

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWENTY-FOUR, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2015

DEATH, HOME, AND HOUSE IN 1920s MATERIALISTIC AMERICA

Wisam Chaleila
KU Leuven, Belgium

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the death of the idea of home in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922). Lewis's anxiety concerning "homes" is outlined in the examples he offers in these novels. While the homes he presents signify a set of American values derived from Puritanism, as houses they signal the emptying out of these same values. In both novels, the typical American home, which symbolizes solid qualities such as austerity, morality, and well-founded marriage, is defunct. Instead, it is diminished by materialism. In addition, houses symbolize the social and financial status of a person: big, luxurious, fancy houses full of material yet void of life. Homes, however, epitomize the past, legacy, and family. Unable to recognize themselves in their homes, the protagonists escape; they seek a substitute in nostalgia for the past, the communal clan, or a material way of life. Nonetheless, they are dissatisfied as a result of the calamities that these substitutes imply. A "house is not a home" occurs because of mass production and industrialization that typified America in the early twentieth century, particularly in the 1920s.

HOUSE (SPACE) VERSUS HOME (PLACE)

The theme of houses is not new. According to Joseph Uργο, houses occupy a prominent place in American literature, a reflection of the American culture that is "full of references to houses" (27). Nonetheless, as interesting as this may seem, the

—————Death, Home, and House *continued on page 4*



Members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and friends gathered to empty the artifacts from the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center. Pictured above (from left) are John Olson, Dave Simpkins, Foundation President Jim Umhoefer, Pat Lewis, Roberta Olson, Colleen Steffes and Joyce Lyng.

Photo by John Steffes

SINCLAIR LEWIS CENTER CLOSES: MUSEUM ARTIFACTS NOW SCATTERED THROUGHOUT TOWN

Dave Simpkins
Sauk Centre Herald

It was a bittersweet day for members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation as they packed up and moved their historic belongings from the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center after 42 years of telling the story of Minnesota's greatest author.

Harry Sinclair Lewis graduated from Sauk Centre High School in 1902 and Yale in 1908. He soon began writing best-selling novels. His best-selling books, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth* would make him the Babe Ruth of literature in the 1920s, leading him to gain

—————Sinclair Lewis Center Closes *continued on page 14*

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation is hoping to work with the city of Sauk Centre to find a new place for a Sinclair Lewis Museum, ideally in downtown Sauk Centre. The Sinclair Lewis Society encourages our members to support the Sinclair Lewis Foundation as well, either through membership or through support of the relocation. Their address is P.O. Box 25, Sauk Centre, MN 56378.

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 1 Death, Home, and House in 1920s
Materialistic America
by Wisam Chaleila
- 1 Sinclair Lewis Center Closes:
Museum Artifacts Now Scattered
Throughout Town
by Dave Simpkins
- 3 George Babbitt and Almus Pickerbaugh
as Representatives of Standardized Society
by Narine Zakaryan and Ann Yeganyan
- 5 Picturing the Story: A Review of *Magazine
Illustrators of Sinclair Lewis's Short Fiction:
A Case History of Early 20th Century
Popular Art*
by Bob Ruggiero
- 14 In Memoriam: Katie Broman and Roberta Parry

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Contributors
- 4 New Members
- 18 Sinclair Lewis Scholarship
- 19 Sinclair Lewis Notes
- 20 Sauk Centre News
- 22 Letters to the Editor
- 23 Collector's Corner

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter is published twice a year with help from the Publications Unit of the English Department at Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

Editor: Sally E. Parry

Publications Unit Director: Steve Halle

Production Director: Holms Troelstrup

Intern: Erica Young

Please address all correspondence to: Sinclair Lewis Society, c/o Sally E. Parry, Department of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240

OFFICERS OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY

PRESIDENT

Frederick Betz
Southern Illinois University
at Carbondale

SECRETARY-TREASURER

Robert L. McLaughlin
Illinois State University

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ted Fleener
Waterloo [Iowa] Public Schools

George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

Quentin Martin
University of Colorado–Colorado Springs

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS

John-Paul Sinclair Lewis
Author

Patricia Lewis
Sinclair Lewis Foundation

Richard Lingeman
Author, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*

Joyce Lyng
Sinclair Lewis Foundation

GEORGE BABBITT AND ALMUS PICKERBAUGH AS REPRESENTATIVES OF STANDARDIZED SOCIETY

Narine Zakaryan and Ann Yeganyan
Yerevan State University, Armenia

Though nearly a century has passed from the time that Sinclair Lewis wrote *Main Street*, discussions concerning his life and his art are still ongoing. Some literary critics try to fix his real place in American literature with the social novel or the social-problem novel. For example, John Updike writes in the *New Yorker*: “The one place he did not scour for dope was within himself. The women and the venues of his life left traces in his imagination, and certain characters speak his mind more than others, but his novels took their inspiration from a sociological topic rather than a confessional or self-exploratory impulse” (79). Likewise, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* characterizes Lewis as an “ingenious satirist of the American middle class, mimicking its speech and actions with what seems to be photographic realism but is actually more or less good-humored caricature” (Hart 425).

Lewis’s writing is very representative of the social novel genre because his novels confront a whole range of problems concerning the American middle class of his time. Within this genre Lewis has managed to make up a real assembly of typical figures, especially men who are either members of the standardized society or rebelling figures striving against standardization. M. H. Abrams defines the social novel as a type of novel that “emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events; ... it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform” (193), a definition that coincides with Lewis’s creative activity and intentions. Mark Schorer, one of Lewis’s biographers, comments on how the literary establishment has dealt with his writing. “Most of our best critics, when they have not ignored his work entirely, have assailed it for certain philistine attitudes that infected it, but either they did not analyze it as art or they have treated him as ‘a publicist in fiction’ whose work cannot sustain that kind of analysis” (1).

Lewis’s figures are true representatives of the middle class: people who separately are professionals or members of small social groups but together represent the whole galaxy of the middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Gore Vidal wrote in the *New York Review of Books*, Lewis “had a wide repertory of characters—types—and he was constantly shifting in and out of characters” (14). Although Lewis’s characters can be studied in a number of ways, one of the most useful divisions is given by Hone: “Broadly speaking, Lewis’s heroes may be divided into two groups: the ‘philistines’ and the ‘rebels’” (9). The philistines are the agents of the standardized society, while the rebels are those who mentally stand above the rest. They try to make some steps to reform society, but are usually defeated and accept their defeat. The rebellious characters of Lewis are mostly aware of the forces of standardization. Martin Arrowsmith, in thinking about his failure as the head of the Department of Public Health of Nautilus, says: “It’s my own fault. I can’t go out and soft-soap the people and get their permission to help keep them well. And I won’t tell them what a hell of an important thing my work is—that I’m the one thing that saves the whole lot of ’em from dying immediately. Apparently an official in a democratic state has to do those things. Well, I don’t!” (263–64). At first Arrowsmith didn’t know much about standardization and fought against it quite actively. But as soon as he realized its force, he gives up the fight and moves on (and this happens to many of Lewis’s rebelling characters), accepting his inability to change the culture.

Among the typical representatives of Lewis’s “philistine” heroes are George Babbitt in *Babbitt* and Almus Pickerbaugh in *Arrowsmith*. In both cases the author begins the presentation of his characters from their appearance, as if he wanted to show that even their outer look coincides with the role they

————— George Babbitt *continued on page 15*

CONTRIBUTORS

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

Thanks to Debbie Carter, Wisam Chaleila, Sean C. Denniston, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Ron Miller, Susan O’Brien, Charles Pankenier, Bob Ruggiero, Dave Simpkins, Ann Yeganyan, and Narine Zakaryan.

Death, Home, and House *continued from page 1*

houses I prefer take on another dimension: that of the materialism (masquerading as mass production, modernity, industrialization, and capitalism) of twentieth-century America, especially when this is connected with the dissolution of the home.

The difference between house and home entails connecting the home with identity, legacy, and family, whereas the house is presented as merely a structure. These definitions of the house and the home remain impractical if we do not link them to “place” and “space.” There is a need to examine these two terms because it is impossible to ignore the place or space within which human relations transpire and interact. Therefore, the repetitive pattern of the home-house theme in these novels inevitably requires a genuine scrutiny.¹ My concern is not the topographic aspect of place and space or spatial notions, which Plato called *khôra*, but rather something closer to Aristotle’s *topos*. *Khôra* is a space that carries only the spatial sense of the word, whereas *topos* is a place (Algra 35–36). Bearing these definitions in mind, we realize that *khôra* is closer to the house, whereas *topos* can be linked to the home—something that embodies memories, rootedness, and nostalgia. Embracing this theory, then, we can also call the home a place and the house a space.

The protagonists of the novels neither experience the feeling of rootedness nor that of belonging to a home because they are either forced to leave their first home and/or because they move consistently and restlessly among different houses. According to Glynis Breakwell, once an individual or a group of individuals alter a space into a place via direct reciprocal action and reaction, it becomes a vital part of their self and identity (32–33). Thus, place enhances identity, and in return the individuals feel commitment to the place that extends to an obligation to protect it, and by so doing they protect their “self.”²

PURITANISM VERSUS THE “DEATH” OF VALUES

The connection between homes and Puritanism is traced in both novels. One Puritan value the US government was trying to revive in the 1920s was temperance. At first, teetotalism or temperance was voluntary and advocated for by organizations such as the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, which started in 1826.³ Jon Sterngass argues that temperance was associated with materialistic concerns: “The prohibitory laws of the 1850s reflected the alarm of middle-class Protestants

made uneasy by the social and cultural changes brought by capitalism and the Industrial Revolution” (393).

The desire for reviving temperance was renewed during the Second Industrial Revolution,⁴ particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century. On November 18, 1918, the temporary Wartime Prohibition Act was ratified. One year later, on October 28, 1919, the Volstead Act, also known as the National Prohibition Act, was passed, with enforcement starting on January 16, 1920 (Welskopp 31).

The value of temperance is evident in *Main Street* just as the Prohibition Act is recurrent in *Babbitt*. Babbitt, who ostensibly supports Prohibition, invites his friends to a party and buys a bottle of gin: “obtaining alcohol under the reign of righteousness and prohibition” (106). Later, he associates with people whose lives are “dominated by suburban bacchanalia of alcohol” (339). Likewise, in *Main Street*, Carol was “taken to a certified Studio Party,” where she is exposed to beer, cigarettes, and bobbed hair (9).

Puritan-like characters would call fox-trotting immoral.⁵ In *Main Street*, Lewis has Mrs. Champ Perry (a pioneer) draw a comparison between dancing in the past and the present. She says that they “used to dance modest,” but today young people Turkey Trot, hugging each other (136). She maintains that most dance places will still “manage pretty well” because immodest girls who are foreigners are not welcome there. Here, we note the American anxiety regarding the new values that invaded America. Typically, preserving the past is one of the primary goals for Mrs. Perry who believes that she, like other citizens, would not want “to see the town ... look like nothing but some Dutch story-book and not a bit like the place we loved” (136). In addition, reading the memoirs of Mrs. Mahlon Black, a pioneer who settled in 1848, Carol is exposed to the Puritan point of view concerning dancing: “We used to waltz and dance contra dances. None of these new jigs and not wear any clothes to speak of. We covered our hides in those days; no tight skirts like now. You could take three or four steps inside our skirts and then not reach the edge” (151). Mrs. Bogart, Carol’s neighbor, also criticizes these dances: “These dances they have at the lodges are the worst thing that ever happened

Death, Home, and House *continued on page 6*

NEW MEMBERS

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

Linda Shanley
Fontana, CA

Bruce Corsino
Reston, Virginia

PICTURING THE STORY: A REVIEW OF *MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATORS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS'S SHORT FICTION: A CASE HISTORY OF EARLY 20TH CENTURY POPULAR ART* BY SAMUEL J. ROGAL. EDWIN MELLEN PRESS, 2014

Bob Ruggiero

You wouldn't know it today by their scarce appearances on newsstands or in the mailboxes of an ever-dwindling number of subscribers, but for decades the "general interest" magazine was a viable and hugely successful media form.

Titles like the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Red Book*, *Hearst's International*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *McClure's* were frequent guests on coffee tables all over America, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.

And, as Samuel Rogal notes in this book, their many varied eventual destinations included everything from stately homes, apartments, and libraries to rural farmhouses, schools, and offices. In addition to content on recent news and history, feature articles, and how-to pieces, many of them also carried short stories and works of literary fiction.

The authors of many of those pieces were often better known as novelists, who for various reasons either sought work in those pages or were solicited by editors looking to add some luster to their magazines.

In turn, authors found an outlet for their work that went to a huge number of readers. It would keep their names out there in between their books, or—frankly—simply offered some quick cash as they churned out prose for which the short story was an ideal vehicle.

Sinclair Lewis was no exception to this practice.

"When I think how *easily* I can make money and praise by magazine stories," Rogal quotes Lewis saying in a 1915 letter to book reviewer Gordon Ray Young. He also notes that the "easy money" aspect could be viewed as a sort of revenge for any magazine's poor review of one of his novels.

"It makes me sore as hell to read the reviews of *The Trail of the Hawk* in the New York papers," the letter continues. "Reviews of a book I worked on like *hell* for nearly two years, dismissed in a quarter of a column of easy comment."

As per usual practice, editors commissioned illustrations to accompany the fiction—both to break up the blocks of text and provide visual accompaniment to the narrative in the form of sketches of the story's characters or major scenes.

And though he posits the theory that Lewis himself didn't really care whose illustrations accompanied his text or what they showed, Rogal introduces readers to the 68 artists (63 known, five unsigned) who illustrated Lewis's fiction of 94

stories, which appeared in 25 different publications.

An addendum notes Lewis's additional magazine work which appeared without graphic blandishment.

Rogal notes that these illustrators (who usually got a smaller credit line than the author, if at all) could also be "serious" artists and painters who took the assignments for a quick buck—and perhaps didn't want their name associated with the more "lowbrow" magazine work.

He also adds that a story's illustrations usually appeared on the initial or main pages of the story's content and not their jump pages. This so as not to have the illustrations compete for eye attention with the magazine's advertisers pitching their products like soap, baking powder, and toothpaste.

The book includes entries on all the artists, including biographical information, notation of other non-Lewis work, and often very detailed descriptions of the illustrations themselves, down to their positioning on the page.

Some of the artists most associated with illustrating Lewis's work—whether for frequency or impact—include Alfred Charles Parker, Gordon Hope Grant, Tony Sarg, Henry Patrick Raleigh, James Montgomery Flagg, and Rose O'Neill.

Of those, at least two would find greater fame in literary, art, and popular culture.

Flagg would also illustrate P. G. Wodehouse "Jeeves" stories for *Collier's*. But his most famous and lasting work would be in creating Uncle Sam of the familiar "I Want YOU" military recruitment posters used in World Wars I and II (which he based on his own visage). And O'Neill was the originator of the popular, wide-eyed "kewpie" doll artwork.

However, the work has one glaringly obvious weakness: This book about illustrators doesn't contain a single illustration.

This unfortunate aspect doesn't allow the reader to compare and contrast the illustrators' styles or see how they brought Lewis's prose to life. Whether the exclusion was on purpose or simply due to logistical or copyright issues, it was a hugely missed opportunity.

Nonetheless, Rogal should be given ample credit for compiling such a detailed and interesting work to Lewis scholars and admirers. It shines the spotlight on a nook and cranny of the career of Sinclair Lewis often overlooked, but still crucial to understanding and appreciating the man's bibliography. ✍

Death, Home, and House *continued from page 4*

to this town, lot of young men squeezing girls and finding out” (186). In *Babbitt*, similar “scandalous” dances are censured: “[girls] danced cheek to cheek with the boys” (228).

Another example of lost morals is demonstrated by Beecher Ingram, a minister who preaches “free love” and “sedition” in a theater or what Zilla (Babbitt’s friend’s wife) calls the “House of Satan” (307). Obviously, such labeling of the theater (that is also a consequence of modernity) as “sinful” or “Satan’s” indicates the Puritan beliefs held by the speaker.⁶

HOUSES AND DEATH

A recurring element in the novels discussed is the death of the American home. In *Babbitt* the narrator repeatedly underlines the changes that befall the American family in “the barbarous twentieth century,” as social status is determined by the “family’s motor” just as “the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family” (74). In point of fact, traditions and legacy are replaced by a yardstick; therefore, true homes no longer exist. Instead, they are replaced by houses, which embody this death. Either the American home-place is under threat and should be protected to preserve its merits, or it is actually dead, and its death entails such negative consequences that it should be reestablished. In either way, an air of desolation runs through *Babbitt*. Houses, though prosperous and lavish, are depicted as comfortless and cold. In them, people feel discontented, lonely, and bored. Babbitt sells houses “for more than people could afford to pay” (2). In contrast to his real feelings, Babbitt publicly gives a speech quoting Chum Frink’s poem: “never more I want to roam; I simply want to be back home” (163). To be more persuasive, he uses part of the sentimental song “Home, Sweet Home” twice: the first for advertising purposes (38) and the second quoting Frink (186). Thus, he cheapens the emotional aspect of the home. It is not that Babbitt is unaware of the difference between house and home, but the utilization of these two terms in such a dishonest way underscores the commercial element that stamps the language. To put it another way, vocabulary is molded in accordance with the sphere of activity, in this case “selling,” and thus words lose their original meaning and distinctive nature. While Babbitt commercializes the idea of “home” by “selling” it to others, he does not really believe in this idea himself. He feels that his own house “was not a home” (15).

In the 1920s the early nineteenth-century sentimental ballad “Home, Sweet Home” became extremely popular and was used in various ways. It was sometimes a part of the fads and crazes that swept over America. For example, one Indiana school student “made headlines by chewing 40 sticks of gum

while singing ‘Home, Sweet Home’ and, between stanzas, chugging a gallon of milk” (Drowne and Huber 147). The song also served in promotions. For example, the Department of Commerce “worked with private philanthropic organizations—Better Homes for America—to promote the ideal of homeownership.” The organization produced a film entitled *Home, Sweet Home* (Rome 23). Unsurprisingly, the song was considered an emblem of “racial longing” of the American people by President Herbert Hoover:

There is a wide distinction between homes and mere housing. Those immortal ballads, “Home, Sweet Home”; “My Old Kentucky Home”; and the “Little Gray Home in the West,” were not written about tenements or apartments. They are the expressions of racial longing which find outlet in the living poetry and songs of our people. They were written about an individual abode, alive with the tender associations of childhood, the family life at the fireside, the free out of doors, the independence, the security, and the pride in possession of the family’s own home—the very seat of its being.

These lines clash with the homes drawn in the novels. In *Main Street* the concern of losing the home is evident. Hoping to create a new family and home to replace those she lost when her father died, Carol marries Dr. Will Kennicott. However, she meets only intimations of death. Upon reaching Gopher Prairie, her new town, she confronts a sample of the town’s “unadventurous people with dead eyes” (27). She realizes that this is the beginning of her end and that of her world, and instead of starting a new life in a new place, the process of her metaphorical death begins. She finds herself in a threefold grave: the town, her house, and her room.

Encountering Gopher Prairie for the first time, Carol describes its houses as “unprotected and unprotecting” (26). She does not feel safe. This town cannot be her home, and she wants to escape the minute she arrives. Admittedly, she is happy that she has her “own shrine” and that she does not have to live in “Other People’s Houses” any more (29). Nevertheless, she finds the house she has come to live in lugubrious and airless. In this house she feels suffocated. It is no coincidence that so many words that invoke death are used to render both the town’s houses and Carol’s house. Indeed, a deathlike spirit prevails during the welcome party held in the house the Clarks have only recently built: “in the hallway and the living-room, sitting in a vast prim circle as though they were attending a

Death, Home, and House *continued on page 7*

Death, Home, and House *continued from page 6*

funeral, she saw the guests” (40–41), who “sat up with gaiety as with a corpse” (46). Contrary to homes that preserve one’s history and roots, houses are perishable. Obviously, “death” in this sense is not to be taken literally, but rather figuratively which exemplifies the protagonists’ anxiety concerning the place.

Like all of Gopher Prairie, so too the inside of Carol’s new house and room resembles a grave.

So many of the phrases indicate death: “In hallway and front parlor she was conscious of dinginess and lugubriousness and airlessness” (30), “She was alone in this house, this strange still house, among the shadows of dead thoughts and haunting repressions,” “gravestone,” “condemning her to death by smothering,” “Choke her—choke her—smother her” (31). Such phrases evoke the spirit of lifelessness that prevails in the house. Whereas the house is supposed to mean a new start, a newborn family, and happiness, it in fact conjures up elements of subjugation, stillness, and asphyxiation. The depiction of Carol’s house as an epitome of death does not exclude her bedroom: “She suddenly saw the foot-board of the bed as the foot-stone of the grave of love” (168). The airlessness of the house and of the room implies suffocation and cessation. In the following paragraphs we see that “death” takes another form: that of mass production, especially industrial repetition.

COPIES, SAMENESS, AND MASS PRODUCTION

According to Frederick Allen, writers such as Dreiser, Cather, and Lewis were highly outspoken in arguing against romanticizing the past, lamenting a lost civilization, and advocating a renewed moral awareness. They fought materialism, mass production, and pointless consumption (199). In *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, Lewis expresses such anxiety by denouncing houses—one face of capitalism.

Judged by their interior, most houses look the same and are mere copies of each other. This is the result of mass



Main Street in Sauk Centre, MN

production, globalization, urbanization, and relentless marketing. Houses are only a reflection and an imitation; they are all copies of a non-existent, ideal original, the home (Baudrillard 87). Throughout *Babbitt*, Sinclair Lewis offers many examples of replicas to emphasize this fact and to show how the home becomes demeaned: “the house ... had, like all houses on Floral Heights, an altogether royal bathroom

of porcelain and glazed tile and metal sleek as silver” (5). Moreover, “Two out of every three houses in Floral Heights had before the fireplace a davenport, a mahogany table real or imitation, and a piano-lamp or a reading-lamp with a shade of yellow or rose silk,” and “Eight out of every nine Floral Heights houses had a cabinet phonograph” (91). The furniture in the room also evokes “samples in a shop, desolate, unwanted, lifeless things of commerce” (92). In this mode, homes have become houses that inside resemble hotels. The intimacy of a room that a home provides is nullified when it feels like a “very good room in a very good hotel” (14). Hence, the house suggests a feeling of displacement: one cannot settle down in such a house. Illustrating this point, *Babbitt* quotes Chum Frink’s poem approvingly, that when he stays at a hotel, he finds there everything that he would also have in his house, such as “the same news-stand, same magazines and candies grand, [and the] same smokes of famous standard brand” just as though he had never left his house (185–86). The theme of the similarity, if not sameness, extends to American towns, people, and culture in *Main Street*.

Nine-tenths of the American towns are so alike ... the same lumber yard, the same railroad station, the same Ford garage ... the boy in Arkansas displays just such a flamboyant ready-made suit as is found on just such a boy in Delaware, both of them iterate the same slang

Death, Home, and House *continued on page 8*

phrases from the same sporting-pages, and if one of them is in college and the other is a barber, no one may surmise which is which. (268)

Sameness is not only a fictional characteristic of American houses and life but a factual one stimulated by mass production and modernity: “As mass production came to dominate American life, consumer products took on a dreary sameness, and Americans began to look and live more and more alike” (Moss 127). Sameness was also promoted when between the years 1908 and 1927 the Model T Ford became the worldwide symbol of sameness and homogeneity in the booming automobile industry. Around the same time, Le Corbusier was the first architect to compare this mechanical apparatus with the production of houses. The narrator’s voice reflected in Carol’s psyche contradicts Le Corbusier’s proud phrasing of a house as a “*machine à habiter*” or a machine for living in (73). Unlike him, Carol is concerned about the fact that homes have turned into machine-houses. Namely, the mere depiction of the house as a mechanized production devalues this house-machine because it is identity-less, an equivalent to death.

Carol refers to the house she and her husband live in as “his house” (290) where his guests engage in “mechanical” talk and “mechanical music” takes place (265). Here, the word “mechanical” echoes the mechanization of the human spirit evocative of Søren Kierkegaard’s idea of soullessness, which he sees as the inevitable result of a materialist society that embraces the “cog in the machine” (qtd. in Dy 32).⁷

Unable to become mechanical like her husband’s guests, Carol both attempts to escape and work for change. Similarly, Babbitt’s feeling of spiritlessness and, remarkably, his escape, recall Gustav Landauer’s statement: “others who thirst for culture want to create socialism because they want to escape from the disintegration and misery of capitalism and its concomitant poverty, spiritlessness and coercion” (73).

One prominent consequence of capitalism portrayed in both novels is dehumanization. Naturally, the theme of the mechanization of humans emerges in the early twentieth century as the epoch is characterized by industrialization, mass industry, mass consumption, and mass media.⁸

DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE, CHILDREN, AND THE AMERICAN FATHER

The theme of death, ubiquitous in both novels, not only refers to the death of the home and the family but also to marriage as a uniting agency. Houses overshadow the life of the family within them and marital life becomes tenuous. In *Main*

Street Carol does not perceive her husband as a partner but as a stranger: she found in him “strangeness” and “slowness and insularity” (30). Disappointed, she discovers the “Lies about marriage” (29).

Carol’s and Myra’s (Babbitt’s wife) married lives are depicted as mechanical. The reason for this is connected to modernity, whereby the newly formed fast-paced society is overwhelmed by science, material ambitions, and prosperity. Even the simplest daily situations attest that marriage has become empty and superficial: when Babbitt kisses his wife, he does not “quite kiss her—he laid unmoving lips against her unflushing cheek” (23). Babbitt realizes that his life is pointless because he does not know what he wants. He understands that all that he already has—such as wealth, social position, travel, and servants—are not of prime importance. The sole solution for Babbitt, then, is escaping to the fairy girl of his dreams. With his family, Babbitt is confused, and he wonders why he cannot enjoy himself with them. When Myra returns home from a trip, he “was sorry that she was coming before he had found himself” (293). When involved immorally with another woman (Tanis), Babbitt remembers that his wife “had been bored by anything more affectionate than a farewell kiss” (333). Thus, he feels her reproach in contrast to Tanis whom he finds “unreproachful” (363). Ironically, he is entirely loyal to Tanis rather than to Myra.

The reversed roles of wife and mistress signify the unstable relationship of marriage and illustrate the shaky basis of the American home. Babbitt realizes that the place where he lives is a “house” whereas at Tanis’s he feels “that he had beautifully come home” (364). Later, seeking freedom, Babbitt realizes that he has been mistaken; thus, he leaves Tanis and attempts to find a new home. The houses that substitute for homes are void of emotions. These houses suggest tackiness, lost morals, and the loss of innocence that hit the American family in the 1920s, in what became known as the Roaring Twenties.⁹

In discussing the time period 1914–1932, William Leuchtenburg maintains that it is characterized by inconsistency, transformation, anxiety, and conundrum. Those years signify a restless turning point between the typically conventional, agrarian, nonmetropolitan, religious nation from before World War I and a mechanized, nonreligious, and urban country. There was a sudden transformation from an “oldstyle evangelical reformism” to a “newstyle urban progressivism.” The nation’s conundrums emerged due to the disinclination of Americans to reconcile themselves with their new America: “a

strong state, the dominance of the metropolis, secularization and the breakdown of religious sanctions, the loss of authority of the family, industrial concentration, international power politics, and mass culture” (Leuchtenburg 522).

Another theme that deserves a thorough analysis is that in both novels children are largely absent. Although both Carol and Will want children, Kennicott believes it is unwise to have children until he earns more money. Carol also thinks it is a crime to bring children into this hazardous world (85). This, as well as Kennicott’s endeavors to postpone building a new house, underscores the loss of the home: “We’ll have a new house in a couple of years, anyway” (68). In *Babbitt* children are absent in the sense that they are never home: “Verona escaped, immediately after dinner, with no discussion save an automatic ‘Why don’t you ever stay home?’ from Babbitt” (75). Babbitt even complains about the situation: “‘Nobody’s going to pass no slighting remarks on nobody,’ Babbitt observed, ‘not if they stay home . . . and mind their own affairs instead of hanging around a lot of poolrooms and soda-fountains and places where nobody’s got any business to be!’” (81).

Longing for his youth, Babbitt escapes to the world of fantasy in his dreams and sometimes in his real life. Babbitt’s escape emphasizes not only his loneliness in his house but also his nostalgia for his past life as a child. It is another world in contrast to the materialistic one—a world full of love and romance (2–3). In contrast, his relationship with his wife reflects the loss of intimacy. Thus, he slips away from the crowded house, from his friends, and from his wife (i.e., from the reality that he abhors) to the arms of the “so white” fairy (3). This desire for a place outside reality conveys the severity of displacement Babbitt feels, but at the same time it perhaps points to the narrator’s pessimism as to preserving the American home. Hence, it is suggested—through a not-so-perfect solution—that only in fantasy does a person feel at home.

Remarkably, the figure of the American father is so deficient that he is apt to become extinct. Such extinction is underscored psychologically (lost patriarchy) and physically (low fertility). Babbitt and his wife sleep in separate locations (he sleeps on the porch). Lewis does not mention the sleeping porch arbitrarily but intentionally: it is yet another indication of modernity which contributes to the ruin of the home. Likewise, Carol asks to have a room of her own—that is, to be physically separated from her husband (172). Such a sexless marital relationship indicates, first, a lack of reproduction. The new American families have “but two, one, or no children” (*Babbitt* 122), and second, a lack of manliness: the dysfunction of the American male. To emphasize his lack of virility

Babbitt is depicted as a child: he is called “Georgie boy” by his wife and he wears “faded baby-blue pajamas” (4). Myra is portrayed as “sexless as an anemic nun” (7), exactly like the virginal-cheeked Carol (112). These examples suggest the disappearance of American identity and selfhood.

The babyish quality in *Babbitt* and the scarcity of children in both novels indicate a loss of identity. At the same time, it indicates in broader ways the condition to which the typical American family has descended, with anxiety about the past and the future. It also highlights a certain dismay regarding the possibility of infecundity and dissolution of the American family, which is what the narrator/author tries to emphasize. This indistinctness of the American father figure is connected to the absence of children. American infertility projected in these works of fiction is actually borrowed from the real world. The article “Maternal Health and the Baby Boom” demonstrates the decline in American fecundity: “We find that the reduction in infant mortality is strongly associated with a reduction in fertility for the 1921–1928 birth cohorts in comparison to the 1911–1918 birth cohorts” (Albanesi and Olivetti 3). In another article, the authors maintain that “with few exceptions, fertility rates in the largest American municipalities declined through the 1920s and early 1930s” (Fox and Myrskylä 6).

One reason for such deficiency is materialism. In *Main Street* having children is directly connected to money, and in *Babbitt* their absence is associated with the wide range of possibilities offered by the new modern world (i.e., motors): “The automobile offered an almost universally available means of escaping temporarily from the supervision of parents and chaperones” (Allen 86).

In *Babbitt* it is obvious that the father’s role ceases to be governing; instead he has become impersonal and uninfluential, just like any other stranger: “Babbitt was no more conscious of his children than of the buttons on his coat-sleeves” (224). In a money-oriented world, sentiment is *bêtise*. Love, and having children, is overwhelmed by materialism. However, this awareness is not a modern one. In 1759 Adam Smith foresaw that “Society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection” (86).

THE PAST, NOSTALGIA, AND THE QUEST FOR A HOME

The protagonists’/narrator’s feeling that America as a place is turning into a space, partly due to rising immorality, evokes nostalgia for the past. Indeed, the best way to interpret this notion

is to investigate particular psychological theories. In 1915, Freud published “Mourning and Melancholia” in which he notes that mourning is a normal and healthy response to loss, by which the mourner reconciles himself to a new reality. Contrariwise, melancholia is a pathological symptom that indicates regression and the inability to proceed (244–46). The protagonists in these novels project a kind of melancholia that causes their discontent and their relentless search for escape. Their melancholia is connected to the space (houses) within which they exist and the insufficiency provided by this space. The desire to flee that emerges as a result of this melancholic condition encompasses also the element of time: the protagonists aspire for a different time from the present they already experience. They do not want to live in the unpredictable future, but in the past.

In this context, we see that Babbitt is always nostalgic, and this nostalgia allows him to distance himself from the present. Inside Babbitt’s house there is a connection between place and the past. Yet such a place indicates death. Babbitt’s Colonial room (present/space) is compared to his boyhood parlor (past/place); still, the room is “as negative, as a block of artificial ice” (death) (92). This connection entails a paradox. Despite the fact that the present room is more comfortable than his boyhood parlor, Babbitt always reverts to the past (i.e., his boyhood). Contemplation about his childhood is most likely to free him from the loneliness of his house: it results in him feeling “heavy with a lonely feeling which perplexed and frightened him” (94). However, when his wife suggests escorting him on a trip, “he did not wish to have her go with him” (94). This sentence shows that the reason for his loneliness is not physical (lack of people) but emotional. Thus home becomes a state of mind rather than a physical structure. Similarly, in *Main Street* Carol keeps yearning for the past, for her father, but with her husband she feels vulnerable: “It was not her husband to whom she wanted to run for protection—it was her father, her smiling understanding father, dead these twelve years” (97). Carol recalls the days when she used to live with her father, “remembered her father’s Christmas fantasies” (195). In contrast, Gopher Prairie residents do not maintain these traditions. An example of this is Will’s rather flippant reaction to Carol’s decorated Christmas tree: “Nice way to fix things, all right. What do you say we go down to Jack Elder’s and have a game of five hundred this afternoon?” (195). The American past is an integral part of the American identity and some Gopher Prairie citizens, like Carol, want to conserve it: “in the history of the pioneers was the panacea for Gopher Prairie, for all of America. . . . We must restore the last of the veterans to power and follow them on the backward path to the integrity of Lincoln” (150).

The protagonists’ concerns about the present echo those of many Americans around the turn of the twentieth century. Rapid-paced modernity at the turn of the twentieth century seemed to pose a threat to the identity and morality of the American people, and nostalgia was a way to stabilize the trembling ground under their feet. Fred Davis connects nostalgia to identity. The “process of change” is an experience that incorporates the peril of the unknown; therefore, it challenges the very existence of those undergoing it (32). Davis also notes that the new fast-paced world order raised the pulses of Americans. He depicts their predicament as “the good past/bad present contrast” (15). This description not only characterizes Babbitt’s paradoxical situation, torn between the past and the present, but also his clan. In the past he was an idealistic person who dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but he became a realtor instead. He wanted to defend the poor “against the Unjust Rich” (90), but he then aspires to become one of the Unjust Rich himself. The extreme alteration that overcomes Babbitt is motivated by materialism. Babbitt claims that he wishes he were a pioneer like his grandfather. However, he goes against this declaration when he considers that then he “wouldn’t have a house like this” (89). We note how Babbitt’s present materialism interferes with returning to the past and restoring the old values. The situation Babbitt finds himself in echoes Davis’s past/present contradiction.

The narrator’s unease toward modernity is further underscored by the portrayal of the Eathorne house. William W. Eathorne, the seventy-year-old president of the First State Bank of Zenith, comes from a long-established American family and represents the previous generations. His house symbolizes the declining American past and is one of the few houses left exemplifying the “memory” of the old “nice” parts of Zenith/America as most of the “castles of the testy Victorian tetrarchs are gone now or decayed into boarding-houses” (213). Eathorne’s house embodies the residues of America’s history and culture. However, Lewis uses phrases that also indicate their death: “The porch is like an open tomb,” “dyspeptic yellow,” “anemic towers,” “castiron ferns,” “frozen cascades,” and “stained-glass” (213). Against this is the faddy spirit of the twenties discussed by Frederick Allen in *Only Yesterday* (164–66). Accordingly, old ideas, including values and literature such as that of Shakespeare and Milton, are considered “junk” by the new generation, including Ted—Babbitt’s son (76).

The protagonists’ yearning for the past is also connected to their quest for a home, signified by mobility. This mobility

comes in two forms. The first takes the guise of voluntary movement from one place to another. The second is mandatory, which takes on the guise of escape. Unable to find her place, Carol continues to abscond both from situations and from people. She even begins to actually use the word: “She was startled to find that she was using the word ‘escape’” (229). Carol’s escapes are place/time-related: “She escaped from Main Street” (38). Later, she would “escape the coma of the Village Virus” (208); then, she “reflected that she might never escape from them” (229). Coming back to Gopher Prairie from a trip with her husband, she hardly recognizes it and even feels like a “stranger.” She decides that this too is “not a home for [her]” (416). In due course, Carol decides to leave Gopher Prairie alone. Kennicott calls her escape “running away” (401), but she defines her escape as “going away” (409). It is noticeable that sometimes the protagonists escape from their houses and at other times they escape from themselves. One explanation of the unsettledness and restlessness that characterize the protagonists of these novels is to be found in the ceaseless instability that Walter Lippmann saw as characteristic of the early 1900s. He claimed that modernity and capitalism made America a “carelessly classified universe” and that “we are unsettled to the very roots of our being” (177).

THE CLAN

Because family and home in the materialistic 1920s lose their earlier identities, they take on a new form: the clan. The clan, which disintegrates in the novels, does not necessarily refer to material status or degree of affluence, but to shared interests such as marriage, blood, and racial sameness. The club of good-fellowship, for instance, becomes Babbitt’s home and the “Fellow Boosters” become his family. Like good families, these boosters deal with one another rather than let all the good “money get outside of our happy famby” (258). There are two main country clubs in Zenith: the “Outing Golf and Country Club” to which Babbitt belongs and “the Tonawanda” (155). Being a member of a country club is as important for a businessman as wearing “a linen collar” (155). Belonging to a clan is a transformation of place (traditions, home, past) to space (wealth, house, present) under the auspices of the materialistic system. As a result, a collective identity emerges within the boundaries of this space, retransforming it to place.

In the new family of social belonging, people are tagged and labeled according to their affiliations: “the Boosters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or Red Men or Knights of Columbus” (188). In this context, emblems of mass

industry created by materialism and mentioned recurrently in *Babbitt* are buttons, pins, and badges. These emblems consume individual identity because they generate a certain collective identity that indicates one’s clan, tribe, circle, or class. By putting on and taking off so many symbols, a person’s identity becomes confused and nebulous rather than solid and distinctive. Babbitt, therefore, does not have one clear, definite viewpoint, but many: the Republican’s, the Presbyterian’s, and the real-estate broker’s.¹⁰

The clan created by society determines what Babbitt loves and what he hates. Although he does not actually play baseball, for example, he is convinced that he loves the game only because it is a custom of his clan and because this game is an “outlet for the homicidal and sides-taking instincts which Babbitt calls ‘patriotism’ and ‘love of sport’” (154). Even though he belongs to a clan, Babbitt does not feel at home; therefore, he attempts to find the home he wishes with others, including befriending agitators. When he abandons his clan, he is vehemently censured by them and is considered unfaithful. Vergil Gunch, Babbitt’s friend, tries to persuade him to change his ways and return to the right track, warning him against associating with the agitators who obviously affect Babbitt’s attitudes. Gunch maintains, moreover, that this is a war between “decency and the security of our homes” and “red ruin and those lazy dogs plotting for free beer” (347). Eventually Babbitt returns to the clan and becomes among the most fervent attackers of agitators and the “crimes of labor unions” (390). However, deep inside, Babbitt is still discontented. He claims that he will “run things and figure out things to suit myself—when I retire” (398). This attitude conveys Babbitt’s real feeling. That is, he is not fully convinced of the rightness of his return to his former ways. He does so only because the clan seems the closest to a home.

The incessant conflict between Carol and the town mirrors the home-house conflict. She tries to change Gopher Prairie’s residents but they also try to change her by resisting. This seemingly personal conflict is in fact a conflict within the clan. Because she holds different values than those of the town, she is perceived as an intruder. Although Carol is presented as a person who holds American values, Vida Sherwin, Gopher Prairie’s librarian, voices contrary values to those of Carol’s in a conversation about the American home and American ideals: “they’re sacred to me. Home, and children that need you . . . hearts of our nation, our state, our town” (65–66). Carol does not adopt Vida’s sentiments. The difference between Carol and Vida (who stands for Gopher Prairie’s ideals) is that the

latter is convinced that home and American virtues still exist and that duty calls for their protection, whereas Carol, like Babbitt, is certain that home and all it represents does not exist anymore; therefore she yearns for them in many ways: escape, nostalgia, and rebellion.

In conclusion, I have tried to impart a fresh outlook on the link between representations of materialism and the fictional structures of home and house in 1920s America—particularly in considering how the death of the American home is connected to the death/disappearance of American identity and family. The house, which symbolizes materialism, mass production, and capitalism, contributes to such death. By amalgamating historical facts and theory from various disciplines, the relationships between themes that are usually discussed separately or that are largely overlooked have been enhanced.

Notes

¹At the outset, I do realize that in order to present a solid interpretation of this notion, it is necessary to emphasize the place-space domain. There are many studies, each of which investigates these terms differently, that either relate them to other variables such as capitalism, politics, etc., or use space as place and vice versa.

²Other theorists propose different interpretations that do not situate place against space and home does not stand in opposition to house. One example is Gaston Bachelard, who dedicates a whole book to scrutinizing “space.” The problem with Bachelard’s wide-ranging study is that it deals with place as a synonym of space. Consequently, the house and the home are presented equivalently rather than distinctively.

³The idea of temperance progressed gradually during the nineteenth century. Following Neal Dow’s practice of temperance in 1827, “In Maine, a legislative committee headed by James Appleton decided in 1837 that the complete prohibition of alcohol was the best means of improving the state’s licensing laws. . . . In 1842, the city of Portland voted by a two-to-one margin (943 to 498) to stop the sale of alcohol. . . . The Maine law achieved nationwide fame and many states rushed to copy it” (Sternglass 393). In 1851 “Maine became the first state to outlaw the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. In the next four years, twelve states and territories followed Maine’s example and adopted prohibitory legislation. . . . By 1855, all of New England was ‘dry,’ as was New York, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, Delaware, and the Minnesota and Nebraska territories” (Sternglass 393).

⁴I refer here to mass production triggered by the Second Industrial Revolution 1870–1914 and following the process of electrification. See Mokyr.

⁵Puritans were against “Mixt” dancing, also known as Fox-trot, Horse trot, or Fish walk (animal dances), all of which emerged

from the Turkey Trot dance. See Erica Nielsen’s *Folk Dancing* (17). Here, I am referring to the dominance of mainline Puritan thought in 1920s America: “Mixt” dancing is illustrated as a promiscuous activity, a vice that contradicts the vestiges of Puritan thought inherent in many Americans (Knowles 190–91). Mixt dancing was viewed with disfavor by Puritans because they believed it induced promiscuity and thus violated the Seventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). In addition, according to James and Dorothy Volo, “Many Americans could not escape the view that the decay and degeneracy of cities was due to the immigrants themselves who seemed to tolerate—if not frequent—taverns, beer halls, saloons, dance halls, gambling establishments, and houses of ill repute with amazing disregard for traditional American standards of conduct” (11). It is worth noting that three-quarters of Americans born in 1920s America were Protestants (see Dillon and Wink 15).

⁶Zilla might be considered a resentful religious maniac. However, we cannot deny that the labeling of the theater as “House of Satan” or “Chapel of Satan” (Weaver 236) was generic among Protestant Americans, and this labeling represents a Puritan view: “This is the more remarkable because in both the theatre was for centuries worse than suspect: it was damned by the Puritans who ruled across each border and regarded the theatre as the house of Satan” (Cheney 470).

Beecher Ingram may be a fictional projection of Henry Ward Beecher, the notorious American minister who in 1872 had vehemently attacked free-love advocates such as Victoria Woodhull, whereas he himself was found to have committed adultery with his best friend’s wife (Rabban 29). Evidently, he did not preach free love, but practiced it while pretending to be against it.

⁷In 1909, Max Weber picked up the same “cog in the machine” theory and applied it to modernity camouflaged by bureaucracy: “The forward progress of bureaucratic mechanization is irresistible . . . then on this basis one can only say: away with everything but an official hierarchy which does these things as objectively, precisely, and ‘soullessly’ as any machine” (qtd. in Mayer 125–31). Then he demonstrates the effect of such modernity on human beings: “the performance of each individual is mathematically measured, each man becomes a little cog in the machine and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is whether he can become a bigger cog.”

⁸Charlie Chaplin conveys the reality of mechanization negatively in his 1936 film *Modern Times*. It takes place in a mechanized factory where Chaplin works for long exhausting hours and eventually, physically, turns into a cog in the machine he operates. Furthermore, mass production symbolized by the factory and the repetitive motion of the machines involves loss of identity and,

—————Death, Home, and House *continued on page 13*

equally, loss of individuality. The scene in which individuals are driven as a herd perfectly illustrates this notion. There is no place for rebellion in this matrix, and those who do rebel, such as the protagonists, are victimized and dispelled.

⁹See Allen for more information.

¹⁰At the beginning of the twentieth century lapel badges had become one of the means to spread advertisements and many commercial manufacturers ordered them for their employees (Bailey and Crawford xii–xiv). Buttons and pins frequently conveyed the wearer’s social or political position in the 1920s: Ted wears “a high-school button, a class button, and a fraternity pin” (20).

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 1944. New York: Verso, 1997. 120–67.
- Albanesi, Stefania, and Claudia Olivetti. “Maternal Health and the Baby Boom.” Stanford U. 2009. April 4, 2013. <http://goo.gl/tVt9Z3>.
- Algra, Keimpe. *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- Allen, Frederick Lewis. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920’s*. 1931. New York: Perennial, 2000.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. 1958. Boston: Beacon, 1994.
- Bailey, Chuck, and Bill Crawford. *Texas Political Memorabilia: Buttons, Bumper Stickers, and Broadsides*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2007.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Trans. Sheila Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994.
- Breakwell, Glynis. *Coping with Threatened Identities*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Cheney, Sheldon. *The Theatre: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting, and Stagecraft*. London: Longman, 1929.
- Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press, 1979.
- Dillon, Michele, and Paul Wink. *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2007.
- Drowne, Kathleen, and Patrick Huber. *The 1920s: American Popular Culture through History*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004.
- Dy, Manuel B., Jr. “Existentialism and Man’s Search for Meaning.” *Philosophy of Man: Selected Readings*. 2nd ed. Ed. Manuel B. Dy, Jr. Makati City, Philippines: Goodwill, 2001. 31–35.
- Fox, Jonathan, and Mikko Myrskylä. “Urban Fertility Responses to Local Government Programs: Evidence from the 1923–1932 U.S.” *Demographic Research* 32.16 (2013): 487–532. March 5, 2013. <http://goo.gl/tVt9Z3>.
- Freud, Sigmund. “Mourning and Melancholia.” *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 244–46.
- Hoover, Herbert. “425—Address to the White House Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership.” Dec. 2, 1931. *The American Presidency Project*. University of California Santa Barbara. June 11, 2013. <http://goo.gl/77X5fD>.
- Knowles, Mark. *Tap Roots: The Early History of Tap Dancing*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.
- Landauer, Gustav. *For Socialism*. St. Louis: Telos, 1978.
- Le Corbusier. *Vers une architecture*. Paris: G. Cres, 1924.
- Leuchtenburg, William E. *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922.
- . *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914. *Internet Archive*. September 11, 2013. <http://goo.gl/aXlsZC>.
- Mayer, J. P. “Max Weber on Bureaucratization in 1909.” *Max Weber and German Politics*. 1944. London: Routledge, 1998. 125–31.
- Mokyr, Joel. “The Second Industrial Revolution, 1870–1914.” Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 1998. May 23, 2013. <http://goo.gl/YGHEZ9>.
- Moss, Richard J. *Golf and the American Country Club*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2001.
- Nielsen, Erica. *Folk Dancing*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011.
- Rabban, David M. *Free Speech in Its Forgotten Years, 1870–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Rome, Adam. *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 1759. Ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984.
- Sterngass, Jon. “Maine Law.” *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia*. Eds. Jack Blocker, David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrell. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003. 393–95.
- Urgo, Joseph. *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1995.
- Volo, James, and Dorothy Denneen Volo. *Family Life in 19th-Century America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007.
- Weaver, Richard L., II. “The Lyceum Movement in Kalamazoo 1835–1860: Cultural Heart of Mid-Michigan.” *In Search of Justice: The Indiana Tradition in Speech Communication*. Eds. Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987. 229–44.
- Welskopp, Thomas. “Prohibition in the United States: The German-American Experience, 1919–1933.” *Bulletin of the GHI* 53 (2013): 31–53. May 2013. http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu053/bu53_031.pdf >. ❧

Sinclair Lewis Center Closes *continued from page 1*

three Pulitzer Prize nominations and the first Nobel Prize for Literature ever won by an American. The Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center has honored and displayed Lewis's achievements since 1973, drawing visitors from all over the world. Joyce Lyng has been an active Foundation member and a gracious museum guide from the beginning. She has met many authors, scholars, and students visiting the museum to study Lewis. "I really enjoyed giving Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich and his wife a tour but I was so nervous," said Lyng.

Believing the property would be better off on the tax rolls, the City of Sauk Centre has the property near I-94 up for sale, leaving the Foundation looking for a new location.

Foundation President Jim Umhoefer said, "I don't worry about leaving this building, it needs work, but it's hard to leave this beautiful location."

For now, artifacts will be spread across the city. Furniture and photographs went to the Lewis boyhood home on Sinclair Lewis Avenue. The bronze bust of Lewis went to the Bryant Library that his parents helped build and where he gave talks and sent his books. The Palmer House Hotel took some displays and the city will hold the rest of the collection in its storage.

Sauk Centre's movie theater was named after Lewis's famous book, *Main Street*, and the marquee represents a book. When the theater opened on March 7, 1939, Sinclair Lewis gave a speech where he noted this was the grandest



Roberta Olson and Jim Umhoefer stand in front of one of the museum exhibits at the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center.

theater between Minneapolis and Fargo and that the opening of a theater was vital in the recovery of a small town. He also offered theater owner Freeman Parson a plaque that read, "Here are the portals of imagination—recover hope all ye who enter here." The plaque found its way to the Interpretive Center after a remodeling and was returned to the theater.

Umhoefer noted that while the Interpretive Center may be closed, the impact of Sinclair Lewis will be evident in Sauk Centre in many other ways.

The Foundation hopes another location will be found, perhaps shared with the Sauk Centre Historical Society, which is now below the Bryant Library and would like to find a larger location.

The Foundation, led by Tillie Guelson and Dave Jacobson, raised the money to build the Interpretive Center building and leased the land from the state in 1973. They shared offices with the Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce until this year. The building was dedicated in 1975 by Sen. Hubert Humphrey.

Many of the board members held back tears as they walked through the empty building sharing memories. "I'm not going to cry," said Foundation Board Member Roberta Olson. "We've had thousands of people come through the Interpretive Center over the years and there will be thousands of people visiting a new center." [Originally published Dec. 10, 2015.] ✍

IN MEMORIAM: KATIE BROMEN AND ROBERTA PARRY

Our condolences to the family of Katie Broman who died at the age 95 in Sauk Centre in August. She had a 35-year career with Northwestern Bell Telephone Company and was very proud to be the last surviving grandchild of Albert Dahlem, a pioneer who came to Sauk Centre in 1868. Katie was very involved in Sauk Centre activities, including the Sinclair Lewis Foundation.



Roberta Parry, an honorary member of the Sinclair Lewis Society since its beginning, passed away in December 2015. She patiently listened to a lot of talk about Sinclair Lewis over the last couple of decades, and even visited Sauk Centre two years ago where she was given a tour of the Interpretive Center by Joyce Lyng and the Boyhood Home by Dave Simpkins. She often supplied material for the newsletter, attended the musical of *Elmer Gantry*, and a book club meeting on Lewis in Washington, DC. ✍

have in the society. Thus, the 46-year-old George Babbitt, who has a real estate business in Zenith, has a pink head and babyish face and despite this is supposed to be a very prosperous citizen of that city.

There was nothing of the giant in the aspect of the man who was beginning to awaken on the sleeping-porch of a Dutch Colonial house in that residential district of Zenith known as Floral Heights. . . . His large head was pink, his brown hair thin and dry. His face was babyish in slumber, despite his wrinkles and the red spectacle-dents on the slopes of his nose. He was not fat but he was exceedingly well fed; his cheeks were pads, and the unroughened hand which lay helpless upon the khaki-colored blanket was slightly puffy. He seemed prosperous, extremely married and unromantic. (2)

Almus Pickerbaugh is nearly the same age as Babbitt but has a presidential appearance: “Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh was forty-eight. He was a graduate of Mugford College and of the Wassau Medical School. He looked somewhat like President Roosevelt, with the same squareness and the same bristly mustache, and he cultivated the resemblance. He was a man who never merely talked: he either bubbled or made orations” (*Arrowsmith* 194). Although their appearance differs, in essence they are the same. Both are strictly following the organized rules of their standardized society and trying to please that society.

From their appearance, Lewis moves on to these characters’ lives and ways of living. Step-by-step the opaque masks of both Babbitt and Pickerbaugh are disclosed to readers, although they have so masterfully tried to hide their real faces from the public and live artificial lives.

We first see Babbitt at home. Despite his university education, he is primitive and empty. He has surrounded himself with all kinds of luxuries, from his clothes to his toiletries. His alarm clock “was the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial. Babbitt was proud at being awakened by such a rich device” (3–4). The problems concerning his bathing seem to be only trifles but make for a whole inner speech: “By golly, here they go and use up all the towels, every doggone one of ’em . . . and never put out a dry one for me—of course, I’m the goat! —and then I want one and—I’m the only person in the doggone house that’s got the slightest doggone bit of consideration for other people and thoughtfulness and consider

there may be others that may want to use the doggone bathroom after me and consider—” (6).

The passage vividly shows the most important weapon that Lewis uses to formulate his characters: the English language, especially American slang. As a master of English, Lewis has managed to use the slang of his time to help create his characters. Babbitt’s character is connected to his surroundings not only by his way of thinking and actions but also by the peculiarities of his speech. Lewis intentionally lets his protagonist make some mistakes and omissions in the speech act that make him resemble real businessmen of his time.

In other words, Babbitt’s character is made complete by passages of dialogue and inner speech. In dialogue Lewis shows the relationships of Babbitt with other people. From the talk of Babbitt with his wife we find out that although this famous businessman is influential and successful in work, he is voiceless in his family. His wife Myra resists pressing her husband’s clothes and, in addition, makes fun of him.

“How about it? Shall I wear the brown suit another day?”

“Well, it looks awfully nice on you.”

“I know, but gosh, it needs pressing.”

“That’s so. Perhaps it does.”

“It certainly could stand being pressed, all right.”

“Yes, perhaps it couldn’t hurt it to be pressed.” (7)

After presenting Babbitt’s relationships with his house and wife, Lewis presents his hero’s car. In a standardized society, a luxury machine is considered to be one of the markers of belonging to the upper class, and Babbitt follows this rule: “To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. The office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion ashore” (24). Thus, we come to the conclusion that money is an overwhelming obsession for Babbitt, which also takes on a religious aspect. And though he regards himself as a Christian, in his behavior he appeals to the dollar. The narrator notes that the “kernel of his practical religion was that it was respectable, and beneficial to one’s business, to be seen going to services” (208).

It goes without saying that a person who considers financial benefits so essential, who prefers the *Evening Advocate* or the *Advocate-Times* to books, has a prosaic opinion about education. In his bedroom on the table there are books that he doesn’t even open. These books are needless to him and stand there to impress society. Babbitt enriches

his speech with colloquial words and expressions from the above mentioned newspapers; finally becoming so entangled in the language that it becomes a real adventure for an ordinary reader to decipher it. Education per se makes no sense for Babbitt, as it's not obviously profitable. He is sure that "there's a whole lot of valuable time lost even at the U., studying poetry and French and subjects that never brought in anybody a cent" (85).

Anything concerning money and social opinion that might seem secondary to somebody else is quite essential for Babbitt. He seems to live mostly to get positive attention from society, and he carefully selects not only the things but also the people surrounding him. For example, in referring to his neighbor Dr. Howard Littlefield, the narrator notes, "Babbitt had a good deal of honest pride in being the neighbor of such a savant, and in Ted's intimacy with Eunice Littlefield" (26).

The next layer of description has a social marker of place. This place is Babbitt's office, and it is presented as artificial and connected to his character. For the sake of the same public opinion, he enters his office from the back door to be in the center of his staff and customers' attention. "Babbitt could have entered his office from the street, as customers did, but it made him feel an insider to go through the corridor of the building and enter by the back door. Thus he was greeted by the villagers" (32).

However, there is an inner struggle within him. Deep in his heart Babbitt is tired from business, but at the same time he understands that there is no way out. There is nowhere he could escape to. He is too closely connected to his work: "He sulkily admitted now that there was no more escape, but he lay and detested the grind of the real-estate business, and disliked his family, and disliked himself for disliking them" (4).

But why do people go on reading the story of George F. Babbitt? If everything is so artificial, why is it a pleasure for people to see this reflection of American society? The key is to be found in the words of American journalist and satirist H. L. Mencken: "Babbitt has a great clownishness in him, but he never becomes a mere clown. In the midst of his most extravagant imbecilities he keeps both feet upon the ground. One not only sees him brilliantly; one also understands him; he is made plausible and natural" (21). This naturalness is the secret that keeps both Babbitt and the novel about him among the best-sellers of world literature.

Almus Pickerbaugh of *Arrowsmith* is a kind of continuation of Babbitt. The latter ages two years during the course of the novel, thus becoming 48, the same age as Pickerbaugh. Pickerbaugh worships the same "God" as Babbitt and lives a

similar sort of life. The major difference is in his profession, since Pickerbaugh is a doctor with a different sort of vocabulary. He is ambitious like Babbitt and is proud to be the author of a couple of short poems, as well as the subject of one by noted *Zenith Advocate-Times* poet Chum Frink. During a dinner party he boasts to Arrowsmith, "So Chum wrote this poem about me:"

Zenith welcomes with high hurraw
A friend in Almus Pickerbaugh,
The two-fisted fightin' poet doc
Who stands for health like Gibraltar's rock.
He's jammed with figgers and facts and fun,
The plucky old, lucky old son—of—a—gun!

"For a moment the exuberant Dr. Pickerbaugh was shy" (196–97).

How exciting it is to be both a practicing doc and at the same time in the center of public attention as a poet and hero of other's poetry! And although he tries to conceal his ambitious nature, everything he says seems overblown.

Like Babbitt, Pickerbaugh has a number of social markers connected with being a member of various social groups. And this is his visa to higher society—to the assembly of those who are "worried" about the fate of their nation. Trying to get everybody's attention, Pickerbaugh gives his daughters floral names: Orchid, Verbena, Daisy, Jonquil, Hibisca, Narcissa, Arbuta, and Gladiola. And he is proud because, in his words, "many people have congratulated us on their names as it is" (201).

Pickerbaugh's house is a symbol of prosperity, as it was in the case of Babbitt. "The home of Dr. and Mrs. Almus Pickerbaugh, on the steeple-prickly West Side, was a Real Old-Fashioned Home. It was a wooden house with towers, swings, hammocks, rather mussy shade trees, a rather mangy lawn, a rather damp arbor, and an old carriage-house with a line of steel spikes along the ridge pole. Over the front gate was the name: UNEEDAREST" (200). This kind of luxury can only be afforded by those who know the ever-mighty power of money, and Pickerbaugh is among them.

But what is the source of this money? The "clever" Dr. Pickerbaugh has discovered the best way. He invents so called "Weeks" and sells "charitable" tags to help the poor. In fact, much of the money seems to go into his pocket. Lewis's satire here is well designed with ridiculous weeks, such as

“an Old Home Week, a Write to Mother Week, ... an Eat More Corn Week, a Go to Church Week, a Salvation Army Week, and an Own Your Own Auto Week” (222). In other words, health and public service becomes a sharp sword in the hands of Pickerbaugh with which he carefully cuts the fattest slices of the society profit and, without worrying, swallows them. Where Babbitt sells real estate to make his income, Almus Pickerbaugh puts public health to auction and has no sense of shame for it: “Martin realized that though he seemed, in contrast to Gustaf Sondelius, an unfortunately articulate and generous lout, he [Pickerbaugh] was destined to be ten times better known in America than Sondelius could ever be, a thousand times better known than Max Gottlieb” (236). Going on with his innovative programs, Pickerbaugh organizes a so-called Health Fair. It’s difficult to say whether this was for public health or “perhaps Dr. Pickerbaugh desired a little reasonable publicity for his congressional campaign, but certainly the Health Fair which the good man organized was overpowering” (248). As a result of all his thoughtful activity, Pickerbaugh gains enough publicity that he wins in the elections and becomes a congressman.

Thus, we come to an important question: how do these characters become so standardized? The only answer is the social context: the society in which they live. As Frederic Carpenter writes, “Where Lewis had obviously sympathized with Carol Kennicott, and later almost identified himself with Martin Arrowsmith, Babbitt is neither hero nor villain, but seems to exist in his own right—the natural product of his society” (9). In a state of affection, as he realizes his fate as a victim of standardization, the philistine Babbitt becomes a rebel, speaking out for his friend Seneca Doane. It is from Doane that we find out that Babbitt was not born a philistine—he has been made so. “I remember—in college you were an unusually liberal, sensitive chap” says Doane (303). So the fault is laid on the shoulders of the society. Deep in his heart, in his unconscious, Babbitt is not soulless, that’s why “he could not see Graff go to jail and his wife suffer” (238). He is positive that he loves his country, and “all the while he was conscious of the loveliness of Zenith” (31).

As for Pickerbaugh, he never has such moments of hesitation and rethinking as Babbitt has. Pickerbaugh was never conscious of his plight, rather reveling in it as he goes on with his march to Congress. Bringing a new viewpoint on the life and activity of Pickerbaugh, Marcia Buchs writes, “the genius of Pickerbaugh lay not in his scientific skills, but in his ability to work together with people” (8). With this skill and the happy unconsciousness of his state, Pickerbaugh went to Congress

with the words, “I am not running because I want office, but because I want the chance to take to the whole nation my ideals of health” (252).

The difference between our protagonist Babbitt and secondary characters like Pickerbaugh lies not only in that the first realizes the forces of standardization and the latter doesn’t, but also in their psychological types as well. Babbitt as a person is an introvert—a man who is closed within himself, thinking about his house, his family, his work, while Pickerbaugh is an extrovert, and he sees Congress as a huge chance for him to spread his ideas to everybody.

Is there any way out of this standardized prison? For Pickerbaugh everything is clear; he feels good about the society he lives in, but Babbitt is different. The crisis of his character is the section where Babbitt tries to leave everything and escape, with only the wish to live in Mother Nature. But his stormy soul cannot find relaxation there either. Babbitt “scanned again his discovery that he could never run away from Zenith and family and office, because in his own brain he bore the office and the family and every street and disquiet and illusion of Zenith” (300–01). The defeat is complete. He can’t escape from the society, as it is rooted within him. He is the social agent of that society. Thus, it is too late to change anything.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. 1957. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999.
- Buchs, Marcia K. “Pickerbaugh Was a Genius!” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 9.1 (2000): 7–8.
- Carpenter, Frederic I. “Sinclair Lewis and the Fortress of Reality.” 1955. *Sinclair Lewis’s “Arrowsmith.”* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1988. 5–15.
- Hart, James D. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Hone, A. Preface. *Babbitt*. By Sinclair Lewis. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing, 1962. 3–20.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *Arrowsmith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925.
- . *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922.
- Mencken, H. L. “Portrait of an American Citizen.” *Sinclair Lewis: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Mark Shorer. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962. 20–22.
- Schorer, Mark. Introduction. *Sinclair Lewis: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962. 1–9.
- Updike, John. “No Brakes.” *New Yorker* Feb. 4, 2002: 77–80.
- Vidal, Gore. “The Romance of Sinclair Lewis.” *New York Review of Books* Oct. 8, 1992: 14–20. ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP —

Maryellen V. Keefe's *Casual Affairs: The Life and Fiction of Sally Benson* (SUNY Albany, 2014) brings to the fore the career of Sally Benson, who started her fiction-writing career as a short story writer for the *New Yorker* in the late 1920s, with her work being compared to Dorothy Parker's. Benson's portrayals of family life in her stories, which were later made into plays and movies of *Junior Miss* and *Meet Me in St. Louis*, are romanticized versions of her friends and family. Like many writers of the time she abused alcohol, and became a successful screenwriter in Hollywood.

In the early 1920s she wrote for a number of motion picture magazines. In an interview in 1941, she recalled back in the 1920s

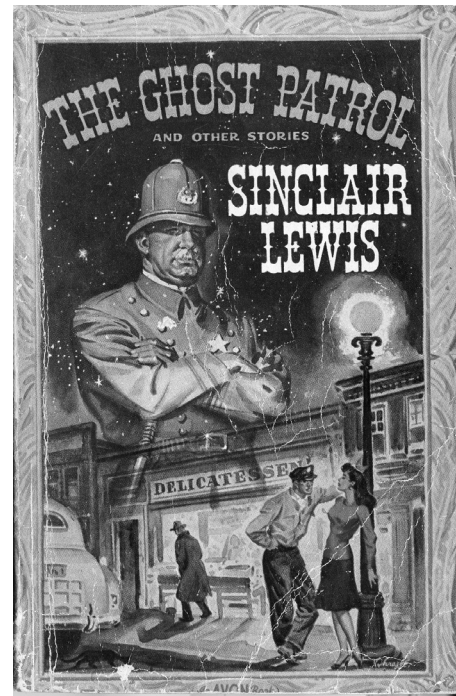
a mass interview when a whole flock of girls went to work on Sinclair Lewis.' Benson, seated next to him, was appalled by the kinds of questions he was asked. One, for example, was 'how he thought English women compared to American women.' She claimed that she liked Lewis, that he held her hand, and that when he asked her what she would like to know, she replied that she 'hadn't any questions at all.' She added the disclaimer, 'That was the interview. But I guess I got some space out of it. (95)

Benson certainly embellished her recollections, so it's not clear how true all this was. She did admire Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*, and claimed that she read Lewis's *Babbitt* every year (272).



Scott D. Emmert's "'Uniformed for Work': Clothes and Wartime Sacrifice in Edna Ferber's Last Emma McChesney Story" (*Midwestern Miscellany* 42 (2014): 32–39) examines "One Hundred Per Cent," an Emma McChesney story that was published during World War I, and written as propaganda to support the war effort by showing that it was appropriate for women to work in order to release men to serve overseas. At first Emma engages in war work and has a lovely uniform, but realizes that her husband is jealous of the uniform and wants to serve his country. She goes back to her traveling salesperson attire and brings back the wives of two other employees to the firm so that the men can join the armed services. One should compare Emma's work for the war effort to the activities of

Sinclair Lewis's Lancelot Todd who took advantage of the soldier's need for all sorts of supplies to invent the Khaki Khomfort Trench Bench and sell it at a highly inflated price to mothers and sweethearts (even though the thing fell apart pretty quickly). [See also "Lancelot Todd: A Case for Fictional Independence," by Samuel J. Rogal in the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 20.1 (2011).]



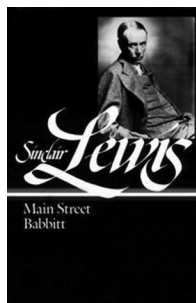
Louis Menand, in "Pulp's Big Moment: How Emily Brontë met Mickey Spillane" (*New Yorker* Jan. 5, 2015: 62–69), writes about the rise of Pocket Books in a review-essay on Paula Rabinowitz's *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street* (Princeton UP, 2014). Mass-market paperbacks were made to be sold cheaply and in a variety of businesses other than a bookstore. This approach to publishing encouraged people who might not enter bookstores to pick up a book they might have heard about while waiting for a train or buying a magazine. Pocket Books was founded in 1939, and in less than ten years there were nearly a dozen paperback publishers including Penguin, Avon, Popular Library, Dell, Bantam, and New American Library. The interest in paperbacks only grew during World War II with the Armed Services Editions, which were published through a collaboration of publishers and distributed free of charge to men and women in uniform. Over 123 million copies were published of 1180 titles.

Paperbacks featured literary classics, reprints of hard-cover bestsellers, mysteries, science fiction, and somewhat racy novels, often with lurid covers. What publishers discovered in the 1950s is that they could take these covers, often with nearly naked women, add teasers about the plot, and package all sorts of literary classics in this way as well. This marketing philosophy “put the frisson of scandal back into books, even books that had been around for decades” (66). See “Lewis as Pornography” by Sally E. Parry [*Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 12.1 (2003)] for more pictures of these salacious covers.



Wilson Kaiser, in “The Micropolitics of Fascism in Carson McCullers’s *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here*” (*Genre* 47.3 (2014): 285–307), responds to Malcolm Cowley’s assertion that American writers have not effectively treated fascism by examining these two novels, both of which set fascism in small towns in the 1930s against a larger sociohistorical setting. Kaiser prefers McCullers’s novel of the intimate depictions of life that has sociohistorical events as part of the fabric of the novel, rather than Lewis’s “relentlessly linear plotline” with binary political generalizations.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES



The Library of America’s Spring/Summer 2015 catalogue offers:

Sinclair Lewis, Nobel Laureate: In two volumes, five penetrating novels by the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The first volume was originally released in 1992, followed several years later by the second one. The Library of America website is now offering both volumes at 20% off.

Main Street and *Babbitt*, John Hersey, Editor

Arrowsmith, *Elmer Gantry*, *Dodsworth*, Richard Lingeman, Editor

The catalogue is a treasure trove of great offerings and fun to peruse. It may be ordered free at: www.loa.org

Offers 10% off an order if you sign up for the e-newsletter.



In *Robert Redford: The Biography* by Michael Feeney Callan, Redford mentions liking Sinclair Lewis. Redford read *Main Street* and *Babbitt* in 1955 soon after his mother’s death when he was eighteen, just before he dropped out of college and went to France and Italy to pursue an “authentic” study of art. Lewis Society member Debbie Carter notes that Redford had many interests as a boy and young man before he pursued extensive classical training as an actor. “He was recognized as something special early on. His story is inspiring and interesting!”



Lewis Society member Ron Miller reports that in January 2015 he participated in a story reading at the Woodstock, Vermont Library. He read “The Kidnaped Memorial” from the collection *The Minnesota Stories of Sinclair Lewis* to an audience of about twenty. He writes, “Literary-minded people here still appreciate Lewis’s connection to Twin Farms in nearby Barnard.”



From Writer’s Almanac for May 23, 2015:

It’s the birthday of Edward Norton Lorenz, born in West Hartford, Connecticut, in 1917. He started out as a mathematician, but turned to meteorology during World War II. In an attempt to explain why it’s so difficult to make a long-range weather forecast, he spawned chaos theory, one of the twentieth century’s most revolutionary scientific ideas.

Chaos theory is sometimes known as “the butterfly effect,” a term coined by Lorenz in an attempt to explain how small actions in a dynamic system like the atmosphere could trigger vast and unexpected changes. He discovered the effect in the early 1960s while entering values into a computer weather prediction program; instead of entering the number to the full six decimal places, he rounded it to three to save time, and the resulting weather pattern was completely different. He first framed it as the effect a seagull’s wing has on the formation of a hurricane, but he changed it to the more poetic butterfly in his 1972 presentation, “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?”

Though the term dates back to 1972, the concept actually predates Lorenz’s discovery. Science fiction

writers had been playing around with the idea for several years in their time-travel stories: Usually the hero goes back in time and makes some seemingly insignificant choice that ends up changing the course of history.

Sinclair Lewis grasped this idea as well in his story “The Cat of the Stars,” first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on April 19, 1919, and included in the 1937 collection, *Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. The premise is a slight one, that an annoying little boy, Willis Stodeport, pets a cat and is admired for it by Mrs. Dolson, a friend of his mother’s. This causes Mrs. Dolson to almost miss a streetcar, and because it is held up so that she can board, the streetcar goes off schedule, and a man who was waiting for it gives up the wait and plays poker all night. The story goes through the plights of several other characters, ending up with the overthrow of the king of a European country, all because Willis “stroked a cat.”



Donald Lewis writes: The most recent book from Michael Fridgen, *College Street*, just got released and it is brilliant! A satirical takedown of higher education in this country written in the style of Sinclair Lewis (hence the title from Lewis’s *Main Street*). Set in a fictional university in Minnesota, this book tackles higher education in the same way that Lewis tackled small town USA, middle-class ennui, racism, sexism, religious evangelicalism, and fascism in his various books. A must-read for any Lewis fan!!



John Fabian Witt, in an article on Richard Reeves’s new book *Infamy*, “It Happened Here”: “About 70% of the 120,000 Japanese-Americans held were citizens. Some 2,300 would fight for their country” (*Wall Street Journal* April 24, 2015: C6). Witt starts his essay by referring to *It Can’t Happen Here*.

In 1935, Sinclair Lewis published a dystopian novel about an America turned fascist, run by racist demagogues and littered with concentration camps. Lewis titled his novel *It Can’t Happen Here*. Six years later, something very much like it did. *Infamy*, Richard Reeves’s book on Japanese-American internment in World War II, brings out the tragic foolishness and vicious anti-Japanese sentiment underlying the forcible detention of 120,000 people in inhospitable and sometimes brutal camps.

Go to <http://www.wsj.com/articles/book-review-infamy-by-richard-reeves-1429904122> for the full article.

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation has posted a mini-documentary on Lewis that includes comments by Lewis Society members Dave Simpkins, Pat Lewis, and Joyce Lyng. It’s a little over five minutes and very well done. <https://youtu.be/M81ARV53a-I>

This mini-documentary feature was produced for Lifetouch for their *Life to the Max* show.



Kalli Kaiser was named as the 2015 Miss Sauk Centre during Sinclair Lewis Days. Throughout the year, Kaiser will represent the town of Sauk Centre at area parades and community events, as well as act as a role model for young girls across town. The princesses named are Lily Satterlee and Hope Schwinghamer. These three, and the five other contestants, Kalli Kuhlmann, Erin Tamillo, Emily Middendorf, Emma Quistorff, and Molly Weyer worked since June to prepare for coronation night by learning a choreographed dance that would be performed as their opening number. They also took time to become educated on the history of Sinclair Lewis by touring his boyhood home.

Kaiser, who won the talent portion of the competition, wanted to combine her enthusiasm for photography and small-town humor into an act that would leave the audience begging for more. She incorporated iconic characteristics that perfectly described living in the small, rural community of Sauk Centre and summoned belly laughs from audience members with her true Minnesota accent.



Main Street Mural Complete Plans Set for Band Shell Mural

by Dave Simpkins
Sauk Centre Herald

Just as the team of artists put the finishing touches on the last two of six panels of the *Main Street Mural* on the corner of Original Main Street and Sinclair Lewis Avenue, they began discussing ideas for a possible mural inside the band shell at Sinclair Lewis Park.

Roger Reinardy, Carole Bersin, and Diane Leukam have worked on the *Main Street Mural* in two painting sessions—one last fall and one this summer. The mural depicts the history of Sauk Centre as it relates to the Sauk River. Other members of the committee were Andrea Kerfeld of the Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce, Annette Hinnenkamp, and Dave Simpkins. Reinardy, a local artist, provided the basic design for the mural,

Bersin of Carole Bersin Painting provided the professional mural work and Leukam, another local artist, helped with the painting. They also enlisted a group of local volunteers at the beginning of the painting process to get the first layers of paint down. “It should be easier to find donations and grants for a second mural now that we’ve shown people what we can do,”

said Bersin. Reinardy said the band shell is in a beautiful setting, used for a beautiful purpose but badly needs a paint job. ‘I’ve been thinking through some ideas, maybe the old Butter Days Parade with all the instruments and people,’ said Reinardy. ‘We’re just daydreaming now and open to suggestions.’”



Mural artists Diane Leukam (from left), Roger Reinardy, and Carole Bersin put the finishing touches on the last two of six panels on the Main Street Mural at the corner of Original Main Street and Sinclair Lewis Avenue.

He said the curve of the walls of the band shell would be difficult to paint but well worth the effort. Hinnenkamp and Kerfeld headed up the fundraising for the \$15,000 *Main Street Mural*, with \$9,000 raised locally and \$6,000 from the Central Minnesota Arts Board. Kerfeld believes the mural brightens up downtown Sauk Centre and tells a colorful story of the city’s history.

Simpkins worked on the historic references in the six panels. The first panel depicts Ojibwe Chief Hole in the Day looking to the future of Sauk Centre as European settlers follow the Sauk River into the valley. The next panel depicts the Yankee, German,

and Scandinavian settlers breaking the ground on the fertile prairie. The third panel demonstrates farm life and the fourth honors the role of women settlers. The fifth panel is the busiest panel



A finished version of the entire mural. Photo by Dave Simpkins

as it depicts a World War I soldier writing home to Sauk Centre, along with the city of Sauk Centre in the background.

The artists are quick to note that while the mural

is detailed, they did take some artistic license in putting all the pieces together. “While the location of things and the time they really happened may be off, what is there tells a broader historic story of who we are,” said Reinardy.

The artists had some fun. There is a Reinardy Liquor which really existed, but not on Main Street, a Leukam Bakery, and a Bersin Signs truck driving down the street. You can also find a John Deere tractor, Lorne Greene in the window of the Palmer House, children on the orphan train, and Charles Lindbergh’s *Spirit of St. Louis* flying overhead. A few local people were used as models for the people in the mural, including Alyce Hintzen on a bicycle.

The last panel portrays Sauk Centre’s most famous citizen, Nobel Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis, holding a copy of his novel, *Main Street*. The picture is taken from a rare 1916 photograph of Lewis when he visited Sauk Centre. He had published a couple of novels at this time and was a popular magazine writer, but was yet to reach international fame with the five best-selling books of the 1920s. Opposite of Chief Hole



Bruce Welle (left) and Don Leukam (far right) present a donation to the mural project from Dan Welle’s GM and Chrysler.

Photo by Bryan Zollman

in the Day, Lewis is observing the history of Sauk Centre as he did in many of his novels.

The band shell also has a prominent place in the last panel, which may say something about the future of the mural movement in Sauk Centre.



Anniversary Celebration

Sinclair Lewis was a mentor to many aspiring writers during his career. The Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference, held in Lewis's hometown of Sauk Centre, is a tribute to a writer who took the time to help other writers hone their craft. The event on October 10, 2015 was the 26th annual conference and, based on the enthusiastic response following the previous 25, it will continue the mission of encouraging and inspiring Minnesota writers.

This year included a special evening 25th anniversary celebration event featuring Don Shelby as Mark Twain, sharing Twain's thoughts on writing and writers. Joining Shelby were the Sutter Brothers, Bart and Ross, performing a lively mix of poetry and music along with songs and stories.

This year marked Don Shelby's second appearance at the Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference. As part of the 25th anniversary celebration, Shelby wrote a special performance portraying Mark Twain and what he had to say about writers and writing. Don also joined the other three speakers during the panel discussion at the beginning of the conference afternoon.

Lorna Landvik spoke on "How Reading and Comedy Influence Writing and Ideas." She is the author of ten novels, including the best-selling *Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons*, *Oh My Stars*, and *The View from Mount Joy*. Her most recent books are *Best to Laugh* and *Mayor of the Universe*. Landvik is also an actor, stand-up comic, and a playwright.

Barton Sutter, who spoke on "Haiku—Tiny Poems with Large Implications for Writers," has received the Minnesota Book Award for poetry with *The Book of Names: New and Selected Poems*, for fiction with *My Father's War and Other Stories*, and for creative nonfiction with *Cold Comfort: Life at the Top of the Map*. Among other honors, he has won a Bush Foundation Individual Artist Fellowship, a Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Grant (Sweden), and the Bassine Citation from the Academy of American Poets. Sutter has written for public radio and has had three verse plays produced.

Ross Sutter, who spoke on "How Song and Ballad Lyrics Make Musical Memories," is best known as a singer of Scandinavian, Scottish, and Irish songs and for his wide repertoire of American traditional and popular songs. Sutter accompanies himself on guitar, dulcimer, button accordion, and bodhran (an Irish goatskin drum). Sutter's work is featured on the recordings *Walking on Air*, *Up the Raw*, *Crossing the Shannon*, *Hunger No*

More, *Songs By Heart*, *Over the Water*, *Ye Banks and Braes*, and on his highly popular children's recording, *Mama Will You Buy Me a Banana?*



Allison Olib, Editor, and Brook Dahlgren, Office/Ad Manager, of the *Walsh County Press*, in Park River, North Dakota, sent Dave Simpkins of the *Sauk Centre Herald* a picture and short article on Glenn Penas of Park River in front of the house Lewis built for his family who were renting from him in 1934. This is indicative of Lewis's generosity without a desire for publicity.

Glenn says the old house was in such bad shape snow



Photo by Larry Biri—Walsh County Press

would blow in. He lived there most of his life, selling the house a few years ago. Legend has it that Lewis flew over the farm and saw how bad the house was, called the bank, and had them arrange to build a new house on the site.

The Penases raised ten children on the farm; seven went to college. The family was very proud of the place—planting many trees, flowers, and landscaping structures and winning them the title of most beautiful farmstead in Walsh County. Glenn's brother Phillip was a member of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation and came to the annual banquets.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Responses to "Two Lewis Homes for Sale" (*Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* Spring 2015).

Susan O'Brien writes:

On Jan. 26, 1920 [1921], a young writer sent this letter from New York:

Dear Mr. Lewis:

I want to tell you that 'Main Street' has displaced 'Theron Ware' in my favor as the best American novel. The amount of sheer data in it is amazing! As a writer and a Minnesotan let me swell the chorus—after a third reading. With the utmost admiration,
F. Scott Fitzgerald

So I find it interesting that two residences once inhabited by Minnesota's most famous writers are for sale, concurrently. The sale of Thorvale Farm, Lewis's home in Williamstown, Massachusetts, has been documented in a previous email. On June 27, the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* announced that 593 Summit Avenue, the three-story row house where Fitzgerald resided in his "younger and more vulnerable years," is also for sale.

Fitzgerald lived there during his Christmas vacation from Princeton in 1914. He later returned to the house while battling an illness, according to the *Press*. He would go on to finish his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in the house. I have seen it, and in fact worked with a man who once owned it; it is a very beautiful brownstone that would hold its own on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston's fashionable Back Bay. The sale price for the house, built in 1889, is \$665,000.

Sinclair Lewis also lived on this historic boulevard of mansions, at 516 Summit, in 1917. Lewis dubbed his rented home "the lemon meringue pie house" because of its "white yellow brick spotted with dabs of whipped cream marble. It was the scene of many parties to which hosts invited both wealthy industrialists and Farmer-Labor industrialists." What a coincidence that these two great writers of the twentieth century, raised in entirely different Minnesota environments yet both products of elite eastern universities, once lived so close to each other on what is likely Saint Paul's most famous street.



Charles Pankenier writes:

Several notable homes on Summit Avenue were designed (or remodeled) for Saint Paul's elite in the 1880s and 1890s by native Cass Gilbert—the architect who went on to later renown as creator of Manhattan's Woolworth Building, for seventeen years the world's tallest skyscraper. The nearest of at least eight examples is at #415. Gilbert briefly attended MIT (before it was MIT). He was another local artist who attended an elite eastern school and who, in the nineteen twenties, was nearly as celebrated in his field as Lewis or Fitzgerald.

—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.]



PBA Galleries

1233 Sutter Street,
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 989-2665 Toll Free: (866) 999-7224
Fax: (415) 989-1664
Email: info@pbagalleries.com
www.pbagalleries.com

James Pepper Rare Books, Inc.

3463 State Street, Suite 271,
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
Phone: (805) 963-1025 Fax: (805) 966-9737
Email: pepbooks@aol.com
www.jamespepperbooks.com

CATALOGUE 218

SALE 566: FINE BOOKS IN ALL FIELDS LIMITED EDITIONS CLUB

559. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Limited Editions Club, 1937. \$330

Illustrated by Grant Wood with color plates. Original slipcase. No. 62 of 1500, signed by the artist in the colophon.

One of the great American artist-author pairings of the 1930s. Light wear to slipcase; very slight chipping to glassine jacket; overall near fine.

88. LEWIS, SINCLAIR. *The God-Seeker*. New York: Random House, 1949. \$25.00

First edition. Very good lightly used copy with some very minor fading to the top and bottom edges of the spine in a used and worn dust jacket with some fading to the spine and some chips and tears.

Join Today...

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY.

MEMBERS RECEIVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE *SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER*.

PLEASE CHOOSE A CATEGORY BELOW:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 ⁰⁰ sustaining member | D. <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 ⁰⁰ student/retiree membership |
| B. <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 ⁰⁰ family/joint membership | E. <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 ⁰⁰ institutional member |
| C. <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 ⁰⁰ individual member | F. <input type="checkbox"/> Additional donation to the Society \$_____ |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____ E-mail Address _____

Send form, along with check, to: The Sinclair Lewis Society, Box 4240, English Dept., Illinois State University,
Normal, IL 61790-4240

The Sinclair Lewis Society
4240/Dept. of English
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61790-4240