy Parker, a Sauk Centre real estate and insurance agent, who "has little traveled" and "knows no known language," was more "sleek," more "urbane," than "rustic, awkward American-toned" diplomats like U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull. This assessment sounds very like the fictional Dr. Will Kennicott's idea that some of the "best people on earth" live in Gopher Prairie, the small town in *Main Street*.



Lewis's desire to strengthen his provincial identity and his desire to connect, like Thoreau, with the land were the two primary motives for him to try to settle in Minnesota. There was also a third motive. He wanted to keep writing novels, and he needed to gather material. Writing novels about American society was his profession, and he could not give it up, even if it inhibited transcendental aspirations. It would mean, of course, living in circumstances different from the hut at Walden Pond. He had to be in a setting where his next two stories could take place. Duluth filled the bill.

This choice was not for the sake of revealing Duluth's soul in the same way he had bared the soul of the small town in *Main Street*. Duluth was just to provide background. Along the way, of course, dirty laundry from small-city Midwestern America would come to light, but the place was not the theme.

The theme of the first Duluth novel, *Cass Timberlane* (1945), was December-May romance and the unraveling fabric of American marriage. Lewis had had both these experiences already. He was twice-divorced and conducting a romance with the very young Marcella Powers, whom he had met doing summer theater in Provincetown in 1939. In 1944, she was still just twenty-three. Beginning a career in the New York magazine world, she could visit Duluth only on holidays. Lewis wrote charming letters to keep her interest, but he also advised her to see men her own age, and in 1946, after he left Duluth, she announced she was going to marry one.

In the novel, a well-connected, middle-aged, divorced judge, Cass himself, falls in love with a young woman. They marry. Then she falls prey to the blandishments of one of Cass's best friends and runs off. She discovers her new lover is fickle. She gets seriously ill, and Cass speeds to the rescue. This story of a salvaged marriage takes place against the backdrop of numerous marriages, most of them gone sour, described in vignettes between the main chapters. Though Cass's marriage ultimately offers hope, the novel in general portrays romantic love as difficult, unpromising, often perverse.

Grand Republic, Minnesota, where Cass lives, has character-

istics like Duluth's. It is described as being eighty miles north of Minneapolis with a population of 85,000. Its wealth arose from the exploitation "of forests, iron mines, and soil for wheat." One step in Lewis's disciplined preparation was to sketch elaborate maps of states, cities, even floor plans in the fictional setting. His map showing Grand Republic's location in Minnesota reveals a correspondence to Duluth very similar to the correspondence between Sauk Centre and Gopher Prairie, which are also drawn side by side on the same map.

An interesting absence on this map, at least from the point of view of Duluthians today, is Zenith, the setting for *Babbitt*. That city has a population of 361,000 and belongs in the fictional state of Winnemac, which borders Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. Despite the name Zenith, an appellation of Duluth even in the 1920s, the city where Babbitt lives is in a different league, much more like Cincinnati or Minneapolis. CBS chose the wrong location in 1968 when it featured middle-class Duluthians in an uncomplimentary documentary designed as an updated view of *Babbitt*.

Many houses in Cass Timberlane's blue-blood neighborhood in Grand Republic have the same architecture as houses in Lewis's neighborhood in Duluth. The house across the street from Cass has "fake half timbering and wavy shingles imitating thatch," just like the house a block away from Lewis at 2432 East Second Street where Carlisle and Charlene Heimbach lived. Another of Cass's neighbors owns a "hulk of grim dark native stone," a "donjon," suggesting the house inhabited by Cecil and Francis Myers at 2505 East First Street. A third neighbor has a "white pillared brick Georgian mansion." Lewis had only to look across the avenue to see this one at 2525 East Second Street, where lived Mrs. William Richardson and her daughter Mrs. J. G. Harrison. Other descriptions, including a Spanish stucco tiled-roof structure and a New England colonial cottage, match houses in the Duluth neighborhood.

Among people in Duluth who influenced characterization in the novels was Judge Mark Nolan, whom Lewis followed around so as to be able to describe accurately the life of Judge Cass Timberlane. In the diary Lewis pictures Nolan as a "big Irish Catholic" product of Notre Dame and the Iron Range, "a learned and good judge." The novel portrays Cass positively too.

Another Duluthian from whom Lewis derived details was Marjorie Kelley, a student in St. Mary's nursing program, who went on to a long career as a nurse anesthetist at St. Luke's Hospital and as a human rights leader in Duluth. Lewis cultivated a friendship with her which no doubt influenced his portrayal in *Kingsblood Royal* of Sophie Concord, a young black nurse, sharp-witted and attractive, who helps introduce Neil Kingsblood to his new life as a black man. This second Duluth novel, *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), tells the story of an upper-middle-class white man who, after discovering his lineage is one-thirty-second black, loses his job and, with his family, suffers multiple abuses. The setting is again Grand Republic. To prepare for this book, Lewis cultivated the

acquaintance of blacks in the Twin Cities and made an expedition to the deep South. He also had friends in Duluth like Marjorie Kelley.

Lewis entered Duluth society vigorously and had dozens of acquaintances so as to be able to describe Grand Republic. As a satirist, he could not help grinding some of the grist into uncomplimentary flour. Few characters end up with portrayals as positive as Cass Timberlane and Sophie Concord. But no individual Duluthian becomes a main negative focus, at least not according to surviving witnesses and the evidence of the texts themselves. Lewis's themes are larger than that.

The process of gathering details put Lewis into a public role. His public persona had often been boisterous and insistent, obscuring private aspiration. Even the public voice of the novels, reaching hard for the reader's attention, masks the private Lewis of dignity and peace. If he had not been so determined as a novelist to grapple with public American culture, he might have had a quieter profile.

When he left Duluth in March 1946, he was responding to the restlessness that had kept him on the move all his life. He had mined the ore Duluth could provide for fiction, and he wanted to prospect elsewhere. Completely aware of the comedy in his inability to settle, he wrote Marcella Powers on March 7, 1946, "As with Cass, I could never have written the new book if I hadn't been living here. But enough of Duluth now. Hail Hartford! Cheer Chatham! Banzai the Berkshires! Lo, London! California, I call!"

If novel-writing impinged on his private mission, it never removed his sense of value. He had always had intimate acquaintance with the peace of rural landscapes. Even the diary of his youth in Sauk Centre records habitual long walks, sometimes solitary, for five miles, ten miles, once eighteen miles. He liked the stability of rural life, and as an honest hayseed and Thoreauvian moralist, he did not want to hear any lies about it or about life anywhere. Through novels he could combat lies, make a living, adventurously research the great world. Though this work may have obscured the private self, the landscape descriptions in the "Minnesota Diary," persisting to the end, show he could never entirely forget the quiet of his own fields and his own heart. *AK*

Notes

Used with permission of *NorthLife* magazine © 1998, Duluth, Minnesota. An abridged version of this essay appeared in *NorthLife* in March 1998.

Lewis's "A Minnesota Diary," quoted in this article, is in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The letters to Marcella Powers, also quoted here, are in the Lewis Collection at the St. Cloud State University Archive.

The University of Idaho Press is bringing out George Killough's edition of Lewis's "A Minnesota Diary" in spring or fall 2000.

mous with frugal. It was printed in a larger format than both the original Harcourt and standard G&D editions, but utilized the second state text plates from the Harcourt original (broken "y" on last line of page 387); to obtain the larger more impressive size, the publisher simply used larger paper. A mere 1000 copies were produced and it sold out immediately. Interestingly, Lewis, himself a former "promoter" in his early days at Harper Brothers, opposed the G&D method of advertising books in such places as drug stores. However, he could not argue with the success of the approach and willingly agreed to reduce his royalties. Today's booksellers would probably ask \$350-400 for the book which, in 1945, sold for \$2.50.

Babbitt was published as an anniversary edition as well, not by G&D, but by its original publishing house, Harcourt, Brace. The war years were over and Americans were consuming at a feverish pace. *Babbitt* had never been out of print since its first appearance in 1922. As part of a promotional plan to capitalize on Lewis's waning but nevertheless sound reputation with the reading public, Harcourt republished *Babbitt* in its original format. It produced only 100 copies of the book in a replica of

the original dust jacket, changing only the color of the typeface (from light blue to dark brown) for Lewis's name at the bottom of the front panel and the publisher's name at the base of the spine. The book itself was a replica of the original, of course, using the second state plates (Purdy/Lyte on page 49). Inserted in the book was a card which stated "In celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, an American Classic." The book was issued in a glassine over-jacket and a fairly flimsy light weight cardboard unmarked slipcase and distributed to the trade only. The re-issue of *Babbitt* under the Harbrace Modern Classics logo was simultaneous. The anniversary edition in the original slipcase and glassine should bring over \$1,500 in today's market; the jacketed book only would probably fetch \$1000 or more depending on condition and the avidity of collectors, it being considerably scarcer than the original edition.

Both the *Main Street* and *Babbitt* "anniversary editions" make a wonderful addition to any Sinclair Lewis collector's library; they offer an interesting glimpse into publishing history and, in some small measure, paid homage to Lewis a few short years before his death. ♪

target audience, students examined the devices used, particularly the use of language and nonverbal symbols. Students who had difficulty identifying imagery and other rhetorical devices in reading passages found this activity to be helpful. D.G. Kehl's article, "How to Read an Ad: Learning to Read between the Lies," is valuable to any instructor wishing to encourage students to be skeptical in the face of the daily barrage of advertising by being able to distinguish between an ad's truth and falsity.

Most students enjoyed a writing assignment that flowed from *Babbitt*'s college reunion. I asked them to imagine their thirtieth high school reunion, describing in particular one member of the class. The responses ranged from the amusingly absurd to the uncomfortably serious. While some envisioned spectacular professional achievements and glamorous wives, others wrote of classmates who would compromise their ideals like Paul, Chum, and *Babbitt*.

The last major assignment associated with the book was a paper in which students examined how one aspect of *Babbitt* continues to exist in American life. There were papers on overconsumption, deceptive advertising, business ethics, substance abuse, immorality in religious communities, crooked politics, biological explanations of adultery, the future of marriage, and social conformity. It was a rather impressive collection coming from a group of high school juniors.

At the end of the academic year I asked students to identify the single work among the many we studied that best exemplifies the characteristics of important literature and explain in writing why that particular work is likely to

endure over the years. About twenty-five percent of the students selected *Babbitt*. One of my brightest students, Michael, remembered Lewis's "two-layered portrait of the conformist, with both the utopian 'if everyone likes you, good things will come' and the inner anguish that George *Babbitt* truly feels beneath his outer shell." Another very capable student, Monish, cited George *Babbitt* "as an example of what not to be like." And Ryan, a student who experienced difficulty during much of the year, wrote, "Although times are changing fast, moral lessons about materialism, conformity, and non-monogamous relationships will continue to be taught through books like *Babbitt*."

I'm not surprised that most of my students liked the book. The makers of reading lists in both high school and college should make room for George *Babbitt* alongside Hester, Jake Barnes, Addie Bundren, Tom Joad, and Sethe. ♪

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THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF MAIN STREET

The following is an excerpt from the response of Britta L. Bloomberg, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, to the plans of the Minnesota Department of Transportation to both preserve the historic character of Main Street and deal with traffic concerns. (See the Fall 1997 [vol. 6, number 1] issue for the proposals of MnDOT.)

The project has been reviewed pursuant to the responsibilities given the State Historic Preservation Officer by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the Procedures of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (36CFR800), and to the responsibilities given the Minnesota Historical Society by the Minnesota Historic Sites Act and the Minnesota Field Archaeology Act.

We have greatly appreciated the opportunity to participate in the discussions of the T.H. 71 Advisory Committee over the past several months. The Minnesota Department of Transportation and its consultant, OSM and Associates, should be commended for organizing and implementing a process to bring historic preservation and other community concerns together to develop a highway design that meets the traffic needs of Trunk Highway 71 and preserves the historic character of the Original Main Street Historic District.

We believe that the process has worked well, and that the result is in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects. Although re-striping the roadway and reorganizing some of the traffic patterns will constitute some change to the area, the retention of the curb lines and the rehabilitation and replacement of many of the important elements of the streetscape will serve to preserve and strengthen the historic character of this nationally significant district.

Based on our review of the material in the task force

report, we concur with your determination that the project should have *no adverse effect* on the historic district. We ask that the final designs for all elements in the historic district—including, but not limited to, trees, lighting, sidewalk/boulevard improvements, hydrants, railings, and curbing—be developed in consultation with our office and that the final designs be submitted to us for concurrence.

We would also ask that the designs for the project segments outside the district be submitted for review, since these areas define a context for the historic district. The concerns that have been discussed for improving access to the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center are included in this area.

We do have one specific comment on the proposed lighting. The design of the suggested light standard is based on historic precedence and is appropriate. However, further study and field review of the lighting specifications of the suggested lamp are needed to address the concerns detailed in the third paragraph on page 3 of the task force report.

Finally, we believe that a project of this importance merits some sort of public education component to reinforce the significance of the area and the efforts that have been made to preserve it.

Please note that our review of this report and our concurrence with the "no adverse effect" determination is based on an integrated comprehensive project package in which amenity development and highway improvements create an overall result. If portions of the project are eliminated or if the project is segmented, our concurrence no longer stands and consultation must be re-initiated to reassess the project's effect to the historic district.

Again, we congratulate MnDOT and the representatives of the City of Sauk Centre on a successful and productive collaboration. *LS*

NEW MEMBERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society welcomes the following new members who have joined since the publication of the Spring 1998 newsletter.

Dr. R. W. Allred
3712 Dentelle Drive
Plano, TX 75023

Dave Simpkins
Sauk Centre Herald
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

Florence Buchanan
499 Banning Beach Road
Tavares, FL 32778

Mathew M. Sonnenberg
415 Grantley
Elmhurst, IL 60126

HIKE AND THE AEROPLANE TO BE REPRINTED

Sinclair Lewis Society board member Steve Pastore has purchased the property rights to *Hike and the Aeroplane* from the estate of Sinclair Lewis and is planning to have the text reprinted with new illustrations next year. Members can place an order from him by calling 717-448-9377. He notes that the cost will be \$75.00 per copy less 30% for Sinclair Lewis Society members. He's anticipating an 8 1/2" by 11" hardbound format with 8-10 b/w illustrations. He's also contemplating a paperback edition in the \$15.00 range. For more information he can also be contacted by e-mail at deerbook@ptd.net.

LEWIS AND THE WEB: INFORMATION REQUESTS

The editor of the newsletter has received such good response to the "Lewis and the Web" feature that it is being continued with this issue. Here are some questions that we have received over the summer. Material in brackets are either answers that were sent or comments by the editor.

Plan to check out the Sinclair Lewis website in December 1998. Illinois State University student Brett Lettiere is doing an honors mentorship on the project of updating the website. Among the improvements will be biographies of Grace Hegger and Dorothy Thompson, more pictures, more hyperlinks (including the text of the Nobel Prize acceptance speech, the *Sauk Centre Herald*, and various library holdings of Lewis material), and more recipes.

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Were any of the characters or companies (particularly in *Dodsworth*) real or based on actual historical facts? Thank you for your cooperation.

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I heard a rumor that Sinclair Lewis was an alcoholic. I was wondering if this held any truth. If you know, please e-mail me.

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Last year there was a conference on July 17th about Sinclair Lewis, no? Would it be possible for me to obtain a written transcript or some type of record of the speeches made? I'm really interested in seeing other people's views and ideas on *Babbitt*, and my local library contains no books which offer commentary and criticism on Sinclair Lewis. Any info would help. Thank you very much!

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I was looking through Sinclair Lewis's biography at the beginning of my copy of *Main Street*, and I noticed that it said that in 1926 he won the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith*. The bio goes on to say that he refused this award. I wanted to know if you have any information on his reasoning behind the refusal.

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I was wondering if it was possible to get a copy of the silent film *Babbitt*. If there is anyone in your group who could help me figure this out? I would be most appreciative. [If any Sinclair Lewis members know where this film could be obtained, please e-mail or write the newsletter and let us know.]

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In Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, what word was introduced to the English language? A friend and I have a wager. We are torn between "by golly" and "zip." [Interestingly enough, the word

Lewis introduced in *Babbitt* is "Babbitt," meaning a self-complacent, smug, middle-class businessman. "By golly" dates from 1848 and "zip" circa 1900.]

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I am working on a book on 20th century American writers and their alcoholism. Obviously Lewis is of particular interest, and I would like to correspond with any scholars or researchers (or anyone else) interested in the topic or with knowledge of it. [Please contact Jack Cobbs at cobweb@enter.net]

Student Messages

I am a high school student doing research for my senior thesis on Sinclair Lewis and his novel *Babbitt*. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for the great resource your website has provided to me (and no doubt to many other young researchers). Thanks again and continue the good work.

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I am a sophomore at the Wellesley High School outside of Boston Mass. I am doing my sophomore author thesis on Sinclair Lewis, and I request a little help if any can be given.

Here is the introduction to my thesis:

"I was brought up to believe the Christian God wasn't a scared and compromising public servant, but the creator and advocate of the whole merciless truth" (*Elmer Gantry* 357). This statement, "the whole merciless truth" seems to sum up the world of Sinclair Lewis in a few brief words. Sinclair Lewis was a promoter of this truth in his writings. Through the lips and lives of his characters, Lewis discourses about how easily people conform to a socially acceptable status, and how materialistic modern American society is.

In many of his books, the characters Lewis portrays are on a quest, fighting or defending a certain aspect of the American society. After a struggle, the character either advances cheerfully, or gloomily retreats back into the society they had been so ardently fighting against. Using his biting satirical style, and through the dialogues and monologues of his characters, Lewis is able to generate cutting social commentary on any aspect of American society.

I read *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, *Dodsworth*, *Kingsblood Royal* and *Cass Timberlane*. Are there any more books I should read that would help my thesis? Also, what is *Cass Timberlane* about, I don't quite get it. I was able to answer almost all of the quiz questions on the web site.

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As a high school student, I am doing an oral report on Sinclair Lewis. I've done a moderate amount of research on this author. I must admit that I have never read any of his works, but I now plan to do so in the near future. I became deeply interested when I learned of the themes of his major novels, especially *Main Street* and *Babbitt* about the middle-class and how they blindly conform to the monotony and standards of their environment, and their lack of spiritual and intellectual values. The reason I am writing this is I would like to know how I could research more information on Lewis, and if you have any suggestions on how I could better present a report on him. Thank you.

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I am doing a report on Sinclair Lewis. Could send me some information about your club?

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I appreciate you taking the time to respond to my e-mail. Your sources were a great help in completing my paper.

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I am doing research for an impact paper on Sinclair Lewis. I want to either focus on his influences on the medical field or his relationship with Upton Sinclair. I am having a difficult time finding information on him and was hoping that you could help me in my study. Please contact me if you can be of any assistance.

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Thank you very much for your quick response! Via the Internet I couldn't find anything when I searched on "Babbitt" or "Babbitry." So I was very pleased when I found out how to associate the term. I'm sure I can use some of your message! [This was in response to the question, "What's a Babbitt?" The answer we sent was, "George F. Babbitt is the eponymous hero of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, a novel which was published in 1922 by Harcourt Brace. Babbitt is a real estate salesman who seems to be very much a product of his time and culture, interested in material possessions and concerned with education for his children as long as it's practical. Much of the first half of the novel seems to be primarily satire against various aspects of society, the church, the men's club, high school and college education, business, etc. However, in the second half of the novel, Babbitt begins to realize the sterility of his life and experiments with radical politics, engages in an affair, and attempts to find solace in male bonding in the Maine woods. All of this fails and at the end of the novel Babbitt is back with his family and hoping that his son will have a life different from the one he has had (although it doesn't look like it). 'Babbitt' is often used to define someone who is a middle-class social conformist, although as you can see from the plot description, this is based primarily on the first half of the novel. The most recent book focusing on Babbitt is *Babbitt: An American Life*, by Glen Love (1993)."]

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I am very much interested in your society. I chose to read

Main Street for an English term paper. I am a student in high school. I am writing about Lewis's satire of small town life displayed through the setting and characters in *Main Street*. I would very much appreciate any information you could give me pertaining to this topic. Regrettably, I did not discover this website sooner, because my term paper is due on Thursday. However, any information you could provide would be appreciated, even after Thursday.

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I am senior medical student at the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine and I have recently been given a project which includes reading *Arrowsmith*, writing an essay on my views of the novel, and then researching the opinions of others, particularly those in the medical field. I have done a search on the Internet for *Arrowsmith* and also for Sinclair Lewis, but I cannot find any kind of commentary on this particular novel. Do you have any suggestions for my search? Please let me know via e-mail and thank you for any help you might be able to provide. [We responded to this e-mail and heard later that not only did this medical student successfully complete the project, but he received his medical degree this spring.]

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Hi. I am doing a report on Mr. Lewis. We were assigned questions that we have to find the answers to. I have been unable to locate a few of these. I was wondering if maybe you could help me. 1) How did Lewis feel about winning the Nobel prize, and where was it given to him at? 2) Why specifically did he move to Italy? 3) What was the George H. Company, and why did he leave it? Your response on this would be greatly appreciated!! I need this as soon as possible.

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I am a student and I am writing a critical essay about Sinclair Lewis's work *Babbitt*, which I enjoyed VERY much. I am trying to find resources in which critics offer insight to this work and I am having a hard time doing so. I would APPRECIATE any help or leads of any kind you could give me. Please help me if you can.

Book Values

I have an old book *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis. I believe it is the first edition. Inside the cover is an autograph that says "To my friend, Amy MacNamara, 'MAIN STREET' Lots of Luck signed Sinclair Lewis. The print date is 1920. New York Harcourt, Brace and Howe. The copyright date is also 1920. Can you give me any information about this book.

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Sirs; I just purchased this book and was wondering why Mr. Lewis found that he had to write as Tom Graham?

I have a rare book of Sinclair Lewis written under his penname-Tom Graham. Could you please put me in touch with interested buyers? The book is *Hike and the Aeroplane*. Thank you for your assistance.

Lewis commented that Garland would be "acutely annoyed" to know that *Main-Traveled Roads* made it possible for the author of *Main Street* to write about America as he saw it. Lewis as Nobelist, however, paid Garland back by informing the world that this literary pioneer had allowed himself to become Howellized, had changed from "a harsh and significant realist into a genial and insignificant lecturer." Still, Lewis could applaud *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917) for its many "real and vital" scenes—the awakening boy, the blizzard, the wagon trip, "the thrill of the first trip into the mellow and magic East."

While Lewis acknowledged his early debt to Garland, he maintained that he had been influenced by Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) not "in any slightest degree." Lewis never tired of repeating that he had begun *Main Street* ("The Village Virus") in 1905. Nevertheless, Lewis proclaimed Masters a truly original and vital poet, his *Spoon River* "utterly different," coming like a revelation and creating a new school of native American poetry. Among Western poets Lewis also paid tribute at various times to Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Robinson Jeffers.

Theodore Dreiser's poetry he thought surprisingly watered down, but in spite of his personal grudges against the man, Lewis's judgment about this novelist's place in American literature remained unclouded. Often Lewis acclaimed Dreiser as above all other living writers, hailing him as the emancipator of American literature, the head of the native tradition, a literary trailblazer who cut through "Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility" to "honesty and boldness and passion of life." From his platform in Stockholm, Lewis announced that 25 years earlier he had first read Dreiser's "great" first novel. To "housebound and airless America" *Sister Carrie* (1900) came "like a great, free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Walt Whitman."

Although Lewis could not say the same for another famous Hoosier writer, Booth Tarkington, he yet expressed a certain respect for this writer's craft and concerns, for Tarkington was one of the few writers who had treated the American medium-sized city before Lewis himself had created Zenith. And in *Turmoil* (1915) and in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918) Tarkington had "touched" the Average Capable American before Lewis himself had written *Babbitt* (1922). Though he had less to say about any obligations to yet another popular Indiana novelist, Meredith Nicholson, Lewis in 1914 favorably reviewed *Otherwise Phyllis*. Interestingly, Lewis describes the character Amzy Montgomery, who stands in front of his bank and watches Main Street, "its miniature picture of the world." Lewis also had good things to say about Brand Whitlock and Robert Herrick. Later Lewis generously indicated that Sherwood Anderson had made the American village important to all modern letters, defending him against charges of humorlessness and excessive sexuality. In his review of *A Storyteller's Story* (1924) Lewis believed that Anderson's memoir helped explain the Middle West and its generally misunderstood literature.

Not only *Main Street* in 1920, but two novels published earlier that same year, contributed to the new direction of

provincial realism—Zona Gale's *Miss Lulu Bett* and Floyd Dell's *Moon Calf*. Lewis liked the new Zona Gale even more than he liked the old, the author of 83 highly optimistic Friendship Village stories. Lewis judged Dell's *Moon Calf* his first and best novel, "remarkable." This story of the intellectual development of a young dreamer and poet in conflict with the humdrum—along with Dell's earlier plea for educational reform—*Were You Ever a Child?* (1919)—are worthy, said Lewis, of study by Froebel and Montessori.

Despite their radical dissimilarities of temperament and artistry, Lewis had from early on celebrated Willa Cather. Even after *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), Lewis was dismayed that the public did not know her better. Cather's West does not smack of "obvious heroisms" but is, instead, the "actual grain-heightened, wind-sharpened land of today." In one of his *Newsweek* "Book Week" columns in 1938, Lewis, ever the cataloguer, nominated 28 writers as candidates for the title: "The Greatest American Novelist"—and after a bit of dallying finally cast his vote—for Willa Cather. Lewis's choice is especially interesting in light of his unfavorable review of *One of Ours* (1922) in the *New York Evening Post* and in his later disappointment when the Pulitzer Prize went to *One of Ours* instead of to *Babbitt*. "No other," asserts Lewis, "has so preserved our frontier—from Nebraska Lutherans to Quebec padres—as she has. . . . Yet no one has more lucidly traced the post-pioneer than she has. . . ." For Lewis, Cather's greatest work is *A Lost Lady* (1923). For 35 years Willa Cather has "gone on creating beauty." Other writers have chased after novelty and nihilism, but "quiet and alone, Willa Cather has greatly pictured the great life."

Lewis appreciated the urbanity of Iowa-born Carl Van Vechten, his civilized wit, dexterity, and charm. In his *Saturday Review* assessment of *The Tattooed Countess* (1924)—the story of a woman from Maple Valley, Iowa, who returns to her birthplace after her 35-year marriage to an Italian nobleman—Lewis did not fail to praise Van Vechten's picture of "lawnmower" innocence, the bizarre catalogues, and the "lugubrious" village personages. The reviewer wryly comments that Van Vechten has made his Midwest "at once real and amusing"—"like the worthy though sometimes depressing authors of *Winesburg, Ohio*, *Main Street*, and *O Pioneers!*" Though Lewis did not prophesy that the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) would some day win the Nobel Prize—as he prophesied for the author of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)—he publicly recommended *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and confessed to the Bemidji College faculty: "I like Steinbeck."

Besides using Mark Twain as a stick on Howells, Lewis also used him as a bludgeon on Bernard DeVoto from Ogden, Utah. Lewis was saddened to learn that Mark Twain's future reputation would depend on DeVoto as his literary executor. When, in *The Literary Fallacy* (1944), DeVoto declared that folly and lying in literature should be denounced, Lewis, defending Van Wyck Brooks, angrily responded: "Very well," he wrote in the pages of *Saturday Review*, "I denounce Mr. Bernard DeVoto as a fool and

Bucco continued from page 18


a tedious and egotistical fool, as a liar and a pompous and boresome liar." Since no serious critic would think deflating DeVoto was worth while, Lewis indicates that he will take on the job. *The Literary Fallacy* (a "dull pamphlet" in "stumble-footed" style) attacks Brooks for not writing about Francis Parkman in the approved DeVoto method, which sounds to Lewis like the old John Fiske method. Unable to challenge DeVoto's monumental history, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (1943), or DeVoto's vast knowledge of the American West, Lewis resorts to iffy invention and other points of the compass: "If Brooks ever tackles Proust or anything east of Massachusetts or south of New Jersey, then DeVoto is sunk for life." By alluding to DeVoto's frog-like face, Lewis (no Barrymore himself) plays the man, not the board. The mayhem and carnage do not abate. In the end, Lewis attacks DeVoto's second-rate fiction written by the pseudonymous "John August." Still, Lewis concludes, this hack stuff combining Tarzan and MGM is superior fiction to the fiction in *The Literary Fallacy*.

"Incomparably" better than DeVoto and the other "cultural quacks" at Harvard, Lewis asserted, was Wallace Stegner. Among the young Western writers Lewis championed in his conversations, letters, lectures, and articles were August Derleth, Vardis Fisher, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Oliver La Farge, H. L. Davis, Paul Horgan, and George R. Stewart. After reading *Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943), Lewis looked upon Stegner as "one of the very best of the younger writers." He hoped that Stegner, without "pietistic regionalism," would "go back to Utah and Iowa, and put on the mantle of greatness that is awaiting him." Unlike Stegner, Lewis noted in *Esquire* magazine, August Derleth does not "wander" far from Sauk City, Wisconsin, the "Sac Prairie" of his fiction. Derleth's formidable "Sac Prairie Saga"—a series of novels and short stories—demands our attention. Though a champion of and justification for "regionalism," Derleth unfortunately has never planned or molded from this saga a single unified work. His "gush of variegated compositions," Lewis points out, makes Louis Bromfield "look like a secluded perfectionist." Derleth's literary ambitions remind Lewis of Babbitt's real estate development. "Yet—yet if August Derleth could ever, by some unusually strong magic, be persuaded that he isn't half as good as he thinks he is, if he would learn the art of sitting still and using a blue pencil, he might become twice as good as he thinks he is—which would rank him with Homer."

During this period—the 1940s—Lewis also promoted the reputations of four Middle Western women writers. For *The Three Readers* (1943) an omnibus compiled by Lewis, Carl Van Doren, and Clifton Fadiman, Lewis selected novellas by Eleanor Green and Ruth Suckow—*The Hill* (1936) and *Country People* (1924)—"opposite," noted Lewis, "in almost every mood." Though Eleanor Green had lived in the East, she had the good sense to return to Wisconsin. And Ruth Suckow, "with apparent contentment" after sojourns east and west, found material for many books in her own Iowa back yard. *The Bonney Family* (1928), *The Folks* (1934), and *New Hope* (1942) are, Lewis noted, "genuinely native." As the Great Valley created Green and Suckow, so in turn Green and Suckow have created the Great Valley.

Forgotten today are two younger Middle Western writers that Lewis boosted. In Maritta Woolff from Michigan, Lewis saw "a quiet, relentless observer," without opinions, without egotism. Her *Whistle Stop* (1941), written in the tradition of Farrell, Steinbeck, and Caldwell when she was only 22, is about a struggling village family. *Night Shift* (1942) details the seamy and sordid side of an industrial city. Though today Maritta Woolff's novels seem undisciplined and stereotypical, Lewis saw them as neither "drab" nor "propagandistic." Like Maritta Woolff, Ann Chidester, of Stillwater, Minnesota, can be melodramatic, but this daughter of a pioneering family, Lewis remarked, has "no more humor than a ration book." *Young Pandora* (1942) and *No Longer Fugitive* (1943) exemplify "impressionism." Chidester's love of nature and of courage are poetic and passionate, but Lewis thought that she seems at times too aware of her own cleverness.

In January 1946, Lewis invited Ann Chidester and another young Minnesota novelist, Frederick Manfred, to spend a week with him in his big Tudor house in Duluth. Four years earlier the Frisian-American Manfred—writing under his birth name Feike Feikema—had written to Lewis for advice on marketing his unpublished novels. Teaching a class at the University of Minnesota at the time, Lewis snapped back: "Quite impossible." Later, however, looking over a list of the previous year's fellowship winners, Lewis noted the title of Manfred's first novel—*The Golden Bowl* (1944)—and (for the obvious reason) registered a protest. Nevertheless, Lewis eventually read Manfred's manuscript and quietly sent it to The American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1945 The Academy awarded Manfred and Jean Stafford each a \$1000 grant-in-aid. Soon afterward Lewis invited the robust Chidester and the Bunyanesque Manfred to his hotel room in Minneapolis, and so famously did the trio get along that Lewis extended his grand Duluth invitation. Besides talking literature and Midland writers for days, Lewis at one point tore a sheet from a notebook, handed it to Manfred, and told him just to look it over—a few comments on his second novel, *Boy Almighty* (1945). "You've got a little too much bull in it," said Lewis. Afterward he showed Manfred how he laid out his plots, built his settings, collected notes, made up names, wrote the various drafts—and then pointed out that, after all, every writer has to find his own methods. Before the week was up, Lewis persuaded Manfred to let him help him find an Eastern publisher—for the sake of wider distribution—and told Manfred how to handle reviewers and, in due time, declining powers. Always Lewis admonished: "Work. Work. Work. And it'll bend before you."

Only three brief times did Manfred see Lewis after the Duluth visit. The fourth time the prolific Manfred (who gave the impassioned funeral oration at frozen Sauk Centre Cemetery on January 28, 1951) saw his mentor as only an escaping cloud of urn-vapor and some ashes returned home from Rome. As restless as the American pioneers before him, Sinclair Lewis—try as he might—was never able himself to settle down once and for all in the Middle West. Yet always, he advised the literary aspirant from the Corn Belt or the Big Sky Country: Stay at Home . . . or . . . Return to Your Native Place. 

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

In a review of *Kudzu* in the May 8 *InTheater*, critic Michael J. Bandler refers to a number of musicals "that are finding homes around the country without necessarily venturing into Broadway's heady environs" (35) and mentions *Elmer Gantry* as a good example. (See the Spring 1998 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* for a focus on *Elmer Gantry* including reviews of the musical.)

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Chicago critic Lucia Mauro also mentioned *Elmer Gantry* in the July 3 *InTheater* as one of the "adventurous" offerings that Marriott's Lincolnshire Theatre has done recently. She discussed it in light of the vigorous theater community in Chicago (24).

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Elmer Gantry is cited as a superb salesman by Stephen McCauley in the *New York Times* article, "Selling Anything, Enthusiastically, at 3 A.M.," (Arts & Leisure section, July 26, 1998). In this feature on infomercials he says, "These barkers on adrenaline overload are the direct descendants of the snake-oil hucksters who have held the rapt attention of teeming masses at state fairs for more than a century. Part Elmer Gantry, part Lucille Ball, they are American archetypes who hook me every time with their fanaticism and the sheer force of their personalities" (27).

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In *Notes on Contemporary Literature* (28.3, May 1998), Martin Kich writes about the critical grudge Alfred Kazin held against John O'Hara. Kazin apparently considered O'Hara a "pseudo-intellectual with an easy facility with words who snipes at the foibles of the rich and prominent because he envies them" (6). Kich argues that Kazin's attitude toward O'Hara is illustrative of the sort of received critical wisdom that is passed on from reviewer to reviewer and teacher to student in a vicious circle. Because of people relying on critics rather than reading the novels themselves, "is O'Hara a lesser Fitzgerald, or even a lesser Sinclair Lewis, or some strange amalgam of the influences of Hemingway and Dreiser? If he were all three, would it be remarkable or pathetic?" (7).

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In response to an article on Jack London in *Smithsonian*, Peter S. Beagle writes in the April 1998 *Smithsonian*, "In the last decade or so of his life, London bought story plots from

other authors. At the time of his death, he was working on his last novel, *The Assassination Bureau, Ltd.*, which was based on an idea by the young Sinclair Lewis. Robert L. Fish finished the book in the early 1960s, and it was later made into the 1969 British movie *The Assassination Bureau*, starring Oliver Reed and Diana Rigg" (16).

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David Streitfeld, in the *Washington Post Book World* (November 9, 1997), writes about "Wobegon Writer" Garrison Keillor and how he has contributed to the language a "phrase that becomes so much a part of the vernacular that neither a definition nor the writer's name is necessary for the reader to get it." Keillor is compared to fellow Minnesotan Sinclair Lewis in this regard. "The presumed Lake Wobegon isn't too far from Gopher Prairie, the fictional setting of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. [Keillor says] 'He did a sort of vengeful cartoon of the Midwest. Now I think everything has changed 180 degrees. Where Minnesotans were embarrassed in 1925 [*sic*] by a writer who made fun of a small town, now it's fair to say they'd be embarrassed by someone who wrote lyrically and lovingly about a small town'" (15).

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Oops! The *Chicago Tribune* on July 19, 1998 noted that *The Jungle* by Sinclair Lewis was one of the top ten best sellers at the Museum Store of the Chicago Historical Society. There was a correction about the author in the main section of the newspaper that same day.

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Northwestern Perspective, the alumni magazine of Northwestern had a Lewis-related pop quiz in their Winter 1998 issue. "Q: What Nobel Prize-winning writer had his first short story published in the *Daily Northwestern* in 1936? A: Saul Bellow (CAS37). The story, 'The Hell It Can't,' was a response to Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here*, about the possibility of a fascist takeover of the United States" (9).

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The Californian of the Salina Valley mentions Lewis in connection with the opening of the National Steinbeck Center Museum in Salinas. J. Kyle Henry asked the third Mrs. Steinbeck, Elaine, if her husband would have approved of the museum. She refused to say and Henry draws a parallel with Lewis. In *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck notes that Sinclair Lewis's book *Main Street* spawned

'violent hatred' in Sauk [Centre], Minnesota, Lewis's hometown but that the hatred subsided in Sauk [Centre] after Lewis's death. Steinbeck wrote of Lewis: 'And now he is good for the town. Brings in some tourists. He is a good writer now'" (1A).

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Jeffrey Toobin's article, "Starr Can't Help It," (*The New Yorker*, May 18, 1998), compares independent counsel Kenneth Starr to George Babbitt. "According to Clinton's defenders Ken Starr is Babbitt with a badge—a minister's son from San Antonio who shined shoes for fun as a kid, jogged to the cadence of hymns as an adult, and now calls down legal hellfire and brimstone as a prosecutor" (33). Loren F. Schmidtberger, writing on June 15, seems to have read more Lewis than Toobin has. He notes, "Mr. Toobin's analysis of the Starr investigation contains a puzzling reference to the hero of a Sinclair Lewis novel: 'According to Clinton's defenders, Ken Starr is Babbitt with a badge.' But Toobin's description of Starr as a Goody Two-shoes who 'now calls down legal hellfire and brimstone as a prosecutor' seems less George Babbitt, the epitome of the small-minded philistine, than Elmer Gantry, the eponymous hero of another Lewis novel, who got 'everything from the church and Sunday School, except, perhaps, any longing whatever for decency and kindness and reason.'"

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In a review in *The Nation* of *Notorious Victoria*, a biography of Victoria Woodhull by Mary Gabriel (May 11, 1998, 43), reviewer Amei Wallach mentions Sinclair Lewis's description of minister Henry Ward Beecher as "the greatest preacher since St. Paul" and a "a powerful writer of trash." Woodhull had exposed Beecher's affair with Elizabeth Tilton and it became one of the major scandals of the 1870s. Shades of Elmer Gantry.

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The Literary Companion to Medicine, edited by Richard Gordon and published by St. Martin's in 1993, has an excerpt from *Arrowsmith*. The section chosen was from part III, chapter 1 where young Martin Arrowsmith is being shown scientific curiosities by the alcoholic Doc Vickerson. The headnotes at the beginning call the book *Martin Arrowsmith* (the British title) and say that it was published in 1923 (perhaps someone saw a gleam in Lewis's eye of what was to be!).

◇ ◇ ◇

Lewis is in good company in the new anthology *Closers: Great American Writers on the Art of Selling*, edited by Mike Tronnes and published by St. Martin's Press in 1998. Edna

Ferber, Arthur Miller, and John O'Hara join Lewis in this collection. In the introduction, Tronnes says, "When he was researching *Elmer Gantry*, Sinclair Lewis posed as a door-to-door Bible salesman. Today, he would take a job hawking Bibles on QVC or the Christian Broadcasting Network" (xii). The selection that was chosen was from chapter 11 of *Elmer Gantry* when Elmer has temporarily given up the ministry and become a salesman.

◇ ◇ ◇

Martinis and Lewis are mentioned together in the *American Heritage* article "There's Something About a Martini" by Max Rudin (July/August 1997). In a paean of praise to this beverage, he writes that "the martini features in major works by Sinclair Lewis, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Mencken, and John O'Hara and, overseas, in Maugham, Coward, and Graham Green, to name just a few."

◇ ◇ ◇

In an article on Paul Robeson and Film, "A Giant Denied His Rightful Stature in Film," (*New York Times*, March 29, 1998), Martin Duberman notes that there were very few good roles in film for African-Americans in the 1930s and 40s. An exception he mentions is *Arrowsmith*, directed by John Ford. The film uses a character from the novel, a black doctor, Oliver Marchand (Clarence Brooks). He has a practice on St. Hubert, the Caribbean island where Arrowsmith (Ronald Colman) has been sent to test a vaccine against the plague, and they work together as equals.

◇ ◇ ◇

Bill Jennings, a Sinclair Lewis Society member who lives in Australia, writes that he quoted from *Arrowsmith* in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* to refute the notion of Anglo-Saxon purity. "Martin was, like most inhabitants of Elk Mills before the Slavo-Italian immigration, a Typical Pure-bred Anglo-Saxon American, which means that he was a union of German, French, Scotch, Irish, perhaps a little Spanish, conceivably a little of the strains lumped together as 'Jewish,' and a great deal of English, which is itself a combination of primitive Briton, Celt, Phoenician, Roman, German, Dane, and Swede."

◇ ◇ ◇

Bill also brought my attention to a chapter in *Dale Carnegie's Five Minute Biographies* on Sinclair Lewis called "Fired from Four Newspapers—He Won the Nobel Prize and Thought it was a Gag." The book was first published in 1937. "He has written an unceasing stream of excellent novels. And if you don't think that's a man's job—try it" (141).

◇ ◇ ◇

Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently.

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1998 Summer Miscellany

142. Lewis, Sinclair and Lloyd Lewis. *Jayhawker. A Play in Three Acts*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$150

First edition. Near fine copy in dust jacket.

143. Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1914. \$250

First edition. Some foxing to title page and frontispiece, gilt on spine a little darkened, otherwise a solid and near fine copy lacking the very scarce jacket. Lewis's first book published under his own name.

144. Lewis, Sinclair. *Cheap and Contented Labor*. New York: United Textile Workers, 1929. \$375

First edition. First issue lacking quotation marks at beginning of "Dodsworth" on title page. Some minor soiling to covers. Very good in wrappers. Laid in is a letter from the United Textile Workers to Lewis's secretary at the time, Louis Florey, forwarding a copy of *Cheap and Contented Labor*.

145. Lewis, Sinclair. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1933. \$300

First edition. Some faint spotting to flyleaf and front jacket flap otherwise a particularly fine bright copy in dust jacket.

146. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929. \$375

First edition. *Special advance issue* bound in orange cloth with black printing on spine only and with tipped in notice at flyleaf: "This is a special edition presented to the trade in advance of publication and is not for sale." Spine soiled with some rubbing to printing. Very good.

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Catalogue 96—Modern Literature

Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$1250

A novel of fascism coming to America, written by the author of *Babbitt* and *Main Street* at a time when Europe was coming under the sway of various fascist dictators. Inscribed by the author: "To Roy Grimmer/ from his friend/ + sometime patient/ Sinclair Lewis." Light flaking to spine gilt; near fine in a very good dust jacket with light edge-chipping.

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Public Auction Sale 1790 May 1998

116. Lewis, Sinclair. *Cass Timberlane: A Novel of Husbands and Wives*. 8vo, cloth; dust jacket, spine ends chipped, tape repairs along edges of verso. First edition. New York, (1945). [150/250]

117. Lewis, Sinclair. Group of 3 first editions. 8 vo, original cloth, rubbed; variously foxed. First editions, first states. New York, vd. [400/600]

Babbitt. Front hinge cracked. (1922) * *Elmer Gantry*. Clean tear across one page. (1927) * *Dodsworth*. (1929).

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Closing date June 23, 1998

280. Wray, Fay. (Born 1907). American leading lady, forever remembered as King Kong's girl friend. Signed and inscribed book: *On The Other Hand*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. 270 pages, 5.5" x 8.5," board, jacket. First edition. Signed and inscribed on front free end paper. Slight age toning to margins, light bumping to corners, small sticker on jacket. Describes her many love affairswith such famous men as Clifford Odets, Cary Grant and Sinclair Lewis. MB \$30. Est (\$50-75)

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191. Lewis, Sinclair. Original poster advertising the May 1935 issue of *Good Housekeeping Magazine* 50th Anniversary issue 1885-1935. n.p.:n.p., 1935. \$125

Printed on stiff board, 8 1/2" x 13" with a deep royal blue background and yellow-orange accents. "45 stories-features-serials" and indicates articles by Sinclair Lewis, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Ursula Parrott, Edith Barnard Delano, Grace Coolidge and Violette Kimball Dunn as in the special issue. About fine. Scarce poster.

192. Lewis, Sinclair. Original poster advertising the June issue of Hearst's *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. (1935). \$150

A striking art deco design in a rich red, dark grey, and black & white, 8 1/2" x 13" printed on stiff board. "3 New Novels, 22 star writers" and indicates contributions by Sinclair Lewis, Peter B. Kyne, A. J. Cronin, Pearl S. Buck, P.G. Wodehouse, Bess Streeter Aldrich, and Noel Pierce. About fine. Handsome and scarce poster.

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June 1998

145. Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$200

First edition. Ownership signature; signed by the author; a very good copy.

146. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1938. \$25

First edition. Very good in a chipped dust jacket with some wear and tear.

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Catalogue 61 New Arrivals Summer 1998

151. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1926. \$750

White cloth spine and paper spine label modestly soiled else near fine lacking the original glassine and slipcase. One of 500 numbered large paper copies *signed* by the author. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize (which Lewis refused) and, while seldom listed among his best books, probably the one most influential in winning for him the Nobel Prize.

152. Lewis Sinclair, et al. *Addresses by Erik Axel Karlfeldt . . . and Sinclair Lewis . . . On the Occasion of the Award of the Nobel Prize*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1930. \$250

Stapled wrappers. Fine. Text of Lewis's acceptance speech, as well as an introductory speech by the Secretary of the Swedish Academy. Scarce.

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Catalogue Thirteen

304. Lewis, Sinclair. *Sinclair Lewis on the Valley of the Moon*. [n.p.]: Harvey Taylor, 1932. \$250

First edition, one of 100 numbered copies. Wrappers, stapled, fine.

305. Lewis, Sinclair. Program for the Manhattan Theatre Colony's production of Eugene O'Neill's *Ah Wilderness!*, starring Sinclair Lewis. Ogunquit, Maine, 1940. \$200

Wrappers, stapled, tape stains on edges. Signed by Lewis.

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264. Lewis, Sinclair. *Cheap & Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929*. New York: United Textile Workers, 1929. (100/150)

Illus. from photographs. Pictorial wrappers. First edition. An exposé of the working conditions and labor rights in the city of Marion. Slight browning to extremities, else near fine.

265. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929. (200/300)

Jacket. First edition. Chipping to jacket spine head, 3/4" piece of jacket lacking from spine foot, flap tips clipped, else very good.

folio on p.54. Bookplate, else about fine.

EARLY LEWIS NOVEL

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266. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. (500/800)

270.. Lewis, Sinclair. *Our Mr. Wrenn*. New York: Harper, 1914. (300/500)

Jacket. First edition. Lewis's second novel, the first under his real name. Soiling & short tears to jacket, tape repairs to verso, flap tips clipped, else very good.

Jacket. First edition, First binding. Very faint blue lines from former jacket protector to jacket, else fine & bright.

267. Lewis, Sinclair. *John Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer*. New York: Harper, 1926. (70/100)

271. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. (1922). • *Arrowsmith*. 1st Trade ed. (1925). *Mantrap*. (1926). • *Elmer Gantry*. 1st issue. (1927). (150/250)

3/4 cloth & boards, paper cover label. No. 129 of 975 copies. First edition. Sunning to cover edges, else very good.

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NEAR FINE MAIN STREET

268. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920. (1000/1500)

272. Lewis, Sinclair. *Cass Timberlane*. (1945). • *Kingsblood Royal*. (1947). New York: Random House. (80/120)

Jacket. First edition, first issue. First issue with perfect folio on p.54. Second issue jacket advertising 125,000 copies sold. Minor rubbing to jacket spine ends & corners; faint foxing to pastedowns, slight fading to spine, else very good in near fine, bright jacket.

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269. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920. (150/250)

273. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Trail of the Hawk*. Frontis. by Norman Rockwell. (1915). • *The Innocents*. (1917). • *The Job*. (1917). • *Free Air*. (1919). (150/250)

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