

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME THREE, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 1995

RICHARD LINGEMAN AND THE NEW SINCLAIR LEWIS BIOGRAPHY

The editor of the *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* wrote up questions for Richard Lingeman about his work on his new biography of Sinclair Lewis. Lingeman has been executive editor of *The Nation* since 1978 and prior to that was an editor at the *The New York Times Book Review*. He is the author of *Small Town American* and *Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey*.

Here are the questions and Lingeman's responses.

1) What first drew you to the idea of writing a biography of Sinclair Lewis?

The immediate impetus to my undertaking a biography of Sinclair Lewis came from Professor James L.W. West III, who had been very helpful with my biography of Dreiser. In the throes of trying to conceive a new book project, I asked him for suggestions. He said (I paraphrase): "Why not do a biography of Sinclair Lewis? He's been neglected, Schorer's biography was unsympathetic, etc., etc." As I've painfully learned in this earthly travail, the best advice one can give another person is that which he or she wanted to do all along but didn't know it. It happened that I had loved Lewis's books in college, especially *Main Street* and *Babbitt*—the former, probably, because I'm from a Middle Western small town myself and had gone off to an Eastern School, and the latter because I have some innate predilection toward satire—a satire bone, if you will, which Lewis tickled. I went on to write a senior paper on Lewis at Haverford College and defended it at a seminar in the English department (I had made some half-baked claims about the sociology of literature). Lewis and I go back.

2) Mark Schorer's 1961 *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* seems to have influenced an entire generation of readers and scholars about Lewis. Do you think there are areas in which Schorer's biography is deficient? If so, how will your biography address these areas?

Because of the aforesaid interest, I eagerly read Mark Schorer's biography when it came out. It rather depressed me—fallen idols and all that, but however I squirmed, Schorer's impressive accretion of detail overwhelmed my demurrers and, after all, hadn't this work been hailed as "definitive"? This, roughly, was the prevailing opinion among readers and scholars at the time, I suppose. But after rereading the book recently, talking to people in the field, perusing articles from back issues of this very Newsletter, I began to think that perhaps Schorer's book wasn't the last word after all. It was very much of its times—the 1950s, the heyday of the New Criticism, conformity and anti-communism. As I discovered in writing a biography of Dreiser, there are

new things (one hopes) to be discovered, or at least to be teased out of extant material with a fresh eye; and new perspectives, critical and social, and one's own experiences and times and sensibility, to bring to bear. And so I began to believe a new book was possible. I think Schorer showed a failure of sympathy, at times a simmering hostility, to both the man and his works, that now seems excessive. What the explanation is I don't know (though I've read some plausible speculations), and I have no desire to wrestle with the ghost of Schorer, whose research was awesome (indeed, the very massiveness of the detail sometimes serves to overpower his attempts to be fair minded, though they're often pro forma). One must write a biography "against" some prevailing view, and that is what I set out to do vis à vis Schorer, in terms of questioning his evidence and conclusions, not of an intellectual vendetta. I believe that Schorer did not fully interpret Lewis's personal relations with his wives and friends, particularly Dorothy Thompson; nor did he adequately place him in the context of his times; nor fully appreciate him as a satirist and political and social critic. Lastly, though, God knows, Lewis's life was often sad and self-destructive, he was a funny man, as well as a trenchant critic of American flaws, which he knew as well as a rejected lover knows his mistress's body.

3) Although your attitude about Lewis as both a person and an author may change as you continue to do research, how would you describe your current impressions of him?

He was a consummate professional, a man containing a boy inside who could never find his (first) mother or please his father—a lonely boy but, in a way characteristic of so many incipient writers, not pathologically but productively so. As a social critic, he was not kidding; he bore scars from his own lash coming back at him. (There is the larger question of a chronically misunderstood satirist in a literal-minded society in which the provocateur's methods—exaggeration, put-on, hoax—are taken with deadly solemnity—e.g., challenging God to strike him dead.) Feeding into this backlash sensibility was a deep-seated sense of unworthiness and a desire to punish himself. In women he wooed the departed mother; there was something of the little boy lost (or abandoned) in his petitions. Then he fled from too much intimacy. He married his illusions of his two wives, and later rebelled against the disappointing reality....

I have other such theories, impressions, half-thoughts still working beneath the threshold of articulation—all subject to revision or cancellation without notice.

4) Most of the critical attention that has been paid to Lewis

since the 1960s has focused on the big five novels, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*. Are there any novels pre- or post-1920s to which you think more critical attention ought to be paid?

Pre-1920s: *The Job* as a work of social realism, which is now being rediscovered by feminist scholars, and some of the short stories. And *Our Mr. Wrenn* when read in conjunction with H.G. Wells and the progressive social thought of the day. Post-1920s: I am quite interested in *It Can't Happen Here* and *Kingsblood Royal*, which offer visions of America that were true then and are true today in a prophetic sense.

5) What is your favorite Lewis novel and why?

Main Street for its indelible pictures of small town life; *Babbitt* for its satirical vision. I agree that *Arrowsmith* is Lewis's most fully realized novel, but what if it had been more of a satire?

6) Could you describe the research agenda you are pursuing in preparing to write the biography?

I am shortly going on leave from my job at *The Nation* and plan to put in sustained time at the Lewis Collection at Yale, as well as other collections around the country, and to revisit Sauk Centre and environs and to talk with as many survivors who knew Lewis as I can find.

7) What sort of information about Lewis are you looking for (maybe Newsletter readers might be able to help or provide you with leads).

Just in general, I would appreciate any articles, tearsheets, primary materials, letters, leads, observations, advice, anecdotes not only about the man but about the current assessment of his books, critical and popular, in academe and among general readers; and examples of his influence on later writers. Of course, I would be overjoyed to hear about hertofore untapped sources, letters, diaries, etc.

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

Sinclair Lewis Society Panel at ALA Conference in Baltimore

The Sinclair Lewis Society will be holding a session at the 1995 American Literature Conference which is scheduled for May 26-28, 1995 (the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend). The conference will again be held at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore.

The panel, which is scheduled for Sunday, May 28 from 9:00 to 10:20 a.m., is called "Sinclair Lewis: New Approaches" and will be chaired by James M. Hutchisson, The Citadel. The following papers will be presented:

"Carol Kennicott's Rite of Passage: A Turnerian Reading of *Main Street*," Jon W. Brooks, Okaloosa-Walton Community College

"Tropic of Zenith: *Babbitt* as Field Study," David J. Knauer, Purdue University

"Gopher Prairie or Prairie Style?: Character Designs in *Dodsworth*," Jay Williams, University of Chicago.

Sinclair Lewis Foundation Holds Annual Meeting

Sinclair Lewis Society member Roberta Olson has sent the Newsletter a copy of the annual report for the Sinclair Lewis Foundation. The Foundation is responsible for the upkeep of both the Birth Home and Boyhood Home of Lewis as well as organizing the Sinclair Lewis Writers Conference and running the Interpretive Center.

Among the highlights of the report was the announcement of a very successful Writers Conference which made a profit of nearly \$2000.

The Boyhood Home had 1,778 visitors during 1994, down from 1,900 in 1993. This can be compared to the 2,041 visitors in 1992 and 2,416 in 1991. The Foundation contributed to expenses for signs on Interstate 94 which, it is hoped, will increase attendance at the Boyhood Home and Interpretive Center. The Home did have visitors from 14 nations as well as the United States this past year. The Interpretive Center had 11,831 visitors, down from 15,000 in 1992. Arrangements have been made so that AAA members get a discount. In 1995 the Foundation will be listed in the State of Minnesota tourism brochures which should also generate more attendance.

Roberta Olson also reports that a literary event is being planned Thursday, July 13, 1995 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the publication of *Main Street*, "Is *Main Street* relevant today?" There will be a one-woman play presented and a panel discussion. Contact Jim Umhoefer, 950 Lilac Drive, Sauk Centre, MN 56378 for more information. We hope that all goes well and that we will receive a report on the festivities.

NEW MEMBERS

The Sinclair Lewis Society has added several new members since last spring. They include:

Joyce Lyng 1725 Sinclair Lewis Ave. Sauk Centre, MN 56378	Kevin Swaim 712 Golfcrest #7 Normal, IL 61761
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Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin 521 King Edward Ave Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7N3 Canada	James L. West III Institute for Arts & Humanities Penn State University University Park, PA 16802
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THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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A REVOLUTION OF ONE

Clare Virginia Eby
University of Connecticut, Hartford

Review of Sinclair Lewis, *The Job* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

It is difficult to find early novels about working women suitable for the classroom. *The Job*, newly reissued in paper as a Bison Book, raises questions as timely now as they were in 1917, especially about gender roles in and out of the workplace, what feminism means to the average woman, and how desires for love and work can conflict. Something of a cross between *Babbitt* and *Main Street*, *The Job* makes fun of business (especially when it pretends to grandeur) and sympathizes with an ordinary woman's search for autonomy, even for happiness.

Actually it takes Lewis a while to start sympathizing with his heroine, Una Golden, whose averageness he relentlessly insists upon. Like George F. Babbitt, Una is a type character who struggles to transcend her monotonous life and the yet more monotonous expectations placed upon her. When Lewis attends to how type is determined by social class, *The Job* moves beyond snide commentary to take up substantive issues. (The role of social class in determining—or rather, limiting—early twentieth-century women's options could be brought out nicely in the classroom by pairing *The Job* with Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*, both of whose heroines launch their very different careers by moving from a small town to New York City. Another good classroom pairing would be *The Job* and Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*.)

Una struggles against stereotypes, and so does *The Job* itself. Lewis periodically swipes at the writers of romanticized, sissified, or puritanical literature, and asserts the superiority of his version of realism. He seems particularly to have it in for Frank Norris's proclamations about the romance of business; as Lewis puts it, "There is plenty of romance in business. Fine, large, meaningless, general terms like romance and business can always be related" (41). But Lewis attributes to Una's consciousness a sentiment that describes his own struggle to narrate a new sort of story: "She could not imagine any future for these women in business except the accidents of marriage or death—or a revolution in the attitude toward them" (235). Three-quarters of the way through the novel, it begins to seem that Lewis has the same problem imagining a plausible future for a woman who remains in business.

Then Una starts to wise up. Going after her fourth job, she decides to settle for no less than twenty dollars a week, because "she knew that any firm taking her at this wage would respect her far more than if she was an easy purchase" (275). Working again as a secretary, Una starts to realize what has been evident to the reader for some time: that the men she works for depend upon her to get their jobs done. Gradually developing self-confidence, Una persuades her boss to let her sell real estate. She then invents an executive position for herself, upgrading and managing a chain of hotels. Not waiting for a social revolution, Una effects a quiet revolution of one, and it is to Lewis's credit

that he makes it plausible. Unfortunately he can't leave well enough alone, for an implausible reunion follows, and then an ending that's even less satisfying.

Finally more interesting than the plot are the various subtexts, most taking up aspects of the woman question. Particularly in the first of the three parts, Lewis quite credibly depicts Una's nascent sexuality—and it is definitely a matter of sex, not just "romance" of the sort depicted in the stories Una's mother reads. Una has, by my count, two "men" (although another reader might tally up Una's suitors differently), and initially she has to con herself into liking both of them. One of her beaux protects his ego by a time-honored diversionary tactic—blaming Una's lukewarm sexual response on her lack of "fire"—rather than considering how repulsive are his own fat neck, stupid jokes, whiskied breath, and woolen underwear (266).

Lewis does quite a "job" on men throughout this novel. It takes him only five pages to dispose of Una's father, who "left to wife and daughter a good name, a number of debts, and eleven hundred dollars in lodge insurance"—more than half of which is promptly eaten up by debts (7). Men in *The Job* tend to be philandering, sloppy drunks, one of them developing an alarming resemblance to Dreiser's George Hurstwood (and *Sister Carrie* might be the best novel to place on a syllabus alongside *The Job*). According to Lewis, men depend on important toy soldiers. Lewis sides firmly with women as he confronts double standards in the business world: "the comfortable average men of the office sooner or later, if they were but faithful and lived long enough, had opportunities, responsibility, forced upon them. No such force was used upon the comfortable average women!" (235). Lewis clearly anticipates the signs that hang over the desks of women today reading, "Women have to do twice as good a job as men for half the pay—fortunately, that is not difficult."

Una's relationships with women are more substantial and certainly more intimate than anything she experiences with men. After moving to New York, Una's guilt and her mother's passive-aggressive manipulations combine to create a bond between them that is both frightening and nourishing. Lewis's treatment of this mother-daughter relationship is harrowing and effective. He then shows Una developing less ambiguous bonds with other women, particularly the Jewish socialist Mamie Magen and the free-living divorcée Esther Lawrence, whom Una meets while living at a women's boarding house. Una's transformation from frowsy office girl to successful executive is hastened by the vision of Beatrice Joline, a businesswoman whose "smartness" includes brains as well as fashion sense. If Una is, at the end, "at least one-third the new, independent woman" (300), it is in spite of the men she has known and at least partly because of the women.

If Una's story is implicitly a feminist tale, frequent narrative interpolations make it explicitly one. Quite a gap separates Lewis's understanding of women's exploitation from Una's through most of the novel, but this gap could be spotlighted to raise questions about two important issues in feminism today:

the relationship of sympathetic men (such as Lewis) to feminism, and the role played by social class and education in predisposing an individual to embrace feminism. I'd bet that many students inclined to think feminism is irrelevant, outmoded, and/or elitist might be shaken up by Una's story. *The Job* could be a welcome addition to a gender studies course, especially for its focus on work as well as love.

The introduction by Maureen Honey does a good job of contextualizing the novel, particularly emphasizing its relationship to American women's history and to formulaic fiction of the period. I question the usefulness of some of Honey's abstractions (such as the claim that *The Job* is "reformist" rather than "revolutionary"), but she provides a real service by concisely pointing out how fully engaged was Lewis's fourth novel with New Women and age-old stories.

FROM THE LEWIS ARCHIVES I

by Roger Forseth

University of Wisconsin, Superior

[The following is a section of a paper, "The Biographer As Victim: Mark Schorer's Sinclair Lewis Revisited," read at the Sinclair Lewis Session of the American Literature Association Conference, San Diego, 1992.]

In the course of my research on Sinclair Lewis, I have conducted a preliminary survey of Mark Schorer's biographical research materials. The Mark Schorer Papers at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, are in excellent shape, consisting essentially of the entire corpus of his Lewis research; especially valuable are the often exhaustively detailed interviews that were *not* used in his biography. I also have examined the Schorer correspondence at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (including the letters of Philip Allan Friedman, an early competitor of Schorer); the Schorer-Dorothy Thompson letters at The George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University; and Schorer's correspondence with Ida Kay Compton in the Sinclair Lewis Archive of St. Cloud (Minnesota) State University. These letters, though less important than the Bancroft materials, provide important insights into Schorer's research procedures, procedures characterized by meticulousness with his materials and diplomacy with his correspondents.

The Mark Schorer Papers in the Bancroft Library include two collections, the unrestricted Sinclair Lewis documents donated shortly after the publication of the biography, and the restricted personal papers (available by permission of the library director).¹ The Lewis materials, contained in ten boxes and six cartons, are meticulously organized. The first four boxes include Schorer's correspondence with the Lewis family, friends, and associates, as well as letters to and from his publisher and agent. Boxes five and six hold the correspondence after the publication of *Sinclair Lewis*, primarily fan mail. The last four boxes include periodical material about Lewis, corrected copy of the biography, articles and speeches by Schorer about Lewis,

additional correspondence, and photographs. The six cartons hold Schorer's carefully arranged working materials: the Lewis correspondence; notes, clippings, transcripts; manuscript drafts and galleys; copies of books by and about Lewis; plot summaries of the short stories; transcripts of the 1900-1907 diaries; and Schorer's interview notebooks. Finally, there are several card files of notes and bibliographies. Of particular interest, as an example of Schorer's exhaustive research method, are his careful summaries of all the short stories.

The Bancroft does not supply a "Key to Arrangement" for Mark Schorer's personal papers. These materials include documents "sealed during Mrs. Schorer's lifetime," but otherwise are available to the researcher and may be photocopied. The Lewis papers here are confined to those not used directly in the biography. Mostly, however, this collection contains Schorer's miscellaneous papers, among which I found particularly interesting an unpublished lecture on John Berryman that he delivered at the University of Minnesota in 1973.² In the light of Schorer's oft-declared fatigue at having to research Lewis's drinking behavior *ad nauseam*, it strikes me as peculiar that he chose to treat (and to treat admiringly) another alcoholic—and concurrently to review, for the *Atlantic*, Berryman's *Recovery*, his novel about alcoholism.³

The Beinecke Library does not have much material directly relating to Schorer that is not in the Bancroft. What I found most intriguing there was the correspondence of Philip Allan Friedman, dated 1953 to 1962. Friedman, who assisted Harrison Smith in editing *The Man From Main Street* (1953),⁴ was a graduate student of Mark Van Doren's at Columbia. His dissertation was to be a biography of Lewis; and he had written to a great number of people asking for their cooperation, among them Dorothy Thompson, who wrote back a short, chilly note informing him that it was her firm policy to refuse to talk with any biographer of Lewis.⁵ Since she had, about this time, apparently agreed to cooperate with Mark Schorer (whose biography by this time had been officially sanctioned) her response to Friedman seems less than candid.⁶ And Schorer seems to have been concerned about Friedman's possible competition. In 1954 Frederick Manfred wrote Schorer:

Mr. Friedman is teaching at Wayne University (Detroit) this year. I doubt if he is writing [his biography of Lewis] now. He began the thing last summer, but when he saw how tough the job really was, and how little money he had left, he took the job teaching. As I see it, I don't see how he can finish it for at least a couple of years. (Of course he may not be telling everything.)

I doubt whether he'll take the edge off anything you may write. You've got the goods; he has all too little. And Lewis is important enough to have at least a half-dozen books written about him in the next score of years or so.⁷

Clearly Schorer was attempting to discover Friedman's progress. I have not been able to find, however, any direct communication between the two, and in his biography Schorer does not cite Friedman in either his acknowledgments or index.

The Dorothy Thompson Papers at Syracuse University are in splendid shape. The Thompson-Schorer correspondence in it documents one's impression that a close personal as well as

professional relationship developed between the two. Schorer apparently did not write Thompson until the spring of 1953 to ask for her help: "You must know that any help you can give me and any suggestions you are willing to make will have my deepest gratitude."⁸ He did not write again until the summer of 1958:

You have . . . been continually in my mind as probably the individual who is most important to the interests of this book, and if I have not sought you out by now, it has only been because I have known that later your assistance will be indispensable, and until that time I have not wished to be a nuisance.⁹

Schorer's diplomacy soon pays off, and by November they are on a first-name basis. Their "collaboration," as he was later to call it,¹⁰ blossomed, indeed, to the point where he had become a reliable friend, as the following letter suggests. In the Spring of 1959 he took Michael Lewis, Sinclair and Dorothy's son, out to lunch in New York. On Harvard Club stationery, he wrote:

I've just had a long lunch here with Mike. . . . He is an extremely attractive fellow and he talked attractively—and perceptively—of his father. May I add that he was a great relief from both Gracie [Hegger Lewis] & Marcella [Powers], with whom I seem to have been spending endless hours.¹¹

In short, the Syracuse correspondence documents the elaborate care with which Schorer cultivated Dorothy Thompson; there is no reason, however, to think that he was not sincere.

Finally, a long anticipated source of information about Lewis has proved disappointing. From the time of Lewis's death till that of her own in 1985, Ida Kay Compton had planned to write a book on the novelist, but it was not to be.¹² Her papers are now part of the Sinclair Lewis Archive at St. Cloud State University. Her correspondence with Schorer, consisting of twelve letters from him and one to him, are dated from January 1954 to November 1961, and though cordial, they suggest a purely professional interest. Schorer, in this collection, is filling in the factual gaps.¹³

NOTES

¹The "Key to Arrangement": *Papers of Mark Schorer Pertaining to His Book, "Sinclair Lewis: An American Life," 1952-1962*, is available from the Bancroft Library. "This material was given to the Bancroft Library by Professor Schorer in December 1962 and February 1963." The restricted personal papers were apparently donated to the Bancroft after Schorer's death (11 August 1977).

²"Berryman Recovered." The Joseph Warren Beach Memorial Lecture. 25-page typescript.

³Mark Schorer, "The Lonely Calm," *Atlantic* Aug. 1973: 92-94.

⁴Sinclair Lewis, *The Man From Main Street: A Sinclair Lewis Reader*, ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane (New York: Random, 1953).

⁵Letter dated 18 November 1953. Beinecke/Lewis: Un Cat Za MSS Lewis Box 1.

⁶After the publication of *Sinclair Lewis*, Mark Van Doren was to write Friedman that the main criticism he had heard of it was that "Schorer doesn't like Lewis, either the man or the writer" (letter dated 17 Jan 1962; Un Cat Za MSS Lewis B1 [Friedman File]).

⁷Frederick Manfred to Mark Schorer, 8 May 1954 (Bancroft C-H 149 Box 3). Note also: "The only person to whom I have talked at any length about Red is Phillip [sic] Friedman, who is working on a biography and claims to have had access to the papers you mention. Mr. Friedman was covering the country in an attempt to see people and talk with them about Red." Ida Kay Compton to Mark Schorer, 3 Feb 1954 (Bancroft C-H 149 MS Box 1). Not much, apparently, came of Friedman's research. see Robert E. Fleming, *Sinclair Lewis: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980): items 1966.8 and 1971.10.

⁸Mark Schorer to Dorothy Thompson, 28 April 1953 (Dorothy Thompson Collection Series I Box 27: Mark Schorer File).

⁹Mark Schorer to Dorothy Thompson, 20 June 1958 (Schorer File). The Schorer File contains thirty-six items. The letters to Schorer are in Series II Boxes 7 and 8.

¹⁰Mark Schorer, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (New York: McGraw, 1961), xviii.

¹¹Mark Schorer to Dorothy Thompson, 11 March 1959 (Mark Schorer File).

¹²Her husband, Charles Compton, had her manuscript published after death: Ida L. Compton, *Sinclair Lewis At Thorvale Farm: A Personal Memoir* (Sarasota, FL: Ruggles Publishing Company, 1988).

¹³The addresses and telephone numbers of the libraries mentioned above are: The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720 (415/642-8173); The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, P.O. Box 208240, New Haven, CT 06520 (203/432-2977); The George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244 (315/443-2697); Centennial Hall Learning Resources Center, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301 (612/255-4753).

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter welcomes other reports on Lewis holdings either in libraries or private collections. Send information to: Editor, *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, Dept. of English, Campus Box 4240, Normal, IL 61790-4240, Fax: (309) 438-5414.

CONTRIBUTORS

The editor of *The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue by writing articles or sending notes. These people include Martin Bucco, Clare Eby, Roger Forseth, James Hutchisson, Jacqueline Koenig, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Roberta Olson, Christa Sammons, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, Caren Town.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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

HARVEY TAYLOR AND JACK LONDON'S PURCHASE OF SINCLAIR LEWIS'S PLOTS: A POSTHUMOUS SAGA

Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin
University of Ottawa

After a decade of highly successful writing, Jack London bought several plot outlines from Sinclair Lewis in 1910 and 1911.¹ Younger than London by nine years, Lewis had not yet written a novel and was wandering from job to job, eventually finding himself in Carmel, as secretary for Grace MacGowan Cooke. There he met George Sterling. London and Lewis also met in Carmel through Sterling sometime between 26 February 1910, when London and his wife Charmian arrived in Carmel, and 9 March, when London bought his first 14 plots from Lewis at \$5.00 each. There were at least two reasons for such a transaction: London was always casting around for new story ideas—in his personal experience, in his readings, and in conversations with friends; and Lewis was in dire need of money. The arrangement was thus potentially useful to both men, although it turned out to be more profitable for Lewis than for London.

Although the sums charged by Lewis were comparatively small, the earnings were of great importance to him as evidenced in some of his letters to London. For instance, on 28 September 1910, he wrote to London:

I was very glad to receive your note suggesting that you are willing to look at some more short story plots, etc. I am enclosing a big bunch, at the completion of which I have been working day AND night since hearing from you.... I hope to gawd that you will feel like taking a considerable part of them, because, if you do, it will probably finally give me the chance to get back to free-lancing . . . which I have not done for over a year; can the job and really get at decent work. (Walker 75)

Later, on 15 November 1911, Lewis wrote London to thank him for helping buy his winter coat by taking three more plots. Altogether, it seems that Lewis submitted some 55 plots to London, and that London bought 27 of them for a total of \$137.50. Despite Harvey Taylor's 1933 claim that Lewis "contributed the outlines of nine of London's stories (Van Doren 83), London used only about five in his writings: 3 for published short stories ("The Prodigal Father," "When All the World Was Young," and "Winged Blackmail"), one for a novelette, *The Abysmal Brute*, and one for a novel which he never completed, *The Assassination Bureau*.

The stories which came out of these outlines were not among London's best. Answering a query from Lewis as to whether the transaction had proved to be a good business investment, London replied on 20 October 1911: "Frankly, I don't know whether I am making money or losing money by working up some of those other short-story ideas from you. Take *The Abysmal Brute*, for instance. I got \$1200 for it, after it had been refused by the first-class magazines. Had the time I devoted to it been devoted to some *Smoke Bellew* or *Sun Tales*, I'd have got \$3000 for the same amount of work" (Labor 1041). London had

trouble with *The Assassination Bureau* fairly quickly and, by 4 October 1910, he was "stuck and disgusted. [He] had done [his] best with it, and [after 20,000 words could] not make up [his] mind whether or not to go ahead with it" (Labor 933). London's purchase of plots from Lewis ended after November 1911.

On 7 December 1930, a young man, Harvey Taylor, contacted Charmian London concerning a London bibliography he was working on. A friendly relationship developed quickly between the ambitious Harvey Taylor and Charmian London who (at 59) felt a bit lonely and welcomed the attention of the young man. By 25 December, Taylor wanted to become Charmian's "agent for London rarities," setting out the rules he wanted her to abide by, and on 4 January 1931 he visited her in Glen Ellen for a few days. Harvey flirted with Charmian, declaring his love for her and never losing an opportunity to establish physical contact. Charmian herself was intoxicated by the young man's admiration, feeling "wide-eyed" and "expectant." Whether Harvey was himself infatuated with Charmian or merely manipulative is hard to determine. His letters to her were quite passionate, trying to convince her to have an affair with him and join him on a cruise on the *S.S. Pennsylvania*: "Now one last word from me from Havana. Someone said that the widow of a famous literary figure should never remarry. It was Somerset Maugham. But he said nothing about having an ——— with the young literary manager while away from home. Come. Please come. Oh please. PLEASE."² Harvey visited Charmian again in Glen Ellen in May 1931, arriving on the 9th, looking "fat and a bit soft." Together, they went through boxes of notes, finding two more items for the bibliography. When Charmian went down to Glendale to visit Louis and Nancy Stevens, talk at the Breakfast Club, and visit the Huntington Library, he followed her, accepting the Stevens' invitation to stay in their home. Harvey did not behave well during that visit, according to Charmian's diaries, and eventually left for Santa Fe on 20 May, begging her to go with him.

Infatuated, Charmian made the mistake of handling her business dealings with him instead of letting the executor of the estate, Eliza Shepard, do it, thus allowing Harvey to take advantage of her more easily than he would have been able to with Eliza, who had no particular liking for him. By 2 June 1931, Eliza was already getting annoyed at Charmian's handling of Harvey, and Charmian noted in her diary; "Have [ungainly?] feeling that Sis wants to blow up, & that she's not in a good frame of mind." Eliza had met him on business in New York on 2 February and had been shocked by his heavy drinking. By August, Eliza was openly antagonistic to Harvey Taylor, an antagonism which got Charmian "all stirred up and a bit angry" on 17 August. However, it seems that Charmian realized fairly quickly the potential dangers of his lack of professionalism and her own leniency. She wrote to him on 13 June 1931: "... every contract must be sent through Mrs. Shepard. If there is anything she is not equal to (I have yet to discover it), she would go to a lawyer. One little word or a paragraph can ruin us.... She is at the

helm, has always been since Jack died, and not only because I wish it and that she has proven herself invaluable, but by the terms of the J.L. will, she is in charge. If I should get anything into a tangle, we all go down together" (File JLT 33). This warning carried little weight with Harvey who handled a lot of business matters for her without informing her clearly of what he was doing. Among the business matters he mishandled was the issue of Sinclair Lewis's plots.

Harvey Taylor became interested in the Lewis plots at the end of May, and had plans for selling some of that material to the magazines. He gave Charmian more information concerning his plans in a letter of 11 June:

I received a letter from Sinclair Lewis giving me data regarding the outlines in a very nice manner, congratulating me upon my work and the contemplated bibliography. There will be no objection from him. I sent you a wire asking you to send along the affidavit.

Lewis said that there were more than the three outlines sold to London. He said that he sold them over the period 1908 to 1911. I should like, if you have Jack's check books for these years to make a search. He realized, he said, that Jack had no reason to use them, for he had plenty of ideas of his own, but that he supposed he was a bit impertinent to have offered such a writer as London ideas for stories. There was no note of any objection.³

On 11 June Charmian and Eliza "whacked out" an affidavit which they had certified by a lawyer on the 12th after receiving Harvey's wire. Charmian was happy at Lewis's consent and hoped that Harvey would get \$1.00 a word for the material on hand.

Things did not turn out as well as expected, largely due to Harvey's obfuscations. On 28 June, he wrote Charmian that he was "selling a photograph on *one* of the Sinclair Lewis stories to accompany an article which [he was] now at work on," indicating that he would collaborate should he get into difficulty. "I want you to have five hundred dollars for the rights to photograph. I should like to send you four hundred and let me borrow the other hundred for a month or two. O.K.? I have been reading and rereading everything that relates to Lewis, working like the dickens on it" (File JLT 101). Clearly, he did not write the article himself, since it was published by Viereck in October 1931, using as illustrations the 11 March 1910 check given by London to Lewis and two pages of the plot outline "Mr. Cincinnatus," and quoting extensively the affidavit provided by Charmian. According to his letter of 1 December 1931, Harvey merely ended up "arranging" the material for Viereck's article.

By the fall of 1931 Harvey Taylor was intoxicated by the attention paid to him by Sinclair Lewis, writing to Charmian on 25 September: "I'll bet you can't imagine where I am going for a few days. To *Sinclair Lewis*' at Barnard, Vermont. Isn't it a scream? Lewis asked me to come up the end of this month. I wired him that I should be there today" (File JLT 111). On 29 September he wrote again to Charmian:

Here I am at Sinclair Lewis' having a very brilliant time. I don't know what it is but I seem to get along with literary people awfully well. The place is magnificent, in a grand setting. . . . This scenery, if I had not lived so long in California, would outrival any I have ever seen. The houses—there are two large mansions—are far separated. The servants live

over in the other house leaving it silent here for work. . . .

Mr. Lewis has been real to me. He is a *real* person, much unlike the picture his critics make of him. He does not like the publicity. . . . He is the genius—the artist really. (File JLT 112)

Charmian heard nothing from Harvey in October, and wrote him a harsh letter on the 28th, but decided to wait a little longer before mailing it. By 9 November, although she had still not mailed her letter, she decided to write to MacFadden publishers, asking for information. Their reply of 19 November revealed the extent of Harvey's deceit. MacFadden had bought from him "Poppy Cargo," for \$750.00 and "Mr. Cincinnatus," which was used in Viereck's article, for \$1184.00. None of that money had been sent to Charmian. Charmian had clearly expected the worst, although she had kept hoping that things would turn out right, and her reaction evinced no real surprise, just sadness. She noted in her diary of 23 November: "Now I know the worst about H.T. Too bad. I'm only hurt for him. Must be cracked." The next day, she noted that Eliza and she had "thrash[ed] out H.T. amiably & Affec." and that relations were reestablished between Eliza and herself. She felt sorry for Harvey: "Poor lovely spoiled young thing." and posted a final letter to him, making her position clear:

Why have you done it? I can understand natural crookedness, and crookedness for its own sake. But I fail to comprehend why an intelligent young man, with his future to mold, deliberately risks that future by not being square. You had everything to gain by a frank and honorable business relationship about these bibelots in your care for sale (always under consultation with Mrs. Shepard and me). Yet when you sold POPPY CARGO you did not submit the manuscript to us first, and never of your own will told us of the price you realized. Worse, when under my rallying you came though you UNDERstated the figure—as I now know. And I have never been paid one dollar for the money you received.

The same, only infinitely more at stake, about the Sinclair Lewis Outline article in LIBERTY. How *dared* you publish that legal document, the purpose of which was solely that you might negotiate with Lewis's people. You sold the manuscript to LIBERTY for a red-letter price. I saw the article quite by accident and through the indignation of family and friends. I did not hear from you for two months. Then a hard-luck story comes, with no accounting, no explanations of your arbitrary actions—and no check. (File JLT 52)

Of course, she demanded a full accounting for moneys received to date, the return of all the material in his possession, including all her letters to him, the immediate termination of all negotiations on her behalf under way, and forbidding his continued use of the letterhead he had printed without permission naming himself "Literary Manager of the Jack London Estate," threatening legal proceedings if he did not comply.

His reply of 1 December was a masterpiece of self-pity, arrogance, duplicity, and a desperate attempt at saving face, beginning with: "All considered, I shall relinquish my connection with the J.L. estate." While he did his best to minimize his misappropriation of funds, he also threw in a few thinly veiled

threats: "The price I am to pay you for the Lewis thing will have to be arranged. The stories in their present form are not the property of the estate. Too, Lewis who was nice enough to quiet down on the whole thing, has revealed much to me. Jack did use many of Lewis' plots, all of which, though meaningless, is really a mystery" (File JLT 114). Clearly confused by this whole change in Lewis's attitude towards the plots, Charmian queried further: "You wrote me that Lewis was very nice and willing about your using them in the way you planned, and on that basis I sent you the affidavit which you, with the most incredible effronterie, sold to be used in that article in LIBERTY.... [N]ow with a different idea from you, I MUST know where I stand about it. If I do not hear from you, I am tempted to take it up with him direct. I simply WILL NOT be kept in the dark any longer by you, Harvey, about things which are MY business" (25 December 1931, File JLT 53).

Harvey finally came through with the requested information:

The legal angle on the thing, as Shultz, attorney for MacFadden told me, is that since Jack London did not use them, he did not fulfill the collaboration contract and that all rights to them still belong to Lewis and that he could sue if they were printed, or in any other way used.... Lewis knows of this. The originals are yours but the rights remained his. Shultz said that any court would give the benefit to Lewis. They printed photo-static copies to evade the law. Lewis did not like the one printed, or rather narrated, in Liberty, thought it was not a credit to his reputation. He asked me if the others were as bad; he found them worse. It is likely that he will try to prevent their further use, and everyone knows how much Lewis loves a fight.

Lewis did not fight the article because, fortunately, I was with him in Vermont when it came out, and became his secretary a few weeks later when he came to New York (28 May 1932, File JLT 53).

Amazingly, he who had created the problem presented himself as having saved the day.

Thus seems to have ended the mess created by Harvey Taylor concerning the sale of Lewis's plots to Jack London, although he was still planning to publish a book entitled *The Ghosts of Jack London: George Sterling and Sinclair Lewis, Containing the "Lost" Stories by Sinclair Lewis* (Van Doren 84). Charmian's trust had certainly been used and abused. Whether Harvey Taylor was truly dishonest or merely irresponsible and spoilt, hoping to get away with dishonesty because of Charmian's fondness for him, is difficult to determine. He certainly was irresponsible with money, and was constantly being locked out of his rooms because of his failure to pay rent. His hard-luck letters to Charmian are many, and he constantly used real or imaginary financial and health problems as excuses for his behavior, working Charmian's sympathy for all it was worth. It appears that he may even have borrowed money from Sinclair Lewis, as suggested in his 16 November 1931 letter where he uses a tooth infection and a dentist bill for \$185.00 as excuses for his having appropriated the \$1184 he was paid for the Lewis outline. He also claimed that Lewis had paid his hotel bill and given him another \$200.00 to clear his debts. In fact, Charmian had a hard time getting back her manuscripts, and especially her letters, since Harvey was always too sick to look for them or locked

out of his rooms and therefore unable to have access to them.⁴

Somehow, he also thought of himself as God's gift to the revival of Jack London's reputation in the United States, and he became quite resentful when his efforts to sell third-rate, unfinished London material failed, claiming that London was "quite dead in New York" and that "only a third class house such as MacFadden would touch the stuff" (1 December 1931). As Charmian bluntly put it to him on 25 December of the same year, it was he, Harvey Taylor, who was responsible for his own failure, not London:

If your judgment, that the "dated" stuff WOULD go down their [the publishers'] throats, proved wrong it was only what I myself told you—that the "stuff" had been retired by Jack before he died, and continued on the retired list by myself after his death. And so you should have no complaint to make. Also you should hesitate to say that "London is dead in N.Y." when you have such poor material in mind. I repeatedly sell or have inquiries from magazines for second serial rights in Jack's copyrighted stories. He is far from "dead" in N.Y., with the right matter submitted. (File JLT 53).

After 1931, what small dealings the Jack London estate had with Harvey Taylor went through Eliza's hands. Charmian herself apparently wrote him off entirely after 1931 and his name no longer seems to appear in her diaries, although she had some minor correspondence with him and wrote to his mother in a last attempt at retrieving her letters and manuscripts, which brought a bitter and accusatory response from Harvey on 9 March 1933. In fact, Charmian was apparently quite happy to be done with him, and felt lighter and freer—and she had good reasons to.

NOTES

¹See Walker and Viereck.

²All Jack London letters, unless otherwise noted, are at the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California and are cited JLT.

³See diary entry for 2 June 1931 and File JLT 97.

⁴See, for instance, letters of 27 June 1932 and 9 March 1933.

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- Walker, Franklin. "Jack London's Use of Sinclair Lewis Plots, Together with a Printing of Three of the Plots." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 17 (Nov. 1953): 59-74. Rpt. *Critical Essays on Jack London*. Ed. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983. 73-85.

Teaching Sinclair Lewis

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

Collector's Corner

Jacqueline Koenig attended the California Antiquarian Book Fair in February and found several items related to Sinclair Lewis. In a display case were letters from "The Clarence Darrow Collection" including the following one from Lewis to Darrow. The collection is preserved by Clarence Darrow's direct descendants and has previously been unavailable to scholars. The exhibit was not for sale.

(Note in the display case)

The first part of an amusing exchange of letters between Darrow and the famous author

The "preacher book" to which Lewis refers must almost certainly be *Elmer Gantry*.

We have been able to trace only two other letters between these good friends, part of Yale University's collection.

Ambassador Hotel

Kansas City,

April 5, 1926

Clarence Darrow,
Chicago Temple Building,
77 West Washington St.,
Chicago, Illinois.

Dear Clarence:

I have returned to Kansas City for a couple of months. Burriss Jenkins tells me that you will be here in a couple of weeks or so. Will it be possible for you to plan to have a whole day with me while you are here? I most eagerly hope so.

I am now just starting the preacher book after a couple of months of wandering through the west - an agreeable loaf which has put me into excellent shape for work.

Yours ever,

/s/ Sinclair Lewis

(In autograph)

I seem to have a
couple=of complex

At the same Book Fair from Bibliotopus, Beverly Hills (310) 278-6433 or Idyllwild (909) 659-4389.

Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry* (1927). 1st edition, 1st binding. *The Dedication Copy*. On the endpaper is a printed presentation slip, signed by Lewis, noting that he will be abroad when the book is published. *Below this is an inscription from the dedicatee, H. L. Mencken, to silent star Aileen Pringle, "Dear*

Aileen: This will make you yell. H.L.M., 1927". This was the dedicatee's own copy of *Elmer Gantry*, sent to him by the publisher at Lewis' behest. Mencken had already read the book in proof and reviewed it, so it is not surprising that he would pass it along to a close friend in the same year. Cloth rubbed and stained, inner hinges strengthened. A bright, 1st state dustjacket is supplied. FINE full morocco case. Lewis was the first American awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature breaching the Swedish citadel for the likes of Faulkner, Hemingway and Steinbeck. *Elmer Gantry* is a pathetic reminder that there will always be Americans who demand free speech, as a cheap compensation for free thought. 7500.00

Waiting for Godot Books, P. O. Box 331, Hadley, MA 01035, (413) 585-5126, in catalogue 33, offers several items related to Lewis.

648. LEWIS, Sinclair. OUR MR. WRENN. The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1914. First edition of author's second book, first book under his own name, second issue binding and sheets [with "Published February, 1914/C-O" on copyright page; 1st issue has code "M-N"; "C-O" is one month later]. 8vo, cloth, 254 pages. A fine, bright copy in dust jacket. The pictorial jacket is exactly the same as the first issue jacket on the printed recto; on the verso of the jacket are variant ads from the first issue jacket. The pictorial jacket has had some professional restoration on lower spine and at bottom corner of front cover (where loss of paper was restored, leaving a loss of a few words of text). With the exception of some faint creasing on front panel, the jacket is crisp and bright, a very pleasing copy; extremely scarce in jacket. \$1000.00

649. (LEWIS, Sinclair). IRVIN COBB. His Book. Friendly Tributes Upon the Occasion of a Dinner Tendered to Irvin Shrewsbury Cobb at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. New York: [Privately Printed], 1915. First edition. Tall 8vo, blue paper-covered boards (with label on front cover), parchment spine (and tips of corners), 30 pages, illustrated. Inscribed by Irvin S. Cobb in year of publication on half-title page: "April 25, 1915. For Mrs. Grace Hawley with a tremendous amount of the most respectful admiration. Irvin S. Cobb." Contains the first (and only?) appearance in print of three-page tribute, "C-O-B-B," by Sinclair Lewis; other contributions by G.B. McCutcheon, R.W. Chambers and Henry Leon Wilson, with pictorial contributions by R. Golderg, Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg et al. Light wear at tips of spine, else a very good copy [presumably issued without dust jacket]. \$100.00

ONE OF 500 HARDBOUND COPIES

650. (LEWIS, Sinclair). SINCLAIR LEWIS By Oliver Harrison. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, (1925). First edition, hardcover issue limited to 500 copies "printed for presentation to the American Booksellers Convention Chicago 1925." 12mo, cloth spine, textured paper covered boards [with cover label], 28 pages, illustrated. Reproduces a number of photographic portraits of Sinclair Lewis. Endpapers moderately foxed, small leather bookplate on front pastedown, else a near fine copy, quite uncommon in the hardcover presentation issue. \$50.00

651. LEWIS, Sinclair. FALKEFLUGT. Kobenhavn: H.

Hagerups Forlag, 1930. First Danish edition [of *The Trail of the Hawk*]. 8vo, printed wrappers, 295 pages. Owner's ink name on front flyleaf, spine lightly browned and bit askew, else a very good copy. \$45.00

652. (LEWIS, Sinclair). IN NEW ENGLAND FIELDS AND WOODS WITH SKETCHES & STORIES by Roland E. Robinson. Centennial Edition. Edited by Llewellyn R. Perkins. Foreword [two pages] by Sinclair Lewis. Bibliography by Harold G. Rugg. Rutland, VT.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, (1937). First edition thus, "Centennial Edition" [with Sinclair Lewis foreword]. 8vo, cloth, 257 pages, illustrated. A fine copy in very good dust jacket (jacket has light wear on spine, with two neat mends on verso with paper tape, else quite fresh and clean). \$65.00

From Pepper & Stern - Rare Books, 1980 Cliff Dr., Ste. 224, Santa Barbara, CA 93109, (805) 963-1025.

134 LEWIS, SINCLAIR. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. Uncorrected Galley proof, 84 leaves, printed on rectos only. The proof is dated November 21, 1925. The novel was published the next year. Some marginal tears, and archival mends in the final page. Bound in decorated vellum and boards (some wear). The sheets measure nearly two feet by six inches. \$2,000.00

This novel, admittedly not one of his best, was published between two of his greatest successes, *Arrowsmith* and *Elmer Gantry*. Although never a favorite with critics, Lewis was America's great satirist of the middle class (perhaps sharing the honor with Mencken, who was not so good-natured in his satire). Galley proofs of this vintage are genuinely rare, and were distributed only to a few people for editing, submissions for serial rights, foreign printings, etc. Lewis was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1930).

From List N3

351 LEWIS, SINCLAIR. *The Trail of the Hawk*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1915. First Edition. Inscribed by the author: "To Kate Vassault with the regards of a small boy who played with her & those other children, Artie Hoffman, Gil Hall, Virgie Roderick, Jimmie Hamilton, by the babbling brooks (of type metal) & pleasant fields (of galley proof) in the Butterick Building. Sinclair Lewis, NY, Nov. 15, 1915." Some tears in, and fraying of, the spine cloth, very good. The author's third book. \$850.00

352 LEWIS, SINCLAIR. *Tennis As I Play It* by Maurice E. McLoughlin. New York: George Doran, 1915. First Edition of a book ghostwritten by Sinclair Lewis. Accompanying the book is documentation about Lewis's authorship. Ownership signature dated 1915. Illustrated with photographs. Very good. \$750.00

353 LEWIS, SINCLAIR. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943. First Edition. Signed by Lewis and dated Oct. 17, 1943. Fine in a very good dust jacket with a chip at the top of the spine. \$225.00

From Antic Hay Rare Books, P. O. Box 2185, Asbury Park, NJ 07712, (908) 774-4590, catalogue 99.

259. [LEWIS, Sinclair]. HARRISON, Oliver. *SINCLAIR*

LEWIS. NY: Harcourt, Brace, [1925]. Sm. 8vo., cloth & boards, issued without dust jacket. Limited Edition of 500 copies for presentation to the American Booksellers Convention, Chicago. Very Good (some wear & little browning endpapers). \$45.00

From Joseph the Provider, 10 West Micheltorena, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, (805) 962-6862.

129. Lewis, Sinclair. (Ghostwriter). *Tennis As I Play It* by Maurice E. McLoughlin. New York: Doran [1915]. First edition of this study of tennis that was ghostwritten by Lewis. 8vo. Illustrated with numerous photographs. Lewis had been hired by the publisher, George H. Doran, in the summer of 1914 as an editorial assistant and worked there in various capacities until the winter of 1915 when his third novel, *The Trail Of The Hawk*, was published. Hinges starting, else about fine. A little-known Lewis item from the years of his literary apprenticeship. \$500

From Ken Lopez, Bookseller, 51 Huntington Rd., Hadley, MA 01035, (413) 584-4827, catalogue 74—Modern Literature.

265. LEWIS, Sinclair. *Kingsblood Royal*. NY: Random House (1947). One of his last novels. *Inscribed by the author in the year of publication* to Janet Nathan, wife of author Robert Nathan: "To Janet Nathan/ with an amount of/ love which would/ cause indignation/ in Bob/ Sinclair Lewis/ Truro - Cardinal's Palace/ July 17, 1947." *Together with* two ALS from Lewis to Janet Nathan, one preceding the inscription and one later the same year. Apparently "Cardinal's Palace" was the name of the Nathans' home in Truro, and Lewis remarks in one of the letters that "I'm impressed by the name of your place & shall hereafter address Bob as Parson Nathan." The letter is signed "Love, Red." The book is very good in a good dust jacket. The letters are each folded once for mailing and are each in a hand-addressed envelope. Books inscribed by Lewis, or autograph material by him, are quite scarce. This, as an indication of a close relationship with another writer—or at least with his wife—is an excellent association. \$750

From Thomas A. Goldwasser Rare Books, 126 Post St., Ste. 407, San Francisco, CA 94108-4704, (415) 981-4100.

288. Lewis, Sinclair. *Free Air*. New York: Harcourt, Brace (1919). Blue cloth. Very good copy, dime-store bookplate.

First edition. \$150

289. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace (1925). Cloth backed boards. Fine copy in publisher's slipcase.

First edition, one of 500 specially bound, numbered and signed. \$1,250

290. Lewis, Sinclair. *Elmer Gantry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace (1927). Blue cloth, a fine, very bright copy in dust jacket, very slightly chipped at the ends of the spine, and a few small, old tape repairs inside.

First edition, first issue binding. \$500

291. Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. Dramatized by Sidney Howard. With comments by Sidney Howard and Sinclair Lewis on the art of dramatization. Illustrated. New York: Harcourt,

Brace (1934). Original grey cloth, fine in dust jacket.

First edition, like a number of Harcourt plays, this does not carry the usual "first edition" statement on the copyright page. \$150

292. Lewis, Sinclair. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1934. Blue cloth. A fine and bright copy in bright dust jacket with three paper tape repairs on the back.

First edition. \$175

293. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. With a special introduction by the author and illustrations by Grant Wood. Chicago: Printed for Members of The Limited Editions Club at the

Lakeside Press, 1937. Cloth, tissue jacket, boxed, very fine copy.

First illustrated and first limited edition, one of 1500 copies, signed by Grant Wood. \$500

294. Lewis, Sinclair. *Cass Timberlane*. New York: Random House (1945). Grey cloth, as new in dust jacket.

First edition. \$125

295. Lewis, Sinclair. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House (1947). Red buckram, fine copy in publisher's slipcase.

First edition, copy no. 1040 of 1050 signed, printed on laid paper, specially bound. \$200

A LIBRARY'S THINGS

OTHER THAN BOOKS and manuscripts, what does a library like Yale's preserve? First of all, literary relics—pens that belonged to Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Dickens, and William Howard Taft. Then there are locks of hair: Napoleon's, Tennyson's, Major Andre's. And fragments of history: a bit of the first telegraph wire, a fragment of the original Star Spangled Banner, a swatch from Martha Washington's wedding dress. Photographs, jewelry, pressed flowers, busts, death masks, medals, flags, and banners, all associated with the famous, the notorious, or simply the dearly beloved.

The list is long, and this spring Yale will stage a major exhibit of literary and historical memorabilia, drawn from the collections of the Beinecke Library, the Department of Manuscripts and Archives in Sterling Memorial Library, and the Yale Music Library. THINGS, on view at the Beinecke Library from April until the end of June 1995, is being prepared and annotated by Joseph W. Reed, professor of English and American studies at Wesleyan University and chairman of the Yale Library Associates.

When an author's books and manuscripts come to Yale, there are often other sorts of things in the boxes or between the pages. Photographs of pets, for instance. The exhibit will include pictures of Carl Van Vechten's cats (he wrote *Tiger in the House*), Sigmund Freud's chows, and Gertrude Stein's poodle Basket. (Another section of the show will exhibit one of Stein's colorful vests.)

Jewelry includes a brooch made from the first Atlantic cable and an opulent array of watches, cuff links, rings, and cigarette cases that belonged to Eugene O'Neill. For the gardeners, there will be roses—one kissed by Liszt, another kissed by Byron, a third from Goethe's garden, a scarf and a plate bearing Gertrude Stein's famous line "A rose is a rose is a rose." Visitors to the exhibition will see a candelabra presented by Puccini to Toscanini, silver trowels used to lay the cornerstones of Yale buildings, and an example of the mass-produced enamel cup given by Czar Nicolas II to his people at the time of his coronation.

Some objects are puzzling (an empty mailing tube signed "Alice B. Toklas"), some are funny (false hair used by Sinclair Lewis in amateur theatricals), while some are moving—a piece of the bullet that killed Lord Nelson.

Few of the objects in this exhibition were sought out by Yale curators or librarians. Accidental by-products of the library's collecting process, these relics can take on new life years after they were acquired. THINGS will amuse and instruct, as it illuminates moments from the past.

"Time, which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these minor monuments."

—Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia* (1658)

For more information, please call
Christa Sammons at 203-432-2964.
Fax: 203-432-4047
E-mail: CSAM@YALEVM.CIS.YALE.EDU

Sinclair Lewis items included in the Beinecke Library exhibition THINGS, April-June 1995.

False hair and a bow tie used by Sinclair Lewis in amateur theatricals.

Sinclair Lewis's glasses, pince-nez, and case.

Photograph of Sinclair Lewis in Sauk Centre, with two hunting dogs.

Photograph of Sinclair Lewis's cat walking through an upstairs hallway in his house in Duluth, Minnesota.

Formal photograph portrait of Sinclair Lewis's cat.

Certificate of the Nobel Prize awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930.

CAROL'S REVOLUTION

by Caren J. Town
Georgia Southern University

Review of *Main Street: The Revolt of Carol Kennicott*, by Martin Bucco. New York: Twayne, 1993.

Martin Bucco's *Main Street: The Revolt of Carol Kennicott* (1993), part of Twayne's Masterwork Studies series, provides a useful introduction to Lewis's novel. The book includes a chronology of Lewis's life, chapters outlining the novel's historical background, literary significance, and critical reception, a systematic and detailed reading of the text, and a selected bibliography.

In the historical background chapter, Bucco situates the novel in its literary context, showing how it negotiates the conflict between the idealization of small-town America by authors such as Zona Gayle and more satirical versions created by Twain, Garland, Wharton, and Anderson. Also in this chapter, Bucco discusses the precursors to Carol Kennicott in Lewis's first four novels and the ways Lewis used *Main Street* as "a trove of themes, types, and social issues" (6) for his later novels. The chapter on the importance of *Main Street* makes some rather old-fashioned comments on the ways in which the novel "embraces good" (11) and provides a "rich synthesis of values" (12), but the section on critical reception is informed and current, moving from the early critical debate about the novel's satirical realism to the centennial conference in 1985 and the formation of the Sinclair Lewis Society in 1992.

For his reading, Bucco advocates what he calls a "combined approach" to the novel, which "follows the larger design of the narrative" and also "groups and examines recurring themes, motifs, and techniques" (22). The primary focus is Carol Kennicott's revolt against Gopher Prairie, which aligns him most obviously with critics like Martin Light in *The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis* (1975). While Bucco's approach occasionally leads to a certain repetitiveness, the systematic overall organization of the book, based on Lewis's "not only proportional but symmetrical" (25) structure, avoids confusion.

Early in his reading, Bucco correctly notices the combined purposes of the novel, in particular its "satiric realism" (13), but he is clearly uncomfortable with the inconsistencies of Lewis's "intrusive novelist-narrator," who at times "chattily confides" (27) and at other times becomes "brazenly reticent" (28). "More effective," he says, "are the novelist's rich details" (28), and he notes favorably the epic qualities of the novel. Still, Bucco discerns in *Main Street* "a rough equation between routine and standardization, between standardization and dullness, between dullness and blemish, between blemish and inertia, between inertia and death" (44). It seems Bucco might have applied this distrust of routine he finds apparent in the novel to Lewis's narrator as well.

Bucco develops several important insights in the next chapters. First, his assertion in his chapter entitled "*Mater Dolorosa*" that Carol becomes a mother at the "precise center of *Main Street*" emphasizes the centrality of motherhood for Carol's revolt (76). Carol's motherhood is both salvation and trap, part of her revolt and the necessity for it. His psychoanalytic reading of the function of Erik Valborg in "American Bovary" is useful as well. He notes that by "seeing in Erik father, husband, and child, Carol plays the psychologically intriguing but confusing roles of daughter, wife, and mother" (102) and shows that her "'Valborg phase' is a masterpiece of insight, self-delusion, and confusion" (106). Equally important is his recognition in this chapter of Fern Mullins as "communal scapegoat" (104) and especially as substitute for Carol.

In his last chapter—"Passionate Pilgrim"—Bucco asserts that Lewis "does not satirize his 'new woman' in the final section of *Main Street*" (116) and provocatively demonstrates how Lewis reserves his satire for the hearth and home imagery of the last chapter. Eerily, Lewis's emphasis on Will at his furnace recalls to Bucco the influence of Lewis on Richard

Wright, who, 20 years later, made very different use (although with perhaps some of the same satirical edge) of a furnace in *Native Son* (122).

The only objection one might have to this fine introduction is Bucco's somewhat unreflective comments about women, both inside and outside of the novel. Comparing Carol's lack of achievement in life to the successes of the main characters in *The Trail of the Hawk* and *The Job*, for example, seems to miss the particular focus of Lewis's satire in *Main Street*, which attempts to show that the restrictions placed on women are as much psychological as they are societal. Referring to Grace Hegger Lewis on the following page as Lewis's "hypercritical wife" suggests an equal imperceptiveness (5). Also, by portraying Carol as fitting not only the gender-neutral symbol of rebellious youth but also "the archetype of the unhappy housewife fleeing hearth and home," which Bucco sees as a "primordial image" (12), he simultaneously elevates a relatively modern class- and gender-bound image to the status of the primordial and diminishes the complexity of Carol's character.

Perhaps most problematic, though, is the discussion of Carol's attitude toward motherhood. Carol's negative, and nearly despairing, attitudes toward pregnancy and delivery, Bucco says, "surprise us," although such ambivalence to traditional female occupations, like motherhood, seems a consistent part of Carol's nature (79). "More surprising," he says, is Lewis's "failure to represent a self-righteous Bogartian reaction to Carol's unholy complaints" (79). Even "more shocking" is that Carol "does not believe in maternal devotion," although she almost immediately comes to love Will's son after his birth (79). Rather than remaining surprised, it may be possible to read the satire as extending outward past the "self-righteous Bogartian reaction" to those more progressively minded in Lewis's audience, who, while advocating reform in women's lives, nevertheless retain the belief that female attitudes toward motherhood remain those of unadulterated joy. Later, in "Village Intellectual," Bucco is "sad to say" that Carol flees from Will's erotic embraces "until he himself feels like an outsider in his own home" (97). This becomes less sad than explicable, given Carol's ambivalence about motherhood: her withdrawal more likely signals a fear of another pregnancy than any rejection of Will.

Except for this lingering traditionalism in Bucco's attitude toward women and a rather abrupt conclusion, the book is an enjoyable and informative look at one of Lewis's greatest novels. It would be a useful companion for first-time readers or teachers of the novel, as it provides sufficient literary and historical background, useful bibliographic information, and a thorough, if not dramatically new, reading of the novel.

JEOPARDY TIME

Here are more Sinclair Lewis answers and questions from the syndicated game show *Jeopardy*.

From February 21, 1995: Burt Lancaster compared love to "the morning and the evening star" in this 1960 film that won him an Oscar. This Movie Nostalgia question for \$400 was answered correctly as *Elmer Gantry*.

From October 11, 1994: "He's the ex-football player turned evangelist in a 1927 novel by Sinclair Lewis." This Literary Characters for \$600 was also answered correctly.

From October 4, 1994: "The site of this author's birth in Sauk Centre, Minnesota is now on an avenue named for him." The category was Home Sweet Home and was a \$500 daily double. Lewis again was good to *Jeopardy* contestants.

From September 30, 1994: "The wife of this Sinclair Lewis realtor sometimes calls him 'Georgie Boy.'" Babbitt was given as the correct answer for this \$800 answer in Literary Characters.

Sinclair Lewis Notes

The St. Croix Center for the Arts in Osceola, Wisconsin produced the play *Strangers* by Sherman Yellen September 16 through October 8, 1994. This play, which ran briefly on Broadway with Bruce Dern, is the story of Lewis and Dorothy Thompson. The St. Croix Center's brochure noted: "He was the Nobel prize winning author from Minnesota whose novels exposed the hypocrisy, brutality and corruption of life in small town America. She was the first American journalist to interview Hitler and, to her weekly radio audience of more than 7 million, was among the first to warn of an imminent threat to German Jews. Festival Theatre favorites James Walker and Marilyn Mays are featured in this true love story of novelist Sinclair Lewis and journalist Dorothy Thompson chronicling the whirlwind romance, stormy courtship, careers and marriage of 'Red and Darthy.' Festival Theatre invites you to spend an intimate evening with strangers and meet two of American's most enigmatic and influential figures." Sinclair Lewis Society member Joyce Lyng attended the production and reports it was "well worth the trip." She also gave the actors and actresses a tour of the Lewis Boyhood Home prior to the production.

Ivy Hildebrand shared her views of Lewis in an article in the *Sauk Centre Herald* last year. She felt that Lewis was "just a small town boy at heart" and that's why he wanted his ashes brought back to Sauk Centre. Although the people of Sauk Centre were upset with *Main Street*, "They (Sauk Centre businesses) capitalized on the book. They used that as much as they could when they saw he had become famous." The Sauk Centre Area Historical Society has published her *Sauk Centre: The Story of a Frontier Town* which is available for \$15.95 + \$3.00 postage and handling. It covers the first 50 years of Sauk Centre, 1855-1905, and was developed for a master's thesis she wrote for St. Cloud State University. Write to the Sauk Centre Area Historical Society, P.O. Box 211, Sauk Centre, MN 56378 to order a copy.

Entertainment Weekly eulogized the late Burt Lancaster for the many film roles that he played with distinction. Of his role in *Elmer Gantry*, the movie that won him an Academy Award, Tim Purtell and Ty Burr write, "He won an Oscar as the bogus minister of Sinclair Lewis's novel, and it may be the ultimate Lancaster role: equal parts eloquence and lust, philosophy and action, gusto and regret" (Nov. 4, 1994).

In *No Pickle, No Performance: An Irreverent Theatrical Excursion from Tallulah to Travolta* by Harold Kennedy published in 1978, Kennedy writes about a production of *It Can't Happen Here* that Sinclair Lewis appeared in in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (74-75). Kennedy, a director and producer (although not of this production), had met Lewis at the bar of the Red Lion Inn and was discussing his novels with him. A student approached Lewis and asked for his autograph. Lewis wrote something on a piece of paper and returned it to the young man. It read, "Why don't you find a hobby that isn't a nuisance to other people?" This note was unsigned. The young man did get even. After the play opened and was rather poorly received, Lewis received a note handed to him by an usher. In his own handwriting, he read, "Why don't you find a hobby that isn't a

nuisance to other people?"

Thanks to the Jack London Society for running a notice about the Sinclair Lewis session for ALA in their newsletter *The Call* Fall-Winter 1994.

Sweden has issued its annual Nobel Prize commemoratives and among the authors it is honoring is Erik Axel Karlfeldt who was elected to the Swedish Academy in 1904 and became its permanent secretary in 1912. He was honored posthumously in 1931 with the Nobel Prize for literature. Karlfeldt's speech, "Why Sinclair Lewis Got the Nobel Prize," was published by Harcourt Brace in 1930 and has been reprinted several times, including in the 1968 *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Arrowsmith: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Robert Griffin.

The new *John Steinbeck: A Biography* by Jay Parini (New York: Henry Holt, 1994) has several references to Lewis.

Ruth and Augustus Goetz, authors of the play *The Heiress*, based on Henry James's novel *Washington Square*, are back in the news. Although Mr. Goetz died in 1957, Mrs. Goetz is still very much alive and is celebrating a revival of *The Heiress* at the Cort Theater in New York City. The *New York Times* of March 5, 1995 reports that among her friends were authors such as Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Mencken, J. B. Priestley, Dorothy Parker, George Jean Nathan, Moss Hart, and George Kaufman (H7).

The Book of the Month Club has been offering various titles from the Library of America editions in their monthly publication. Among the authors they've offered are Mark Twain, Sinclair Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, William Faulkner, Abraham Lincoln, Flannery O'Connor, and Ulysses S. Grant.

BOOK NOTES

The Penguin Twentieth Century Classic edition of *Main Street*, edited, with an introduction and notes by Martin Bucco, will be published in October 1995.

Choice mentions Martin Bucco's *Main Street: The Revolt of Carol Kennicott*, published by Twayne in 1993. It is part of the Twayne's Masterworks series and is selling of \$22.95 in hardcover and \$7.95 in paperback. S. I. Bellman of California State Polytechnic University writes, "Within 126 pages, exclusive of editorial apparatus (chronology, notes, selected bibliography, index), Bucco's in-depth study of Lewis's *Main Street* from the perspective of heroine Carol Kennicott is a very competent job. From his deep immersion in Lewis's canon and his life and times, Bucco points up essential considerations that are exemplified in the various sections of the book. Lewis brought to *Main Street* "such popular and personal themes as aspiration, rebellion, and escape." The novel "reflects and illuminates American life, especially for the New Woman of the New Century," under the presidential administrations of Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson. Those "larger historical events surrounding Carol's youth and maturity in *Main Street* . . . correspond precisely to the author's own."

Chelsea Curriculum Publications, as part of its 1994-1995 Literary Criticism catalogue, is offering the Sinclair Lewis

volume of the Modern American Writers series edited by Harold Bloom for \$29.95. For more information call 1-800-848-BOOK.

In the 1956 edition of Dell's *Great Scenes from Great Novels*, edited by Robert Terrall, an excerpt from *Babbitt*, entitled "Guests for Dinner" is included along with sections from other great novels like *Ulysses* and *Anna Karenina*.

A Soldier's Reader: A Volume Containing Four Hundred Thousand Works of Select Literary Entertainment for the American Soldier on the Ground or in the Air, edited by George Marcy for Heritage Press in 1943 includes Lewis's "A Letter from the Queen." Marcy says in his lukewarm introduction to the story that "there is nothing special for me to say about it other than it is a good story and worth reading."

ON HIKE AND THE AEROPLANE

Roberta Olson responds to the mention of Carter Burden buying a copy of Lewis's juvenile novel, *Hike and the Aeroplane* (*Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*, Fall 1994) by noting that "there are quite a few copies of *Hike and the Aeroplane* in existence. I personally have one in the original presentation box. I also know of three other copies (at least) in Sauk Centre, in addition to the Sinclair Lewis Foundation copy. There are also multiple copies of the book at St. Cloud State University's Lewis Family holdings, St. Cloud, Minn., and at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn. and at places like the Minnesota Historical Society, and Twin City colleges."

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