

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2015: CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF LEWIS NOVELS

The Sinclair Lewis Society, in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, is delighted to announce a conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, on July 15–17, 2015. This conference will mark 100 years of Lewis as a novelist. His first novel under his own name was *Our Mr. Wrenn* in 1914. He went on to write 21 other novels as well as over 100 short stories. The conference will celebrate his continued importance in American Literature in the 21st century.

We welcome papers on any aspect of Lewis Studies. The Conference will be held in conjunction with Sauk Centre's annual Sinclair Lewis Days. There will be a variety of panels on Lewis's work, feature films based on Lewis's novels, and a tour of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home. Accommodations are available throughout Sauk Centre, including at the Palmer House where Lewis worked as a young man.

Abstracts of papers are due by May 1, 2015, but are welcomed earlier. For more information, please e-mail Sally E. Parry at separry@ilstu.edu.



SINCLAIR LEWIS'S FORMER GREENWICH VILLAGE HOME DESIGNATED AS HISTORIC LITERARY SITE

Dave Simpkins and Sally E. Parry

Like many of America's greatest writers, Sinclair Lewis got his start as a professional writer in Greenwich Village. The boarding house he lived in from 1909 to 1913 at 69 Charles Street [then 10 Van Nest Place] was designated a historic literary site in May 2014 with a plaque installed on the building by the Historic Landmarks Preservation Center. While living there, Lewis published *Hike and the Aeroplane* under the pseudonym of Tom Graham and completed most of *Our Mr. Wrenn*.

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The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Medallion Coverage/Simpkins *continued from page 1*

Lewis came to the Village in the fall of 1909 to work for book publisher Frederick A. Stokes. Stokes's son had worked under Lewis at the *Yale Literary Magazine*. Lewis, a year out of Yale, read manuscripts, wrote dust jacket blurbs, promoted books, and helped attract new writers. He also hoped to get his own writing career started.

New York was becoming the literary capitol of America at this time and Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in lower Manhattan, was being called the "Republic of Dreams." Here Lewis could stroll the streets walked by his favorite writers and poets. He found a room in a Greenwich Village boarding house where Yale classmates William Rose Benét, an editor at the *Century* magazine, and George Soule, who also worked at Stokes, lived, along with Bohemian poet Harry Kemp who called himself the "Hobo Poet." Lewis's friends Edith Summers and Allan Updegraff also lived nearby.

The NYC Landmarks50 Alliance, on May 9, 2014, held a ceremony at 69 Charles Street to unveil the plaque. The speakers included Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, chair

of the NYC Landmarks50 Alliance and Historic Landmarks Preservation Center; Dave Simpkins, publisher of the *Sauk Centre Herald*; Lewis biographer Richard Lingeman; and Sally E. Parry, executive director of the Sinclair Lewis Society. Remarks written by Anthony Di Renzo, editor of *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, were also read.

The Historic Landmarks Preservation Center installs these medallions to commemorate and celebrate New Yorkers involved in the arts, sciences, law, business, education, sports, and politics. These elegant and informative medallions bring history alive by recognizing that it is people, and what they accomplish, that truly matter.

George Capsis, the homeowner and *WestView News* publisher, was a gracious host to the many Lewis friends and hosted a reception after the ceremony. Following this a group went to the White Horse Tavern for lunch, where poet Dylan Thomas drank his last, followed by a tour of sites connected to Lewis led by Catherine Revland. All in all, a most memorable Lewis day.

REMARKS GIVEN AT THE LEWIS MEDALLION CEREMONY, MAY 9, 2014

Richard Lingeman

Harry Sinclair Lewis was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, but Sinclair Lewis, the world-famous author, was born here in New York City. He came to the city in 1910, an unknown young man from the provinces burning to be a writer. It is fitting that the Landmarks Alliance commemorates the first place he lived when he arrived in this great international city.

In September 1910, Lewis, barely two years out of Yale, sent a letter to his father asking to borrow \$300 so that he could move to New York. At that time he was living in Washington and working on a magazine for deaf people, which was edited by a college friend. Before that he had been bumming about the country, ending up in California, where he held and lost several jobs. His future did not look too promising.

In the letter to his father Lewis said he needed to come to New York to meet editors—to see if there was a future for him in the writing game. He could live here on \$50 a month, he said. If after six months he didn't "make a strike," as he put it, he would get a full-time job.

Lewis's father, Dr. E. J. Lewis, was a frugal man. He had loaned Harry's money to finance a previous foray into New York. That incursion came about after Lewis impulsively dropped out of Yale. He shared a shabby room with a friend, sending out

poems and stories to magazines with little success. Defeated, he returned to Yale and finished his final year.

So when he asked for *another* loan, Doc Lewis, dubious about his prospects, turned him down. But Lewis came to New York anyway and took a job with a publisher. He rented a room in this house, which he'd probably heard about from two college classmates already living here.

He held the publishing job for several years but kept writing in his spare time. He began selling short stories to the high-paying *Saturday Evening Post*. When he moved to Long Island with his new wife, Grace, a smart, stylish young woman who worked for *Vogue*, he wrote on the train commuting to work.

His first novel under his real name, *Our Mr. Wrenn*, came out in 1914. It was set in the city, and possibly Lewis's own room here at 69 Charles Street was like the one his hero William Wrenn lived in: "An abjectly respectable room—the bedspread patched, no two pieces of furniture from the same family, [pictures] from the magazines pinned on the wall."

Lewis went on to publish more novels. One of them, *The Job*, was a realistic study of working women in New York.

Medallion Coverage/Lingeman *continued on page 4*

Medallion Coverage/Lingeman *continued from page 3*

The heroine's career was partly based on Grace's experiences at *Vogue*.

But all the while he never gave up his real dream, which was to write a big and true novel inspired by his own hometown. He already had the title: *Main Street*.

In 1915, bolstered by his high-paying connection to the *Post*, he quit his publishing job and became a full-time writer. To research the big novel, he and Gracie toured the country in a Model T Ford, accumulating notes on the look and feel of the dusty, dozing little towns of his own Middle West.

Finally, he was ready. In 1919, he and Gracie settled in Washington. Writing steadily through the hot summer of 1920, he finished *Main Street*.

When it appeared that fall, it caused a sensation. It touched the hearts and minds of many people—especially young people who like Lewis had moved to the big city seeking opportunities commensurate with their ambitions. It could be said that Sinclair Lewis had to come to New York in order to write a novel about small towns.

Main Street got the whole country talking; it sparked a

national dialogue on the provincialism, conformity, and cultural poverty out in Middle America.

Eventually, it got the *world* talking. People in other countries were curious about America, which had emerged from the First World War as a top economic power. *Main Street* was their first glimpse of the real America—its people, its towns and cities, its farms and factories.

In subsequent novels during the 1920s—*Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*—Lewis gave the world more vivid pictures of his country. In 1930, the Swedish Academy confirmed his international stature when it awarded him the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first American so honored.

Back in 1910, when he was pleading with his father for that loan to finance his move to New York, Lewis vowed that he was “going to go on working toward the end of getting to be a really great writer.” He predicted that one day his father would be proud to “see me as a sizable writer; one whose books everyone must know.”

His prophecy came true. And it was in this house he started the first leg of his momentous literary journey.

SINCLAIR LEWIS IN NEW YORK CITY

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

Sinclair Lewis, when he moved to New York City in the fall of 1910, was an enthusiastic and driven young man, anxious to make his mark in the world, but still not sure how. He had a bachelor's degree from Yale, had done odd jobs for Upton Sinclair at the utopian community of Helicon Hall in New Jersey, and had traveled some—twice to England, working on a cattle boat, once to Panama for adventure and to learn Spanish. He had published a few things—some poems, including children's verse, a couple of short stories, and some translations from the French and German for the American publication *Transatlantic Tales*. The years between finishing his degree and moving to New York are summarized by biographer Mark Schorer as “a miscellany of false starts, lost jobs, lost hopes, loose ends, [and] erratic wandering.” He had been a newspaper reporter (although rather unsuccessfully), worked as a part-time secretary in California, and sold plots to author Jack London.

In October 1910, he started working as a manuscript reader for the publishing firm of Frederick A. Stokes Company, a job that brought him to New York and put him in contact not only with the publishing world, but also with many of the

rising intellectuals of the time: novelist Floyd Dell, dramatist Susan Glaspell, civic reformer Frances Perkins, and the social revolutionaries John Reed and Louise Bryant. Lewis joined the Socialist Party, attended the Anarchists' Ball, and supported women's suffrage. Although he wasn't a strong supporter of political causes, he was interested in social justice and had a desire for America to live up to the ideals on which it was founded.

While at Charles Street (which was Van Nest Place at the time), he wrote *Hike and the Aeroplane*, a boys' adventure story, under the pseudonym of Tom Graham, and sold it to his employer, the Frederick A. Stokes Company. The terms were such that he was able to take a two-month leave in order to start work on *Our Mr. Wrenn: The Romantic Adventures of a Gentle Man*, his first adult novel and the first under his own name. *Our Mr. Wrenn* shows much of the writing style that Lewis would develop in his later novels, such as the detail with which he describes everything, including the streets on which Mr. Wrenn walks in Greenwich Village. In Lewis's writing it is evident that he paid real attention to the way that people spoke, and what and

Medallion Coverage/Parry *continued on page 6*

PLURALISTIC NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF “MODERN REALISM” IN SINCLAIR LEWIS’S NOVELS

Haiou Yang
Huaihua University

Although Sinclair Lewis is the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, I hold that critics have neglected one of the main cultural topics of the American nation narrated by his novels—the paradoxical cultural characteristics of both idealism and pragmatism. Escape too is an important concept, both in its original meaning and reflective form, because the United States at the time he wrote was made up mostly of immigrants from Britain and other European nations and their descendants. “Most European emigrants left their homelands to escape political oppression, to seek the freedom to practice their religion, or for adventure and opportunities denied them at home” (Cincotta 20). To neglect this topic is to ignore the important narrative forms of Lewis’s works: pluralistic narrative lines caused by the need for “escape.”

The American writer Michael Kammen was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in History in 1973 for his profound ideas in *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization*, which reveals a typical characteristic of America: one must have both idealism and pragmatism (Kammen 217).¹ The narration of Lewis’s works vividly illustrates this national peculiarity. Lewis skillfully integrates the reflective form of “escape” in the American cultural characteristic into his novels’ narrative structures, which display the American national feature of both idealism and pragmatism and creates his distinctive and rebellious cultural narrative as well as the pluralistic narrative strategies of modern realism.

In Lewis’s famous novels *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), and *Elmer Gantry* (1927), the pluralistic narrations belong to omniscient narrators, but they are quite different from traditional ones. In his “Point of View in Fiction,” Norman Friedman distinguishes eight different points of view, among which are four omniscient styles: Editorial Omniscience (a narrator is often present and tells something about moralities, values, and judgments); Neutral Omniscience (a narrator does not appear to comment on anything); Multiple Selective Omniscience (choosing the brains of people present to send information to readers); and Selective Omniscience (choosing a fixed protagonist’s vision to relate the story). Lewis’s omniscient narrators do not belong to any one of the four classifications. His narrators are neither the ones who often appear to comment on morality, value, and judgment, nor the ones who do not comment; instead, they are the ones

who make a comment occasionally. In addition, Lewis chooses neither the person who is present to pass information to readers nor a fixed protagonist’s vision to tell the story. Connected by pluralistic narrative lines of the “formal ‘break’ and ‘cause’ modification” type (discussed below), the narrative vision of Lewis’s omniscient narrator changes between the characters’ limited points of view constantly, while the narrative voice is a blend of the narrator and characters more generally (Jameson 26). This omniscient narrative technique used by Lewis is a combination of Friedman’s four omniscient styles, most of which are abandoned and few of which are retained and combined, so that Lewis’s omniscient styles take on a pluralistic peculiarity in various texts.

Scholars of Lewis unanimously agree that Lewis is a critical realistic writer. However, after analyzing his work carefully and considering all the relevant facts, I conclude that through “pluralistic” omniscient narrators, Lewis’s novels not only have the authenticity and objectivity that are reflected in realistic literature and are its most important elements but also contain strong elements of rebellion against tradition and distinctive self-consciousness that are the core of modernism. Moreover, many postmodern features are also demonstrated in Lewis’s novels. These include his fiction’s open form, transformation of one narrative point of view into another, the description of undermining depth, pasting and combining patterns of events, violent irony, and fragmented linear structure. Lewis’s literary style, created by the pluralistic narrator, is “modern realism” because it gathers the characteristics of realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

The pluralistic narrative characteristic of modern realism in Lewis’s works is very similar to Fredric Jameson’s cultural theory. Jameson considers that he can make two contributions to Marxist modern theory that is still unformed, one of which is a dialectic paradox: “It is a modernist realism, or a realism of a part of modernity which is therefore required to be characterized by some ways of traditional modernism itself: such as fracture, innovation, the emergence of new cognition, etc.” (356). Jameson’s modernist realism reveals some partial features of Lewis’s modern realism. However, besides containing Jameson’s modernist realism, Lewis’s fiction still retains

————— Pluralistic Narrative Strategies *continued on page 10*

how they thought. Bill Wrenn is in many ways a stand-in for the young Sinclair Lewis of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, who romanticized far-off places and eventually traveled to some of them.

When Lewis left the Village, he married and moved to Long Island, but the intellectual ferment and ideas about social reform that he encountered here affected much of his later writing. A novel later in the same decade, *The Job*, provided a sympathetic but not sentimental look at the women who were becoming increasingly important in offices across the city. He is celebrated for his magnificent novels of the 1920s: *Main Street*, which showed both the

good and bad sides of small-town life, and made him a best-selling author; *Babbitt*, a somewhat sympathetic picture of the American businessman; the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Arrowsmith*, which is still cited by doctors as inspiring; the very relevant *Elmer Gantry*, an exposé of pernicious evangelism; and *Dodsworth*, which presented the American businessman in Europe; all of which gave rise to E. M. Forster's oft-quoted statement that Lewis was able "to lodge a piece of a continent in our imagination."

Lewis, although popularly thought of as a cynic and a

satirist, also loved the America he wrote about, but, as he later told literary critic Perry Miller, "I don't like it." The dissonance between what the United States stood for and what actually

happened turned him into "a disappointed democrat," as his second wife, journalist Dorothy Thompson, noted. This ambivalent attitude toward his country is evident in much of his writing, from the very beginnings to the warnings against fascism in the 1930s in *It Can't Happen Here* and the explosive exposé of racism in the postwar *Kingsblood Royal*.

In an obituary, Donald J. Adams observed "both in his life and in his work, he was

American. So many of our national characteristics were magnificent in him—our restlessness, our energy, our impatience, our quick friendliness, our idealism. He was bone of our bone." I'll leave the final words to my friend Richard Lingeman, from his *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*, "His fiction functioned at its highest pitch when galvanized by anger at some banality or stupidity or injustice. His iconoclasm chimed with America's coming of age after World War I, but he wrote with a real moral passion. *He really cared.*"



STATEMENT FOR THE SINCLAIR LEWIS CULTURAL MEDALLION CEREMONY

Anthony Di Renzo
Ithaca College

Whenever another Wall Street crook beats the rap, another overpaid CEO cuts benefits, or another business guru writes a best-seller, I shake my head and sigh: "*Lewis, thou shouldst be living at this hour. America hath need of thee.*" No other American humorist, not even Mark Twain, remains more relevant or better deserves to be commemorated in a cultural medallion.

Sinclair Lewis was the Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert of his day, but he was as much a prophet as a satirist. Long before the Roaring Eighties, Lewis foresaw America's "revolution by Rotary" and its corrosive impact on our nation's politics and institutions. Like Daniel in Babylon, he dreamed of the Beasts of the Sea: hustling realtors and housing bubbles, big pharma and junk science, corporate philanthropies and profitable diploma

mills, televangelism and prosperity theology, the corruption of the U.S. auto industry and the McDonaldisation of the world.

Perhaps, if we had paid more attention to the Man from Main Street, the Men from K Street might not have won. But by honoring Sinclair Lewis, we can encourage young Americans to rediscover his work and to recover the heartland populism he promoted and defended. For certain network pundits, populism is a sneer against the poor and the weak. For Lewis, it is a horselaugh against the rich and the powerful. "If you want to 'take back' this county," he might chide, "don't wear powdered wigs and silk cravats. That's bunk! Instead, cultivate enough shrewdness to recognize stupidity

— Medallion Coverage/Di Renzo continued on page 8

TRANSLATING LEWIS INTO ENGLISH

TWO POEMS: “THE STUDENT’S SONG” AND “TO TWENTY-ONE”

Joshua P. Preston
Baylor College

Growing up on the prairies of western Minnesota, Lewis devoured the books of his father’s library. Reveling in the works of Dickens, Scott, and Irving, he dreamed of *Ivanhoe* and imagined himself a knight in medieval lands. These were a far cry from the physician’s work expected by his father, and it was this imagination that alienated the young Lewis from his peers. With literature pointing like a telescope to foreign lands, Lewis traded the barns for English towers and, in his own childish verse, soon mastered what Richard Lingeman has termed “Minnesota-Tennyson” (20).

Attending Yale, Lewis wrote for the *Yale Courant* and *Yale Literary Magazine* (the *Lit*) where his verses sang of saints and viziers, Prince Hal, and, most well-known, “Launcelot.” As a student he published three poems in the *Lit*, fourteen in *The Courant*, and 36 in several national publications such as *The Outer’s Book* and *Woman’s Home Companion*. In addition, he published seven French and German translations for *Transatlantic Tales*, including one by Sully Prudhomme, the first Nobel Laureate in Literature. All of these Lewis later disavowed as “banal and imitative verse, all about troubadours and castles as sagely viewed from the eminence of a Minnesota prairie village” (Lewis, “Self-Portrait” 11). This retrospective, though, forgets at least two trips he made to that other fantastic and mystical place: the German pub.

Although Lewis’s early poetry has been dismissed by biographers as fanciful, romantic verse, two pieces have been overlooked. While true that the freshman Lewis fancied Launcelot gazing at “The Queen’s Tower...mid [the] distant hills” of the English countryside, it is also true that his imagination lept the North Sea into Germany. In these poems, distant is his Lady’s Maid’s “ribboned hair” and “tiny feet / The daintiest of urban fays” (Lewis, “My Lady’s Maid”) as he praises instead “These Heidelberg girls, this beer” (“To Twenty-one”).

Raising “[o]ne for the barkeep, one for the grill,” the sonnet has become a drinking song.

Composed in German, both “Student Lied” and “Um Ein Und Zwanzig” were published in the *Yale Courant* in 1904, the former appearing in volume 40 and the latter in volume 41. Reading them, one is swept into the simple rhyme and relaxed rhythm. Yet, like his other poems, one also senses Lewis imitating a world and lifestyle he could not have possibly experienced himself. In “Student Lied,” for example, the narrator joyfully escapes the classroom (“Class? Oh, God, no more!”) for an adventure of song, girls, and—naturally—beer. In “Um Ein Und Zwanzig,” he records a party where many glasses are raised to the bartender, the cooks, and “the girl stealing my heart.” With his whole life ahead of him he suggests there is still time to figure out what everything means—and, if there is time for sorting out one’s life, there is surely “Time, time for girls and wine.”

Interestingly, in his official papers at the Yale University archives, very few of Lewis’s college poems are available and, as far as I am aware, what follows are the first translations of his German poems. In translating them I have taken as little creative license as possible. Where my discretion was unavoidable, I resorted to similar phrases and ideas to maintain the spirit of the piece. This is especially apparent when working to maintain the alternating rhyme. To use one example from “Student Lied”:

Auch Füchse lernen, und finden
Zweikämpfer weniger dumm
Als Arbeit; kühl sind die Linden.
Trinkt Kameraden, eins ‘rum.’

————— Translating Lewis *continued on page 14*

CONTRIBUTORS

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Medallion Coverage *continued from page 6*

and chicanery and enough compassion to denounce cruelty and arrogance.”

My late father-in-law, God bless him, a traveling salesman who was born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and raised in Fargo, North Dakota, left a Gideon Bible in every motel. Whenever I book a room, I leave behind a paperback edition of a Sinclair Lewis novel. This cultural medallion, however, is a more effective way to keep Lewis in circulation. I also suggest that the U.S. Mint stamp his face on a five-cent piece. If the day

ever comes when—through our own fault—this commercial democracy ain’t worth a wooden nickel, Sinclair Lewis will still be the gold standard of American satire.

Anthony Di Renzo is the author of Bitter Greens (SUNY, 2010), Trinàcria: A Tale of Bourbon Sicily (Guernica, 2013), and After the Fair is Over: A Novel (forthcoming), and the editor of If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis (Southern Illinois UP, 1997).

SINCLAIR LEWIS LOCATIONS

Greenwich Village

Sinclair Lewis lived at several addresses here, beginning with **10 Van Nest Place**, now **69 Charles Street**, where he lived in 1910. Lewis’s later addresses include the **Hotel Lafayette**, on **University Place**, where he lived in the autumn of 1926 and worked on *Elmer Gantry* (1927), and **37 West Tenth Street**, where he moved in 1928 after his marriage to Dorothy Thompson.

Midtown West

The **Algonquin Hotel**, at **59 West 44th Street**, home of the famous Algonquin Round Table, has been identified with writers and artists since its founding in 1902. Lewis was acquainted with many of those who frequented the Algonquin, including Carl Van Vechten, Robert Benchley, Alexander Woollcott, and Edna Ferber. He stayed there frequently in the 1940s.

A famous eating and drinking place is the “**21**” Club, at **21 West 52nd Street**, established originally as a speakeasy. Even the men’s room at “21” enters literary history as the arena for a much publicized disagreement between John O’Hara and Sinclair Lewis, who happened to meet here.

Sinclair Lewis moved to the **Wyndham Hotel**, at **42 West 58th Street** after separating from Dorothy Thompson in 1937—they did not divorce until 1942. Another place he sometimes stayed was the **Dorset Hotel**, at **30 West 54th Street**.

Midtown East

Sinclair Lewis stayed at various times at a number of



At the medallion ceremony, from left to right: Dave Simpkins, Richard Lingeman, Sally E. Parry, Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, Sean Denniston, Benjamin Beede, Robert McLaughlin, and Peter Paulino.

East Side addresses: **309 Fifth Avenue**; **66 Park Avenue**; the **Berkshire Hotel**, at **Madison Avenue and 52nd Street**; the **Lombardy Hotel**, at **111 East 56th Street**.

At another hotel, the **Roosevelt**, at **Madison Avenue and 45th Street**, Lewis attended a 1933 dinner honoring a group of fellow Nobel laureates.

Dorothy Thompson also has a medallion located at **237 East 48th Street**, which you can view at hlpculturalmedallions.org/browse-cultural-medallions by hovering over the various markers.

Upper West Side

Sinclair Lewis lived at two addresses on the Upper West Side: **2469 Broadway**, which was the home of economist George Soule, and the **Eldorado Towers**, at **300 Central Park West**.

Before marrying Grace Hegger in 1914, he courted her at her mother’s home at **345 West 70th Street**.

Upper East Side

Sinclair Lewis and his wife Dorothy Thompson took an apartment at **21 East 90th Street** in 1931. Lewis worked on his novel *Ann Vickers* (1933) while living here. It was the first book he published after winning the Nobel Prize in 1930.

Harlem, the Heights, Upper Manhattan

Sinclair Lewis was entertained at Walter White’s house, longtime executive secretary of the NAACP, at **409 Edgecombe Avenue**, in the Sugar Hill area. ✍

WHY READ “MOLDY” OLD SINCLAIR LEWIS?

Dennis Dalman

Newsleader, Sartell and St. Joseph, Minnesota

Why should anyone in this new century want to read anything by Sinclair Lewis? “Isn’t he that moldy old author from Sauk Centre who wrote a bunch of stuff about a small Minnesota town in the 1920s?”

That’s a typical response when Lewis’s name comes up. It’s unfortunate, but it’s to be expected from people who won’t read anything older than a month and who consider even the immortal writers—Shakespeare, Austen, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Joyce, Proust, to name just six—“moldy.”

So why should anyone today read Lewis? Here’s why: his novels still have much to tell us about America and its institutions—warts and all. Though Lewis was not a master prose stylist like his contemporaries, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, he more than made up for that in the sheer drive, vigor, and commotion of his storytelling skills. Lewis’s novels are still relevant because they deal with issues with which we are still grappling: stultifying provincialism, capitalism and materialism, commercialism and boosterism, the struggle for women’s rights, religious hypocrisy, the forces of political chicanery, the danger of demagogues, medical ethics, the tug-of-war between married men and women, metropolitan vs. small-town values, and the corrupting lures of money and greed.

Well, why should we read about those themes in Lewis? Wouldn’t it be better to read current takes on those subjects? No, not necessarily. As most novice readers of Lewis quickly discover, he had an uncanny knack for making those themes come to life through his settings and characters. It’s interesting and lots of fun to see those topics treated in that faraway country of the 1920s and 1930s; it’s like rediscovering our current selves, with a renewed focus, in a foreign land. One of the secrets of Lewis’s greatness is that he knew in his mind and soul that such themes are timeless, always working themselves out, one way or another, in different times, by different people in different places, endlessly. Shakespeare, of course, understood that, too, as did all the greatest of writers, which is why their works remain classics—worth reading in any age.

Last, but not least, a good reason to read Lewis is that he can

be laugh-out-loud hilarious. Eagle-eyed for every kind of foible and foolishness, he wrote with a caustic pen that could puncture any and all pretensions. The results are often wickedly funny.

Here are thumbnail comments about Lewis’s best books:

Main Street: A woman marries a doctor and moves to his small hometown, Gopher Prairie (a fictional Sauk Centre). Bored and discontented with the vulgarities and small-mindedness of the “village,” she starts a single-minded campaign to bring high-brow culture and enlightenment to the townspeople.

Elmer Gantry: The lead character, a preacher, is a rip-roaring, athletic, alcoholic, narcissistic, womanizing, cynical, hypocritical hellion—yet he is strangely charming, as many characters discover, to their regret.

Babbitt: A gung-ho but personally unhappy businessman tries to put his life together. This novel is a masterpiece of hollow-headed, noisy, commercial-crazed boosterism, and its prose zings and hollers like a loud circus of insipid ad slogans. A great book!

Arrowsmith: A research bacteriologist wrestles with his conscience as he helps fight a plague on a Caribbean island. Ethical (and marital) dilemmas abound in this unfairly neglected, brilliant novel.

It Can’t Happen Here: A frightening novel about a senator who promises the moon and stars while crooning a mantra of patriotism and family values. Gullible voters elect him president and soon find themselves in a totalitarian-militaristic nightmare.

Kingsblood Royal: After doing genealogy research, a middle-class white man discovers to his horror that he has African-American blood in his veins. The social calamities that follow are, at the same time, pathetic and grotesquely comical. Another unfairly neglected book, far ahead of its time.

Dodsworth: An American couple decides to take a European tour with dispiriting results. One of the best novels about a marriage unraveling. Also, a superb movie, widely considered among the top 100 of all time.

The astute critic H. L. Mencken described Lewis as a “red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds.” So true. Please, readers, give Lewis a try. ✍

NEW MEMBERS

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

Jim Grebe
Roeland Park, KS

Cindy Kaplan
Barrington, RI

Andrew Seal
Ogden, UT

Mark Silcox
Edmond, OK

some features of postmodernism that Jameson's modernist realism does not have. Lewis's modern realism assembles and demonstrates widely different heterogeneous events through pluralistic narrative lines of the formal break and cause modification. The plurality of narrative lines results in new heterogeneous events, which are broken and combined constantly, rather than complete traditional narrative lines. The quality of those conjunctures and fractures is displayed in Jameson's work with a kind of intertextuality so that we can conclude that Jameson provides comparatively suitable terminology—"conjuncture" and "deterritorialization" for the interpretation of Lewis's novels.

Jameson considers that the most important deterritorialization is as follows: What Deleuze and Guattari call "capitalist axiom" has decoded and released old coding systems of pre-capitalism so as to construct new and more functional assemblies. The responsive chord struck by this new term can be judged by a more frivolous and even more successful popular media term "decontextualization." It rightly means that anything grabbed from the original context may all be "recontextualization" in a new region or environment. But "deterritorialization" is much more absolute than that (360).

From Jameson's interpretation, it is clear that the deterritorialization implies fracture and abandonment of the old and problematic so that one can flee to a safer area and by "conjuncture" build a more functional assembly, a plane of consistency that displays social customs and practices—social stages. For example, from Wheatsylvania, to the Department of Public Health in Nautilus, to the Rouncefield Clinic in Chicago, to the McGurk Institute in New York, each of Arrowsmith's escapes connects the last social stage with a new one and constructs a more useful combination.

By the deterritorialization, conjunction, and pluralistic narrative lines of the formal break and cause modification, Lewis implemented the renarrativization of various events of early American culture of the twentieth century. That is to say, by way of great narrative techniques, Lewis renarrates multifarious heterogeneous events, which gives those insignificant, unrelated, and mixed events fresh significance in special historical time by the means of collage and assembly so as to demonstrate unique national customs of America and establish a rebellious cultural narrative characteristic of modern realism with supreme artistry. As to *Main Street* and three other novels (*Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Elmer Gantry*), the expressive form of the narrative style of modern realism varies widely from novel to novel, but the pluralistic narrative line of the conjunction-developed fracture-conjunction is their

basic and common feature, with the multiple narrative lines demonstrating distinctive narrative characteristics in different social contexts.

In *Main Street*, Lewis creates a "heterogeneous" narrative strategy. According to the regular rule of fictional narrative, reforming the Main Street should have been the core of the fictional narrative. This should have started after Carol inspected Main Street in Gopher Prairie with seriousness, escaped from it, and fled home in the fourth chapter. However, the narrator does not start to relate Carol's reforming action until the tenth chapter. Between these chapters, broken away from the narrative main line, the narrator assembles seventeen kinds of heterogeneous events that do not belong to reforming Gopher Prairie, such as country girl Bea Sorenson's praise for Gopher Prairie, Sam Clark's welcome party for Carol, taking part in the Jolly Seventeen Club's activity, etc.

It is this heterogeneous, pluralistic narrative structure of the formal break and cause modification that puts Carol's conflict with Main Street in the outer extensive world, beyond the central events. It connects the fictional narrative language with the content of semantics and pragmatics that needs to be narrated, with collective expressive assembly, and with the whole culture, politics, and economics of Gopher Prairie's social province. Although those multiple heterogeneous events that do not seem to be related to central affairs interrupt the complete narrative line of the novel and weaken the violent collision, it both fully portrays Carol's idealistic, well-rounded image that contains more idealism and less pragmatism and demonstrates the colorful social life of the American Middle West in the early twentieth century represented by Gopher Prairie. Meanwhile, it also further reveals the themes of parochialism, mediocrity, materialism, and prejudices connected to social hierarchy. It is owing to the cultural narrative of heterogeneous events assembled by Lewis's multiple narrative line that the main idea of *Main Street* has won popular approbation and acquired a cultural currency.

In *Babbitt*, Lewis utilizes a kind of narrative artistry of "portrait narrative" (Phelan 178) that connects the components of narrative and character sketch, deterritorializes traditional plot, and counteracts, dissolves, or eases the development of events by the narrative line of the formal break and cause modification. Lewis uses a global tension formed by Babbitt's excitement, dysphoria, and discontent to drive the progression of the narrative, and then applies the resolution of that tension via Babbitt's rebellious story resulting from dissatisfaction, not to signal a change in his protagonist but rather to complete

“PEASANT AND COCKNEY”: MENCKEN’S UNKNOWN REVIEW OF *MAIN STREET*

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H. L. Mencken first met Lewis at a party in New York hosted by T. R. Smith, the managing editor of *Century* magazine, in late September 1920 (Hutchisson 59). Lewis was, as Mencken recalls in *My Life as Author and Editor* (1993), “far gone in liquor, and when he fastened on me with a drunkard’s zeal, declaring that he had lately finished a novel of vast and singular merits full worthy of my careful critical attention, I tried hard to shake him off” (328). Mencken and his co-editor of the *Smart Set*, George Jean Nathan, fled the apartment as soon as they could. Although they had accepted Lewis’s short story “I’m a Stranger Here Myself” for publication in the *Smart Set* in August 1916 (Schorer 819, also 230; Hutchisson 251, n. 10), Mencken recalled that Lewis “had published nothing up to that time, save a few light novels that had been *Saturday Evening Post* serials,” and that “he had never reviewed any of them, nor read them” (328).

The next day Mencken returned to Baltimore, but before leaving the *Smart Set* office, he gathered up an armful of review books to examine on the train, and among them was a set of proofs from Harcourt, Brace & Company. Ordinarily, Mencken refused to read books in proof, but this time, on a sudden impulse, he started reading the sheaf, and by the time the train reached Newark Mencken was interested, by the time it got to Trenton he was fascinated, and at Philadelphia he sent a telegram to Nathan back in New York exclaiming that “that idiot has written a masterpiece” (329). On October 27, Mencken wrote to Lewis that he had just finished reading *Main Street* and hastened to offer his congratulations, for it was “a sound and excellent piece of work—the best thing of its sort that has been done so far,” and that, moreover, “it will sell.” Mencken would “review it in the January *Smart Set*, the first issue still open” (*Letters of H. L. Mencken* 206).

Mencken’s review (“Consolation”) of *Main Street* appeared, as promised, in the January 1921 issue of the *Smart Set* (138–40), and it has been discussed in Lewis scholarship (e.g., Schorer 285, Hutchisson 59–60, Lingeman 253–54) and reprinted in *Critical Essays on Sinclair Lewis* (35–37) and *H. L. Mencken’s Smart Set Criticism* (279–82). However, Mencken wrote another review of *Main Street*, which has been reprinted, without commentary, in *The Impossible H. L. Mencken* (523–26) and listed in *H. L. Mencken: An Annotated Bibliography* (172), but has remained completely unknown in Lewis scholarship. In his “Monday Article” for January 3, 1921,

entitled “Peasant and Cockney,” in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, Mencken recommends that some novelist depict Baltimore in the same manner as Lewis’s novel of Gopher Prairie, and finds it admirable that Lewis has forsaken the “easy money” from popular magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* and produced “a literary phenomenon of the first order” that has brought him even more money.

That “the extraordinary success” of *Main Street* was being “hailed by many of the intelligentsia as proof of a new and highly gratifying interest in beautiful letters in America,” was, as Mencken bluntly puts it at the outset, “actually nothing of the sort.” Lewis’s novel was “being vaserlined by the newspaper Brander Matthews¹ and pawed by the women’s clubs,” not because “it happens to be a very competent piece of writing,” but “simply and solely because it presents an extremely acidulous picture of human existence in a small American town,” and thus “caresses the vanity of all those who are able to thank God that they do not live in such a town, and are not as Dr. Lewis’ folks are.” In short, *Main Street*’s popularity rested “upon malice far more than anything properly describable as aesthetic appreciation.” It is “a big-city success,” for “nine-tenths of all novel readers live in big cities.” Echoing his letter of October 27, 1920 to Lewis, Mencken described *Main Street* again as “a very excellent piece of work, boldly imagined and brilliantly executed.” Mencken singled out some of its scenes, for example, “the scene of the banquet of town boomers and that of the sermon by the Methodist dervish,” and, alluding to such novels as Dreiser’s *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) or *The Financier* (1912), James Branch Cabell’s *Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice* (1919), and Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–64), Mencken found that they “combine a Dreiserian ruthlessness of observation with a Cabellian-Rabelaisian richness of humor,” which he thought was “a truly amazing combination, goodness knows.”

But what Mencken maintained was that “the average reader does not admire and enjoy this capital writing,” and that “this, alas,” was “not quite as it should be.” “There should,” Mencken argued, “be more aesthetic understanding in the land,” and “books as good as *Main Street* should be admired on a plane above mere prejudices, as the Parthenon and [Conrad’s] *Heart of Darkness* and Brahms’ Fourth Symphony are

————— “Peasant and Cockney” *continued on page 13*

the portrait of Babbitt. As a result, audiences would think as Mencken did: Babbitt does not change, except that he is two years older than before.

According to Phelan,

Progressions in portrait narrative often depend upon the introduction of a global tension that must be resolved before completeness can be achieved. Instabilities may be introduced but they are more commonly local, connected with the movement of subordinate mini-narratives rather than with the larger trajectory of the hybrid work. The global tension can arise from the narrator's initial descriptions of a protagonist's character, or from a character's habit or hobby. (179)

In *Babbitt*, the global tension starts with Babbitt's dream, in the first chapter, which shows the protagonist's expectation of prosperous social reality and an escape from reality caused by dissatisfaction with his expectations, which are the essential features and main components of Babbitt's character. The global tension circles around his self-satisfaction and discontent—two mini-narratives (an extramarital love affair and his battle over free speech) solve this tension by the end of story and complete the portrait of Babbitt.

Babbitt's dissatisfaction is not too strong nor is his rebellion; as a result, it is plausible without forming violent dramatic conflicts. In fact, it marks his pursuit of self-improvement and self-expression while Babbitt enjoys a modern, rich, material life. But it is not the important part of his life, and this does not become the main characteristic feature of his portrait, though it is an indispensable feature. Because they have not fully recognized the characteristic components of complacent and conformist Babbitt and the narrative artistry created by Lewis, many critics are lavish in their praise of *Babbitt*, while paradoxically, they imply that *Babbitt* lacks conventional fictional techniques.

In *Arrowsmith*, the author uses the device of "deterritorialized narrative." Lewis lets his narrator use the narrative lines of the conjunction-fracture-developed to present the plot that the protagonist Arrowsmith came to know himself through fleeing and deterritorializing the coding system between himself and various social groups. On the other hand, through the protagonist's deterritorialization, the narrator resolves local conflicts and demonstrates the cognitive process of the character's ideological break, innovation, and new cognition. It is the typical reflection of Lewis's modern realism and is also one of the main features that Jameson contributes to modern Marxist theory. With the emergence of the character's new cognition, the protagonist begins his new pursuit. It strongly

shows that Arrowsmith's escape was not his failure, but only the problem of the assembly between himself and a certain social coding system. Following the break with the coding system, Arrowsmith connected himself with a new coding assembly. Just as Jameson says, "anything grabbed from the original context may all be 'recontextualization' in a new region or environment" (360). In other words, Arrowsmith tempered himself and accumulated experience from the escape action within his power, which is his valuable spiritual wealth. The escape-pursuit process of the fracture-conjunction-developed was also the process by which Arrowsmith accumulated and transferred wealth and sought for greater development. So Arrowsmith became more mature, stronger, and firmer so that he has a further cognition about his ability and interest and further approaches the heroic character of a great scientific idealist.

In *Elmer Gantry*, the author utilizes a kind of "autonomous narrative." Lewis improves traditional fictional convention, abandons the crucial fictional factor "clash," and completely crushes the concept of "plot," which all give way to the deterritorialization of the protagonist's actions and ideas, in other words, the character's "autonomy," which is also representative of Lewis's modern realism. In reading the novel through Jameson's cultural concepts, the greatest feature of Elmer is that he could decode his unique self-cognition quickly and renarrate self-action. He used what he thought was an axiom to crack the coding system of religious doctrines and social morality, and then built himself a set of autonomous conceptual rules. Elmer set up his discourse as follows: once he ran into conflict with other people, he would turn his mind back to himself and begin a self-examination, then define a set of rules for his selfish judgment and vicious lust to establish his self-logic and self-ethics, by which he obtained authoritative discourse power.

Elmer seduced his parishioner, a young girl named Lulu. In the face of Lulu's suggestion of marriage, Elmer made a self-examination, from which he judged the affair was Lulu's fault, while his fault was that he would have to risk marrying Lulu, which he was not willing to do. After self-examination, he drew his ethical conclusion: he had the courage to acknowledge his error, and on the one hand, he was proud of it; while on the other hand, he almost forgave Lulu. From these logical inferences, he gained a new insight: it was Lulu's fault, so he need not face the consequence of marrying Lulu; if he needed Lulu in the future, he could get her, because he had the virtue to forgive and take pity on other people. That is Minister

“Peasant and Cockney” *continued from page 11*

admired.” Moreover, “books that are better than *Main Street*,” such as Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia* (1918) and Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), “should be admired a great deal more, which is assuredly not the case.” The lesson, for Mencken, was that the big-city “cockney should not be so ready to laugh at the poor yokel” or small-town peasant, for “he is quite as thumping an ass himself”!

Challenging readers of the *Evening Sun* to “consider our own imperial town, great Baltimore,” Mencken asked rhetorically: “Is its average citizen more civilized and intelligent than the average citizen of Gopher Prairie,” as depicted by Lewis? Mencken presumed to doubt it, for “we have dervishes here who are fully as idiotic as the holy clerk in *Main Street*”; “we have had town boomers quite as noisy and hollow as Gopher Prairie’s”; and “we have women’s clubbers, uplifters, bridge-players, neighborhood doctors, storekeepers and other such fauna who might be brothers and sisters to Lewis’ poor mimes.” Moreover, “we have many more of them than Gopher Prairie has, and they are far more pretentious, and hence far more prosperous.” There was, Mencken contended, “nothing in his book so magnificently imbecile as the Merchants and Manufacturers’ Association as it was in the palmy days of resoluting and honorary-pallbearing.” Lewis “describes no intelligentsia so laughable as those who lately confessed that they had never heard of Lizette Woodworth Reese,” a Baltimore poet and schoolteacher (1856–1935), whose austere and yet intensely emotional poetry Mencken had been praising in the *Evening Sun* since 1911.² In comparison with Dr. Will Kennicott, “a genuinely competent operative surgeon,” and Carol Kennicott, “a very pretty and charming gal,” Mencken invited his readers “to contemplate the average Baltimore saw-bones—and the average Baltimore lady lifter and yearner,” an invitation which might have also reminded them of Mencken’s frequent criticism of the city’s antiquated health department and teasing of local women reformers in his always provocative “Free Lance” column from 1911 to 1915 (see Rodgers 123–25).

Mencken went on to lament “that no Baltimore novelist has ever put this town into a vast tome, as Lewis has put Gopher Prairie!” Alluding to Baltimore attorney and writer Sidney Nyburg’s novel *The Chosen People* (1917), which portrays the antagonism in “the enlightened year, 1915” (41) between affluent “uptown” German Jews in Northwest Baltimore and proletarian “downtown” Russian Jews in East Baltimore,³ Mencken (a third-generation German-American) noted that Nyburg (1880–1957) had “nibbled around the edges of the subject,” implying, it would seem, that Nyburg had focused only on the Jewish population, who, moreover, made up little more than

ten percent of the total population (509,000 in 1900, 734,000 in 1920) of Baltimore (“Virtual Jewish World”), in spite of the phenomenal increase in Russian-born immigrants in Baltimore in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Hirschfeld 25; Crooks 7).⁴ A panoramic novel of Baltimore would, Mencken asserted, “cover all other second-rate American cities, as *Main Street* covers all the Gopher Prairies between Salisbury and the Pacific coast.” To Mencken, they were “all pretty much alike—huge, overblown villages run by lodge-joiners and green-grocers, some of them disguised as bankers, publicists and pedagogues.”

Mencken would later (in the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 21, 1930) observe that “the old Baltimore” was gone, but that there was “no use mourning it.” It was “infinitely charming while it lasted,” but it “belong[ed] to the past.” Now the town (with a population of approximately 800,000!) was growing “more and more like Philadelphia, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Buffalo, Akron, Birmingham,” and that “the same wordy, humorless Babbitts run it and the same dull hordes of slaves infest it” (“800,000”). Mencken’s reviews of *Main Street* appeared as Lewis was planning *Babbitt* in early 1921, and in January 1922 Lewis acknowledged his indebtedness to Mencken for having suggested in his review in the *Smart Set* that “what ought to be taken up now is the American city—not NY or Chi but the cities of 200,000 to 500,000—the Baltimores and Omahas and Buffaloes and Birmingham” (qtd. by Schorer 290, but not to be found in Mencken’s review!).

“But,” Mencken maintained in January 1921, “the field remains strangely unworked.” There were “many American novels dealing with city life,” and “some of them even tackle it on a large scale,” but Mencken could “think of none that actually depicts the general life, the communal life,” for they all “deal with some narrow circle, high or low, or with politics.” “The thing ought,” he thought, “to be done in the manner of Arnold Bennett [1867–1931]—which manner Lewis frankly borrowed for *Main Street*.”⁵ In his “Five Town” novels of English provincial life since the turn of the century, “Bennett sees everything, but he knows how to pick and choose; his story is never drowned in detail.” Moreover, Bennett “knows that devastating satire is not enough; there must also be some feeling,” and “Lewis gets that feeling into *Main Street*.” Lewis’s “satire is uproarious, but it is never merely ill-natured,” for “he is artist and humanist enough to see what Thackeray always forgot: that there is a man beneath the flunky’s plush.” Mencken’s comparison of Lewis with Bennett was apt. When

“Peasant and Cockney” *continued on page 16*

Elmer's disgusting virtue, his towering independent process of autonomy. He deconstructs the basic social ethic that men and women should love each other sincerely and be open with each other, deconstructs the basic religious ethic that the clergy should help and cherish their congregations and seek for moral purity and perfection. He utilizes his automatized axiom as the means to deal with affairs between men and women and his relationship with his congregations, his colleagues, and God. Based on this, he proceeds to develop his world, advocate moral virtue, and condemn evil.

In the narrative of *Elmer Gantry*, many conflicts that break out soon disappear because of the protagonist's autonomy. Conflicts are defused, stabilization and tension are balanced, and Elmer also becomes more and more arrogant and powerful in this autonomy. We can see through this the omniscient narrator applying the autonomy of Elmer Gantry's ideology to connect many narrative clues of the formal break and achieve the unique artistic effect that the animals have all been stirred up.

Some argue that Lewis's novels seem to have a loose structure, that they lack plots, conflicts, and other basic fictional elements or that they are only a paradoxical mixture of realism and ironic literature; but in fact they contain a wealth of artistic styles that oppose contemporary conventions. This indicates that the novels connect narrative technique with the reflecting form of escape in American culture characteristic of both idealism and pragmatism, as well as demonstrate the rebellious cultural narrative features of modern realism, which commingles realism, modernism, and postmodernism, and other narrative strategies: the heterogeneous narrative in *Main Street*, the portrait narrative in *Babbitt*, the deterritorialized narrative in *Arrowsmith*, and the autonomous narrative in *Elmer Gantry*. The narrative features demonstrate that Lewis's novels integrate narrative devices with the ideology of the characters, the characters' personalities,

national cultural characteristics and their reflecting form, and the pulse of the times. This close combination of narrative form and narrative content causes scholars and ordinary readers to confuse the novels' narrative artistry. The revelation of the narrative features of modern realism shows that Lewis's novels do not lack artistry, nor are they of poor artistic quality, but are very forward-looking and superb works of art.

Note

¹Kammen recounts this conversation: "Robert Frost once advised President Kennedy to be as much an Irishman as a Harvard man: 'You have to have both the pragmatism and the idealism'" (217).

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A (bad) literal translation would read as follows:

Also foxes learn, and find
Two fighters are less stupid
Than work; the limes are cool.
Drink, comrades, a 'round.

Considering the context, tone, and Lewis's chosen imagery, I have translated it to:

We foxes discovered early
's better to outsmart than labor.

The limes are cut and ready
So drink, friends! Another!

In this case, I substituted the verbs *learn* and *find* for *discover* while emphasizing both the student narrator's fox-like cleverness and disdain for school. This cleverness has led him to conclude that there are other things (such as *dueling* or *sparring*) that are smarter (*wiser, less stupid*) than work. In fact, as a clever fox, he has discovered it is "better to outsmart than labor." As for the last two lines, Lewis is using a standard

Translating Lewis *continued from page 14*

drink staple—limes—as a way to prepare the climax, “Drink, comrades, a ’round.” Paying attention to syllables (for rhythm) and the rhyme scheme (-ly, -or, -dy, -___) one gets, “So drink, friends! Another!”

This is a long way from “Minnesota-Tennyson.”

Note: This short essay draws on research from a book of Sinclair Lewis’s poetry I am editing. As a published poet, these are my first translations.

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Poems and Translations

Student Lied

Sinclair Lewis

Wie Luther lieben wir immer
Lieder, und Mädchen, und Bier.
Lernen wir? Gott, was ist schlimmer?
Kein’ dicke Bücher sind hier.
Schön, schön, wunderbar schön,
frei wie die Vögel, die Adler, sind wir!

Auch Füchse lernen, und finden
Zweikämpfer weniger dumm
Als Arbeit; kühl sind die Linden.
Trinkt Kameraden, eins ‘rum.’
Schön, schön, sonderbar schön,
Heidelberg Mädchen und Pilsener Bier!

The Student’s Song

Sinclair Lewis (trans. Joshua P. Preston)

Like Luther we’ll always adore
These songs and girls and beer.
Class? Oh, God, no more!
There are no textbooks here.

All’s well; all’s well; so wonderfully free
As the birds and wind we are!

We foxes discovered early
’s better to outsmart than labor.
The limes are cut and ready
So drink, friends! Another!
All’s well; all’s well; how lovely
These Heidelberg girls, this beer!

Um Ein Und Zwanzig

Sinclair Lewis

Hoch, hoch, und abermal hoch,
Eins auf den Zapfer, und eins auf den Koch.
Eins auf das Mädchen das halt ja mein Herz;
Einmal ist Freude, und Zweimal kein Schmerz.

’Rum, ’rum, und wieder herum,
Wer ist nicht Herzlich, derselbe ist dumm.
Solche je weinen für Untendlichkeit,
Was wollen wir damit? Wir haben Zeit.

Zeit, zeit für Mädchen und Wein,
(Noch eins auf meines, und noch eins auf dein.)
Hoch auf den Kaiser bis jederman wacht,
Auf Betchen, auf Gretchen, — damn, Freund, gute nacht.

To Twenty-One

Sinclair Lewis (trans. Joshua P. Preston)

Up, up and higher still,
One for the barkeep, one for the grill.
One for the girl stealing my heart;
Once is a pleasure, twice a new start.

’Round, ’round, and around again,
(to hell with the jerks down at the end).
So forever do we whine,
“What do we want?” Well, we’ve got time.

Time, time for girls and wine,
(One more for you, ’nother for I)
Up on the King we wake with the light
On cots and pearls—Oh, what a night! ✍

“Peasant and Cockney” continued from page 13

Alfred Harcourt read the final manuscript of *Main Street* in mid-July 1920, he told Lewis that it was “the truest book I have ever read” and that he had been “deeply moved by it.” When Lewis asked, “Do you think it will sell, Alf?,” Harcourt predicted that *Main Street* would sell as well as Bennett’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1908), which sold 40,000 copies in America. Realistically, Harcourt hoped for 20,000, his sales manager for 25,000. Beyond all expectations, however, *Main Street* became a phenomenal best-seller, with 295,000 copies sold by October 1921, one year after the publication date (Lingeman 146, 157).

In conclusion, Mencken returned to his initial observation: “The idle reader, sweating through *Main Street* pleasantly, as through an agreeable game of tennis,” would “perhaps underrate it as a literary event.” It was, on the contrary, “a phenomenon of the first order, and vastly more significant than a dozen books by Edith Wharton,” whose novel *The Age of Innocence* (1920), however, would be awarded the Pulitzer Prize in May 1921 by the Board of Trustees of Columbia University, who overruled the jury’s selection of *Main Street* (Schorer 299). What *Main Street* represented to Mencken was “the first successful revolt of an inmate of the *Saturday Evening Post* seraglio.” For years, Mencken noted, Lewis had been “a popular and prosperous manufacturer of conventional fiction,” and he knew “how to produce such stuff with an almost infallible art.” Nevertheless, Lewis had “turned his back upon all that easy money, spat homericly upon his hands, and set out to write a novel that should be generally good,” and “curiously enough,” *Main Street* was bringing Lewis more “mazuma” than ever. “For the first time, perhaps, in human history,” Mencken concluded, with customary ironic hyperbole, “virtue is actually its own reward.”

Notes

¹ Brander Matthews (1852–1929), a prolific writer and critic, was appointed at Columbia University in 1900 to be the first professor of dramatic literature in America. In order to protect the freedom of letters in the United States, Mencken had counted on such representatives of the older literary establishment of the Genteel Tradition as William Dean Howells, Hamlin Garland, and Matthews to join in signing “A Protest” in 1916 against the suppression of Theodore Dreiser’s novel *The “Genius”*; but, as Mencken recalled with dismay, these three “refused to sign, and so did many others” (*My Life as Author and Editor* 160, 164).

² In January 1911, Mencken devoted three articles in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* to the “small and delicate works” of

Lizette Woodworth Reese, “a Baltimore native” (January 2), the “extraordinary beauties” of Reese’s poems, especially the sonnet “Tears” and the poem “The Last Lover,” both of which Mencken quoted in full from her 1909 *A Wayside Lute* (January 3), and the “optimism” and “fascination with the common objects of life” in her work (January 4). In his “Literary Note” in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* (February 23, 1920), Mencken mocked “the learned *Sunpaper*” for having “announced [on February 8] to the nobility and gentry that a Miss Lizette Woodworth Reese, a poet, teaches school in Baltimore, and that various unnamed critics regard her as quite talented.” While “she remains almost totally unknown to Baltimoreans in general,” the “plain fact remains that she is an artist of the very first dignity.” What “sets her apart from all other current American poets” is “her superb mastery of simplicity, her almost magical capacity for reaching highly complex and impassioned effects with means almost unbelievably austere” (8).

³ In his review column in the *Smart Set* for August 1917, Mencken notes only in passing that Nyburg’s *The Chosen People* is “the chronicle of a young Jewish rabbi’s disillusionment at the hands of his highly secular flock—a story with the rare quality of irony in it, and several very deft character sketches” (“Criticism of Criticism” 144). Nyburg’s novel traces the efforts of Dr. Philip Graetz, the new Reform Rabbi of the largest and wealthiest Temple in Baltimore, to mediate a strike by the labor union of the garment workers (Russian and East European, Yiddish-speaking immigrants) against the Pioneer Clothing Company, whose owner is a German-descendant Jew and a leading member of the Temple. Rabbi Graetz’s personal sacrifices and efforts to secure peace among all Jews are ultimately futile as he learns that the strike is finally resolved through hard-nosed, interest-based bargaining by a reputable Russian Jewish lawyer, David Gordon, and pressure put on the factory owner by his Gentile bankers, “these overlords of industry” (327), who have decided that the lengthy strike must end because it is beginning to hurt business and threatening to keep capital out of the City. It is the lawyer Gordon, the realist, who has a “peculiar sense of the ironic” (363), who sees and appreciates “the irony of existence in general, and of Rabbis, clothing merchants, and labor disputes in particular” (329); it is Gordon who makes the idealistic rabbi understand at the end that “it was the best settlement we could get under the circumstances” (351) and that he should adapt and rededicate himself to his flock. Historical study demonstrates just how realistic Nyburg’s portrayal is of the garment industry in Baltimore in the early twentieth century; see Argersinger.

————— “Peasant and Cockney” continued on page 17

“Peasant and Cockney” continued from page 16

⁴ Crooks observes that although “the 1890s was a decade of intense German-Americanism among all classes in Baltimore” (6), “the new immigration from eastern and southeastern Europe provided the next largest block of foreign-born Baltimoreans,” and that “Russian Jews predominated. During the decade they more than doubled their number from 4,089 to 10,493, making them second in size to the Germans by 1900. Impoverished, politically inert, and still unassimilated in 1890, Russian Jews lived crowded together in the slums of East Baltimore working in sweatshops and small trades” (7).

⁵ In his review column in the *Smart Set* for September 1919 (“Arnold Bennett”), Mencken focused on Arnold Bennett, noting that he was “of all the English novelists of the day [...] the most steadily aloof and ironical” (36), and concluding: “No writer of his time looked into its life with sharper eyes, or set forth his findings with a greater charm and plausibility. Within his deliberately narrow limits he did precisely the thing that Balzac undertook to do, and Zola after him: he painted a full-length portrait of a whole society, accurately, brilliantly, and, in certain areas, exhaustively” (50–51).

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DEPARTMENTS

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

Sinclair Lewis Writers’ Conference

The 25th Annual Sinclair Lewis Writers’ Conference was held in Sauk Centre on Saturday, October 11. One of

the longest-running, most respected writers’ conferences in the upper Midwest, it has attracted such renowned keynote speakers as Frederick Manfred, Robert Bly, Jon Hassler, Carol Bly, Leif Enger, Bill Holm, Will Weaver, and Patricia Hampl. This year’s keynote speaker was Kevin Kling, distinguished journalist, author, columnist, and speaker who spoke on “Crying Wolf: The Oral Tradition as it Moved into Literature.” He

has been awarded numerous arts grants and fellowships, is a frequent performer at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, and is a commentator for National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. His play, *Home and Away*, premiered at the Seattle Rep and moved off Broadway to the Second Stage Theatre, where it received a Drama Desk Award nomination. He is also the author of five books published by Borealis Books, as well as five CDs of his recorded stories. In his keynote talk, he explored how the method by which we ingest and deliver stories has changed us—expanding our social structure while separating us from the natural world. His basic theme was “What did we trade when the word went from the breath to the page?”

Kling was joined by three other professional writers who shared their writing and marketing expertise.

Kim Ode discussed “How to Get People to Spill Their Guts, and How to Handle It When They Do.” A general assignment feature writer with the *Star Tribune*, she is the author of two cookbooks for the Minnesota Historical Society Press: *Baking with the St. Paul Bread Club: Recipes, Tips and Stories* (2006) and *Rhubarb Renaissance* (2012). Regarding her presentation, Kim stated, “Some people court newspaper coverage, while others have it thrust upon them. Even after someone has consented to an interview, the process can be unnerving, often delving more deeply into their lives than they imagined.” Establishing a comfortable, safe atmosphere is essential, but often needs to happen within minutes. People sometimes say more than they mean to, or perhaps don't realize how their thoughts will appear when in cold, hard print. “Walking the line between telling an honest and compelling story, while respecting their candor, can be a tricky dance among reporters, readers, editors and subjects,” she notes.

Mary Casanova examined artistic and personal strategies to crafting stories in “Where Do Stories Come From?” She is an award-winning author of children's novels and picture books. Many of her books stem from life on the Minnesota-Canadian border; yet some of her stories have taken her as far away as France, Norway, and Belize for research. Whatever the setting for her books, Casanova writes stories that matter—and that kids can't put down. Her book awards include: American Library Association's Notable Books List, Aesop Accolades by the American Folklore Society, Parents' Choice® Gold Award, Booklist Editors' Choice, and two Minnesota Book Awards. “The greatest reward for me,” Casanova stated, “is when a young reader tells me she or he loves one of my books. For me, it's all about communicating writer-to-reader through a character and story.” With 31 books published, including picture books (*One-Dog Canoe*), books for the American Girl® series, middle grade adventure novels (*Moose Tracks*), and young

adult historical fiction, she inspires writers to overcome their fears and dive into writing about whatever delights, intrigues, or haunts them.

William Kent Krueger presented on “Setting: It's a Sexy Character.” Krueger's mystery series, set in the north woods of Minnesota, features protagonist Cork O'Connor, the former sheriff of Tamarack County and a man of mixed heritage—part Irish and part Ojibwe. Krueger's work has received a number of awards, including the Minnesota Book Award, the Loft-McKnight Fiction Award, the Anthony Award, the Barry Award, the Dilys Award, and the Friends of American Writers Award. His last five novels were all *New York Times* best-sellers. *Ordinary Grace*, his stand-alone novel published in 2013, received the Edgar Award, given by the Mystery Writers of America in recognition for the best novel published in that year. *Windigo Island*, number fourteen in his Cork O'Connor series, was just released in August. About his presentation, Krueger stated, “A profound sense of place is a hallmark of great fiction. You should think of it as one of the most important and compelling characters in your story.” In his session, Krueger examined the elements of setting and looked at ways to maximize their impact in writing.

The Sinclair Lewis 2014 Writers' Conference was made possible by the financial sponsorship of the following organizations: The Stearns History Museum, Minnesota National Bank of Sauk Centre, First State Bank of Sauk Centre, Central Minnesota Credit Union, Stearns Electric Association, and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation. The conference was also funded, in part, by an appropriation from the Minnesota State Legislature, through a grant from the Central Minnesota Arts Board, with money from the State's general fund. Private donors included Pat Hanauer, Dick and Pat Lewis, and Dave and Linda Simpkins. Sauk Centre Community Education is a co-sponsor of the event.

Sinclair Lewis Days—2014

For 44 years, the Sinclair Lewis Days celebration has been a way of celebrating both the author and the community. This past July was no exception. Among the highlights this year were two parades, a Kiddie and Pet Parade and the Sinclair Lewis Days Parade, which had as its theme, “A Day at the Beach,” and as the Grand Marshal, Elaine Walter, who worked for many years in the office at Holy Family School.

Other events included a Girls Basketball Tournament, the Sinclair Lewis Days Treasure Hunt, a Minnesota Twins Youth Baseball Clinic, two concerts, a street dance, two pie and ice cream socials, a craft fair, fireworks, and a hot dog eating contest (the winner ate thirteen). One of the highlights every year is the Miss Sauk Centre Pageant. Named queen this year

was Jamie Jennissen, sponsored by the Minnesota National Bank. The two princesses were Jessica Rodenbiker, who also won Miss Congeniality, and Kiley Hooper.

Highlights of 2013 Sinclair Lewis Foundation Report

Events for 2013 included the Literary Landmarks dedication of the Boyhood Home; the showing of the cartoon, *Bongo*, based on a Lewis short story, at the Main Street Theatre during Sinclair Lewis Days; Bradford Lewis, Sinclair Lewis's great-nephew, riding in a 1920s car in the Sinclair Lewis Days' Parade; and the 24th Annual Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference which featured Jim Klobuchar, Anthony Bukoski, Marlene Conner, and Minnesota's poet laureate, Joyce Sutphen. Upcoming plans and challenges include the upkeep of the Boyhood Home (see Roberta Olson's article on this below), the Interpretive Center and the city's plans for it, and the potential for a new Cultural/Community Center which is the focus of a community committee made up of members from the City, the Chamber, the Historical Society, and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation. Jim Umhoefer, Joyce Lyng, and Dave Simpkins from the Foundation all serve on this committee.

Nearly 500 people visited the Boyhood Home this year, from nearly all 50 states, and from a number of foreign countries including Australia, China, England, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, Scotland, and Sweden.



Sinclair Lewis Home Painting Project Complete

By Roberta Olson

Thanks to the Valspar® Paint Company, the Initiative Foundation, and a host of volunteers, the Sinclair Lewis

Boyhood Home Museum and Carriage House have received new paint jobs and refurbishing.

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation received a Minnesota Beautiful 2014 paint grant, which was administered by the Central Minnesota Initiative Foundation of Little Falls.

Fourteen Sauk Centre Lions Club members donated a total of 145 hours scraping, priming, and painting the Lewis house. The Stearns County Sentence to Serve crew, numbering fifteen people, scraped, primed, and painted the Carriage House. Their efforts totaled 84 hours.

In addition to the paint project, the floor on the porch was replaced and various other repair projects on doors and storm windows were completed. During the process, trees and bushes were trimmed as well.

In addition to the paint grant, donations toward the project were received from Stearns Electric Association, Minnesota National Bank, Arvig Communications, and the Sinclair Lewis Society.

Visitors

With the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home all spruced up, the Foundation was happy to hear that the Minnesota Historical Society chose to visit the Lewis sites on its Board of Directors annual tour. Each year they visit a historical site of great interest. They were in Sauk Centre on Tuesday, October 28, to visit the Boyhood Home and the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center.

The Sinclair Lewis Society has also indicated they will hold a conference in Sauk Centre during the 2015 Sinclair Lewis Days celebration in July.

SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2015: CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF LEWIS NOVELS

For more on the upcoming conference, please refer to the box located on page 1, or email Sally E. Parry at separry@ilstu.edu for more information. You can also visit <http://english.illinoisstate.edu/sinclairlewis/> for updates.

WEB NOTES

I hesitate to infringe upon your valuable time, but I thought perhaps you could help me. I have, of late, discovered the joy of reading Mr. Lewis. I have several of his novels under my belt, and I recently finished *Work of Art*.

As is my wont, I write down vocabulary words unknown to me. Often, they lead to delightful discoveries. For instance, I did not know about the old practice of having hair singed at the barber shop until I read about it within those pages.

The small problem, with which you might help me, concerns a word Mr. Lewis used when describing the hotelier's unshakable conviction that the waiters in his hotel habitually drank the tiny puddle of liquor remaining in the diner's glass. There is, apparently, a name for those puddles. (Heaven bless our incomparable English language.) It never occurred to me that such a term existed, as I am a teetotaler.

I told you that I take down unknown words and therein is my problem. I wrote that word on my bookmark, but then I lost it. (Horrors!)

We will agree that to again read *Work of Art* would not be a punishment, but, in my laziness, I turn to you as the font-of-all-things-Lewis in the hope that you know just what chapter I need to reread.

As the youngsters say, I am "taking a shot" and hoping for the best. Thank you so much for your time. I am keeping my fingers crossed.

Responses from our members:

Response one: "Although I have never been much of a drinker, I think the term for leftover liquor is the 'heel.' There is a reference to the custom and perhaps even the word 'heel' in *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones."

Response two: "The liquor left at the bottom of the glass after drinking is called a 'heel-tap.' In the 19th century, 'take off your heel-tap!' was a toast-master's injunction to drain one's glass, according to the *Partridge Dictionary of Historical Slang*. But I don't know where in *Work of Art* the word appears."

I jumped out of my kitchen chair and pumped my fist in the air. I am reading the 1934 Collier and Son edition. Chapter 15 (page 197) follows the death of Tansy Quill. Myron is now in New York, starting at the Westward Ho! under Mark Elphinstone. Five pages in, in the paragraph beginning "It wouldn't hurt you a bit!" Mark Elphinstone goes on to say that, what he has gained from all his years of hotel keeping, is

"...confirmation of my suspicion that all my waiters drink the heeltaps of cocktails..."

I knew it was in there somewhere. Do send my profuse thanks to those who answered your post and let them know that it was indeed in that book. Have a lovely weekend. You have my gratitude for taking such pains with my "silly little question." I have enjoyed this and I hope it provided you with a moment's amusement. Do please thank those who answered you and tell them where to find the passage.

SINCLAIR LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

John Weaver's *Evangelicals and the Arts in Fiction: Portrayals of Tension in Non-Evangelical Works since 1895* (McFarland, 2013) includes a chapter, "Romantic Realism: The Damnation of Evangelicalism" (37–64) discussing Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* as foundational texts in talking about the artist's relationship to evangelicalism. Both comment on the anti-aesthetic nature of evangelical belief, with the former more sympathetic to evangelicals than Lewis, who sees art and evangelicalism as diametrically opposed. "No artistic work, with the possible exception of *Inherit the Wind*, has done more to shape the contemporary perception of evangelicals than the novel of *Elmer Gantry*" (51). Weaver contends that Lewis provides a "fairer depiction of evangelical life" (52) than *Inherit the Wind* or *The Handmaid's Tale* because "he took evangelical belief seriously" (54). Elmer comes from a poor, rural background, and "For Lewis, it was this material poverty, when combined with the materialism of the twenties, that led to the aesthetic and cultural bankruptcy of the modern evangelical church" (54). In essence, Weaver contends that in Lewis's novel, "The art of conservative religious politics...is the art of condemning art" because the aesthetic experience allows individuals to "transcend their social limitations" (61).

An area of Harlem Renaissance studies that has until now been ignored is explored in Carla Kaplan's *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance* (HarperCollins, 2013). Although many of the white men associated with the Harlem Renaissance have been written about, their female contemporaries, known generically as Miss Anne, have not. Kaplan redresses this balance through an examination of some of the white women who embraced the "race spirit" of Harlem. She provides brief biographies of many women, and focuses on six: the philanthropist Charlotte Osgood Mason whose

money supported writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes; socialite Nancy Cunard who edited the most comprehensive anthology of black writing of the era; writer Josephine Cogdell who married the black journalist George S. Schuyler; novelist and teacher Lillian E. Wood who wrote *Let My People Go* (1920); playwright Annie Nathan Meyer who wrote *Black Souls: A Play in Six Scenes*, first produced in 1932; and best-selling novelist Fannie Hurst, best known for *Imitation of Life* (1933). Woven into the presentation of these lives are discussions of passing, patronage, primitivism, publishing, and performance. Sinclair Lewis is mentioned in passing in connection with the question of black representation in the arts. *The Crisis*, an influential black magazine, ran a monthly series in 1926 in which white authors and publishers were invited to weigh in on how blacks should be portrayed in the arts. In addition to Lewis, other writers who contributed were H. L. Mencken, DuBose Heyward, Vachel Lindsay, Sherwood Anderson, and Julia Peterkin.

Josep M. Armengol's "Embodying the Depression: Male Bodies in 1930s American Culture and Literature," in *Embodying Masculinities: Towards a History of the Male Body in U.S. Culture and Literature* (31–48), edited by Armengol (Peter Lang 2013), considers the literary criticism of Michael Gold in view of the distinctions Gold makes "between working-class virility and leisure-class effeminacy" (36), mainly through his essay "Proletarian Realism," published in *The New Masses* in 1930. Gold, best known today for his working-class memoir *Jews without Money* (1930), praised writers such as John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, James T. Farrell, Sinclair Lewis, and Clifford Odets because they wrote about working class and class conflicts, while he derided Henry James and Thornton Wilder for being part of a "feminine" tradition because their writing was effete and genteel.

Ann Brigham's "Sinclair Lewis's *Free Air* and the 'Voyage into Democracy,'" in *American Road Literature* (Salem, 2013: 101–21) argues that the new mobility offered by the automobile early in the twentieth century provided for a more democratic mixing of classes. This mobility also meant that both travelers and the people they came into contact with would receive an education about each other, contributing to an American national identity. Brigham provides an overview of early travel by automobile, as well as discusses the fear among the upper classes that this physical mobility might also lead to too much contact with immigrants, lower class people, and hoboes. For example, early in the novel a German immigrant

tries to make money by creating a big mud hole that travelers would get stuck in. This happens to Claire Boltwood and her father, but they are rescued by Milt Daggett, a self-made Midwestern garage mechanic, who has aspirations to better himself. Eventually he follows Claire and her father across the country so that he can marry her, breaking down the class distinctions between them. As Milt says at the end, "if we stick together, then we have all society, we *are* all society!"

The atavistic tendency that exists in many men is the subject of Dale L. Walker's "Sinclair Lewis, Jack London, and Tarzan of the Apes" (*Jack London Foundation Quarterly Newsletter* 25.1: 1–6). By 1910, London had run out of inspiration and bought plot ideas from the young writer Sinclair Lewis. Although Walker dismisses these plots as "shopworn," London realized over \$1600 from the works he turned out of four of them. Walker discusses "When the World Was Young," about a civilized man with an atavistic alter ego that is not destroyed until he kills a grizzly bear and compares it to Tarzan's killing of the ferocious ape, Tublat.

The little-remembered novel *Kings Row* (1940) is discussed by Rachael Price in "'To Honor a Man': The Decline of Hegemonic Masculinity in Henry Bellamann's *Kings Row*" (*MidAmerica* 40 (2013): 16–28). A best-seller at the time, the novel is probably best remembered for the film version starring Ronald Reagan who has his legs amputated after a terrible accident and yells, "Where's the rest of me?" "Though the novel itself appeared in the waning days of modernism, the village with which Bellamann presents us is distinctly Midwestern, at least by the standards of the day. While authors such as Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, and Sinclair Lewis gave us portraits of a rural Midwest full of corruption and hypocrisy, *Kings Row* is less of a cultural monolith" (17). Price argues that as the town becomes more developed, the "frontier masculinity" by which it was created diminishes. She mentions the older settlers in town who lament the loss of frontier values, and although she does not make the connection, there is a correspondence with the Champ Perrys of Gopher Prairie.

In "The Myth of the Midwestern 'Revolt from the Village,'" (*MidAmerica* 50: 39–85), Jon K. Lauck dissects the notion of the "Revolt from the Village" movement that has been popular with critics and calls for a reassessment so that voices from the Midwest are not muted by this paradigm. Arguing that Midwestern voices are complex, and citing examples from Lewis

and Sherwood Anderson, Lauck asks that we see the complete history of the region in order to appreciate the writings that come from there. He summarizes at length the work of critics who created this concept, including Carl Van Doren, Van Wyck Brooks, Frederick Lewis Allen, Henry Steele Commager, Mark Schorer, and Anthony Channell Hilfer. The “supposed rebels” of the “Revolt from the Village” movement such as Lewis, Masters, and Anderson, all rejected this interpretation of their work, and, Lauck argues, this means that scholars need to move past this idea in order to “see the Midwest and its complete history” (63).

Edward Dauterich’s “*Kingsblood Royal’s* Grand Republic: Sundown Town?” (*MidAmerica* 49: 65–81), situates the novel within the historical context of the “sundown town,” towns that “had policies of banning African Americans from their premises after dark” (66). Grand Republic is an example of one of these places [although usually the towns that are mentioned are smaller and can bar African Americans from town, while Grand Republic has a black section of town that Neil visits with some regularity] and also a stand-in for Duluth. Dauterich comments on the realism of Lewis’s novel, especially in light of the lynching of three African American circus workers in Duluth in 1920, after they were accused of rape. Although not the only reason, it certainly contributed to the very small percentage of African Americans who lived in Duluth through much of the twentieth century. At the end he calls for using literature, “particularly Lewis’s *Kingsblood Royal*, [to] be used to help students and scholars draw attention to problems that we may still be hiding from ourselves” (79).

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Paul Theroux, in the “Soul of the South” (*Smithsonian* July–August 2014: 91–118, 135–38), says about William Faulkner that he was “driven mad in the contradictions of the South, obstinate in his refusal to simplify or romanticize its history, resolute in mirroring its complexity with such depth and so many human faces.... No other region in America had a writer who was blessed with such a vision. Sinclair Lewis defined the Upper Midwest, and showed us who we were in *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry*, but he moved on to other places and other subjects” (110).

In the 1933 movie *Goodbye Again*, with Warren William and Joan Blondell, William plays a novelist who writes novels

that appeal to women. While practicing a speech that is anti-Freud, he attacks “hacking sentimentalists like Sinclair Lewis.” He claims that “Lewis has criticized me.” Later he says that the term “dull as dishwater has been changed to dull as Dreiser.”

In *Farther and Wilder: The Lost Weekends and Literary Dreams of Charles Jackson* (Knopf, 2013), author Blake Bailey reports that Sinclair Lewis thought highly of Jackson’s best-known novel *The Lost Weekend* (1944): “Sinclair Lewis, who knew whereof he spoke, found the novel brilliant on every level — ‘the only unflinching story of an alcoholic that I have ever read...as terrifying yet as absorbing as the real thing’ — and subsequently made a point of mentioning Jackson as one of the few American writers who showed promise of greatness” (127). The quote from Lewis was from a blurb on the jacket of the third hardback edition.

Kathleen Riley’s *The Astaires: Fred & Adele* (Oxford UP, 2012) is a fascinating look at Fred Astaire when he was a star on Broadway with his sister Adele, before he went to Hollywood and before she left show business to marry and move to England. In the Gershwin’s musical *Funny Face*, which they performed in on Broadway in 1927, the Astaires performed a number inspired by *Babbitt*. The song was “The Babbitt and the Bromide,” which was later performed by Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly in the MGM film *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945) and by Fred and Jack Lemmon in a Gershwin tribute in 1972. “The curious title was taken from Sinclair Lewis’s 1922 novel *Babbitt*, which satirized the vacuity and conformity of middle-class American life in the character of middle-aged realtor George F. Babbitt, and from a humorous essay by Gelett Burgess published in the *Smart Set* in 1906 and entitled ‘Are You a Bromide? Or, The Sulphitic Theory Expounded and Exemplified According to the Most Recent Researches into the Psychology of Boredom.’ Essentially, a bromide was an utterer of bromidiums—banalities or commonplaces. Thus, the personae assumed by Fred and Adele in the number meet at intervals of ten and twenty years and exchange the same sequence of meaningless patter in a state of complete self-absorption” (114).

Dana Andrews, the star of a number of noir films in the 1940s and 1950s, is the subject of a biography by Carl Rollyson, *Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews* (UP Mississippi, 2012). Although it gave me more information about Andrews than I really wanted to know, especially about his alcoholism and decline of his career, a point of interest for Lewis scholars is that

his father was a stern Baptist evangelist. Pastor Andrews was often criticized for paying more attention to the poor than his congregation. "Church minutes also reveal expulsions of members for 'gross immorality' and 'ungodly living.' A more supple or conniving preacher—a true Elmer Gantry—might well have smoothed over the church's internal struggle, which was taking place amidst a rapidly changing culture... Although Lewis's novel was not published until 1927, it accurately reflected an

early twentieth-century world in flux... CF [Andrews's father] was an absolutist, no doubt believing in what Lewis's novel characterized as 'the historic position of the Baptists as the one true Scriptural Church'" (26). Dana Andrews aspired to becoming a writer before he became a successful actor. "He admired Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* but was bothered because the author is 'foolishly radical in his desire for reality. He takes too large a discount off of man's higher emotions'" (53).

—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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AUGUST MISCELLANY 2014

75. Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925. \$7,500.

First edition. Advance review copy with publisher's rubber stamp on front free endpaper: "To be published / Mar 5 1925 / Harcourt, Brace & Co." Tiny tear at edge of flyleaf. Else a near fine book in a very good to near fine dust jacket with restoration at edges. One of the scarcest of the Pulitzer Prize novels to find in dust jacket.

JUNE MISCELLANY 2014

69. Lewis, Sinclair. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1933. \$150.

First edition. A near fine copy in dust jacket, faintly tanned at spine panel with a tiny tear to top of rear panel.

70. —. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1934. \$250.

First edition. Fine book in a fine bright dust jacket with a couple of tiny closed tears.

71. —. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, 1949. \$150.

First edition. Some light soiling to page edges. Otherwise fine in dust jacket.

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CATALOGUE 8

53. Lewis, Sinclair. *Kingsblood Royal*. New York: Random House, 1947. \$125.

First edition. A near fine copy of the book with minor discoloration along board edges and a small spot on the rear board. In a very good + dust jacket with minor wear at the spine ends and in the corners, but generally clean and complete. An early work on racial equality, inspired by the "Sweet Trials" where an African American doctor was acquitted of murder charges after defending himself and his family from a mob attempting to force him out of a white neighborhood.

54. —. *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928. \$750.

First edition. A fine copy of the book, clean and unread, in a near fine dust jacket. Jacket with a small tear and chip at lower edge of front panel and minor wear at spine ends and corners, but remarkably bright and fresh. Lewis's humorous portrait of an "ordinary Joe" with all of his faults and foibles.

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