The
Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter

VOLUME TWENTY-FOUR, NUMBER TWO SPRING 2016

Babbitt in Paperback, 1946

Roger Lathbury
George Mason University

A few years ago at the university where I teach, I assembled an exhibit of books and memorabilia from the 1920s. Along with the usual items from Fitzgerald and Hemingway, the novels of Sinclair Lewis were, of course, prominent. Lewis was in that decade considered the outstanding American novelist. Today interest in his writing, while not at the pitch it was, remains considerable.

For the display, I included hardback copies of *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*, which I own in dust-wrapped copies, in various states of pristineness and

Babbitt in Paperback *continued on page 8*

Sinclair Lewis Conference 2017: Lewis in Business and Politics

The Sinclair Lewis Society, in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, is delighted to announce a conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, on July 12–14, 2017. This conference will celebrate Lewis as a commentator on American society and his continued importance in American literature in the 21st century. 2017 is the 90th anniversary of Elmer Gantry *and the 70th anniversary of* Kingsblood Royal.

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

Abstracts of papers are due by April 1, 2017, but are welcomed earlier. For more information, please e-mail Sally Parry at separry@ilstu.edu.

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents

Jan Peter Verhave
Honorary Research Fellow
Van Raalte Institute
Hope College, Holland, Michigan

> *Arrowsmith* to me now is largely a callow and smart-alecky document—because medicine has changed—indeed revolutionized—and we along with it.… For all its jerk scientific stuff, *Arrowsmith* has one deep and timeless part—the famous Hamlet section of controls or not controls in the plague prevention work in the epidemic in the West Indies.
>
> Paul de Kruif, December 29, 1952,
> in a letter to Grace Hegger, former wife of Sinclair Lewis

Introduction

In 1922 Sinclair Lewis hired Paul de Kruif, a bacteriologist with a PhD, who had just begun to write about scientists, doctors, and quacks for a broad readership. The two men agreed to collaborate on a novel critical of American medical circles, with a young physician and researcher, Martin Arrowsmith, as its main character. They described Arrowsmith's life in various medical positions throughout his career. Learning the hard way, Arrowsmith finds out that he is not cut out for just any type of medicine, but is fulfilled through the study of bacteriology and immunology.

Arrowsmith was one of the first explicitly medical novels, and it intrigued lay readers because of its realistic insight into the unfamiliar worlds of student life, doctoring, and medical science. Doctors, professors, public health officials, and researchers did not escape unscathed. Lewis criticized the "businesslike" culture of medicine of the time. The pomp, greed, and unscientific pretentions of many physicians, as well as medical ineptitude, were exposed with ruthless sarcasm. But the novel also contains philosophy, a search for truth, and integrity.

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The
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Carl Van Vechten, Sinclair Lewis, and *The Tattooed Countess*

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

Harlem Renaissance bad boy Carl Van Vechten is the subject of Edward White's biography, *The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014). White considers him through his fascination with the illicit and forbidden. Unlike Emily Bernard's *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White* (2012), this biography looks at Van Vechten's whole life, including his novels, several of which, such as *Peter Wiffle* (1922) and *The Tattooed Countess* (1924), are thinly disguised presentations of his life. Both of these novels present fictionalized presentations of young Carl, who did not fit in with small-town Iowa folks. In his questioning of the function of art, his desire to break taboos, and his embracing of African American culture, Van Vechten seemed to embody the essence of modern life.

Sinclair Lewis wrote a letter of congratulations to Van Vechten after his novel *The Blind Bow-Boy* was published in 1923. This coming-of-age novel, a sort of modern day *Rake's Progress*, focuses on the innocent Harold Prewett who is sent to New York City by his father to become educated in the ways of the world. His guides are the socialite Paul Moody (considered by many a stand-in for Van Vechten) and the beguiling Campaspe Lorillard. Prewett loses his innocence and meets a wide variety of New Yorkers from the very wealthy to the snake charmers of Coney Island. White calls this a campy novel, but remarkable for its portrayal of homosexual characters in the 1920s. Lewis wrote of the novel, "It is impertinent, subversive, resolutely and completely wicked.… You prove that New York is as sophisticated as any foreign capital" (qtd. in White 154). Lewis also admired Van Vechten's controversial *Nigger Heaven* (1926), as did H. L. Mencken, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Franklin Pierce Adams (White 209).

The Tattooed Countess was a controversial best-seller about a worldly woman who returns to her Iowa hometown after twenty years in Europe and shocks the inhabitants, all except a teenage boy who admires her. The boy was a stand-in for Van Vechten as Maple Valley was a substitute for Van Vechten's hometown of Cedar Rapids. Those Lewis aficionados who have read Lewis's 1943 novel *Gideon Planish* may remember that shortly after Planish is made dean of Kinnikinick College, he uses *The Tattooed Countess* as an example of immoral literature. His wife Peony is trying very hard to gain state and national exposure for him, urging him to join every committee that he possibly can. After being named chairman of the County Censorship Board, Planish is keen to find something to censor. Peony suggests *The Tattooed Countess*: "Why don't you get busy and censor the hell out of it?" (130). Planish says, "You can't! I understand Mr. Van Vechten was born in Iowa. He's a Native Son!" Peony responds,

Lewis's home in Excelsior, Minnesota, where he wrote Gideon Planish[1] *(photo courtesy of Jim Moffet).*

> "That's why I picked it. All the guys in the State
> that knew-him-when, or claim they knew-him-when,

Carl Van Vechten *continued on page 19*

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 Ronald Beach, Ben Beede, Frederick Betz, Sean Denniston, Anthony Di Renzo, Ted Fleener, Ralph Goldstein, Roger Lathbury, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Jim Moffet, Dave Simpkins, Ed Tant, and Jan Peter Verhave

What Were They Reading Then?
The Able McLaughlins by Margaret Wilson, 1923

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

This occasional feature discusses other popular books that were written at the same time Lewis was writing.

Two years before Sinclair Lewis was finally awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the Novel for *Arrowsmith* in 1926 (even though he declined to accept it), the prize went to Margaret Wilson for *The Able McLaughlins* (1923). This prize, now called the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, was given "for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life, and the highest standard of American manners and manhood." In 1930, the wording was changed to recognize "the best American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life." There were other minor changes in description over the years although now the phrasing (as of 2012) is "for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life."

Lewis's novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt* had been recommended by the Pulitzer committee as winners for 1921 and 1923, but their decisions were overturned by the Advisory Board of Columbia University who felt that Lewis's novels were too critical of American society. *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton won in 1921 and *One of Ours* by Willa Cather won in 1923.

Margaret Wilson is little known today, except perhaps by true bibliophiles. Born in 1882 in Iowa, she earned two degrees from the University of Chicago, and then served as a missionary for the United Presbyterian Church of North America in India for several years. She wrote short stories under the pseudonym "An Elderly Spinster" and in 1923 won a $2000 fiction prize from Harper & Brothers. She wrote a total of eight novels, including a sequel to *The Able McLaughlins*, *The Law and the McLaughlins* in 1936. Two of her novels, *Daughters of India* (1928) and *Trousers of Taffeta* (1929) drew on her experiences in India. Two of her later novels, *The Dark Duty* (1931) and *The Valiant Wife* (1933), are connected to her life as the wife of the warden of Dartmoor Prison in England.

She was proud of her Midwestern background and in the McLaughlin novels explored the lives of immigrants, focusing especially on feminist and religious issues. *The Able McLaughlins* shares aspects of the novels of Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland because of its exploration of the hard life of immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. However, in overall quality, the novel is too sentimental to be very satisfying.

The Able McLaughlins focuses on a group of Scotch Presbyterian farmers in Iowa who have come to the United States for religious freedom. They keep to themselves; they are somewhat inbred in terms of their interests and limitations. The plot focuses on Wully McLaughlin, a young man who was wounded in the Civil War and has returned home to find out that Chirstie McNair, a cousin of his whom he was attracted to, has been raped and made pregnant by their ne'er-do-well cousin Peter Keith. Peter runs away from home and Chirstie experiences serious depression, brandishing a gun at every man who comes near her cabin. Despite this, Wully woos and marries her, and becomes a doting father to her little son Johnnie, letting no one but his mother know that he is not the father (he claims to have had sex with her before their marriage which causes quite a bit of anguish for his parents for behaving in an unchristian manner).

Reading the Bible is a semiconstant pastime, with folks judging a man by whether he knows the Psalms or not. Wully's mother is presented as overly doting, tending to his wounds, taking care of her large family, and worrying about everything. The dialogue tries to reflect a Scottish dialect, but the effect is rather cloying. "Havers!," his mother exclaims when vexed, and that is the strongest language she uses. The most interesting parts of the novel may be when Wully remembers his experiences in the war, including the death of his brother Allen.

Wully builds a home with Chirstie and succeeds as a farmer, although the specter of Peter is never far away. Once Wully has discovered that Peter is a rapist, he warns him never to return, threatening to kill him if he does. However, Peter is the only living child of Wully's aunt Libby and she spends the rest of the novel searching for her lost son, traveling as far as Chicago by herself. Late in the novel, Peter returns, terrifying Chirstie when he appears unexpectedly. Wully vows to track him down and force him from the area so that she will not lapse back into serious depression. Others see Peter later that same day and in one of the most exciting parts of the novel, the community becomes involved in the search for Peter, most wanting to bring him home to his mother, although Wully

The Able McLaughlins continued on page 20

What Were They Reading Then? *In This Our Life* by Ellen Glasgow, 1941

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction is awarded the year after a novel is published. In 1941, the fiction jury recommended Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to the Pulitzer board. However, Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, found it offensive and convinced the jury not to give the Pulitzer for fiction that year. The next year, the jury decided *In This Our Life* by Ellen Glasgow best fit the description for the award: "the best American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life."

Unfortunately *In This Our Life* does not hold up well and may be one of those examples of why Pulitzer Prize-winning novels are often referred to with derision by critics.

Ellen Glasgow was a southern author, born to a well-to-do Virginia family in 1873. She was of delicate health and educated at home where she read widely in literature, philosophy, and politics. Most of her novels portray the changing nature of the South, from *The Descendant* in 1897 to *In This Our Life* in 1941. Some of them, including *The Battle-Ground* (1902) and *Barren Ground* (1925), sold quite well. Although she never married, many of her novels focus on troubled marriages in a tumultuous time in American history, as the South became more industrial, less agrarian, and seemed to have lost a sense of tradition and social order.

In This Our Time is set in the South in Queensborough (a stand in for Richmond) just prior to America's entrance into World War II, but after the war had started in Europe. This sense of impending change and violence hangs over the novel as the characters all search for happiness in a world in which it doesn't seem to exist. The focus is on two sisters, Stanley and Roy (those really are their names), who are trying to find some meaning in life despite limited resources. Their father, Asa Timberlake, is a sad sack from decayed Southern gentility who works in a factory once owned by his family and who finds the world a very unhappy place. Asa's wife, Lavinia, is a hypochondriac who spends most of her time in bed. The factory is now owned by William Fitzroy, Lavinia's brother, a greedy and crude man, who occasionally shows compassion to Asa's family, partly because of the obligation he feels for his sister, and partly because of the just-below-the-surface incestuous interest he has in Stanley, which she plays up whenever she wants money.

Stanley, the younger sister, is amoral, anxious for excitement, and apparently appealing to all men. Fitzroy spoils her, giving her a car and lots of money, even after she has dumped Craig, her nice lawyer fiancé, and run away with Peter, her sister's husband. Stanley causes lots more trouble, apparently partying so much that she drives her second husband (Roy's ex-husband) to suicide. After returning home she is both depressed and bored. She takes to driving her car very fast around town and one night runs over a little girl, killing her. Roy, the older sister, is fatalistic. She has a job as a designer, but takes little pleasure in it. Eventually she regains some measure of happiness by bringing Craig out of his melancholy, but even that ends when Stanley returns. Roy is reduced to leaving the house in the rain and spending the night with a young man whom she has never met before. He has found a purpose in joining the military to fight in the European war, but she feels compelled to return to the house of sorrow. The novel is told partially through the thoughts of several of the characters, mostly Asa and Roy. An example of the dialogue and the depressive state of the characters is evident in the following quote: "Last year, when she [Roy] looked back, was as blank as all the other years and the days and the hours that had gone by and were now blotted out.... Do I hate love, because it can ravish your heart while it wrings the blood from your veins?"

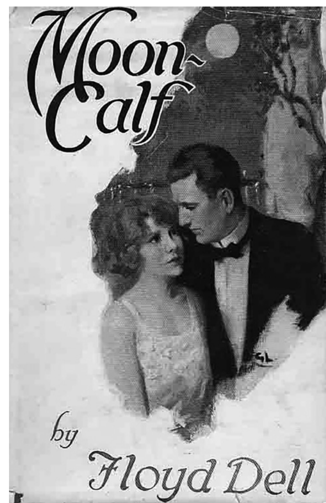
There is a secondary plot about Parry, a young African American man, who wants to study the law, with both Craig and Asa's encouragement. He is saving up money by working as a chauffeur for Fitzroy and for Stanley, and after Stanley leaves the scene of the accident, he is blamed for the little girl's death. Although Parry is released after spending only one night in jail, his self-esteem is shattered. Stanley finally admits that she hit the girl, but remembers little about it, and because of her uncle's influence is able to escape punishment. Glasgow's southern upbringing and condescending notions of race are evident in her portrayal of the African American characters: loyal Minerva, an octoroon, who does washing for the white folks and seems pretty saintly; Virgie, the Timberlakes' maid, who is darker, and whom they wished they could get rid of, but they can't get anyone of better "quality" for what they pay; and Parry, Minerva's son, who is light-skinned and smart, but once he's arrested, his language

In This Our Life continued on page 20

What Were They Reading Then?
Moon-Calf (1920) by Floyd Dell

Ted G. Fleener
Waterloo Community Schools (retired)

Floyd Dell was a major force in American literature in the early 1920s. He was a contemporary of Sinclair Lewis and knew him from the time they both spent in Greenwich Village. Like Lewis, he was born in the Midwest, two years after Lewis's birth, in the small town of Barry, Illinois, in 1887. Unlike Lewis, Dell's life was one of grinding poverty. He did not attend college. As he grew to manhood, Dell became known as the boy genius of the avant-garde. Lewis called Dell a Midwestern Bambi, "a faun at the barricades" who belonged on the sunny bluffs of the Mississippi. Dell's *Moon-Calf* was published in 1920, the same year as *Main Street*. It sold very well and made Dell almost $15,000, a large amount of money in 1920 ("Floyd Dell").



Moon-Calf is almost entirely autobiographical. The novel begins with the Civil War experiences of Felix Fay's father and flows from that point. The father returns from the war, is active in Republican politics, and becomes a butcher—a profession at which he fails. The family descends into less than genteel poverty. Wherever the family moves, they take a shabby bureau with its clutter and knickknacks as a centerpiece of their new dwelling—a symbol of their past status.

Dell paints a very tender and poignant portrait of the coming of age of Felix Fay. Fay struggles through many dreamlike phases of childhood, including his early tentative communication with the opposite sex and his search for purpose and meaning in life. Felix endures a series of factory jobs and meets a girl who totally mesmerizes him. He also becomes enamored of socialism and has mentors who encourage him in this political activity. Felix shows some of the poetry he has written to a librarian who encourages him in his efforts. Some of his poetry is published as a result of her encouragement.

The family moves many times: from Maple to Vickley and eventually to Port Royal. These are thinly disguised descriptions of Barry and Quincy, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa. In Port Royal, Felix is very active in the socialist movement, becomes a cub reporter at a newspaper, and continues his tentative efforts in understanding the opposite sex.

The novel is divided into four books, segmenting the changes in the life of Felix Fay. The first three books recount his various experiences in the towns he and his family live in, and the final book is "The Cabin," in which he is preparing for the next phase of his life. In this section Fay's life as a reporter is firmly established, and he has his first serious romance. The fourth book ends with the words: "Chicago! Chicago!" The words are prophetic of the next phase of his life.

Dell's own words pretty much sum up the essence of *Moon-Calf*. "That novel (*Moon-Calf*) was based upon a selection of memories, with a very few bits of invention to piece it out" (Roba). Dell created a dreamy-eyed youth, Felix Fay, explaining that the word "Fay" was used to describe a wood sprite who really wasn't there.

Moon-Calf is worth reading as a very descriptive account of a young man's coming-of-age. It's a bit choppy in places in the beginning, but as the work progresses, it flows well and Dell does a masterful job of describing and delineating situations, places, and characters. Dell is a master of painting pictures for the senses with his words. You can smell the burnt sugar when Felix works in a candy factory, empathize with the pain in his soul when he loses a position, and feel his angst at the loss of a real or pretended love.

Moon-Calf is a very well written book on the early life of a young American who came of age in the late nineteeth and early twentieth centuries. One difference between Lewis and Dell was that Dell did not reject the small town as Lewis did in his satire. Felix had much good to say about Port Royal. At the end he notes, "It had been built for young men and girls to be happy in, to venture in and to think strange and free and perilous thoughts."

Lewis and Dell both came to be at peace with their earlier lives, but it appears that Dell did so much sooner. *Moon-Calf*, like *Main Street*, is well worth the reader's time.

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Sinclair Lewis and the Novel

In 2014 two scholars explored the form of the novel in systematic ways in an effort to understand it as a genre. Michael Schmidt's *The Novel: A Biography* (Belknap-Harvard UP) examined the novel in English, creating dialogues between authors and books, and sometimes between authors of different time periods. For example, he paired Aphra Behn and Zora Neale Hurston in a presentation of America, and put together Willa Cather, Sarah Orne Jewett, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and others to talk about the blurring of form. Rather than an overarching thesis, Schmidt's intention was to show how the novel as a form has survived over the ages.

Sinclair Lewis is discussed in chapter 26, "The Fate of Form," along with the eclectic grouping of William Dean Howells, Henry James, Cynthia Ozick, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Edith Wharton, Marcel Proust, Dorothy Richardson, Anthony Powell, Henry Williamson, and C. P. Snow. The chapter starts with Howells, who in the late nineteenth century "was a patriot keen to promote American writing" (489). Schmidt then moves to Lewis, both as successor to Howells and one who was trying to encourage American writing to move beyond Howells.

> When Sinclair Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930, he rendered the *coup de grace* to Howells in his address, "The American Fear of Literature." He began in a friendly, patronizing voice, almost like Howells's. "Mr. Howells was one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men," and then, to the jugular, "but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage. He abhorred not only profanity and obscenity but all of what H. G. Wells has called *the jolly coarsenesses of life*." Only the Great War put an end to his stifling influence on American letters. His greatest achievement was "to tame Mark Twain, perhaps the greatest of our writers, and to put that fiery old savage into an intellectual frock coat and top hat." His type survived. Lewis's medicine, magisterially administered, tried to purge the republic of American letters of one of its most persistent types. (489)

In 1921, the judges for the Pulitzer Prize had voted to give the award to Lewis for *Main Street*. Columbia University's advisory board overturned their recommendation because they deemed it not "wholesome" enough, and instead awarded the prize to Edith Wharton for *The Age of Innocence*. Lewis was a great admirer of Wharton and wrote to congratulate her. In return she invited him and his wife to visit her in France. The trip was a success, and Lewis wrote to ask if he could dedicate *Babbitt* to her. She agreed gratefully: "No one has ever wanted to dedicate a book to me before—& I'm so particularly glad that now it's happened, the suggestion comes from the author of *Main Street*" (518). Although the judges again voted to give Lewis the Pulitzer, this time for *Babbitt*, again the advisory board overturned their recommendation and awarded it to Willa Cather's *One of Ours* instead. Small wonder that when the judges and the advisory board both agreed that Lewis deserved the Pulitzer for *Arrowsmith* he turned them down.

Schmidt repeats the canard that by the time Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize his best work was behind him.

> He characterizes the kinds of readers he was up against, though he does not enumerate the death threats he received after the publication of *Main Street* nor does he quantify its enormous success, 2 million copies sold in two editions, a quarter of a million words written in fourteen weeks, 30,000 discarded at the beginning. The novelist John Hersey, who was for a time his amanuensis, was shocked at how much Lewis was willing to excise from a book, not least because Lewis was a two-finger typist and on the old manual typewriters the percussive pressure hurt his fingers. He taped up his fingers and kept on doggedly typing. (519)

Schmidt quotes at length from the Nobel Prize speech, and stresses the violence with which some of Lewis's work was received. "His chief political contribution is in capturing the diction and the emphatic, bullying philistinism of a culture that wore down and defeated certain kinds of innocence" (519). He mentions Lewis's influence on John Updike and John Steinbeck, and the admiration of E. M. Forster and Edmund Wilson. Schmidt sees George Babbitt and Elmer Gantry as "two of the

Sinclair Lewis and the Novel *continued on page 20*

New Members

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

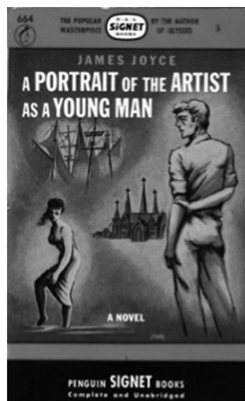
Peter M. Katsaros
Wilmette, IL

Ronald E. Beach
Wethersfield, CT

Babbitt in Paperback *continued from page 1*

tatter. For *Babbitt*, however, I used a paperback that I picked up somewhere for a quarter or fifty cents. The book dates from February 1946, four years after *Babbitt* became part of the Modern Library series in 1942. As is usual, my university included some images from the 1920s display on its website. It included the one for *Babbitt*.

Since that time I have been surprised by the number of places that pictures of my particular copy crops up. That they derive from mine I know because of the distinctive patch missing in the upper left corner and the tear. Why should the image be used so often, however? I have concluded that this image, reproduced to the right, is relatively scarce and may be the first image of George Babbitt since the novel was issued in September 1922. There was, of course, a photocopy edition of the book issued by Grosset and Dunlap that exhibits stills from the motion picture of 1924, but that incarnation of George Follansbee Babbitt had to be derived from a real person so was not wholly based on a response to Lewis's text, for which, I suspect, no concrete representation will do. Moreover, for years following 1946, no other pictorial representations of the book existed except this one. (Since 1961, Signet Classics, Dover Books, and others have filled the gap.) This image of Babbitt in genial, sunlit Zenith was created while the author was alive to see it and so has a kind of interest. One would like to have heard his reaction to it.

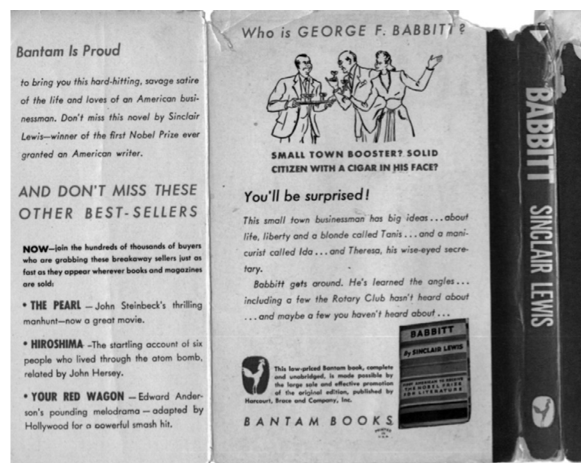


It is a singularly inappropriate illustration. Granted that in the 1940s, before the revolution of "quality paperbacks" that Anchor Books started in the late 1950s, paperbacks were considered disposable goods, to be tossed aside like a newspaper. They were a chance for a publisher to turn a buck. Covers often stressed sexual situations that may have been only a part—a minor part—of the story. For example, here is Signet's 1945 edition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

A tale of seamy intrigue! A purchaser looking to titillate himself with Joyce's novel was in for a disappointment.

The cover for *Babbitt* does not match the sordidness of that for *Portrait*, but it is equally misleading.

It suggests, in words and images, that Babbitt's main concern is sexual conquest and that the book is a hotbed of smoldering desire. "This small town businessman has big ideas . . . about life, liberty, and a blonde called Tanis . . . and a manicurist called Ida . . . and Theresa, his wise-eyed secretary." Readers of the novel will doubtless recall Babbitt's



various quests in respect to these three figures, although they will also realize that except for Tanis Judique those episodes are not central. And even then the novel offers nothing of the lasciviousness implied by the dust wrapper.

B[ernard] Barton's[1] picture presents a man a little more nattily dressed than George Follansbee Babbitt, jauntily smoking a cigar as he ogles a shapely brunette. The town of Zenith is not fully depicted, but it appears smaller than the busting Midwestern metropolis of the story. The sign, which reads "GEORGE BABBITT/REAL ESTATE," is not accurate, since Babbitt works for the Babbitt-Thompson Realty Company. Who the two women on the cover are supposed to be is unanswerable. The jacket writer implies that they must be Ida Putiak, the manicurist whom Babbitt attempts to lead on in Chapter XXIV, and Tanis Judique, Babbitt's fling in his abortive flirtation with wild and dissipated life à la 1920. The woman on Babbitt's left, however, looks old for Ida Putiak, who is "nineteen, perhaps twenty." (Since Ida has black hair, the other woman cannot be the manicurist.) The second woman,

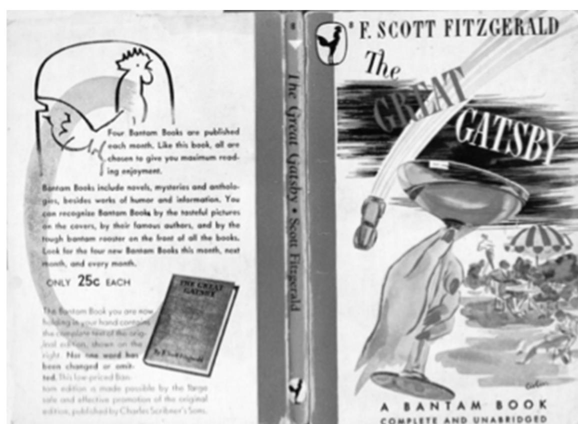
Babbitt in Paperback *continued on page 9*

Babbitt in Paperback *continued from page 8*

the brunette, is too conventional for Tanis Judique. She is not "blonde" as the flap suggests. Furthermore, Babbitt is a comically inept flirter, edgy and not as debonair as this gent seems to be. Bantam was simply hoping to lure the buyer who wanted a sexy read. (Disappointment is also in store for this purchaser.)

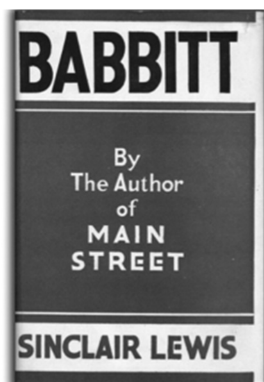
Why did Bantam not use something like the dustcover of the original edition? For one thing, it has no depiction of any figure from the story. It is typographic, unlike the wrap for *Main Street*, which at least shows Carol Kennicott in silhouette against a sketched-in Gopher Prairie. For another, Bantam may not have had a jacketed copy from 1922. The reason I think this possible is that the back cover of the paperback wrap reproduces the uniform green and orange striped dust jackets used on Harcourt reprints of Lewis's novels after Lewis won the Nobel Prize.

It seems today mildly surprising that Bantam used a picture of the original book at all, but at this time paperbacks were trying to associate themselves with the hardcovers. It made them more respectable. The 1945 paperback cover of *The Great Gatsby*, for example, issued around the same time



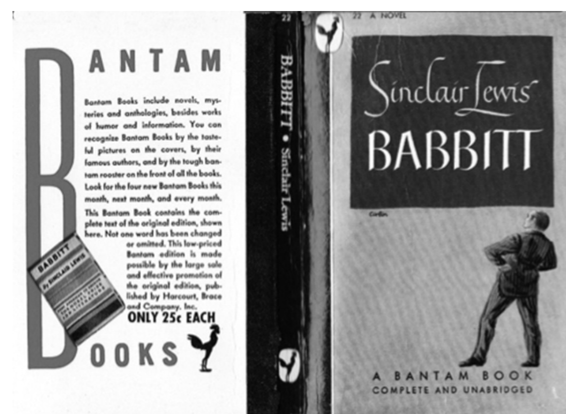
reproduces an unjacketed copy of the Scribner's hardback, either of 1925 or 1942—an image so dull as to hardly seem worthwhile using.

Joyce was safely dead when Signet did violence to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but Lewis was very much alive, living in Duluth, in February 1946 when the Bantam paperback of *Babbitt* appeared. Of course, he may not have been involved in the reissue at all. In 1922, he insisted that the dustcover for *Babbitt* be dignified, with no illustration. By 1945 Lewis had published *Cass Timberlane* and was starting to write *Kingsblood Royal*. His attentions were elsewhere.



It is curious that in 1946 there is a dust jacket on the paperback at all. Although it was not unheard for paperbacks to be jacketed, it was by no means common. *The Great Gatsby* was not given one. Here Bantam fell into the trap of limiting the imagination of the reader that Lewis had avoided in 1922. However, by 1946 readers expected some kind of cover illustration. Thus although the middle-aged flirt of 1946 is not very close to the real estate salesman of 1920, it is not surprising that the inappropriate image gained some currency when my university's website posted it.

Although the paperback dust jacket can hardly be unique or rare or even especially valuable, it is probably moderately scarce. Book buyers of the first half of the twentieth century often discarded the jackets, which were meant, like dusters, to keep dirt from the more valuable cloth underneath (notwithstanding that this copy of *Babbitt* is a paperback). How common it used to be to find in used bookshops copies of Lewis novels in hardback with their blue cloth and orange labels, their jackets long since consigned to the waste basket.



However, it turns out the paperback offers a double treasure. Underneath Barton's mildly salacious jacket is a more appropriate, less sensational image:

This figure is more recognizable as the one who populates Lewis's narrative. In body type and generalized qualities, this man is closer to George F. Babbitt and less of a caricature than the figure on the Signet edition of the 1960s. His defiant stance seems a little overstated, given the humorous failure of Babbitt's efforts to break away from the confining conformities of Zenith, yet the book has more of a "classic" feel. It is more in keeping with Lewis's high reputation at the time.

Babbitt in Paperback *continued on page 11*

Sinclair Lewis Collection at Williams College

Sean C. Denniston, a Sinclair Lewis Society member and alumnus of Williams College, visited there last summer and was able to spend a morning looking at their surprisingly extensive collection of Sinclair Lewis housed in the Chapin Library of Rare Books. Williams's Chapin Library has some Lewis first editions. How'd they end up here? English Professor Sam Allen was a friend of Lewis's and continued that friendship in Williamstown.

Denniston writes, "I spoke with my old history professor (John Hyde Williams '52) who spoke briefly about remembering SL around Williamstown."

While indeed extensive, it did not include Richard Lingeman's *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*. (They do have a first edition of Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*.) To correct this and honor his old work-study boss, Chapin Librarian Bob Volz, Denniston gave Chapin a first edition of Richard's book.

"The thank you note from Chapin's assistant librarian ends with an intriguing question."

Sean wrote to Richard Lingeman: "Well, Richard?"

Richard Lingeman responded: "Sean—Thank you. I appreciated my book being there and rubbing shoulders with Schorer." ✍

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June 12, 2015

Mr. Sean C. Denniston

Dear Sean,

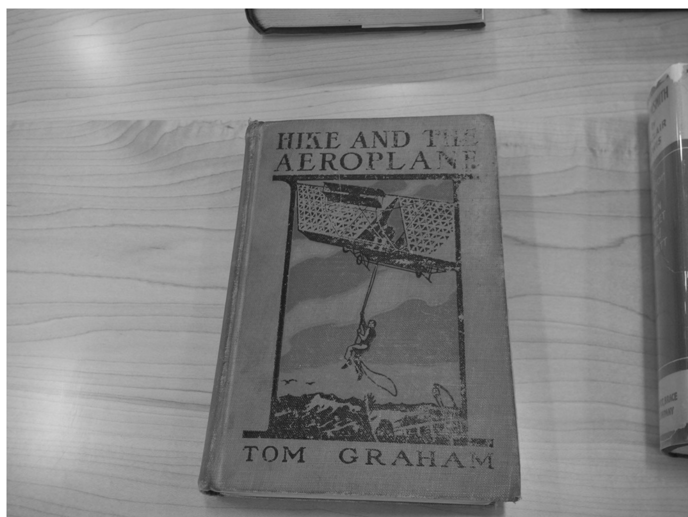
Thank you for sending a copy of Richard Lingeman's biography, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*, Random House, 2002, first edition, hardcover in dust-jacket. I'm pleased to accept it on behalf of the Chapin Library and Williams College. We'll be happy to add it to our Sinclair Lewis collection in honor of Bob Volz on the occasion of his retirement.

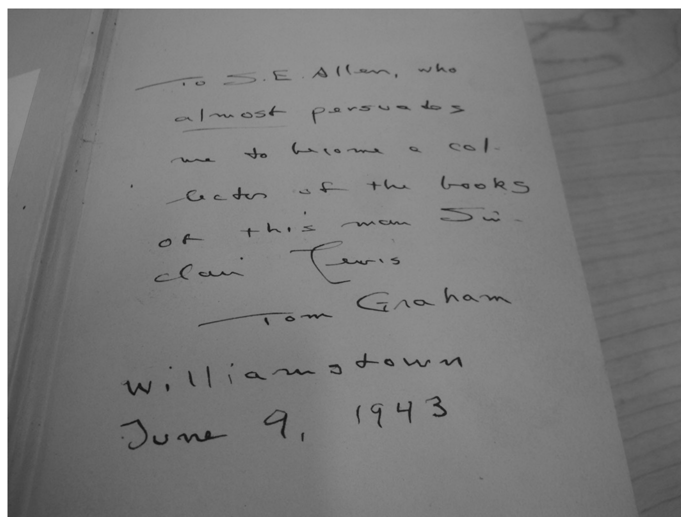
Thus Richard Lingeman will rub shoulders with Mark Schorer. What will they say to each other about Sinclair Lewis in the quiet of the stacks?

Best wishes,

Wayne G. Hammond
Assistant Librarian

Email *whammond@williams.edu*





Photos of the Sinclair Lewis Collection, Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College (photos courtesy of Sean C. Denniston).

Babbitt in Paperback *continued from page 9*

Together these two pictures are symptomatic both of the commercial aims of publishing and of the sense inherent in culture that books have a more important, enduring purpose than titillation or earning money for the author and publisher. The glued wrap of *Babbitt* was drawn not by Bernard Barton but by Edgard Cirlin (1913–1973), the man who illustrated the cover of *Gatsby*. In the hierarchy of illustrators for paperbacks in the 1940s, Cirlin was of higher stature. He was considered one of the premier illustrators during the early paperback period. His choice for the "permanent" cover of the paperback restores *Babbitt* to something closer to its literary distinction.

Notes

[1]Bernard Barton is not to be confused with another paperback artist, Harry Barton. I have been unable to find out much about Bernard Barton. Piet Schreuders, in *Paperbacks, U. S. A., A Graphic History, 1939–1959* states that Bernard Barton was born in New York, aspired to be a baseball player, and worked in the Signal Corps in World War II before illustrating for Bantam and Ace Books until 1958. An original piece of Barton's art auctioned for $2922 in 2014. Other Barton illustrations I know about are for mysteries—*The Squeeze*/*Love Me To Death*, *Death Has 2 Faces*, and *Scream Street*/*Stranglehold*. (Mysteries by different authors were often bound together in the 1950s). He worked in gouache on board.

Samples of his work may be found at http://reviews-and-ramblings.dreamwidth.org/1137809.html ✍

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 1*

The book was a success and was chosen for the Pulitzer Prize. It was also an awakening for many students of medicine. De Kruif's next book, *Microbe Hunters* (1926), although not a novel, also encouraged many young people to study either medicine or (bio-) medical science. De Kruif owed much of his writing ability to Lewis.

Mark Schorer's monumental biography of Sinclair Lewis in 1961 led to a wave of scholarship, which was supported by what de Kruif wrote about his collaboration with Lewis in his autobiography. In this essay, I try to analyze the newer views, particularly with regard to the scientific and medical aspects of the novel and the reason why the peak of scholarly commentaries came out so many years after the novel was first published. The first anthology of essays based on the novel was *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Arrowsmith"* in 1968.

For this essay, I suppose that the content of *Arrowsmith* is known—more or less. In short, Martin Arrowsmith is followed during his hectic student life and his intermittent career as a medical doctor. He excels in laboratory research but fails in an attempt to apply it. Finally, he retires with a research comrade into the woods, away from society. Many readers have considered this implausible end as either romantic or pathetic.

The Making and the Aftermath

In 1922, Sinclair Lewis, author of *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, met the bacteriologist, Paul de Kruif, whose muckraking book, *Our Medicine Men*, had just been published that year. Working at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, de Kruif had started to mingle with literary circles. Some writers (among them H. L. Mencken) had challenged him to write about his milieu of scientists and doctors. In his articles and in the book, de Kruif made mockery of the lack of experimental rigor of certain Rockefeller medical doctors, exposing their mediocrity in research and their bragging about how well they could combine laboratory and hospital work, using the institute to climb the social ladder. That severe critique of his place of employment cost de Kruif his career as a scientist.

De Kruif's encounter with Lewis, shortly after his resignation, resulted in a discussion of their writing a book together. Both men recognized that they had a common critical attitude toward society. Lewis's publisher Harcourt, Brace and Company offered a contract on equal footing, but as Lewis was to be the author, it was soon decided that royalties were split: 75 percent for Lewis, 25 percent for de Kruif. In January 1923, the two took off to the Caribbean, searching for an idea for a deadly epidemic they had planned for the story. They worked hard on the framework of the novel and drank much. Lewis wrote to Harcourt on February 13, 1923: "De Kruif is perfection. He has not only an astonishing grasp of scientific detail; he had a philosophy behind it, and the imagination of the fiction writer. He sees, synthesizes characters" (qtd. in Lingeman 227). Thereafter they headed for London. Upon arrival, the outline of the book was completed.

With a draft completed, de Kruif was enthusiastic, and Lewis's acknowledgment made him blush. From the page proofs, however, it appeared that Lewis had thanked de Kruif only for his technical assistance. That minimalizing of his contribution caused a row between them, and one of the publishers had to convince Lewis to extend the appropriate acknowledgment to de Kruif. It did not really satisfy de Kruif, but he accepted it. In 1926 Lewis rejected the Pulitzer Prize of $1,000, and de Kruif followed suit, but the affair of the acknowledgment drove the two men apart, and they never met again. Much later, de Kruif confessed to Grace Hegger (Lewis's wife during the writing of *Arrowsmith*), "After the promising and praising and evasions relative to the credit, something died in me toward him. The juice had gone out of our friendship" (Hegger 284). Their close collaboration had lasted only about two years.

In 1931 a film version with the same name was released, with Ronald Colman as Dr. Arrowsmith. The playwright Sidney Howard wrote the script.[1] Only much later did de Kruif see it on television, and he thought it was well done. As he wrote to his friend Henry Wallace (the former vice president) in 1960, "It didn't bother me much that there was no credit for my part in it, which was considerable."

During the late 1950s, when Mark Schorer was busy writing his biography of Lewis, he tried to get de Kruif's view on the collaboration and the making of *Arrowsmith*. Initially, de Kruif tried to forestall further contact with a long telegram on May 29, 1959:

> In view of the fact of Mr. Lewis's forgetfulness of my part in the composition of *Arrowsmith*, despite his original agreement for joint top billing and in view of his later almost total neglect to give me the modest credit that I might have deserved, don't you think it would be wise for you to give my part in *Arrowsmith* a miss and not mention me at all? Am quite sure Mr. Lewis in his heavenly home would be pleased if you took this course.

Schorer did not accept that, and persisted; soon they exchanged previews of each other's writings on the collaboration, and they went on, satisfied. Schorer's biography was published in 1961 and de Kruif's autobiography the following year. The details about the creation of *Arrowsmith* have triggered historians

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued on page 13*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 12*

to elaborate on various details.[2] A biography of Paul de Kruif by the present author will hopefully be published next year.

In the next section I investigate the following questions: Reading *Arrowsmith* has been crucial in the choice for studying medicine of many doctors-to-be, but what is its relevance for present-day science and its readers? Why was de Kruif seen for so long as merely a technical consultant? And why did it take scientists and historians some 70 years to recognize and appreciate the medical experimentation of the early 1920s?

Relevance of *Arrowsmith*

It is indisputable that many young people were inspired by *Arrowsmith* (and *Microbe Hunters*) to choose a career in medicine and/or science. Hundreds of doctors, among them several Nobel Prize winners, have testified to that. In this respect, these books were unintentionally instrumental in shaping healthcare and advancing knowledge about diseases in the 1930s and 1940s. For young people the appeal of hero-doctors was attractive, even though the doctors who were described were often all too human in their behavior.

Many of the situations that students, researchers, and doctors face in the novel are very recognizable to their twenty-first-century colleagues. Several authors have emphasized the book's relevance for today. In 1982, Gert Brieger, professor of the history of health sciences, proposed in a journal on medical education that Lewis's book was a good stepping-stone for teaching medical history, mainly in programs for continuing education. Howard Markel, professor of the history of medicine, followed suit and identified several examples of attitudes and airs of students, physicians, and professors in the novel that he saw around him; he pointed to the struggle of Martin Arrowsmith to be both a physician and a scientist ("Reflections on Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*").

Following the same idea, Thomas Häusler, a science reporter, published a retrospect on *Arrowsmith* in 2008. He emphasized its relevance for today and mentioned public trends against vaccination (timely!), problems of communication to the public, and the powerful influence of business over medicine and science. Using *Arrowsmith* as an example, Mark Alpert, author and science editor, wrote in the same year: "Readers Need More Novels about Real Science." He aimed at encouraging youngsters into science and noted that, rather than reading and commenting on original publications in scientific journals, a student might get more from a novel that gives a broader insight to (medical) science in society. Powel Kazanjian, an internist who recently wrote a dissertation on the bacteriologist professor Frederic Novy (mentor of Paul de Kruif and in part Dr. Max Gottlieb in *Arrowsmith*), doubted that the image of the medical scientist as selfless is still pertinent given occurrences of scientists who have engaged in public priority disputes over credit for scientific discoveries. In addition, the significant amount of time that medical researchers must spend writing grants in order to receive funding may lead some aspiring researchers to view entering a medical research career with reservation if not cynicism. Yet, Kazanjian considered that the unconditional passion for discovery of Arrowsmith and Gottlieb in *Arrowsmith* may still serve as a source of inspiration to medical researchers today.

The reasons to read *Arrowsmith* today are diverse. Stephen Greenberg, professor of medical education, maintained that de Kruif's *Microbe Hunters*, "along with *Arrowsmith* by Sinclair Lewis were instrumental in my eventual decision to pursue medicine and infectious disease as a career." And William Summers, professor of medical history, admitted in personal communication to me that almost 100 percent of his own students have never read the book ("or even heard of it; to them 'Arrowsmith' is an old 1970s American rock band"). He opined that Lewis's style, narrative, and character development is not very exciting to a modern reader. The characters are rather "flat," and the dialogue seems stilted … it seems sort of "a period piece." Likewise, the biochemist and Nobel Prize winner Paul Berg, whose own interest in science was awakened by reading *Arrowsmith* and *Microbe Hunters*, noted, "I ask my students today how many have read Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* or de Kruif's book, *Microbe Hunters*. None of my students have ever heard of either one of them, which is a disappointment" (3).

But students *can* be challenged to read *Arrowsmith*, as Gerald Weissmann, professor emeritus of medicine, commented in 2010: "lately, a good number of my students have been led to read *Arrowsmith*, after someone told them that the name of the rock group 'Aerosmith' was taken from a 'doctor book.' They've found it quaint, dated, and totally inspiring" (965). And recently I was invited by Dr. Karen Masterson, instructor at Johns Hopkins University, to give a presentation for her students about *Arrowsmith* and *Microbe Hunters*; it was a challenge to introduce these popular books to them that were important in the time of their great-grandparents. But while students can be gently led by their professors to read these books, today's microbiologists, infectiologists, and public health officials lack such a stimulus. Maybe this is what many medical educators fail to pass on: the spirit of science, the drive for truth-seeking research, the inspiration to be found among the pioneers, and the unimaginable but realistic

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued on page 14*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 13*

disasters of (future) epidemics that may kill by the thousands. Howard Markel considered that, as a doctor, he would like to prescribe a page or two of *Arrowsmith* each day to his more profit-driven colleagues; his overeager medical students; the policymakers; those working at health care, health device, biotechnology and pharmaceutical corporations; and worried patients. It could restore some health to the ailing condition of scientific idealism ("Prescribing *Arrowsmith*," "What a 1925 Novel by Sinclair Lewis"). Unfortunately, medical history is largely a matter of interest and hobby for retired professionals, and their *Aha-Erlebnis* of reading *Arrowsmith* mostly comes too late. Yet, editions follow each other, and Goodreads noted that more than three thousand recent readers of *Arrowsmith* rated it average 3.8 on a scale of 5 (*Microbe Hunters* rated 3.9).

The Role of de Kruif

As suggested in the introduction, there is yet another category of readers. After the Lewis biography by Schorer and de Kruif's autobiography, various windows have been opened that shed more light on the involvement of de Kruif in the making of *Arrowsmith*. A number of authors, literary experts, medical historians, or (retired) medical specialists (so-called "practitioner historians") have tried to dissect the novel. Each of them had a specific subject and approach, but here I focus on the role of de Kruif, which Lewis tended to ignore because he feared that readers would think that he no longer was able to create a novel without help.

During his lifetime, Paul de Kruif's connection with Lewis and *Arrowsmith* was not given much attention, even when the film version came out. De Kruif himself stated in his autobiography: "it's okay not to be more widely identified with its composition.… Apprentices are not supposed to have their name on a product" (99). But in 1931, a medical archivist realized that de Kruif, more than Lewis, was aware of the real figures behind the characters of *Arrowsmith* and asked him to make a list of students, doctors, researchers, and professors and their real-life counterparts. De Kruif consented, but stipulated that the information should remain sealed for 30 years. In 1959 de Kruif gave Mark Schorer permission to use this list. The present author, working on his biography of Paul de Kruif, has made a further analysis of the clues and substantially extended the background of the real figures behind the characters ("*Arrowsmith:* The People behind the Characters"). After ending his long career as a science writer, and writing his autobiography, de Kruif further raised the curtain on his involvement in *Arrowsmith* that he had kept closed for so long. The quote at the beginning of this article reflects how he then saw his participation in writing of the book and which aspect of it was of greatest importance to him.

After the publication of Schorer's biography of Lewis and de Kruif's autobiography, the first scholar to discover more hidden treasures in *Arrowsmith* was Charles Rosenberg, a science historian. In 1963, he elaborated on de Kruif's senior colleague at the Rockefeller Institute, Dr. Jacques Loeb, who was in part the role model for Dr. Max Gottlieb in the book. Rosenberg's analysis of de Kruif's admiration for this greatest of American biologists of German origin and his materialistic philosophy is illuminating. Thereafter, the flow of articles continued, of course, each with its own approach.

Howard Gest, professor of microbiology and science history, wrote in 1991 about Martin Arrowsmith as a scientist and a medical hero. He gave more information on Arrowsmith's discovery of bacteriophage and explained that in the real world, it was Frederick Twort who first made the discovery, and Félix d'Hérelle who made the rediscovery two years later. Cleverly, d'Hérelle is the discoverer in the novel, and Martin is the rediscoverer.

William Summers focused more sharply on the discovery of bacteriophage and did admirable detective work to explore the proximity of de Kruif to the very small circle of microbiological experts who were aware of bacteriophages. Summers also revealed that plague bacilli had been studied in the lab of Dr. Frederic Novy, de Kruif's mentor (and Dr. Max Gottlieb in part), and that one of the students was accidentally infected by a contaminated cigarette. This incident at the University of Michigan is very reminiscent of what happened to Leora, Martin's wife; she got infected in the same way but died before an injection with bacteriophage could save her.

During the First World War, de Kruif was on duty in France, where he visited the Pasteur Institute in Paris. There he met Félix d'Hérelle who worked on the phenomenon of a substance that killed dysentery bacteria. Thus de Kruif likely was aware of the publication by d'Hérelle in 1917. Back in Novy's lab, he witnessed the start of bacteriophage research. Moreover, his fiancée, Rhea Barbarin, worked as a laboratory technician in the nearby Parke-Davis vaccine unit where the bacteriophage was also a hot item. De Kruif left Novy's lab and moved to the Rockefeller Institute (the McGurk Institute in the book); there he shared a lab with the Belgian André Gratia, who also started to work on these parasites of bacteria. When Gratia returned to Brussels, de Kruif's sister Lois joined Gratia as a research assistant. Gratia and his boss, Jules Bordet, defended Twort in the priority case against d'Hérelle. Jacques Bronfenbrenner continued bacteriophage research at

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Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 14*

the Rockefeller a year after de Kruif had left. These examples and more are proof of the close proximity of de Kruif to the bacteriophage research. As a microbiologist working on the frontlines of bacteriology and immunology, de Kruif could have chosen more familiar aspects of his profession for the novel. Its contemporary readers, even among the medical professionals, must have experienced the inoculation of a healing substance that prevented or healed bacterial disease, with the unfamiliar name bacteriophage, as science fiction.

Heiner Fangerau, professor of medical history, further highlighted the influence that Dr. Jacques Loeb, a respected researcher at Rockefeller, had on de Kruif and eventually on the figure of a Professor Max Gottlieb in *Arrowsmith*. Loeb was an outspoken dissector of nature; he saw nature as a machine of chemistry and physics that could be understood only as the sum of measurable qualities, but his work was not directly applicable in practical medicine (he studied the physiology and reproduction of lower animals). "Medical science" was a contradiction in terms, he taught de Kruif, and the bacteriologist—not a medic—like his master, recognized the difference between the medical doctor and the scientist. Thus de Kruif induced Lewis to describe Martin Arrowsmith as the impossible in-between, a hybrid, who finally chose the laboratory research of diseases and their agents as his emphasis. Fangerau discussed the position of Loeb using his correspondence with de Kruif, after the latter had begun to write critical articles in the press. Loeb was nervous about what his junior colleague would write about him, as some colleagues suspected him of having prompted de Kruif's critical attitude. Loeb made the compromise that de Kruif had refused: the old scientist accepted the ambience of the Rockefeller Institute in order to continue his research, and he tried to convince de Kruif to do the same "because I do not want you to be lost to science" (qtd. in Fangerau 86). After his resignation, de Kruif thanked Loeb for his inspiration and personal interest. The atheist Loeb had been a guiding light to de Kruif. He died in 1924, and was spared the confrontation with his mirror image, Gottlieb, in the novel.

James M. Hutchisson made it clear that de Kruif's role was much more than an informant in medical and laboratory affairs: he also left his mark on nonscientific episodes. Hutchisson's analysis of the chronology of *Arrowsmith* and the sequence of events in the life of de Kruif reveals a striking parallel. His experience at the university and the research institute with various colleagues is very recognizable in the novel. (The only period of time in which the two lives do not run parallel is that of de Kruif 's time in the military.) The activities of Martin Arrowsmith during his time at the institute are particularly satirical, and the characters are described as shallow or pompous, written in a style typical of Lewis. Also convincing are Hutchisson's comparisons of de Kruif's earlier writings in *Our Medicine Men* and his ideas about the incompatibility of clinically trained physicians mingling with medical scientists. Hutchisson has built onto the information in Schorer's biography, for example, in drawing on a new source: the correspondence of Grace Hegger Lewis and de Kruif, in which the latter contemplated his relationship with Grace's former husband.

Michael Walters pointed to another aspect of comparison: the synergy between de Kruif and Lewis, citing the latter: "Paul de Kruif proves to have as much synthetic fictional imagination as he has scientific knowledge, and that's one hell of a lot." It shows how the sensibilities of a scientist and a gifted writer can produce an artistic fusion.

The Human Experiment

In preparation for the novel, Lewis and de Kruif visited the Caribbean. In the novel they describe how a village on a Caribbean island is on the verge of a plague epidemic, and how Arrowsmith's bacteriophage will be tested as a prophylactic. Gottlieb insists on proper controls, and Arrowsmith plans to inject one half of the island's population with this "vaccine." In real life, de Kruif had written in his 1922 essay on medicine in America that a good researcher and a good doctor would realize that animals or people in one of these experimental groups might die. And here is Dr. Martin Arrowsmith, the stumbling truth seeker, who goes out with his laboratory product and embarks on a human experiment. Initially, this setup succeeds, but with this mix of ambitions and his wife succumbing to the dangerous infection, he decides not to sacrifice the unprotected control group and injects everybody with the bacteriophage. Martin fears a confrontation with Dr. Gottlieb, but finding his old mentor now senile, he is welcomed in New York as the tamer of the plague. It is a hidden critique of the prominent but unscientific physicians heading the McGurk Institute.

A decade after publication (!), de Kruif's colleague bacteriologist and war comrade, Dr. Hans Zinsser, was merciless in his comments about Martin's procedures (and implicitly on de Kruif's suggestion of the trial): "If an epidemiologist on a plague study talked and behaved in the manner of the hero of *Arrowsmith*, he would not only be useless, but he would be regarded as something of a yellow ass and a nuisance by his associates. And … raucous laughter would be its reception in the laboratories and in the field where the work he describes is being done" (13). But reviews of *Arrowsmith* in the *Journal of*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued on page 16*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 15*

the American Medical Association and the *American Journal of Public Health* in 1925 did not comment on Martin's approach to the trial. If there was laughter at all, it was not very loud.

Only recently, Ilana Löwy, a biomedical science historian, devoted an article to the anti-plague experiment ("Martin Arrowsmith's Clinical Trial").[3] She noted that Lewis did not mention any attempt to show that the two halves of the population had to be comparable, and in fact, the control half did not receive a placebo injection. Large clinical trials with appropriate controls were rare in the early 1920s, let alone randomized, double-blind ones, with the informed consent of the participants, as is the accepted practice of today. It was "phage or nothing," directly from the lab to the people, to make the point more dramatically. Moreover, Löwy pointed to the fact that Lewis was not advised by a clinician but by microbiologist de Kruif, adept in Jacques Loeb and his materialistic, reductionist approach.

Lisa L. Lynch, in her article "Arrowsmith Goes Native," discusses the tropical setting of the outbreak on the British colony, St. Hubert, where Martin is hailed as a hero. However, he does not plan to save the population; rather he wants to perfect a "vaccine" for future use. And in the sense of caring more about the product than the people, he displays a rather colonialist attitude, even though the dramatic events force him to reverse his approach. Still, the same product-focused attitude of using a human population in the tropics for vaccine or drug trials is seen today, though present human trials are firmly embedded in the above described scientific controls.

All these studies reveal much more information than was known during the decades following publication; Paul de Kruif had put his stamp on *Arrowsmith*. He was much more than a supplier of technical facts and descriptions of several characters; he contributed to the critique of the behavior of physicians and scientists of the time and helped paint the idealistic picture of religious devotion to science of the characters Arrowsmith and Gottlieb. De Kruif deliberately minimized his role until writing his autobiography. He had another mission, promoting affordable healthcare for all and working to make new products and techniques of medical science available without lengthy administrative procedures. These aspects are largely ignored by historians, and thus one of my arguments in writing his biography.

The Delay

Studies in bacteriology and immunology were booming during the 1920s, so it makes sense that Lewis and de Kruif created Dr. Max Gottlieb as a bacteriologist and immunologist like Frederick Novy and not a physiologist like Jacques Loeb (Löwy, "Immunology and Literature"). There was much to discover about agents of disease, the defense reactions of the body, and how to neutralize pathogenic bacteria (with bacteriophages). Gottlieb encouraged Arrowsmith to further his discovery and try to grow bacteriophage in dead bacteria. Another aspect in Arrowsmith's research was to expose bacteriophage to irradiation—both brilliant ideas, but to date nobody had succeeded. A quarter of a century later, James Watson (of DNA fame) did his PhD work on x-rayed bacteriophage. He later told about the impact of reading *Microbe Hunters* and *Arrowsmith* but did not mention the phage link (19–20). The therapeutic effect of bacteriophages was an intriguing concept, but it hardly materialized in Western medicine (though it did in Eastern Europe). The killing of bacteria in the body was later achieved by antibiotics. Bacteriophage, however, appeared of key importance for the study of reproduction of viruses and the establishment of modern molecular biology. The spreading multiresistance of bacteria to antibiotics may force researchers to reconsider the therapeutic potential of bacteriophages (Ho; Kuchment).

Summers has written in depth about immunity, resistance to infection, and vaccination during the early twenties. Gest has also noted that researchers have stayed interested in the ideas of de Kruif in *Arrowsmith*. But that was apparently not the case in the 70 silent years after the novel was published, even though de Kruif published his hopeful (sometimes too hopeful) ideas about viruses and immunization in the popular press in the 1930s (Eyler). It was not until the study of immunology became so important in the 1970s and 1980s that *Arrowsmith* became the subject of academic interest. Subsequently, the enormous change that molecular biology brought about in the 1990s and the new tool of manipulating genetic material has further triggered the interest of historians in what was the forefront of medical science during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Trying to explain the *Arrowsmith* wave after Rosenberg, Summers recently speculated that it reflects the current trends in social history, including literature, popular writings, movies, as well as in the history of science and medicine. In the 1950s, it seems that the history of ideas and "internalism" was the stuff that historians of science still focused upon (Summers).

One of the themes in *Arrowsmith* is the relationship between clinicians in the laboratory and biomedical researchers, whose natural habitat is the laboratory. Jacques Loeb, with de Kruif in his wake, considered that a physician (emphatic healer) and a scientist (cool dissector of nature) were incompatible in one person. De Kruif, whose resignation from the Rockefeller Institute originated from his satire on experimenting physicians, induced Lewis to make this an issue. Daniel Albert, an

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued on page 17*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 16*

ophthalmologist, compared the system of becoming a physician/researcher in Martin Arrowsmith's time and the present time. In those days it was easier for medical students to be flexible in choosing a direction. In remembering Albert's own experiences as a clinician/scientist, he recalls that medical undergraduates who were interested in research were warned that non-medical PhDs would "eat their lunch," implying that for a double career one has to compete with able people from other backgrounds. In fact, Arrowsmith was such a hybrid. Fortunately, in real life, there were then and still are shining examples of physicians who are able to combine clinical interest with scientific curiosity and quality of research. There are also those who studied medicine, but realized that they were unfit to care for patients and thus pursued a career in research. That is the path that Arrowsmith chose, via pathology and public health, finally retiring into the wilds of Vermont, away from society where he probably would fail, both in his research and as a human being.[4] This last move is often considered a quaint end of the novel.

Retreat

On this last point, Rebecca Herzig, professor of women's and gender studies, unearthed another layer in *Arrowsmith* in the chapter "Barbarians" of her book *Suffering for Science*. (Actually "Barbarian" was one of the working titles for the novel.) She states that Lewis pictured Arrowsmith as a researcher who rejects intellectual and social productivity, a seeker of truth who constantly stumbles and slides back into a world of corrupting values. Arrowsmith's final refuge in the wild for independent research is satisfying because he goes for scientific inquiry of which there is never an end. Kazanjian concluded that "To de Kruif and Lewis, it was the social necessity of the medical profession that tied its practitioners to the emergencies of everyday life, to compromise and commercialism. A practicing physician as able as he may be could never transcend social relationships which formed the fabric of his professional existence" (369). Through his retreat, Arrowsmith embraces both the spirit of science and his inner calling, fleeing from the social and commercial department heads that he believes have hindered his true scientific work: a potential salvation for an imprecise medical profession. Or, as Josephine Gladstone noted in 1980: "a flannel-shirted, Vermont-phase, rich wife and child behind him, a backwoods 'small-is-beautiful' immunologist, self-funded, content, creative at last" (6).

Similarly, Noortje Jacobs, a science historian, recently pointed to the tension between the scientific ideal of Arrowsmith and his functioning in society: too many social influences corrupted (his) science. And Arrowsmith becomes a believer in the religion of science, secluding himself from the world as a hermit, which makes him less human. Apparently most readers ignored this last move of Arrowsmith as the ultimate consequence of his attitude toward society. This deeper layer escaped the young doctors to be, and in retrospect, maybe we should be grateful for that.

Conclusions

Arrowsmith was an inspiration to generations of doctors and scientists from 1925 to the 1970s. *Arrowsmith* and *Microbe Hunters* no longer have the appeal and impact that they once had.

- The way in which Lewis describes the experiments and discoveries of Martin Arrowsmith reflects the way in which de Kruif expressed his love for the profession. The writing exercises, with Lewis as his teacher, was a way for de Kruif to come to grips with the fact that his life as a laboratory researcher at the forefront of bacteriology and immunology had ended. This can be seen as a period of nostalgia and mourning, a process of partition, despite his exclamation that he felt free after his forced resignation from the Rockefeller Institute. For the informed readers a sentiment of revenge is obvious as well.
- The role of de Kruif in the making of *Arrowsmith* has long been underestimated, despite the fact that later in his life he was a well-known popularizer and campaigner on medical matters. It was mainly due to de Kruif himself that his decisive role in the making of *Arrowsmith* remained underexposed for so long. He avoided this subject and put a moratorium on clues about who was who in the novel. Some of the more recent studies by historians have considerably extended our understanding of his significant input as a literary collaborator.
- The search for truth and honesty by Martin Arrowsmith, instructive an example as it is to medical students and young doctors, cannot have been the reason for a half century of analytical silence around the book. The fact that de Kruif convinced Lewis to introduce a brand-new discovery that plays a decisive role in the book (the plague agent killed by a bacteriophage), contrasts with the long time it took for medical and literary historians and medical scientists (70 years) to recognize and appreciate this bacterial novelty of the early 1920s.
- Medical historians needed an additional trigger to pay attention. It is my conviction that the blossoming of immunology and the beginning of molecular biology in the late 1980s created a renewed or sympathetic view of the application of such sciences as epidemiology and control of infectious diseases. In that context, a new generation of professionals began to see the merits of literature and biomedical science

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued on page 18*

Arrowsmith, a Synergy of Talents *continued from page 17*

and the dreams of writers from the early 1920s.

- The modern way of randomized clinical studies and controlled clinical trials to test new vaccines or drug candidates casts a special light on the fictive campaign against plague on the Caribbean island in the novel.
- Science as a religious pursuit may cause a tunnel view in the mind of a researcher. Focus on the project and the hunt for priority causes the empathy for suffering patients to fade away. The scientist may even reject the social context in which he works as corrupting and become an unworldly eccentric.
- Even though medical science has changed dramatically, *Arrowsmith* has retained some topicality. In particular it is worthwhile to use it as a focal point in teaching medical and/or science history (courses for interns and for continuing education). I am curious to hear from colleagues who have put this into practice.

Notes

[1]The papers of Sidney Coe Howard, including the script, are at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[2]In a second and more recent biography of Lewis by Richard Lingeman the writing process is accurately described, but for this essay, it gives no major additional viewpoints.

[3]The subject of the correctness of the clinical trial has been addressed by Agustín del Cañizo Fernández-Roldán (2007), but he based his article on the film *Arrowsmith*.

[4]De Kruif was less convinced of the futility of research: he proposed to change the word "probably" in the last line "probably we'll fail," to "possibly," and he noted that Lewis always was for the downbeat, and he for the upbeat (*Sweeping Wind* 104).

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Carl Van Vechten *continued from page 3*

> will be jealous of him because he went off to New York."
>
> "But is it immoral enough to get folks interested?"
>
> "I haven't read it. I tell you, with all I got to do, I just don't seem to have time to read novels. But I hear there's a woman and a young fellow interested in each other in the book, without being married! And it's all laid in Iowa—the setting, I mean … And then it's kind of highbrow and kind of humorous, and that makes immorality a lot worse." (130–31)

The committee has trouble finding any copies of the novel for sale; although eventually two copies are located in a cigar store. The owner hasn't read it, but refuses to pull the books based on Planish's say-so. Planish, without having read the novel either, decides to make a moralistic speech at the local park, although not more than 50 people show up. He thunders, "Here's an Ioway boy, Carl Van Vechten … conniving to flood us with a masterpiece of such insinuation, immorality and wicked brilliance that we are all tempted to thoughts entirely different from those proper to the Middlewest" (134).

There is not a lot of press coverage, but Planish is able to capitalize on it, eventually leaving education to promote various organizations including Every Man a Priest Fraternity and the Dynamos of Democratic Direction. The cigar store owner also does well: buying a box of one hundred books and selling them to a crowd, claiming it's "the hottest yarn since the Song of Solomon" (135). The reality is Planish's crusade is muddled by the press: "The State newspapers mentioned the crusade, variously giving the title of the book as *At Tattoo*, *The Tattooed Count*, and *The Stewed Countess*, and the author's name as Carl Van Doren, Marie Van Vorst, Hendrik Van Loon and Upton Sinclair" (135).

Notes

[1]I [Jim Moffet] spent my high school years in nearby Excelsior during the mid-to-late 40s and wasn't aware of the famous author's presence. Later, after reading John Koblas's *Sinclair Lewis: Home at Last*, I discovered that the up-scale home he rented at 26710 Edgewood Road, Birch Bluff, while in residence was on my old grocery delivery route (although I never delivered there). Koblas devoted an entire chapter to Excelsior. All this motivated me to "have a look," as Bill Bryson might say.

Lewis's Minnesota Diary 1942–46, edited by George Killough, has a photo of the place. Possibly taken around the time he was there, it makes the place look decidedly less opulent than today. The diary has lots of interesting nuggets on Lewis's entertainments and travels while there as well. ✍

The Able McLaughlins continued from page 4

hopes he can find him first and kill him. Peter disappears and is found in a nearby town months later by Wully at the end of the novel. Disheveled and dirty, he is dying of a hemorrhage in a stable. Although Chirstie hates Peter for the evil that he has done to her, she insists that they take Peter back to his mother, rather than letting him die alone. Wully "had forborne running a sword less sharp through his fallen enemy than Chirstie's wifely smile had been. In a flash Wully saw himself sitting there by the woman, loved, living, not dying…while that man, loathed and rejected, was already burning in hell." ✍

In This Our Life continued from page 5

is presented in Negro dialect and Asa notes "the older African cast beneath the lighter surface planes of his face."

A successful film was made of the novel in 1942, directed by John Huston, and starring Bette Davis as Stanley and Olivia de Havilland as Roy. Charles Coburn was cast as Fitzroy and brilliantly brings out the character's desire for property, money, and his niece in a nicely understated way. Because of the Hollywood Production Code, Stanley couldn't just kill a little girl and get away with it. The movie ends with Stanley dashing out of the house, driving the car away very fast, and dying in a fiery crash. I found it a much more satisfying ending than the novel. ✍

Sinclair Lewis and the Novel *continued from page 7*

great bullies in literature," and "like Twain, Lewis, earnest in theme, is a great entertainer because he writes uncompromisingly about this world of dead-end promise, the American dream from which Carol Kennicott or George F. Babbitt and Martin Arrowsmith struggle to wake, and which Elmer Gantry understands and plausibly manipulates" (521).

Schmidt juxtaposes Lewis with Marcel Proust and later uses Lewis as a touchstone in discussing some other American writers, including Thornton Wilder, Thomas Wolfe, and Ernest Hemingway. Although Lewis mentioned Hemingway quite favorably in his Nobel speech, "In *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935) Hemingway repays this favor with gall. 'Sinclair Lewis is nothing,' he writes, and Hemingway's last wife was merciless about Lewis's ugliness. Meeting him in Venice, she fitted him with a violent metaphor: 'His face was a piece of old liver, shot squarely with a #7 shot at twenty yards" (710). Lewis also admired Arnold Bennett and his manuscripts, which were neat and decorated with colored initials like a medieval document, while "Bennett, in turn, marveled at the blue-and-red revised tangle of Lewis's scripts" (585).

Lawrence Buell, in *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Belknap-Harvard UP, 2014), interrogates the notion of the Great American Novel (GAN) through a discussion of authors, critics, and the novel's popularity since the mid-nineteenth century. Buell discusses how the notion of the GAN has changed over time, as ideas about American national identity have changed. Through the use of case studies, ranging from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* to Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, plus shorter discussions of over a hundred other novels, Buell shows "how to imagine those books as taking shape within broader contexts of shifting artistic practice and public priorities" (6).

Sinclair Lewis is mentioned several times. He "told his publisher that he wanted *Babbitt* [1924–*sic*, all Lewis scholars know it's 1922] 'to be the G.A.N. in so far as it crystallizes and makes real the Average Capable American" (5). Edith Wharton defended GAN aspirants who were expatriates because their writing is "peculiarly typical of modern America—of its intense social acquisitiveness and insatiable appetite for new facts and new sights." However, she was aware of the

> consensus that "the American novelist must submit to much narrower … limitations before he can pretend to have produced *the* (or *the greatest*, or even simply *an*) American novel": that is, "the great American novel must always be about Main Street, geographically, socially, and intellectually." This amounted to a concession that she might have won the battle but not the critical war. … Lewis seemed closer to the broadly accepted prototype for American fiction. One recalls Fitzgerald's overheated fan letter to Lewis, praising *Main Street* as "the best American novel." (33–34).

Throughout the book Lewis is compared to a variety of other authors, including John Dos Passos and Theodore Dreiser. Buell cites literary historian Gordon Hunter who called 1925 the year the modern American novel "surely might be said to have ascended" (139). As evidence, Buell mentions some of the major novels of that year including Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*, Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers*, Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and, of course, Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, the winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. ✍

DEPARTMENTS

Sinclair Lewis Notes

The little-known Thomas Boyd is celebrated in David Alan Rennie's "'The Best Combatant Story of the Great War?': Thematic and Descriptive Juxtaposition in Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat*" (*MidAmerica* 41 (2014): 95–104). Rennie argues that this little-known war novel deserves more critical attention. It was a bestseller, and praised by F. Scott Fitzgerald as "the best combatant story of the great war." Rennie compares Boyd's writing to Willa Cather's *One of Ours* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* in terms of language and imagery. Boyd served in the Marines in World War I and saw action in Belleau Wood, Soissons, Saint-Mihiel, and Mont Blanc, where he was so badly affected by poison gas that he was invalided out of the war. He wrote for the *Saint Paul Daily News*, interviewing such authors as Carl Sandburg, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. These interactions, especially his friendship with Fitzgerald, encouraged him to write *Through the Wheat*, published in 1923. His bookstore, Kilmarnock Books in Saint Paul, was often visited by Lewis and Fitzgerald. He wrote two other novels, a book of short stories, and several biographies, including *Mad Anthony Wayne* (1929) and *Light-Horse Harry Lee* (1931), before dying of a stroke in 1935 at the age of 37.

Alexa Weik von Mossner, in *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (U of Texas P, 2014), notes in a chapter on Pearl S. Buck how upset much of the American literary establishment was when Buck was named as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She was the third American and the first woman to be awarded this honor, but Robert Frost huffily said, "'If she can get it, anybody can,' and William Faulkner famously got so upset that he declared the prestige of the Nobel Prize to be ruined, vowing that he had no desire to ever end up 'in the company of … S. Lewis and Mrs. China-hand Buck'" (58). Despite his blustering, Faulkner was perfectly happy to accept the award when it was offered to him. Frost never won the Nobel Prize although he was nominated several times. He did win the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry four times.

It Can't Happen Here makes an appearance in the 1938 movie *Brother Rat*, a film starring Eddie Albert, Ronald Reagan, and Wayne Morris about wacky cadet life at the Virginia Military Institute. Cadet Morris very much wants to be alone with his girlfriend for at least a little while before curfew. His pal, Cadet Reagan, doesn't understand his wishes. In order to make a subtle point (one of the few in the film), Cadet Morris hands his friend a copy of Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, implying of course that there can be no romance unless Reagan and a girl he's just been introduced to, leave the room. Although it strikes me as a more sophisticated implication than these cadets could understand, it seems to work.

Ben Beede writes: "No doubt, others have already informed you of this all too familiar bit of confusion. On page 48 of the September-October 2015 issue of *Academe*, there is an amusing reference: Sinclair Lewis first addressed corporate control of higher education in his self-published book *The Goose Step*. Ah, well." [Editor: Upton Sinclair wrote *The Goose Step*. Lewis and Sinclair are all too often mistaken for each other.]

Ralph Goldstein: Here's a link to a list of texts ranked according to the number of times they show up on college syllabi:

http://explorer.opensyllabusproject.org/

Main Street, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry* are pretty far behind *Frankenstein*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Beloved*. Nevertheless, the evidence is clear that Lewis has not been forgotten.

Sauk Centre News

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation annual meeting took place on February 6, 2016, at the Palmer House. After a short business meeting and program, the board celebrated with birthday cake since February 7 was the 131st anniversary of his birth. Among the events celebrated was the 26th annual Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference in October 2015; the Sinclair Lewis Days parade in July; the storage and temporary distribution of materials from the Interpretive Center (including to a storage

room at City Hall, the Boyhood Home, and the Palmer House); and a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grant to complete a Historic Structure Report to preserve the historical and structural integrity of the Boyhood Home and the Carriage House.

Over 400 people visited the Boyhood Home in 2015 from nearly all of the 50 states as well as from Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Scotland, and Wales.

The closing of the Interpretive Center and the removal of the Sinclair Lewis materials made the top ten list of news items for 2015 in the *Sauk Centre Herald*, according to the December 31, 2015 edition:

> 10. Sinclair Lewis Foundation moves out of Interpretive Center
>
> For decades the Sinclair Lewis Center honored the renowned American author, Sinclair Lewis, with artifacts of his life proudly displayed at the city's Interpretive Center. Currently, the city-owned property is on the market and as of Jan. 1 will not be sourced with heat, water, or lights. The items were packed away in early December and dispersed throughout the city, including the boyhood home, town library, and Palmer House until a new location for the foundation may be established.

Those Dangerous German Copperheads
by Dave Simpkins
Sauk Centre Herald, December 3, 2015

A cautious and well-meaning Sen. Torrey Westrom wrote in these pages last week that Gov. Mark Dayton should block Syrian refugees from coming into Minnesota until we have an "ironclad assurance that we would not be allowing any terrorists into our state."

Ironically, he sounds just as cautious and well-meaning as Gov. Joseph Burnquist sounded 98 years ago when he created a state agency to control Germans, labor organizers, and farm protesters as the country entered World War I.

Believing German loyalties to the United States weren't trustworthy during the national emergency, the Minnesota Commission on Public Safety was formed in March 1917 to act on threats to social stability and outlawed any disloyal speech or literature that discouraged enlistment in the armed forces. Pinkerton and state detectives were armed and went undercover to investigate any seditious activity. German Catholic schools were encouraged to teach using only the English language. German and Scandinavian newspapers sent to the Minnesota Historical Society were monitored. While it wasn't against the law to read seditious material, it was against the law to distribute anything thought to be disloyal.

Loyalty Leagues were formed encouraging all aliens to be registered and take a loyalty oath. Their slogan was, "Put every man on record." The leagues advocated every building in the state should fly the flag. A report came to the Commission of a feisty German Democrat from Melrose boasting he would kill anyone that forced him to put a flag on his building. Investigators toured the bars of Melrose, reporting the war wasn't popular there but that there was no seditious activity, and they couldn't find the feisty German Democrat.

Gov. Burnquist suspended his political campaigning during the war, traveling the state instead giving loyalty speeches, and writing a loyalty column for the state's newspapers. According to Burnquist, any lack of patriotism was rebellion. He said there were only two political parties at the time, loyal or disloyal.

A Motor Corp was organized with the help of 72 county sheriffs that included 143 officers and 2,440 volunteers available on short notice to respond to any uprising. There were no uprisings, but they did help with the Tyler tornado and the Moose Lake fires.

Most Germans supported the draft with some reservations on how it should be used. The German mayor of New Ulm, Louis A. Fritsche, asked a rally of 8,000 to sign a petition urging Congress not to force those drafted to fight in Europe against their will, arguing many Minnesotans had relatives living in Germany. That was enough disloyalty to have the Commission depose Fritsche as mayor. One letter to the editor said the New Ulm officials, "should be lined up against a wall and shot." One editorial writer lamented "that the Sioux did not do a better job at New Ulm fifty-five years ago."

As the anti-German hysteria grew, anti-German rumors spread like wildfire. One rumor said Germans would burn wheat fields. Another rumor said a German was discovered with dynamite at the Minneapolis milling district. Actually, the German worker was using dynamite to clear the way for another tunnel to bring water under the mills from the Mississippi River. Editor of the *Princeton Union*, Howard Dunn, speculated, "Copperheads are everywhere, especially in New Ulm and Stearns County, plotting to secede from the union."

A heavy military guard was posted around the state capitol. Ironically, the cafeteria below the Capitol was decorated as a German rathskeller with such seditious jingles as "Noch einen gegen das bose wetter" (One more for the dismal weather) and "Ein Frischer Trank, der Arbeit Dank" (A drink is thanks for a job well done). It was whitewashed in 1917 and restored in 1999.

Living in Saint Paul during WWI, 32-year-old Sinclair Lewis got into trouble for a short story in *Everybody's* magazine, which showed how a successful farmer and Civil War veteran named Hugo Bromenshenkel could both love his homeland and his new land. Lewis was called a pro-German traitor and not invited to any high-society parties. Lewis countered with his own parties inviting the rich and powerful of Saint Paul to parties with Germans and labor leaders.

Sadly, Sen. Westrom isn't the only cautious and well-meaning politician in American history. President Franklin Roosevelt was cautious and well-meaning in 1937 when he sent 900 Jewish refugees back to Germany, where 250 disappeared in the Holocaust. Roosevelt also put Japanese-Americans in internment camps during World War II while their sons fought gallantly in Europe.

Hysteria makes bad decisions in the name of being cautious and well-meaning. The Commission shut down after the war without finding one dangerous German copperhead. German immigrants helped build Minnesota into one of the most advanced and productive states in the Union.

Hopefully, with "ironclad assurance" in place, Sen. Westrom will lead the way to help the Syrian refugees realize the same American dream we have all come to cherish and share.

Sinclair Lewis Web Queries

As a European I often look in bewilderment at the USA. So many good things, and so much bad happening. I have read a number of the books Sinclair Lewis wrote and *It Can't Happen Here* frightened me. I read Carroll Quigley's book from the 1960s called *Tragedy and Hope*, about how in a tragedy, the US (and the West under its leadership) would end up as fascist societies. And now we have a crazy election coming up in the USA, which seems to be following a script almost straight out of the work of Lewis if I am not too far off.

My question to you, if you have time to answer, is as follows: What was the inspiration for Lewis to write the book? Was it the attempted coup d'état in 1933, for which Smedley Butler was approached? What was it in society that Lewis observed to come to his conclusions?

For info, I am just an economist from France working on oil market analysis. I wrote a book about the misunderstood crisis of 2008, which I believe is almost entirely a consequence of the lack of cheap oil. And the realization by government that cheap oil was about to go has been around since 1998–2000. I would therefore believe that much of the political situation today can be traced back to those underlying economic dynamics. But that was not the case in the 1930s, and yet, it is the process that Lewis described that is manifesting itself today.

[Editor: Thank you so much for writing. It's true, this country has a great deal of good in it, but also some tremendously scary and violent people. Although Sinclair Lewis wrote *It Can't Happen Here* back in 1935, much of the essence of what he wrote then still holds true. I usually teach the novel before every presidential election. There was one presidential election about ten years ago with a strong third party candidate and after the novel, everyone in my class registered to vote and all but one voted (and she apologized to the class!).

During the early 1930s the country was in such terrible shape because of the Depression that many people were desperate for anyone who seemed to have answers. There were a lot of pseudo-fascist organizations around including Father Coughlin's Hour of the Little Flower, Huey Long (who was assassinated as the novel went to press), William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Shirts, William Randolph Hearst with his anti-Semitic newspaper chain, etc. It was a sort of perfect storm that Lewis was writing in, aided in part by the information that his wife, journalist Dorothy Thompson, supplied him with (she had been kicked out of Germany by Hitler two years earlier).

I think whenever you have large groups of people who are feeling disenfranchised, and someone who seems to have all the answers—wrapped in religion and patriotism—then this is a possibility.

Hope that helps. Let me know if you have other questions. I love talking about this. I've attached a newsletter from fall 2009 that has an interesting article on this topic.]

I will take time to read it shortly and will revert. I came across the book by chance and read it in one go. It has stunned me ever since. Perhaps I am suffering from bias in my readings, but there are good books from historians too about what Lewis wrote about and how society slides away.

It is unfortunate that in Europe very little time is used to read the US literature of the era. I would have thought that with the remake of *The Great Gatsby* perhaps some interest would revive.

I am writing to see if you can tell me if Sinclair Lewis spoke fluent German. I am currently reading a book entitled *Hitlerland* by Andrew Nagorski, in which he relates a situation where Lewis was visiting Germany during the 1920s, and spoke "fluent German" to a native German he was introduced to who did not speak English. I am a retired university librarian who still just has to get as close to the facts as possible.

[Editor: Thank you so much for writing. Yes, my

understanding is that Lewis was quite proficient in German. When he was a teenager he studied German with a priest in Sauk Centre and his father spoke some German because of all the German patients he had on the surrounding farms in central Minnesota.

When Lewis was first starting out as a writer he did translations, primarily poetry, from both German and French. A number of these poems were published in the magazine *Transatlantic Tales*. A recent issue of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* ran an article on two poems that Lewis himself wrote in German.

Lewis's second wife, Dorothy Thompson, was also fluent in German and broadcast to Germany from the United States during WWII, in an effort to encourage ordinary Germans to turn away from Hitler. Some of these broadcasts were reprinted in the book *Listen, Hans*.]

We are a group of students of the faculty of Translation and Interpeting (University of Mainz, Germany). For a seminar, we are looking for information on Franz Fein, a German translator, who actually translated many works of Sinclair Lewis into German. Do you have any information on this person?

[Fred Betz responds: Dr. Sally Parry copied to me her reply to your inquiry regarding Franz Fein. Unfortunately, I, too, know nothing about his life other than the report that he translated for Rowohlt Verlag eight of Sinclair Lewis's novels between 1927 and 1933 and *Babbitt* in 1957.

Lawrence Marsden Price discusses German translations of Lewis in his study of *The Reception of United States Literature in Germany* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1966), pp. 135–41 and 220–21. Price writes that, "Franz Fein grappled with Lewis's phrases the most successfully [of Lewis's German translators], at times substituting Berliner 'Umgangssprache' for American slang and idiom" (137).

However, examples of Fein's poor translations are registered by Arpad Steiner in his article "Sinclair Lewis in German" in *Language*, 6.4 Language Monograph No. 7: Curme Volume of Linguistic Studies (1930): 134–140.

I have a copy of Fein's translation of *Die Hauptstrasse* (Berlin: Verlag von Th. Knauer Nachf., n. d.) and a copy of Daisy Brody's translation of *Babbitt* (Berlin: Buechergilde Gutenberg, 1931). But I have never gotten around to reading them! A German colleague of mine tells me, however, that Daisy Brody's translation of *Babbitt* is full of blunders, which are blatantly obvious to a native German speaker, even if the native German speaker does not know a single word of English!

It makes me wonder whether Lewis was very well served by the German translations of his novels. It would be interesting to investigate this! I am sorry that I don't know anything else about Franz Feinman, but wish you well in your group's translation work!]

It Can't Happen Here and Politics —

Roger Lathbury: One of my colleagues (now retired), knowing that I have taught a class in Lewis and am (if I dare say) an expert, asked me where Lewis uttered, "When Fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." I knew it wasn't in *It Can't Happen Here* or *Gideon Planish*. Doremus Jessup is too much of a dummy for that kind of remark, but I thought it might be a quote from an interview. To oblige, I did the research. It was said by a Yale University professor, Halford E. Luccock (1885–1961) in 1938. Here is the reference:

Sermon (Sept. 11, 1938), as quoted in "Disguised Fascism Seen as a Menace" in the New York Times (Sept. 12, 1938): 15; also in "Fascism comes wrapped in the flag."

That Rand Paul and others attribute this to SL is indicative of Lewis's iconic status as an iconoclast, etc. In *The Dyer's Hand* (1962) W. H. Auden says that this "cynical" quote was uttered by Huey Long. (Long was killed in 1935. Auden must have been working from memory.) I've also heard it otherwise attributed.

More on the Lewis quote about fascism being wrapped in the flag. I went through *It Can't Happen Here* again and came upon this in Chapter 36:

> He was afraid that the world struggle today was not of Communism against Fascism, but of tolerance against the bigotry that was preached equally by Communism and Fascism. But he saw too that in America the struggle was befogged by the fact that the worst Fascists were they who disowned the word "Fascism" and preached enslavement to Capitalism under the style of Constitutional and Traditional Native American Liberty. For they were thieves not only of wages but of honor. To their purpose they could quote not only Scripture but Jefferson.

This is close in idea to the snappier versions with flag attributed to Lewis (e. g., by Harrison Salisbury) but not quite the same.

Here's a follow-up: The earliest I could find for the quote,

"When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross," is 1938, but possibly it is 1936. To quote from http://exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,481208,481823

Many variants of this exist, but the earliest known incident of such a comment appears to be a partial quote from James Waterman Wise, Jr., reported in a 1936 issue of the *Christian Century*, that in a recent address here before the liberal John Reed club said that Hearst and Coughlin are the two chief exponents of fascism in America. If fascism comes, he added, it will not be identified with any "shirt" movement, nor with an "insignia," but it will probably be "wrapped up in the American flag and heralded as a plea for liberty and preservation of the constitution." [1]

Another early quote is that of Halford E. Luccock in *Keeping Life Out of Confusion* (1938): "When and if fascism comes to America it will not be labeled 'made in Germany'; it will not be marked with a swastika; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called, of course, 'Americanism.'" Harrison Evans Salisbury in 1971 remarked about Lewis: "Sinclair Lewis aptly predicted in *It Can't Happen Here* that if fascism came to America it would come wrapped in the flag and whistling 'The Star Spangled Banner.'" [2]

Maybe Harrison Salisbury got Lewis into this mix. I've read *It Can't Happen Here*, and nothing like that appears in that text, nor is it in *Gideon Planish*, which has some of the fierceness of the quotation.

Notes

[1] *Christian Century* 53 Feb 5, 1936: 245.

[2] Salisbury, Harrison Evans. *The Many Americas Shall Be One*. New York: Norton, 1971: 29.

Richard Lingeman recommends trolling the Internet for references to *It Can't Happen Here* in connection with the current political campaigns. Here's an example.

In an excerpt from the essay "It Really Can Happen Here: The Novel That Foreshadowed Donald Trump's Authoritarian Appeal," (Sept. 29, 2015, salon.com), Malcolm Harris writes:

With his careful mix of plainspoken honesty and reactionary delusion, Trump is following an old rhetorical playbook, one defined and employed successfully in the 1936 presidential campaign of Senator Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip. In his campaign's promotional book "Zero Hour," Windrip laid out the classic nativist call to action that Trump would pick up nearly word-for-word:

> My one ambition is to get all Americans to realize that they are, and must continue to be, the greatest Race on the face of this old Earth, and second, to realize that whatever apparent differences there may be among us, in wealth, knowledge, skill, ancestry or strength—though, of course, all this does not apply to people who are racially different from us—we are all brothers, bound together in the great and wonderful bond of National Unity, for which we should all be very glad.

After Windrip's coup at the Democratic convention, he won a three-way race when the other two candidates split the reasonable vote. Once elected, President Windrip appealed directly to his core constituency of unprosperous and resentful white men to help him repress dissent and bring fascism to America. It's a chilling historical lesson, even though it didn't actually happen.

Windrip's election is the beginning of Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, rather than actual American history. A wonderful example of prophylactic fiction, Lewis used his position as one of the nation's top novelists to show his countrymen exactly how authoritarianism could rear its head in the land of liberty. The assassination of Louisiana Governor Huey Long (better remembered in literary history for inspiring Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men*) and the reelection of Franklin Roosevelt rendered Lewis's warning moot for a time, but 80 years later the novel feels frighteningly contemporary.

Like Trump, Windrip uses a lack of tact as a way to distinguish himself. Americans know on some level that the country's governing system has never conformed to its official values. There are basic contradictions between what politicians and policymakers say and what they do, but also at the core of the national identity. We are, in our own mind, a scrappy underdog and the world's only superpower at the same time. Right-wing populists don't shy away from either side of the dichotomy; instead, they gain credibility by openly embracing the contradictions. They tell the truth about why they're lying and declare their ulterior motives….

As a work of critique, *It Can't Happen Here* doesn't stop with populists. The novel's focal character is Doremus Jessup, a social-democratic newspaper editor in Vermont. Jessup is a member of the exact same political tradition that now animates the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, which makes Lewis's story even more apt. If anyone has an ideology to offer beyond the Clinton/Bush status quo and Trump's extra-cynical embrace of the status quo, it looks to be Sanders and his Vermont-style soft-socialism. But Lewis is not optimistic.

Jessup's view of Windrip's election is familiar; it's what left-wingers are already saying about Trump's poll numbers. "What I've got to keep remembering is that Windrip is only the lightest cork on the whirlpool. He didn't plot all this thing," Jessup tells himself, "With all the justified discontent there is against the smart politicians and the Plush Horses of Plutocracy—oh, if it hadn't been one Windrip, it'd been another…We

had it coming, we Respectables.…But that isn't going to make us like it!" There's a kind of masochism to this formulation: If you believe in American democracy, then a tyrant's election is deserved punishment for the failure of principled people to convince their fellow citizens. The system may be rigged, but not so rigged as to be genuinely illegitimate.

Go to salon.com for the full essay. As Harris writes, "That American fascism has always had a goofy Halloweenish quality makes it easier to laugh, but doesn't protect their targets."

If I Were Boss

Sean Denniston: As Amazon now has mind control capability, they've been sending me SL suggestions. Has anyone read *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, Anthony Di Renzo (editor)? Any thoughts would be welcome!

Ronald Beach: I have an Uncorrected Page Proof copy, a paperback reading copy, and a hardback copy that is still in shrink-wrap. I have read several of the stories but not all of them. The ones I have read are very indicative of Lewis's keen insight of the human psyche. What has always baffled me is how almost all of Lewis's novels still reflect how people think and act after 70–90 years. I see a lot of sardonic satire, not unlike Ring Lardner, just not as humorous, in many of his characters.

Below is the list of the stories.

"Commutation: $9.17" (1915)
"Nature, Inc." (1915)
"If I Were Boss" (1916)
"Honestly—If Possible" (1916)
"A Story with a Happy Ending" (1917)
"The Whisperer" (1917)
"Snappy Display" (1917)
"Slip It To 'Em" (1918)
"Getting His Bit" (1918)
"Jazz" (1918)
"Bronze Bars" (1919)
"Way I See It" (1920)
"The Good Sport" (1920)
"A Matter of Business" (1921)
"Number Seven to Sagapoose" (1921)

Sally Parry: I've read the entire collection. It's very good and especially interesting in that Lewis writes about the ordinary office worker rather than the rich man of business or robber barons like earlier American writers such as William Dean Howells. The stories that focus on Lancelot Todd, a brilliant and amoral salesman, are very funny.

Sean Denniston: Thank you. I'll purchase sometime soon. I enjoyed your compilation of SL short stories. I'll also admit to some gaps in the Sinclair Lewis canon, most glaringly *Arrowsmith*!

Anthony DiRenzo: Fellow Lewisites,

Thanks for your interest in *If I Were Boss; The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. I am grateful that Southern Illinois University Press has kept this anthology in print.

Working on the book was one of the joys of my scholarly life. I not only tracked down the stories in the original slicks but also studied Lewis's early press releases and business correspondence. Since I first encountered his work in advertising rather than the academy, this was a real treat.

Sally is right, of course. Unlike W. D. Howells, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser, Lewis prefers to write about ordinary office workers rather than robber barons and captains of industry. Sociologists and historians, from C. Wright Mills to Anthony Sampson, have praised him for this. We can learn more about day-to-day office life in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, they claim, from *Our Mr. Wrenn* and *The Job* than *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *The Pit*, or *The Financier*.

That possibly explains why his business stories remain so accessible to contemporary readers. Working conditions have not really improved that much in 90 years. In addition, the plots and characters are familiar to readers of *Dilbert* and viewers of *The Office*. As Marshall McLuhan, another Lewis fan, noted the formulaic sometimes does more effective cultural work than the avant-garde.

Coincidentally, I will be teaching Lewis today. *Babbitt* is a required text in my business writing course at Ithaca College. Surprisingly, most students identify with George, particularly with his tortured efforts to draft letters and give speeches. As Red would say, who would've thunk it?

Sean Denniston: That seals it! I really enjoyed some of the short stories I read in Sally's *Go East Young Man* and look forward to yours! Actually, I got hooked on Lewis reading *Babbitt* for a freshman history class at Williams and further intrigued talking with professors who remembered him from Williamstown days.

Ed Tant: Just finished reading *If I Were Boss*. Great anthology that will interest Red's fans. Kudos to editor Anthony Di Renzo.

—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.]

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

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CATALOG 53

Lewis, Sinclair. *Dodsworth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929. $2000

First edition, and a scarce copy of it. First binding, one of the first 500 (900 also reported) in orange cloth, issued late February 1929, preceding the second binding in blue cloth (March). Fine in a near fine first issue dust jacket (no reviews on front flap), and at a kindly price.

Though most copies in the orange first binding were issued without a jacket, the cloth on this one is so new looking as to lend credence to the idea that it always had a dust jacket on it, and the same value proportions apply, as does the customary warning: Do not buy this book without a dust jacket, or even with a jacket if the cloth shows any signs of not having always been covered by one from its day of publication. And that is a shrewd rule to follow for all first editions obtainable in a jacket (Book Code).

Long Galley Proofs of the *Elmer Gantry* first edition (6 1/2" x 24"). $1450

Printed on thin proofing paper (rectos only) dated "Dec. 27" 1926. The first setting in type (book was 1927) of an immortal scrap of Western literature, the first transit stage linking manuscript to first edition. Manufactured in a handful of copies to correct misprints and mis-settings before page proofs. Split across leaves one and 123, rejoined with tape, some edge tears taped, last three leaves missing, but the missing text is supplied with first edition pages, connected to vaguely correspond, else good condition. Spartan cloth case. Despite being worn and imperfect, it's such a rarity that there is some chance it will turn out to be the finest (only?) known set, and with more than 100,000 first editions printed (20,000 in the first binding), it's the only form of *Elmer Gantry* that will ever be rare.

Upon publication the book was greeted with outrage by the exposed peddlers of empty promises, who called Lewis an instrument of the Devil. But those who joined the whining failed to notice *Elmer Gantry* rightly captured the temperament and distillate of a specific type of Midwestern revivalism callously engaged in bleeding those who didn't know the difference between being born again, and being born yesterday. It remains a tartly satiric, and dependence jangling, reminder that the cardinal doctrine of a fanatic's creed is that his enemies are the enemies of God. But God, by all testimonies, is not in danger (has no visible enemies) and, at worst, is only disappointed in those who wimp out and refuse to meet their human responsibility, that is, to live their lives testing the limits of their highest possibilities, and then to die with composure, like a hero going home. Lewis declined a 1926 Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith*, 1925, because the prize was not awarded for literary merit but, "for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life, and the highest standard of American manners and manhood," both major targets of Lewis's satire and the reason why so many sleepy books have won it. In 1930 he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, calming a national impatience that had become like an ingrown toenail. He accepted it, and the fat check that came with it, breaching the Swedish citadel for his fellow Americans, Eugene O'Neill, Pearl Buck, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow (an American born in Canada), and a handful of more recent honorees, whose lasting worthiness will ultimately be decided in the reflections of history.

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NEW ARRIVALS LIST

50. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. $450

First edition. Original dark blue cloth lettered in orange. The first state with corrected type on pages 54 and 387. A very good copy with wear to extremities and head and foot of the spine. This copy is inscribed by Lewis on a bound-in leaf preceding the half-title page, "To Charles Wayne Collins, scribo ergo sum. Sinclair Lewis, Pittsburgh, Dec. 12 1929."

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