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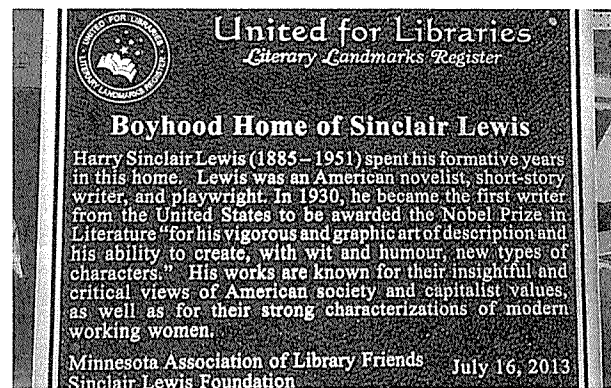
MENCKEN'S MARKET TIP FOR LEWIS

Frederick Betz
Southern Illinois University—Carbondale

Mencken's "Market Tip" appeared in the *American Mercury* of June 1924 (186–87), but perhaps because it was tucked away in the "Clinical Notes" section, which contains brief unsigned contributions from both Mencken and his co-editor, George Jean Nathan, it has never been mentioned in Mencken or Lewis scholarship. Mencken's authorship of "clinical notes" (January 1924–July 1925) was not unequivocally established until 1960 (Singleton 88), but devoted readers could no doubt distinguish his more colorful and provocative writing style from that of Nathan, whose "clinical notes," moreover, focused on theater and drama (e.g., "Abie Krausmeyer's Irish Rose" (185–86)) rather than fiction.

"The next great fortune to be amassed in the art of letters in the Republic," Mencken ventured to guess in his "Market Tip," "will be the reward of that novelist, male or female, who writes a genuinely realistic novel about a happy marriage." "Most of the current Zolas and Flauberts," he noted, "and especially most of the good ones, seem to be desperately afraid of the subject; they appear to believe that dallying with it would convict them of sentimentality and drop them to the level of Harold Bell Wright [a prolific best-selling author of novels of love and adventure in the southwest]. Thus they keep on describing marriages, which resemble nothing so much as a series of raids by Prohibition enforcement officers, with a leap off the Brooklyn Bridge as climax." "Dreiser's heroes" (Frank Cowperwood in *The Financier* and *The Titan*, Eugene Witla in *The Genius*), for example, "imitate the colossal adulteries of a guinea pig, a movie actor or a Wall Street broker." Joseph Hergesheimer "shows us a married lady [Mrs. William Lloyd Grove in *Cytherea*] in good circumstances posturing indelicately before another woman's husband [Lee Randon] and telling him that she longs to be outraged." Sherwood

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MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF LIBRARY FRIENDS AND PARTNERS DEDICATE SINCLAIR LEWIS BOYHOOD HOME AS MINNESOTA'S FOURTH AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION "LITERARY LANDMARK"

Seminal and best-selling novelist Sinclair Lewis, one of central Minnesota's most famous native sons, lies buried in Sauk Centre under a modest headstone. Of his many and varied literary achievements, his epitaph lists only "Author of Main Street." Passersby might wrongfully infer from this that Sauk Centre has all but forgotten Lewis, the local boy who gained international literary acclaim and immortalized a fictional version of the town in 1920's *Main Street*. Walk just one mile down the road from the cemetery to the author's Boyhood Home, however, and you will see how wrong you are in this assessment. Take just one look at the well-maintained home (originally built in 1889, and a National Historic Landmark since 1968), now a major tourist draw and center for Sinclair Lewis scholarship and symposia, and you realize that Sauk Centre is enamored with Lewis now more than ever.

Rather than his later life, career, and death, the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home focuses foremost on the Nobel

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LEWIS HOME NAMED LITERARY LANDMARK

Dave Simpkins

Sauk Centre Herald Editor/Publisher

When Nobel Prize-winning author Pearl S. Buck visited Sinclair Lewis's boyhood home in Sauk Centre she asked, "Why should the fierier, honest, impassioned spirit have come of such a house?"

Walking through the simple story-and-a-half, olive green home, you can see why she said that. Lewis's father, Dr. Edwin J. Lewis, owned the sober, modest home in contrast to the other house on the block owned by Dr. Julian Dubois, a larger two-story with a large porch, fireplace, and carriage house. Yet the home would play a key role in the life of one of America's most important authors.

On Tuesday, July 16 at 4 p.m., Lewis's boyhood home received a special designation as a National Literary Landmark. Members of the public joined members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and the Association of Library Trustees and the Friends and Foundations, a division of the American Library Association.

What Buck didn't see was the life lived by a young boy with an active imagination. Buck didn't see Lewis's birth mother, Emma Lewis, dying of tuberculosis in the upstairs bedroom, weak, pale, wheezing and coughing up blood. This left the six-year-old boy withdrawn, playing imaginary pirate battles in the backyard with clothes-pins, keys, and sticks.

Buck didn't see the coming of Lewis's forty-two-year-old stepmother Isabel Warner, robust, literate, musical, and active with church and women's clubs. Isabel read to her stepson more than was common at the time, taught him manners, and brought him along on her trips to Chicago and Minneapolis. She campaigned for literacy and building the Bryant Library, headed up an anti-fly campaign, and organized a rest room where farm wives could stay while their husbands were drinking in the saloons on Saturday night. Lewis would say of his

stepmother, whom he always referred to as mother, "None of it would have been possible without her."

Buck would have only seen a small portion of Dr. Lewis's four hundred books that made up the largest private library in town. These books included the works of Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, and John Milton. While many of the books are still in the home today, the most prized

book is in the Yale University Library. It is a thick, leather-bound collection of Milton's works with his father's inscription, "Read and profit thereby." It was the first book Dr. Lewis purchased while he taught school at Eberly's Mills, Pennsylvania. Lewis said receiving this book from his father was better than receiving a sword from the Revolutionary War.

Buck wouldn't have seen Harry Lewis taking out the slop bucket and bringing in wood for the cook stove. She wouldn't have seen him chopping cords of ironwood in the backyard with a book

propped up in a tree to read between chops. Buck wouldn't have seen Lewis helping his father with an emergency amputation of a man's arm on the dining room table and then burying it in the backyard. The experience of following his father on house calls in the country and his brother Claude doing surgeries in St. Cloud gave him some of the material he used in the medical novel *Arrowsmith*.

Buck wouldn't have seen the night during Lewis's senior year in high school when he came home late for the third night in a row to find his father at the door. Lewis wrote in his diary, "Pa came down and opened the door, and when I was in said, 'Before we go any farther, young man, we're going to have a settlement. Are you going to run this house or am I?'"



Joan Larson of the United for Libraries Chapter in Alexandria, Mary Ann Bernat of the Minnesota Association of Library Friends, and Jim Umhoefer of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation.
(Photo by Dave Simpkins)

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Anderson "admits us to the soul of a Rotarian [John Webster, manufacturer of washing machines, in *Many Marriages*] who strips off his clothes and cavorts before his wife and daughter in the altogether." And "even Miss Cather deals with husbands [Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours*] who flee to wars [World War I] to escape their wives [Enid Royce], and wives [Marian Forrester in *The Lost Lady*] who forget to honor their husbands [Captain Forrester]."

Mencken was not alleging that "such novels are at odds with the known facts, or that they are immoral and ought to be put down by the police." It must be "plain, indeed, that many marriages among us turn out badly, and it must be plain likewise that they are often amusing to the spectator and that they thus deserve to be depicted in our national fiction." But, Mencken maintained, "it must be just as plain that for every marriage of the melodramatic and bellicose sort there are at least ten that work out more or less peacefully, and endure until the mortician departs with the party of the first part." What Mencken was arguing was "simply that these relatively happy marriages are just as interesting, taking one with another, as those that end in disaster, that they are enormously commoner, and that they thus deserve more attention than they get from the appointed social historians and psychological histologists of the nation." To be sure, "most American husbands, at some time or other, are tempted quite as sorely as John Webster was tempted by [his secretary] Natalie Swartz, and that most wives, on blue days, toy with the dreadful idea voiced by Savina Grove, but the point is that nine-tenths of them somehow get over it—that the average marriage, even in New York and Chicago, somehow muddles through."

It was Mencken's contention that "this process of muddling through ought to be investigated at length by the more talented of our novelists, that the novel, in their hands, may be brought into closer contact with normal American life." Mencken was "not pleading here, of course, for anything so banal as the conventional happy ending of the novelists below the salt.... A novel ending peacefully is not necessarily one that ends happily; both parties, in their secret hearts, may long for another epidemic of the flu." Moreover, "a novel ending with a smash is not necessarily one that ends *unhappily*."

John Webster, "having resumed his clothes and departed with Natalie, is depicted as heaving a tremendous sigh of relief; one fully expects to meet him again in Greenwich Village, leading his own life and master of his soul." But this, "obviously, is not a situation that is typical of America—and the more novels get away from what is typical the less substance and vitality they have.... The odd, the strange, the fantastic—these things belong to the romance, not to the novel.... The charm of even so outlandish a story as Anderson's 'Many Marriages,' in so far as it has any charm at all, lies in what is typical in it, not in what is far-fetched and astounding," and:

It would have been a far better novel if Anderson had hauled up at the point where John begins to take off his clothes and made him keep them on, and get rid of Natalie [whose appeal to Webster mystified Mencken and which, in his review of *Many Marriages* in the *Smart Set*, he found inadequately explained], and come to some sort of *modus vivendi*, happily or unhappily, with his wife [who reacts to his adultery by committing suicide]. That, one can't help feeling, is what the man Anderson tells us John is would have done—that is what a respectable Rotarian in a small Wisconsin town would have done.

Having suggested that the "process of muddling through [a relatively happy marriage] ought to be investigated at length by the more talented of our novelists," Mencken turned to Sinclair Lewis, who, "I sometimes think, is the most intelligent of all American novelists, living or dead." There was, Mencken observed, "no messy artiness in him, no temperament, no posturing,...his mind, indeed, is basically scientific, not aesthetic." Lewis, "as everyone knows, sticks to normalcy...he knows it when he sees it: he is never carried away by the fustian of his own characters." Thus, Mencken wished to "commend to [Lewis's] own prayers the project of a novel dealing at length with the history of a typical American marriage, as aloof in its manner as his 'Main Street' and as relentlessly realistic

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CONTRIBUTORS

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A REVIEW OF *MAIN STREET AND EMPIRE* BY RYAN POLL, RUTGERS, 2012

Ryan Poll uses *Main Street* as a touchstone throughout *Main Street and Empire: The Fictional Small Town in the Age of Globalization* (Rutgers, 2012). Although in popular discourse “the small town is assumed to be a nationally shared, familiar, and obvious space and signifier...there is nothing obvious about the small town” (3). He contends that “the small town is always dying in modernity, and yet it never does die” (5). He analyzes the small town in terms of key texts, from Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* to Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* to the Frank Capra film *It’s a Wonderful Life*. “Lewis critically presents the small town as a singular, fixed nation form that produces the ‘same’ national narrative again and again. Lewis focuses our attention not on the small town’s content, but on its ideological form. The dominant small town, he suggests, is a highly mobile form that can be located anywhere within the United States” (37–38). Like Carol Kennicott, Poll notes “the enormous discrepancy between literary villages and real, material villages” and contends that “Lewis explicitly situates his novel within a recent, modernist American movement that sought to subvert the nation’s ideological identification with the dominant village imaginary” (39). Using *Winesburg, Ohio* as an example, Poll argues that although leaving the small town is a liberating act, once George Willard does so, it becomes a desirable space because he now remembers it romantically. Poll contends that the Revolt from the Village movement that Carl Van Doren identified in 1921 is far from over. He offers examples from contemporary texts and movies, as well as the idealized representations of the small town such as Greenfield Village in Michigan and Disney’s Main Street, U.S.A. in Florida. *It Can’t Happen Here* is also mentioned since Buzz Windrip uses tropes of “traditional values” in order to get elected.

Mentioning John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley* as a travelogue through small towns, he observes that Steinbeck

recalls that when Sinclair Lewis first published *Main Street*, his hometown of Sauk Centre, Minnesota (upon which Gopher Prairie is loosely based), responded with vicious ire for Lewis’s negative portrayal. But by 1962, the year Steinbeck published *Travels with Charley*, he could write that “Sauk Centre celebrates itself” for being the home of Sinclair Lewis (62). (This logic remains true today. If you visit the official City of Sauk Centre’s website, you will see myriad strategies that figure the city as a small town. The motto of Sauk Centre is “A View of the Past—Vision for the Future,” making the community synonymous

with a past that remains viable and visible. Moreover if you search the tourist activities in the city, echoes of the fictional small town are everywhere. Tourists are encouraged to visit the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home, the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center, and the Sinclair Lewis Campground). (83–84)

Carol’s fantasies of living in a small town, which she has early in the novel, serve as an indication of the “literary geography that repeats and recycles throughout U.S. literature” (131). This geography includes the lack of poverty, for when Carol suggests to the Thanatopsis Club that they should help the poor in town, one member replies, “There isn’t any real poverty here.... Papa says these folks are fakers. Especially all these tenant farmers that pretend they have so much trouble getting seed and machinery. Papa says they simply won’t pay their debts. He says he’s sure he hates to foreclose mortgages, but it’s the only way to make them respect the law” (Lewis 142). Poll notes,

Carol learns to read Gopher Prairie as a space of systemic exploitation and suffering. By learning to critique the dominant small-town imaginary, she simultaneously learns how to read capitalism. She recognizes that Gopher Prairie is an ideological form enabled by exploiting social relations outside of its material and ideological borders. More specifically Gopher Prairie is enabled by exploiting farmers, factory workers, and the mass reserve of labor—all of whom are rendered invisible from within the small town’s regulated borders. (134)

In conclusion, he argues from a Marxist stance, contending that the ideological small town “is deployed to underwrite a dominant discourse of U.S. and First World exceptionalism, a discourse that mystifies the extreme exploitation and oppression of the international working class, a discourse that mystifies how capitalism works by fetishizing consumption, and a discourse that mystifies U.S. imperialism by figuring the nation-state as an innocent island community” (165).

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Mencken's Market Tip *continued from page 4*

as 'Babbitt'" [both of which novels Mencken had reviewed in the *Smart Set*]. "Let him show," Mencken instructed, "the genesis of the alliance in the intelligent self-interest of the bride-to-be and the dull stirring of romance in the ganglia of the bridegroom. Let him show it achieved, and then let him show it going through the wash."

Mencken doubted that "such a marriage offers much of what is commonly called drama," and conceded that "of melodrama it is certainly bare." "Its conflicts," he cautioned, "are not vast armed assaults, with dishpans beaten, women ruined and the house afire, but small irritations." More specifically, "it is not adultery that makes the average American wife grit her teeth, but her husband's prejudices about victuals and his appearance after he has cut himself shaving.... It is not the influence of Guillaume Apollinaire [French poet and critic of *l'esprit nouveau*, the new spirit of aesthetic theory at the turn of the century] or Margaret Sanger [New York leader of the movement for birth control] that makes the average husband look at his wife with far-away eyes," but rather "the influence of some woman around the corner, met casually in a delicatessen store.... These frictions, long continued, make plenty of smoke, but not often any actual fire." "Let Lewis," Mencken concluded, "examine them with his achromatic eyes, and report on them scientifically; if he lets the chance go, then let some other novelist embrace it."

Whether Lewis read or received Mencken's "Market Tip" at the time remains unknown. Lewis had written to congratulate Mencken on the publication of the first number (January 1924) of the *American Mercury* and also to his father to tell him to see to it that the Bryant Public Library in Sauk Centre subscribe (Schorer 294). It is quite possible, therefore, that Lewis took notice of Mencken's tip and must have been flattered to be deemed by a critic of Mencken's stature to be "the most intelligent of all American novelists, living or dead." But Lewis did not embrace Mencken's idea, but rather continued to respond to Mencken's call for literary satirical portrayals of individual American types.

Lewis had, by his own account, in a letter to Mencken in January 1922 (Schorer 290-91), the same idea as Mencken of portraying the typical "Solid Citizen" in an American city (rather than of a village like Gopher Prairie in *Main Street*) by writing *Babbitt*, which Mencken praised in his review as "a social document of a high order" ("Portrait" 140). Mencken would continue to urge Lewis to portray characters as national types—for example, the American politician, American university president, American lawyer, American journalist, or revival evangelist, among others ("Essay in Pedagogy" 221). Lewis's next novel, *Arrowsmith* (1925), "interested" Mencken

"immensely." It was "well thought out and executed with skill," but Mencken was not so much interested in the title character as in Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, "the forward-looking health commissioner," the "quack" who "exists in almost every American town," and who is "the Babbitt of this book—far more charming than Arrowsmith himself, and far more real" (Rev. of *Arrowsmith* 508). If Mencken was somewhat disappointed with *Arrowsmith*, he was ecstatic over *Elmer Gantry* (1927): "He will come to represent the type as Lewis' George F. Babbitt represents the type of the gabby, go-getting, hollow-headed small businessman. At one devastating stroke a whole hierarchy of prophets has been reduced to a single symbol." Moreover: "What a gallery of American types he has painted: 'Elmer Gantry' swarms with them!" As for himself, however, Mencken would "not rest in peace until Lewis tackles at least three more. He must do the American journalist, he must do the American Liberal, and he must do the American college-president" ("Lewis and His Novel").

In *Dodsworth* (1929), however, Lewis finally devoted a novel to the subject of marriage, but it was, in Mencken's words, an attempt to "depict the disintegration of a marriage," marred, moreover, by two basic defects. The first lay "in the fact that the woman is never rationally accounted for, that her adulteries, like the social pushing that inspires them, seem gratuitous and senseless." The second had to do with her husband, whom Lewis "first shows that he is intelligent, and then pictures him playing the complete fool." The "worst holes in the book" were "where the two come together." Mencken found "some of the dialogues between them" to be "simply impossible," for "they harangue each other in the manner of actors in a bad play," and "nothing comes out of these harangues."

There were "passages" in *Dodsworth*, however, which Mencken thought showed "Lewis at his best—unctuous, ingenious, penetrating and devastating,... no novelist in practice among us observes so accurately, or has so vast a talent for putting what he sees into pungent phrases." Lewis was, "by long odds, the best reporter ever heard of—not, as incompetent critics so often allege, because he is only a reporter, but because he is so much more than a reporter." "Babbitt shaving," for example, or "Dr. Kennicott operating," or "Gantry drunk"—"these are little masterpieces that no rival has ever matched." "The quality of complete realism is in them, but they are also informed by the imagination," and "there are plenty of the same kind in 'Dodsworth.'"

Just as Lewis was no mere reporter, he was "anything but a mere caricaturist"; he was, "indeed, the precise opposite

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“THIS RED-HAIRED TORNADO FROM THE MINNESOTA WILDS”: A LOST EPITHET FOR SINCLAIR LEWIS

Frederick Betz
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Dedicated to H. L. Mencken “with profound admiration,” *Elmer Gantry* appeared on March 10, 1927. Eleven days later, Mencken published an enthusiastic review of “Lewis and His Novel” in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. *Elmer Gantry*, Mencken maintained, “is not only true in general; it is overwhelmingly true in detail.” Gantry is “intrinsically a fraud,... [but] there is never an instant when his fraudulence is not mellowed and mitigated by an underlying honesty.” In other words, Gantry “always remains a sincere Christian, even at moments when he is reducing Christianity to the level of an obscenity.” Mencken thought this distinction was “important to the understanding of the novel,” even though some of the reviewers he had read “appear to have overlooked it,” for “they mistake *Elmer Gantry* for a mere lampoon, in the manner, say, of Hilaire Belloc’s *Emmanuel Burden*” [1903]. But to Mencken it was “very much more than that, and something very much more interesting.” It was “an effort to get at the anatomy and physiology of the sincerity that can clothe itself in quackery and still survive.” For Mencken, Gantry is “the wowser incarnate.... Examine him at length, and you will begin to understand such men as Billy Sunday, Bishop Manning and Wayne B. Wheeler.”

“What the evangelical religious press will make of *Elmer Gantry*” would remain to be seen. Mencken’s guess was that “it will simply damn the book to Hell and let it go at that.” But “neither Lewis nor his monstrous pastor” could “be disposed of so easily as that.” “For good or for evil,” Mencken predicted, “Gantry will enter into the consciousness of the whole truly literate minority of the American people,” and “he will come to represent the type as Lewis’s George F. Babbitt represents the type of the gabby, go-getting, hollow-headed small businessman.” “At one devastating stroke,” Mencken noted with satisfaction, “a whole hierarchy of prophets has been reduced to a single symbol.” “This feat,” it seemed to him, was “of the first order,” for “not many novelists, even of the front rank, ever succeed in achieving it”; but Lewis had achieved it “three times, with Carol Kennicott, with Babbitt and with Gantry.”

This feat made it convenient, however, to forget Lewis’s faults, “as one forgets the faults of Mark Twain in the presence of Huckleberry Finn.” Lewis was, in Mencken’s view, “casual and journalistic; he lacks finesse; his style seldom shows any beauty; his wit is often harsh and cruel; he is quite unable to give any plausibility to what are conventionally called the finer

feelings.” Although Lewis was “perhaps the most widely traveled and best educated of American novelists, he retains into the forties much of the crudeness of his native Sauk Center” [Centre!]. There was “absolutely nothing of the professional artist about him,” and he had “no more manner than a farmer slaughtering a hog. But,” Mencken concluded, “if there ever was a novelist among us with any authentic call to the trade, then surely it was ‘this red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds.’... The spectacle of life enchants him, and he views it with superb detachment: It would be difficult to imagine a man more free of moral passion. And what he observes he knows how to get upon paper—simply, accurately and completely. What a gallery of American types he has painted: *Elmer Gantry* swarms with them!”

Mencken was so impressed with *Elmer Gantry* that he reviewed it again in the *American Mercury* (April 1927), where he celebrated the satirical novel about the “Man of God” or the Professional Good Man in America, and defended it against the swift and fierce reaction of the religious press, when he wrote in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*: “Lewis does not argue in it that *all* evangelical clergymen are like his grotesque hero; he merely argues that such men exist. Who, having any first-hand knowledge of holy men, and being free to speak frankly, will deny it? Certainly not I” (“The Rev. Clergy”). Both pieces are better known than Mencken’s first review, and they have been reprinted and are cited in scholarship; but the striking image of Lewis as “this red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds” was not repeated in either source. It was a play, of course, on Lewis’s nickname “Red,” as he was known to most of his friends and acquaintances (Sheean 7), and it was much more vivid than, for example, Leon Whipple’s negative review—titled “‘Red’ Lewis in a Red Rage.” But it could also have been thought to betray the condescension of the eastern urbanite Mencken toward the self-confessed midwestern provincial Lewis, as Lewis was to note many years later in his *Minnesota Diary* (55).

In any case, “this red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds” did not survive as a label for Lewis. By interesting coincidence, however, the image of the tornado survived in one of the most used labels for Dorothy Thompson, who met Lewis in

———“This red-haired tornado” *continued on page 12*

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of a caricaturist," for "he is too humane and romantic a man to make his people worse than they are, or even as bad as they are," and "always manages to make them a bit better." In *Dodsworth*, "that habit helps to bring him to grief." Lewis was "so obviously eager to make his wretched Fran Dodsworth a victim, not of her own rascality, but of forces beyond her, that he succeeds only in making her false," and although his Sam Dodsworth was better, he was "still not quite plausible." If Lewis could "produce a 'Babbitt,' a 'Main Street' or an 'Elmer Gantry' now and then," he was, in Mencken's view, "entitled to his intervening 'Dodsworths.'" So, "let him spit on his hands and begin another book."

But Lewis's next book was not ready until 1933, as Mencken recalled in his memoir, *My Life as Author and Editor*, written in the 1940s but published only posthumously in 1993. The novel was *Ann Vickers*, which he "had to describe in the *American Mercury* for March 1933, as full of flubdub and 'surely no great shakes.'" Mencken attributed this "deterioration" primarily to the "uniformly deleterious influence" of Lewis's second wife, Dorothy Thompson, which he thought was "visible on almost every page" (339). After 1933, Mencken was "happily free from [his] old chore of book reviewing, and hence did not have to write anything about the successors to *Ann Vickers*," but he "read all of them, and found all bad" (339).

In some of Lewis's later novels, happy marriages do exist, but they succeed, as Sally Parry notes in her study of the "darkening vision" in his post-Nobel Prize work, "because both the men and the women are secure in their individual roles" (200). Hazel Cornplow in *The Prodigal Parents* (1938) and Effie Mae Weagle in *Work of Art* (1934), for example, are "presented as typical American housewives, happy to stay at home and take care of the children" (200). But reviewers generally considered *Work of Art* to be "dull" (96), and *The Prodigal Parents* is "Lewis's weakest novel of the 1930s" (104). Mencken attributed Lewis's steady decline to "his two poisonous wives," Gracie (Hegger) and Dorothy, and to his "heavy boozing" as a result of "his unhappy marriages" (*My Life* 348), which both ended in divorce. Lewis's "bitter view" of his first marriage was "reflected in the portrait of Fran in *Dodsworth*" (Parry 204). His devastating caricature of Winifred Homeward, the "Talking Woman," in *Gideon Planish* (1943) was, according to Schorer (697-98), based on the prolific foreign correspondent, then syndicated columnist Dorothy Thompson. One contemporary reviewer, George Mayberry in the *New Republic* (April 26, 1943), thought *Gideon Planish* was "certainly one of the poorest books by an American writer of genius talent," and criticized especially such caricature,

adding that it was "enough to make H. L. Mencken turn over in his literary grave" (quoted by Parry 191)!

In his memoir, Mencken noted that Lewis had in the meantime "fallen into the net of another Delilah," and predicted that there was "every promise" that she would "do him even more damage than even Gracie and Dorothy" (345). Marcella Powers was only seventeen when Lewis first met her in 1938 (Schorer 646). She was, as Parry observes, "more supportive and less critical of him than his wives had been"; but "the age difference was more critical in real life than in the fictional marriage of Cass and Jinny.... Lewis was bitter about their breakup," when Marcella married the writer Michael Amrine, "a man closer to her own age," in 1947 (205). Lewis's experience is reflected in his "sorrowful examination of contemporary marriage" (195) in *Cass Timberlane: A Novel of Husbands and Wives* (1945).

Judge Timberlane, forty-one and once divorced, marries twenty-four-year-old Jinny Marshland, who, unlike Hazel Cornplow or Effie Mae Weagle, is not content to be confined to household duties, and Cass is "so afraid of losing Jinny that he is agreeable to every scheme she has for relieving the tedium of a middle class marriage" (Parry 213). The portrait of their marriage is "sentimental" (212) and has a "melodramatic, contrived happy ending" (224). As reflected by the subtitle, the novel also contains "An Assemblage of Husbands and Wives" in fifteen "inter-chapters" briefly portraying twenty-three marriages, only seven of which, according to Parry, "could be described as happy" (207). Key to these successful relationships is "good communication," "feel[ing] united against the world despite outward appearances," "enjoying each other's company," "generous acceptance of each other's faults, and a set of shared interests in their families and community" (207-08). Most of the marriages, however, are "tense, and in some cases, full of despair and/or hatred" (208). In these marriages, "the weaker spouse allows the stronger one to set the pattern for their life"; reflecting Lewis's own bad marriages, "men seem to suffer more in their marriages than women" (209).

Sheldon Grebstein praises these inter-chapters for containing "some of the best writing Lewis ever did, tight, sharp, uncluttered by specious or ambiguous emotion, and sexually frank but not erotic or embarrassed" (150-51). Mencken had told Lewis much the same in a letter (October 15, 1945) to "Dear Red" upon reading *Cass Timberlane*, which he thought was not comparable to *Babbitt* or *Elmer Gantry*, but seemed to him "to be the best thing you have done, and by long odds, since 'Dodsworth.'" It had "the same defects that 'Dodsworth' had:

————— Mencken's Market Tip *continued on page 9*

the woman is such a bitch that it is hard to imagine a sensible fellow falling for her." But there was "not a trace of the banality that I howled against in 'Ann Vickers,'" there was "none of the patriotic fustian that made me sick in 'It Can't Happen Here,'" there was "no going to pieces toward the end, as in 'Gideon Planish.'" In brief, "it was a well-planned and well-executed book, with a fine surface" (*Letters of H. L. Mencken* 490–91). Schorer quotes Mencken's letter (741), but omits what Mencken had to say next about the inter-chapters: "I liked the Assemblages of Husbands and Wives especially. The authentic Red, foul and full of sin, shows up in them. They are searching and swell stuff, though I protest that frigging is much less important in marriage than you seem to make it out. The main thing is simply talk. It is boredom that makes the lawyers fat" (*Letters* 491).

The inter-chapters reminded such contemporary reviewers as James Gray or Edmund Wilson of some of Sherwood Anderson's short stories. In both Anderson's and Lewis's stories there is what Anthony Hilfer calls a sense of "buried life" (161), "a revelation by the writer that the true essence of many people has been suppressed, by the community or by the character, and can be revealed only in fiction" (Parry 212), for example, in the stories of Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Benjamin Hearsh and Vincent Osprey in *Cass Timberlane*.

Just as Mencken found the inter-chapters vastly superior to the main story in *Cass Timberlane*, he had distinguished, in his review of *Many Marriages* ("Some New Books" 138), between Anderson, the short story writer, and Anderson, the novelist. It seemed to Mencken then "that no writer now in practice in America can write a better short story than Anderson," for "he not only sees into character with sharp and awful eyes; he is also extraordinarily adept at handling a simple situation." But when Anderson "tackles a novel, as he has now done four times, he begins to wobble after he has hauled his protagonist through the opening situation, and before the end he usually tries to reinforce his fading story with ideational flights that have nothing clearly and necessarily to do with it." Mencken saw only glimpses of successful "muddling through" an average American marriage in the short story form, which eschewed sentimental elaboration or intellectual explanation. No wonder, then, that in his letter of October 15, 1945, Mencken went on to encourage Lewis to return to the satirical portrayal of individual American types:

The country swarms with subjects for your future researches. You did the vermin of the Coolidge era, but those of the Roosevelt and post-Roosevelt era are still open—the rich radical, the bogus expert, the

numskull newspaper proprietor (or editor), the career jobholder, the lady publicist, the crooked (or, more usually, idiotic) labor leader, the press agent, and so on. This, I believe, is your job, and you have been neglecting it long enough. There are plenty of writers of love stories and Freudian documents, though not so many as good at it as you are, but there is only one real anatomist of American Kultur. I think it stinks, but whether it stinks or not is immaterial. It deserves to be done as *you* alone can do it. (*Letters* 491)

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WHAT WERE THEY READING THEN? *ALEXANDER'S BRIDGE* BY WILLA CATHER

This occasional feature discusses other popular and/or interesting books that were written at the same time Lewis was writing. See the article on Merton of the Movies by Harry Leon Wilson (1922) in the Fall 2009 issue of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter for another example.

In the same year that Lewis wrote his boys' adventure story, *Hike and the Aeroplane*, under the pseudonym of Tom Graham, Willa Cather also wrote her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*. It was originally published in serial form under the title "Alexander's Masquerade" in *McClure's* February–April 1912 and then published in book form by Houghton Mifflin in April 1912. Really more of a novella, *Alexander's Bridge* seems to have been heavily influenced by the writings of Edith Wharton and Henry James. The story concerns a successful engineer, Bartley Alexander, who finds his too-perfect life rather stultifying. He has a wonderful wife, fame and fortune from designing bridges, and everything that he really needs. Unfortunately, that's not enough. While traveling for business in London, he renews a relationship with Hilda Burgoyne, a well-known actress. She brings him out of his middle-aged funk, but at the same time he feels immensely guilty over his infidelity. He keeps thinking about breaking with her, but doesn't want to.

When she comes to New York on tour, he tries to have it out with her, but is called away because the bridge he is building in Canada is having serious structural difficulties. He leaves her, takes the train up to Canada, and then, as he is inspecting the bridge, it collapses around him, like his life. He dies, pulled under by several of the struggling workers. The last image of Bartley is as a friend of his recounts to Hilda how Bartley's widow remembers him: "Almost as if he were there. In a way, he really is there. She never lets him go. It's the most beautiful and dignified sorrow I've ever known.... We sat there evening after evening in the quiet of that magically haunted room, and watched the sunset burn on the river, and felt him. Felt him with a difference, of course."

After this Cather turned to full-time writing, and to the prairie narratives that would make her famous. Her next novel was *O Pioneers!* (1913). *Alexander's Bridge* is currently published by Oxford in its World's Classics series. ✍

IN MEMORIAM: JOHN KOBLAS AND ALICE BROMEN

John Koblas, best known to Lewis scholars for *Sinclair Lewis: Home at Last*, a remembrance of Lewis in the context of his life in Minnesota, died in March at the age of seventy. The author of more than seventy books, Koblas also wrote several screenplays and more than five hundred short stories, articles, and poems. Koblas's writing about Sinclair Lewis led to an invitation by the U.S. Postmaster General to present the Lewis stamp at its First Day of Issue ceremony in Sauk Centre.

Koblas wrote six books on the lives of Minnesotans F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis. He was also well known for his books about the James-Younger Gang and the Northfield Bank Robbery. His other books about outlaws with Minnesota connections include ones on Ma Barker and her "boys," John Dillinger, and the Sontag brothers, who were California train robbers raised in Mankato. In addition, he wrote a trilogy about the Minnesota Sioux Uprising and a series of historical mysteries for young adults. He often appeared in period costume when lecturing and was a consultant and script writer for numerous

television documentaries shown on the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and PBS American Experience.

See english.illinoisstate.edu/sinclairlewis/sinclair_lewis/recipes.shtml for an adaptation of a cookie recipe that Koblas said was Lewis's favorite.

Alice Bromen, a longtime member of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, died in September in Osakis, Minnesota, at the age of ninety-two. A graduate of Sauk Centre High School in 1937, Alice attended business college, worked for several firms in central Minnesota, and then traveled with her husband who was stationed at various U.S. Army posts around the United States. A strong supporter of the Historical Society, the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, and the Sinclair Lewis Society, she participated in the Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre, always helpful and cheerful in greeting conference goers and helping in any way that she could. ✍

EIGHTY-FIVE POETS CREATE FOUND POETRY FROM PULITZER PRIZE WINNERS DURING NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

Eighty-five poets from seven countries created found poetry from the eighty-five Pulitzer Prize-winning works of fiction as part of Pulitzer Remix, a 2013 National Poetry Month initiative. Each poet posted one poem per day on the project's website (www.pulitzerremix.com) during the month of April, resulting in the creation of more than 2,500 poems by the project's conclusion.

The project is sponsored by the *Found Poetry Review* (www.foundpoetryreview.com), the only literary journal in

print dedicated to publishing found poetry. Found poems are the literary equivalents of collages, where words, phrases, and lines from existing texts are refashioned into new poems. The genre includes centos, erasure poetry, cut-up poetry, and other textual combinations.

S. E. Ingraham (seingraham@gmail.com) was chosen to create the poems on Lewis's *Arrowsmith*. Go to www.pulitzerremix.com/category/arrowsmith to see the poems and for more information about the poet. ✍

MALF and Partners *continued from page 1*

laureate's early and formative years in Stearns County. On Tuesday, July 16, 2013, in recognition of the site's literary significance and historic value, the Minnesota Association of Library Friends (MALF), in partnership with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, and with support from several other local organizations, dedicated a plaque designating the Boyhood Home as an American Library Association/United for Libraries "Literary Landmark." The plaque concisely sums up Lewis's life and distinctions, reading:

Harry Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951) spent his formative years in this home. Lewis was an American novelist, short-story writer, and playwright. In 1930, he became the first writer from the United States to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humor, new types of characters." His works are known for their insightful and critical views of American society and capitalist values, as well as for their strong characterizations of modern working women.

The ceremony was one of the linchpin events at Sauk Centre's Sinclair Lewis Days, an annual, week-long festival celebrating the community and its most famous native son. Turnout beat expectations, with over fifty people in attendance. Attendees included District 12B Representative Paul Anderson (R) and Sauk Centre Mayor Brad Kirckof. Speakers included MALF President Mary Ann Bernat, who spoke about United for Libraries and the Literary Landmark program; biographer Roberta Olson, who gave a brief sketch of the youth's years in Sauk Centre; and local author and publisher Dave Simpkins, who is currently researching Lewis's diaries for an exciting upcoming volume on the author.

Sorry you missed the event? The site, at 810 Sinclair Lewis Avenue, is open for viewing and tours Tuesday–Sunday between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Please call the Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce at (320) 352-5201 for daily hours.

The Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home is Minnesota's fourth Literary Landmark, and the first to be co-sponsored by MALF. For more information on the national Literary Landmarks program, including a complete list of previous designees, visit www.ala.org/united/products_services/literarylandmarks. ✍

NEW MEMBERS

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

Michael Barry
Orange, CA

Sean Denniston
Arlington, VA

Tom Jackson
Berea, OH

Joshua Preston
The Woodlands, TX

Barbara and Stephen Coleman
Minneapolis, MN

Patricia Hanauer
Farmington, MN

Terry Jehling
Jefferson City, MO

Jericho Williams
Rock Hill, SC

Constance J. Crisp
Clyo, GA

David Handelman
Barnaby, BC, Canada

James Nixon
Glasgow, Scotland

Haiou Yang
Hunan, China

Lewis Home *continued from page 3*

He grabbed me by the collar, punched me in the face with his fist, threw me on the floor, bumped my head, and raised hell generally. If Ma hadn't have come down, there is no telling what he would have done. As it was he did not hurt me a lot. I have a great belief that if I am not too afraid, I will disappear tomorrow. Make my way to Europe and travel a few years."

Lewis didn't run away. He stayed to graduate from high

"This red-haired tornado" *continued from page 7*

July 1927 and married him the following May. Thompson was already well known as a foreign correspondent, who would go on to become one of the most prominent syndicated columnists in America. In 1935, John Gunther published the first major profile of Thompson in the *New York Herald Tribune*, and the title "A Blue-Eyed Tornado" referred to the enterprising reporter who would travel anytime and anywhere in Europe in the 1920s to get a scoop or an exclusive interview. For the admiring Gunther the reference to a "tornado" had no negative connotation, which he made clear in the baroque subtitle: "For Eight Years in the 1920s Dorothy Thompson Swept through Europe, a Blue-Eyed, Amiable Tornado. She Went Abroad an Unknown. She Returned a Famous Journalist." Gunther's label captured the essence of the now-legendary foreign correspondent, and therefore it is not surprising to find variations of it in almost all subsequent profiles of Thompson, especially from 1935 to 1945, when she was at the height of her career (see Betz). Ironically, however, Vincent Sheean refers neither to "this red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds" nor to the "Blue-Eyed Tornado" in his memoir of *Dorothy and Red*, and today Thompson is better known as the "Cassandra" of her profession (Kurth).

school in 1902 and went on to graduate from Yale in 1908. In 1920 his book *Main Street* would become a best-seller and he would become the first American author to win the Nobel Prize for Literature for his work.

His boyhood home, now on the National Registry of Historic Places, was most certainly an important landmark in his life and an important landmark in American literature. ✍

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DEPARTMENTS

WEB NOTES

In June or July 1936 Sinclair Lewis visited Middletown, Connecticut. The workers at the Remington Rand typewriter factory there had gone on strike and the company's president, James Rand, was using armed detectives to break the strike and destroy the union. This was soon after *It Can't Happen Here* was published and Lewis apparently was considering writing about Jimmy Rand. Did he actually write anything about Rand, the strike, or his visit to Middletown? I asked

the archivists at Yale but they weren't able to help. [Editor: In the spring of 1936 Lewis was considering writing a novel about labor and hired Ramon Guthrie to help him. Guthrie had worked as a mechanic in Connecticut factories when younger and gave Lewis some information on that. He and Guthrie visited a number of local newspapers, factory owners, and workmen in the Naugatuck and Connecticut River valleys in late June. Biographer Mark Schorer notes that Guthrie wrote an article on his work with Lewis in "Sinclair Lewis and the 'Labor Novel,'" which was published in *Proceedings* (Second Series, Number Two) for the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1952 (68-82). Guthrie's notes and correspondence are at the

Baker Library at Dartmouth. Lewis made several attempts to write the labor novel, but never succeeded.]

From Elizabeth Winick Rubinstein: I thought you would appreciate seeing that *Main Street* is #28 on the Buzzfeed list of books you need to read in your twenties! www.buzzfeed.com/doree/books-you-need-to-read-in-your-20s

Rusty Allred, who has contributed a number of articles to the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* over the years, mostly on Japanese translations of Lewis's novels, has visited Sauk Centre for the first time. To see more about his visit to Sauk Centre, visit his blog: ramblingrusty.blogspot.com/2013/05/a-visit-to-my-pal-sinclair-lewis.html

I am a Chinese student studying for my doctoral degree. My masters is on translation study, and now my doctoral focus is on comparative literature. My thesis is about Sinclair Lewis, and I want to study him and his works from a cultural point of view. In my country Sinclair Lewis is not familiar to many literature professors, not even to common people. When people talk about him, they just say he is not a suitable writer for the Nobel Prize during that time. I think the reason they say that is because they don't know Lewis at all. From my recent study, I regard him as the best and bravest writer. He can say the true word because of his deepest love. Also in the Chinese literature field, most people just know *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, so my study focuses on another wonderful work, *Kingsblood Royal*. But by now I have not so much material about Lewis, so could you send me a sample copy? I will be eternally grateful for your help! [Editor: Material was sent and she received her doctorate.]

In the novel *Babbitt*, the protagonist has a paper in his briefcase with the initials DSSDMYPDF. Does anyone know what these initials mean? [Editor: Several critics over the years have puzzled about it. In 1940, IGNOTO (obviously a pseudonym), in *Notes and Queries*, suggested it meant "Do see somebody (or sell satisfactorily); do make your presence definitely felt."

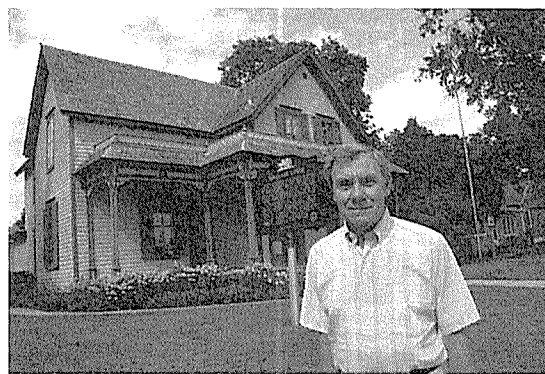
More recently, the suggestions had to do with smoking. Michael Carroll Dooling, in the Fall 2005 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* suggested it meant "Don't Smoke So Darn Much You Poor Damn Fool," which would fit in with where it occurs in the novel.]

Just finished reading—for the second time—*Babbitt* and it stands the test of time—here in western Carolina, real estate is a highly lucrative gig and the Chamber of Commerce, well, it's working to end a highly enjoyable street festival.

Babbitt—was it ever made into a play or movie? [Editor: It was made into a film twice; once in the silent era, once in 1934 with Guy Kibbee as Babbitt and Aline MacMahon as his wife. In the sound version Mrs. Babbitt helps to get her husband out of his various ethical troubles. There have been a couple of different play versions done over the last twenty years, as well as an unabridged radio version with Ed Asner as Babbitt and an all-star cast.]

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

Sinclair Lewis's grandnephew, Brad Lewis, visited Sauk Centre for the first time this summer to ride with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation in the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade and visit the Lewis Family Home where his grandfather and granduncle Sinclair grew up. Lewis, a real estate property owner in Buffalo, New York, said touring the home put many family stories into perspective. He appreciated the restoration of the old home and marveled how simply people lived one hundred years ago.



(Photo by Dave Simpkins)

Lewis's father was president of Pocket Book Publishing and the family lived on Long Island, New York. He began reading his granduncle's work when he was fifteen and obtained a PhD in English. The novel *Dodsworth* is his favorite of Lewis's works because he believes the women characters are the most believable.

The 2013 Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference took place on October 12 in the Sauk Centre High School Fine Arts Auditorium. The keynote speaker was Jim Klobuchar, a longtime figure in Minnesota journalism, including thirty years as a daily columnist for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. Recent books of his are *Pieces of My Heart*, *Always\$ on \$unday*, *The Miracles of Barefoot Capitalism* (with Susan Wilkes), and *The Cross Under the Acacia Tree*. His talk was entitled "Enjoying the Writing Circus of Today," which tied in well with his work as a commentator on "society's follies and moments of grandeur."

Joyce Sutphen, who has been honored as Minnesota's second Poet Laureate, succeeding Robert Bly, presented on "Lifelines: Memoir and Poetry." Her award-winning collections include *Straight Out of View*, *Coming Back to the Body*, *Naming the Stars*, and *Fourteen Sonnets*. She noted that all human beings want to tell their story and that poetry can "make word 'snapshots' of important life events." Anthony Bukoski, a short story writer whose collections include *North of the Port*, *Time between Trains*, and *Twelve below Zero*, spoke on artistic and personal strategies for crafting short stories. Marlene Kim Connor, an author, literary agent, and former editor for the Literary Guild of America, Simon & Schuster, and Random House, spoke on "eReaders: What They Mean for Writers and Readers." This topic grew out of her publishing and writing experiences, as well as her current business, as founder of the Connor Literary Agency, with offices in Minneapolis and New York City, which represents authors as well as corporate clients.

John and Colleen Steffes shared this picture of Lewis's Duluth home. Pat Lewis reports that she and Lesley Lewis toured the home some years ago when Lesley came to Sauk Centre and rode in the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade.



David Simpkins, Editor/Publisher of the *Sauk Centre Herald*, reports:

The Second Annual Fourth of July Lewis Liberty Walk was fun for the twelve patriotic brothers and sisters that participated. Six of us walked the 5K out to Fairy Lake and we were joined by others interested in hearing the Constitution and Declaration of Independence read as Lewis and Irv Fisher did 101 years ago.

We also discussed current issues of freedom, liberty, Egypt, and *It Can't Happen Here*. We lunched on trail mix and bars. All agreed to do it again next year.

Sauk Centre held its first hospitality awards ceremony, "Sauk Centre Serves," on September 23, 2013. Joyce Lyng, a member of the Sinclair Lewis Society Board, was named Volunteer of the Year. This award, sponsored by the Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce and the Convention & Visitors Bureau, honored Joyce for twenty years of volunteer service for the Chamber. She is usually the point person for answering visitors' questions about "the history of Sauk Centre and its most famous citizen, by personally inviting them into the Sinclair Lewis Museum, which may not be open if not for her volunteerism." She has served as president of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and is currently on its board; has trained volunteers to help educate the public; and serves as receptionist and visitor guide for the Chamber of Commerce, caller for the Sauk Centre Blood Mobile, and secretary of the Sauk Centre Area Concert Association. Joyce's daughters, who nominated her for the award, end by noting that "She hopes to live to be 100 and, believe me, if she does, she will still be planning her life around her volunteer commitments!"

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Haiou Yang, a Chinese scholar, has focused on the study of Sinclair Lewis for over eight years and recently finished her doctoral dissertation, "A Study of Sinclair Lewis's Novels in the Perspective of Cultural Narrative: In the Case of *Main Street* and Three Other Novels." It was published in *China Social Sciences Press*, an important Chinese press. Her book is the first monograph on Sinclair Lewis in China written in Chinese. She hopes she can "help more people in the world understand Lewis's novels better and know his great contribution to American literature and culture."

Classic Images, July 2013 (72-81), has a lengthy article on Ruth Chatterton, the actress who created the role of Fran

Dodsworth on stage and repeated it on screen. "Ruth Chatterton, Self-Reliant Star," by Scott O'Brien, traces her rise as an actress on stage in such shows as *Daddy Long-Legs* and *The Rainbow* to her performances for both Paramount and Warner Brothers in the 1920s and 1930s in films such as *Madame X* (1929) and *Frisco Jemmy* (1933). She returned to the stage, starring in national tours of *The Little Foxes*, *Pygmalion*, and *Madwoman of Chaillot*, and the revival of *Idiot's Delight* on Broadway. The article states:

In 2005, critics Richard Corliss and Richard Schickel placed *Dodsworth* among the "All-Time 100 Greatest Films" made since 1923. When Ruth signed on for the role of Fran Dodsworth, she emphasized her delight in portraying a character that was not only brilliant and showy, but unsympathetic. She was tired of playing for audience sympathy, and told Benjamin Crisler of the *New York Times* that she wanted the American public to know that "she can dish it out as well as take it."

The bittersweet tale of *Dodsworth* centers on Sam Dodsworth's love for his wife. He sells his auto factory so they may pursue her fantasy of traveling to Europe. Aboard ship, in new surroundings, Fran's true character emerges. She's 41 going on 35, and accepts the attentions of the much younger Captain Lockert (David Niven). In Paris, Fran indulges in flirtations with every count of no account, hobnobs with those who she considers to be elite, when it is obvious that she lacks the restraint of a well-bred woman herself. She swaggers. She tries too hard. Her clothes may be expensive, her hair the latest style, but she is unable to shake her common roots. "You've got to let me have my fling now!" she tells her husband. "Because you're simply rushing at old age, Sam, and I'm not ready for that yet." Oblivious to reality, and the opportunists that surround her, she encourages Sam to go home without her—he's become a distasteful reminder of her past. Sam later returns to Europe in hopes to bring Fran to her senses, but she is set on getting a divorce. She's determined to marry a young baron, Kurt von Obersdorf (Gregory Gaye). "I'll be happy with Kurt," she tells Sam defiantly. "I'm fighting for life. You can't drag me back."

The film's high point occurs when Fran's engagement is called off by her young nobleman's formidable mother. Baroness von Obersdorf (Maria Ouspenskaya), speaking bluntly to the point of cruelty, asks Fran, "Have you thought what little happiness there can be for the...old wife...of a young husband?" As if encountering her worst nightmare, Fran unleashes her fury. The Baroness and her son leave post-haste—mission accomplished. Chatterton chillingly projected

Fran's desperate attempt to recapture her youth. It may well have struck a chord that mirrored her personal feelings. (75–76)

Although *Dodsworth* was nominated for seven Academy Awards, Chatterton did not receive a nomination. At the time it was considered quite an oversight by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Even today Chatterton's portrayal of a midlife crisis is highly admired by contemporary actors. Laura Linney cites *Dodsworth* as her favorite film. "Ruth Chatterton's deep portrayal of a very superficial person is amazing to watch."

William Cartwright, a film and television editor who won three Emmy awards during his career, died June 1, 2013. A Marine fighter pilot in the South Pacific during World War II, he became an editor for the David L. Wolper production company, editing the Emmy award-winning *The Making of the President: 1960* (1963) and *The Making of the President: 1964* (1966). His third Emmy was for editing the American Masters 1989 documentary *Lillian Gish: The Actor's Life for Me*. In 1994 he edited *Don't Pave Main Street: Carmel's Heritage*. After college, Lewis lived in the artists' colony in Carmel for a while in 1908, sharing a cabin with Yale classmate William Rose Benét.

In *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress: Poor White Women in Southern Literature of the Great Depression* by Ashley Craig Lancaster (Louisiana State UP, 2012), there is a mention of how Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken came to the defense of Erskine Caldwell. Although Caldwell's play version of *Tobacco Road* was a long-running hit on Broadway, his follow-up novel, *God's Little Acre*, became the focus of an obscenity charge brought by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1933. A number of writers "helped Caldwell challenge this case and defeat the charges" (62). Both novels were later made into successful motion pictures.

Broadview Press has published a new edition of Gertrude Atherton's controversial 1923 novel *Black Oxen*, edited and with an introduction by Melanie V. Dawson. The *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* published an article, "The Fountain of Youth: Scandal and *Black Oxen*," by Sally Parry in the Spring 2004 issue on her then scandalous critique of the youth culture of the Jazz Age. The story concerns Countess Mary Zattiany, who, while in her late fifties, took rejuvenation

therapy, as did Atherton, and reappeared to New York society as a woman in her late twenties. The edition has appendices on medical and social change, flappers, and the reviews of the novel and the very successful silent movie that starred Corrine Griffith and Clara Bow. In the introduction, Dawson notes that Atherton was “one of the most widely discussed American novelists of the 20s, alongside Sinclair Lewis and Edith Wharton.... Commonly portrayed figures such as the staid and backgrounded middle-aged woman (satirized by authors such as Lewis) and the vapid flapper—visible in novels such as *Flaming Youth* (1923), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925)—have little in common with Mary Zattiany, who appears as a woman free from all familial, financial, reproductive, sexual, and social limitations” (13). Atherton, like Lewis, was “pointedly critical of what she saw as the imaginative deficits of American literature, which she attributed to the nation’s insular attitude and conservative literary culture” (19).

The most important white writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance was Carl Van Vechten, supporter of many black artists, iconic photographer, and author of the notorious *Nigger Heaven* (1926). Emily Bernard’s excellent *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White* (Yale UP, 2012) examines his influence on the writers of the era, several of whom created fictional versions of him in novels such as Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929) and Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry* (1929). His most lasting accomplishment was the creation of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection at Yale University, an invaluable collection of the work of black artists. The biography talks at length about his many parties where both black and white intellectuals mixed. Actress and singer Ethel Waters attended many dinner parties at his home, “where she met white cultural luminaries such as playwright Eugene O’Neill, composer Cole Porter, novelists Somerset Maugham and Sinclair Lewis, the Knopfs, and journalist Heywood Brown” (55–56). Van Vechten was sometimes jealous when the black writers that he championed, such as Langston Hughes, became friendly with other white writers. In 1950 Van Vechten wrote to his friend Dorothy Peterson, “Am beginning to believe Langston must dislike me very much. Not a word about me in his library poem altho he mentions Sinclair Lewis and Bucklin Moon!” (290). Hughes did include Van Vechten’s name in “Prelude to Our Age: A Negro History Poem,” which he read at the opening of the Schomburg Collection.

Delta Sky Magazine lists Barnard, Vermont, as one of the five best ski spots in North America. “For the perfect romantic escape (read: pricey), book one of the incredible cottages at Twin Farms—perhaps the Moroccan-themed, tented Meadow or glass-wrapped Aviary. Go to the top of the mountain on the resort’s ‘ski Sherpa,’ or partake in snowshoeing and ice-skating. After dinner by the fire, relax in the massive Japanese soaking tub housed within its own cabin. *Twinfarms.com*” (Feb. 2012: 20). See Susan O’Brien’s article, “Twin Farms Today” in the Spring 2013 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* for another take on the former home of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson.

The *American Literary Naturalism Newsletter* (6.1–2 (2011): 27–31) ran an interview with Donna Campbell, author of *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885–1915*, and from 2000–2008, the author of the chapter “Fiction: 1900 to the 1930s” in *American Literary Scholarship*. She notes that “John Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis are increasingly characterized as writers whose concerns range beyond the United States, and works that had not received much attention earlier (Dos Passos on Mexico, or Lewis’s *Kingsblood Royal* and *Arrowsmith*) are now seen in a global context” (29).

In the Spring 2013 issue of the newsletter, we ran an obituary of Barnaby Conrad, Lewis’s secretary in 1947. Leah Garchik in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Feb. 18, 2013: E8) reports the following: “As to writer/nightclub owner/raconteur Barnaby Conrad, who died last week in Carpinteria, his old friend Herb Gold remembers him ‘at the center of a happy-go-lucky fun-making literary scene.

“F. Scott Barnaby Conrad, as I liked to call him, carried on the hard-partying tradition of the 1920s. As a young man, he drank with Sinclair Lewis and Hemingway, served as both an American consul in Spain and as a bullfighter.’ Returning to San Francisco, he opened the Matador, named for his best-selling novel, ‘and both the bar and the man became the center of a group of writers who liked to vary their late night rambles among the hungry i, Enrico’s, and the Matador.’

“At his club, he was proud of having posted his first rejection of his novel *Matador*. Nearby was posted a collection of ‘what followed,’ said Gold, ‘all the telegrams, movie offers’ and mention of its having become a best-seller.”

Susan Jacoby has written a biography of the iconoclastic orator Robert Ingersoll, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll*

and *American Freethought* (Yale UP, 2013). Ingersoll was a favorite of Lewis's and his writings appear in several of Lewis's novels, including *Main Street*, where they are read by the radical Miles Bjornstam.

In *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920–1960*, edited by Erica Brown and Mary Grover (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), the articles enter into a debate about what is middlebrow as opposed to avant-garde literature and what difference it should make. Janet Galligani Casey notes that her students “have been especially intrigued by certain fascinating moments in modern middlebrow history, such as when Sinclair Lewis famously turned down the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* (1925) because he associated literary awards with sub-par literature that was, in his words, ‘safe, polite, obedient, and sterile’” (30). In an article on *Smart Set*, a magazine edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, Sharon Hamilton writes that “it was a particularly supportive venue for those modernist authors writing works that were in some way conventionally accessible, yet in others radical and new: the psychology-based drama and stories of Eugene O’Neill, Sherwood Anderson, and Djuna Barnes; the social realism of Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis; urban sex satire by Dorothy Parker, Anita Loos, and Zoë Atkins; the realism spliced with myth of F. Scott Fitzgerald; and stories of female erotic desire by Willa Cather and Edna St. Vincent Millay” (141).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Dave Simpkins, Editor/Publisher, *Sauk Centre Herald*:

Dear Lewis Friends,

You’ll love this audio presentation of Lewis’s story of an old man going to college reflecting on his own days as a “campus freak” at Yale. I love this old, white-bearded Swede with a desire to learn. I’ve known a few of these old Swedes, by golly.

Enjoy! radioarcana.net/stations/xexs/1957/09/22/young-man-axelbrod-86/

And here is the full story of “Young Man Axelbrod”: m.unsv.com/voanews/specialenglish/scripts/2008/04/12/0045/Young_Man_Axelbrod.pdf

While young Harry Lewis was in the top ten percent of his class at Yale and on the board of the *Yale Literary Magazine*, he was not a Big Man on Campus. Those were tough days for him. Ironically, when you Google “famous Yale alumni,” Lewis’s name is on top.

From Ron Miller, Woodstock, Vermont:

Thank you for another interesting and informative issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. I’m writing to follow up on two of the articles:

First, on Susan O’Brien’s revealing account of Twin Farms, I’m happy to report that the Barnard General Store, which she reported closed, has reopened after an inspiring effort by the entire community to raise the necessary funds to purchase it.

And, in response to Charles Pankenier’s piece about the name “Cass,” we should acknowledge that the Minnesota architect Cass Gilbert not only designed the Woolworth Building and Minnesota state capitol, as noted, but also the U.S. Supreme Court building, for which I believe he is most remembered today.

From Will Kraemer, Belgrade, Minnesota:

I thoroughly enjoyed James Nixon’s “In Defense of Gopher Prairie” and the article’s depiction of the real Gopher Prairie reaction to *Main Street* and to its interpretation of the Carol Kennicott character. I refer to locales like Belgrade, Minnesota, twenty miles south of Sauk Centre, western Minnesota, and rural America in general.

Numerous people who knew Lewis or his family, or who met him casually, have stressed to me that their reaction to *Main Street* was not an angry, defensive reaction but rather one of interest. A relative of mine who grew up in Sauk Centre and whose parents knew the Lewises recalled the reception of the book in Sauk Centre and said very few people were upset about the book. If they were upset, they likely mistakenly felt Lewis targeted them in a particular character. Most people were interested in the novel and not offended, she said. “We knew we were provincial and *Main Street* told us how we were provincial.” As the Nixon article points out, rural provincial practices were often the same provincial practices in big cities.

One of the few times I saw my own father so angry that I noted it in my journal was when I gave him a sneering interpretation of *Main Street* and Will and Carol Kennicott consistent with what I had learned in a literature class. He had read the novel circa 1930 for a high school class. His English teacher did not interpret it as heaping scorn on small towns either. If I were to paraphrase what he said it would be something to the effect that he thought Will and Carol Kennicott were courageous characters who reminded him of people he had known as he grew up in the 1920s.

The local physician and surgeon there was roughly the same vintage as Dr. Lewis and close to the age of Will Kennicott. Both these doctors and the fictional Kennicott entered the field about the time the 1910 Flexner Commission revolutionized medicine by putting it on a scientific footing. My father said he thought it took "guts" to be a real life Will Kennicott practicing medicine and doing surgery at an outpost where a doctor may not have a qualified colleague to help out if he got into trouble. As far as Carol Kennicott was concerned, my father said the general impression of people he knew who had read the book was that she was a character who tried different ideas to help her town. Eventually she realized that some worked and some did not. She was no fool, my father said.

A local Belgrade man also read *Main Street* as a high school reading assignment, though in the late thirties. He was fascinated by the book, as well as by *Arrowsmith*, and considered them portrayals of life as it is lived. This man, whose family owned a local bank, heard Lewis speak in the Belgrade area a few times. He and his family did not like what they thought were some of Lewis's radical ideas. In line

with the Thanatopsis Club's readings on statistics and factual information on English writers, which avoided any potentially corrosive discussion of social theory, this banker's son said that although he was allowed to read and enjoy Lewis's books, he was told to have "nothing to do" with any of Lewis's "ideas."

Nixon's article mentions Thorstein Veblen's claim that the small town aims to control land values and never loses its character of "real estate speculation" with some feelings of irony. Not too many years ago, a Sauk Centre businessman told me of some of its citizens who wanted to sell a local plot of land to a large corporation for an amount that would drive up the value of surrounding real estate. The plan was to even drive up the value of the land on which stands the Sinclair Lewis Interpretative Center, and if possible, to close it and sell the lot to any other corporation wanting to put a business there.

Though I am not a Lewis scholar, I believe the Nixon article presents an excellent defense of Gopher Prairie and adds a perspective on the impact of *Main Street* on rural audiences that seems to be spot-on but all too rare.

—Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently. [Thanks to Jacqueline Koenig for her contributions to this section.]

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SALE 502

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104. Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926. \$780.

First edition. With the rare dust jacket. Blue cloth, stamped and lettered in orange, dust jacket. Scarce earlier title, seldom seen at auction. Jacket flap corners evenly clipped with the publisher's printed "\$2.00" price present at the top of the front flap. Jacket spine restored, replacing two large pieces lacking from ends, professional repairs to flap folds, short jagged tear at bottom of front panel; volume with only slight wear; near fine in a jacket restored to very good or better condition.



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CATALOGUE 210

96. Lewis, Sinclair, and Sidney Howard. *Sinclair Lewis's Dodsworth—Dramatized by Sidney Howard. With Comments by Sidney Howard and Sinclair Lewis on the Art of Dramatization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934. \$4,500.

First edition. Special presentation edition signed by the authors Sinclair Lewis and Sidney Howard. This issue was made in a tiny quantity specifically for members of the original Broadway production with a special printed page which reads, "To Jo Mielziner for helping to turn *Dodsworth* from a manuscript into a play with gratitude of [hand signed in ink] Sinclair Lewis and [hand signed in ink] Sidney Howard. New York—September 1934." Illustrated with photographs from the production. Fine bright

copy in a fine dust jacket. An important presentation copy to Jo Mielziner who designed the sets for the original production. Sidney Howard discusses Mielziner's contribution in his essay on adapting the novel into play on pages xvi-xvii. Sidney Howard was a very successful Broadway playwright in the 1930s and wrote the screenplays for *Gone With the Wind* and film adaptations of Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* and *Arrowsmith*. Jo Mielziner is arguably the most distinguished set designer in Broadway history, creating the staging for such classics as the original productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *South Pacific*, *Carousel*, *Mister Roberts*, *Key Largo*, *Abe Lincoln In Illinois*, *Pal Joey*, *The King and I*, *Guys and Dolls*, etc. An excellent association copy of a highly successful Broadway play.

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CATALOG 183

New Arrivals

40. Lewis, Sinclair. Letter to Willis Birchman. Aug. 20, 1937. \$450.

A brief autograph note signed, one page dated Aug. 20, 1937 on his Stockbridge, Massachusetts stationery to Willis Birchman, who was attempting to compile a biography of illustrator Ralph Barton. With original envelope. In full: "Dear Mr. Birchman: I really knew Ralph Barton only as a friend of George Jean Nathan. Sincerely yours, Sinclair Lewis."

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MODERN FIRST EDITIONS

294. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Job*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$500.

First edition, first issue, of the author's fourth book. This copy is signed by Lewis on the front free endpaper. Hardcover. Fine (lacking the rare dust jacket).

295. —. *John Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926. \$90.

First edition. One of 975 numbered copies (the entire edition). Hardcover. Fine (issued without printed dust jacket).

296. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. London: Cape, 1928. \$175.

First English edition. This copy is in a variant binding of red cloth instead of the more usual blue. Hardcover. A fine, tight copy in a fine, bright dust jacket (price-clipped) with some internal tape strengthening at the edges.

297. —. *Mantrap*. Berlin: Rowholt, 1928. \$250.

First German edition. This copy is inscribed (in German!) by Lewis in the year of publication to the father of his friend, Ferdinand Reyher, who had been a guest at Lewis's wedding just the week before to Dorothy Thompson. Printed wrappers. Near fine.

298. —. *The Prodigal Parents*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1938. \$125.

First edition. Hardcover. Faint offsetting to front free endpaper, else a fine, fresh copy in a fine dust jacket.

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Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920. \$165,000.

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