

# The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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SPRING 2017

## SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2017: LEWIS IN BUSINESS AND POLITICS

*The Sinclair Lewis Conference: Lewis in Business and Politics, which is being sponsored by the Sinclair Lewis Society, in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, should be an outstanding event for Sinclair Lewis scholars and enthusiasts. The conference, to be held in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, on July 12–14, 2017, will feature Anthony Di Renzo, editor of*



*of If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis, as the keynote speaker. There will be panels of speakers, including noted Lewis scholars; a tour of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home; a visit to the archives at St. Cloud State University, which contains Lewis Family papers; a dramatic reading of the play version of It Can't*

*Happen Here; a Sinclair Lewis Sing-along; and a silent auction of books by and about Lewis, as well as Japanese art prints once owned by Lewis.*

*This conference will celebrate Lewis as a commentator on American society and his continued importance in American literature in the 21st century. The year 2017 is the 100th anniversary of The Job, the 90th anniversary of Elmer Gantry, and the 70th anniversary of Kingsblood Royal. The conference is being held in conjunction with the annual Sinclair Lewis Days, which will include a parade, a pie social, a craft fair, and various other events. Presentations will take place at the Sauk Centre City Hall on Oak Street, lunches at the Palmer House Hotel, and evening entertainment at the First Lutheran Church and Jitters Java Café.*

*Accommodations are available throughout Sauk Centre, including at the Palmer House where Lewis worked as a young man. The nearest large airport is Minneapolis–St. Paul, although there is a regional airport in St. Cloud.*

*For more information, please e-mail Sally Parry at [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu).*

**CALL FOR OFFICERS: INFORMATION ON PAGE 22**

## SINCLAIR LEWIS'S ROMANTIC ROLE- PLAYING: READING THE LEWIS CORRESPONDENCE TO MARCELLA POWERS (1939–1947)

*Constance M. Perry  
St. Cloud State University*

Biographer Richard Lingeman in *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* reports that the author's first marriage to Grace Hegger lasted fourteen years, followed by marriage to famous journalist Dorothy Thompson, which also lasted fourteen years, until, broadly speaking, Lewis's fundamental problems of alcoholism and growing antipathy to Thompson's journalistic career led to divorce in 1942. The summer of 1939 found Lewis estranged from Thompson and experimenting with acting roles in theater. As he memorized lines for his role in O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* at Cape Cod's Provincetown Theater,

————— Lewis's Romantic Role-playing continued on page 4

## LEWIS'S PROBLEMS ARE STILL OUR PROBLEMS: REVIEW OF *SINCLAIR LEWIS AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY* BY STEVEN MICHELS (LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2016)

*Ralph Goldstein  
California State University–Los Angeles*

As politics does, literature deals with what could be, based on perceptions of what is. All fiction to some extent is political: examining power relations between and among characters, keeping memory alive, admonishing against repeated past mistakes, suggesting paths out of difficult circumstances, and living with the results.

————— Lewis's Problems continued on page 11

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## The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## “PUBLICIST IN FICTION”: SINCLAIR LEWIS’S USE OF RHETORICAL AND NEWSPAPER STYLE FORMS IN *BABBITT*

Narine Zakaryan and Ann Yeganyan  
Yerevan State University, Armenia

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As James Hutchisson notes, “Lewis had a well-tuned ear that enabled him to reproduce the cadences and idiom of American speech with almost phonographic exactness” (5). Lewis was indeed unique among his contemporaries not only in his topics, but also in his writing style. This style was enriched with satire, sociological attentiveness, and rhetorical sharpness. Lewis’s use of vocabulary and language more generally provides a window into his time.

Lewis seemed born to be a writer. Hutchisson, for example, notes that “Lewis enjoyed the act of writing, and he needed to write...Without a new novel to work on, Lewis grew querulous” (194). Anthony Arthur comments, “In addition to his good education, he had formidable gifts for a writer: a photographic memory, a mind so brilliant that it was commonly called ‘incandescent,’ a capacity for sustained and disciplined hard work, and an all-seeing eye for the false, the pathetic, and the absurd aspects of American middle-class life” (50). And many other critics agree with this drive he had to write. In reflecting on the scholarship on Lewis, Mark Schorer, Lewis’s first biographer, noted: “Most of our best critics, when they have not ignored his work entirely, have assailed it for certain philistine attitudes that infected it, but either they did not analyze it as art, or they have treated him as ‘a publicist in fiction’ whose work cannot sustain that kind of analysis” (1).

We share this attitude, although not in a negative sense. Lewis is really a great “publicist in fiction,” but these would be mere words unless we prove that idea. To do that we will discuss rhetorical styles in *Babbitt*, especially his use of commonplaces of newspaper writing and oratory.

As Russian linguist I. R. Galperin notes, “in articles and announcements as well as in paper titles all the words of sentences are often written in capital letters” (303). This is done to attract readers’ attention. Lewis, with his journalistic

experience, widely used this method in his novels. He took ordinary words and word combinations and put them in capital letters, thus making the speech more vivid.

There were masterly arrangements regarding leaving the key, and having the gasoline tank filled; and passionately, devotees of the Great God Motor, they hymned the patch on the spare inner-tube, and the lost jack-handle. (*Babbitt* 19)

The expression “Great God Motor” is written in capital letters, pointing out how important the automobile is to Babbitt and his son Ted. Lewis satirizes the fact that motors and technologies in general became people’s God in the twentieth century.

Another peculiarity of newspaper style is the frequent use of abbreviations (Galperin 298). Arnold notes that there used to be full stops after the component letters of abbreviations but now these full stops are mostly left out (142), probably reflecting the need for speed both in writing and reading in modern times. Many of the abbreviations in Lewis’s novels do not have full stops. Late in the novel Reverend Drew yells into the telephone, “Get an A.D.T. boy and shoot it up here quick” (*Babbitt* 393), because the Sunday calendar had not yet arrived. The abbreviation “A.D.T.” stands for “American District Telegraph,” a quick form of communication. There are many such abbreviations in his works; their use in *Babbitt* gives a sense of an industrious and fast-paced business atmosphere.

An important element in oral rhetoric is the use of direct address (Galperin 290), where the speaker/author directly addresses the listener/reader. A direct address is not only a good start for an oration, but also an essential and important

—————“Publicist in Fiction” *continued on page 12*

### 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 Rusty Allred, Andrew Baumgardner, Frederick Betz, Ted Fleener, Michael Goodell, Ralph Goldstein, Sherry Kelly, George Killough, Jackie Koenig, Richard Lingeman, Constance Lyons, Robert McLaughlin, Peter Münder, Susan O’Brien, James Pancrazio, Constance M. Perry, Joshua Preston, Dave Rowe, Bob Ruggiero, Dave Simpkins, Catherine Arnott Smith, Ann Yeganyan, and Narine Zakaryan.

the fifty-four-year-old Lewis met eighteen-year-old Marcella Powers, dark-haired and petite, who was assigned to prompt him during what he came to call “that Sacred Summer” (July 24, 1943).<sup>1</sup> Lewis's romantic pursuit of Powers, who was 36 years his junior, led him to escort her on trips, find her jobs, rent and furnish her New York City apartment, give her a monthly stipend as well as other gifts such as clothing and theater tickets, and buy his last home, Thorvale Farm, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where he imagined they would finally live as a married couple.

Why should we be interested in revealing the correspondence of Lewis to a gamine who traded her piquant looks for Lewis's support of her first travels and her shifting dreams of acting, writing, and working as a literary agent? After he died, Powers praised Lewis for being “courageous,” for “form[ing] my opinion on so many basic issues,” for being “so good” to her mother, and for “help[ing] so many people in need,” but she made no other romantic claim (qtd. in Lingeman 551). After all, isn't this merely the besotted story found in Hemingway with his adored ingénue, the Venetian Adriana Ivancich, or Fitzgerald and his young gossip columnist Sheilah Graham? Although the May-December romance is familiar, readers can gain insight from Lewis's liaison with Powers about the potency of alcoholic grandiosity, which likely fueled his pursuit, and the fragile delusions to which Lewis inclined in his late courtship.<sup>2</sup> However, Lewis also used the relationship with Powers—typically conducted from afar while he traveled the country on lecture series, labored at script writing in Hollywood, or sequestered himself with a novel deadline—to sustain himself emotionally and maintain the equanimity to produce his final works of fiction.<sup>3</sup> Lingeman has researched the essential trajectory of this story of Lewis's last romantic foibles and fall, whereas this analysis categorizes the array of romantic roles Lewis played in corresponding with Powers, by analyzing the 262 letters written by Lewis to Rosemary Marcella Powers, from 1939 to 1947. According to archivist Thomas Steman, St. Cloud State University purchased the letters in 1996 from Mary Branham, a longtime friend of Marcella Powers. Branham inherited the letters as part of Powers's estate after the death of Powers in 1985.

Lewis was sensitive to his era's social mores regarding premarital sexual romance—he had protested against them with *Ann Vickers* (1933), depicting his heroine's illegitimate pregnancy, abortion, adultery, and child born out of wedlock. The first role in the budding relationship Lewis cultivated with Powers was as a faux relative, her “uncle.” Charmed by Powers and aware of the improbability of their age difference, Lewis first bowed to the mores of his era by introducing her as

“my niece” (Lingeman 440). Despite Lewis's unprepossessing appearance and behavior (he was balding, his face was scarred from acne treatments, and his behavior was afflicted by cigarette and alcohol addiction), the attention, humor, and generosity of this famous man led Marcella Powers to stay in his life, if not always at his side. Eight years later, he would ultimately grasp at a fantasy familial tie to Powers, whose father was long deceased when she met Lewis, addressing her as a faux father—“my sweet little daughter” (August 25, 1943) and “Dear Baby” (August 18, 1946)—as she broke off their relationship to marry journalist Michael Amrine.

While in conservative circles, Lewis cautiously introduced Powers as his niece or had her bring her mother when visiting Minneapolis “to avoid the scandal” (April 21, 1942); when he began to travel with her, he clearly felt that they should seek cosmopolitan couples who would condone their unmarried status. From Hollywood, he assured her that the famous on-screen lovers, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn, also famously unmarried lovers off screen, would “adore” Powers, suggesting with grandiosity that the famous couple would be “among our closest friends” (July 29, 1943). He offered her a life in Hollywood among celebrities—if that was what she wanted—often mentioning that Lillian Gish believed Powers would become his wife (July 18, 1943).

Lewis took Powers to Key West, Florida, in 1941, where they met Hemingway along with his then wife, Martha Gellhorn. Hemingway invited Lewis and Powers for a day at Finca Vigía in Havana and wrote Lewis an appreciative letter afterward (Lingeman 453). Although Hemingway positively disliked Lewis (McLaughlin; Forseth), Lewis's extramarital relationship was acceptable to Hemingway, who was known for his extramarital affairs with, for example, Jane Mason, as well as Pauline Pfeiffer, who became his second wife. Lewis necessarily explored locations where he and Powers could expect socially tolerant company outside of his own home.

Lewis aimed to display in his correspondence to Powers the role of entertainer, his prolonged giddiness was manifested in an ever-expanding list of nicknames for himself and for Powers. When a letter berated Powers for not writing, he might resentfully sign it “Red” (July 10, 1943), but he typically contrived a new signature for nearly every letter, using such whimsical monikers as “Claude Melnotte Cohen,” “Sven Svenson,” and “C. Wellington Milquetoast” (see note for extended list of nicknames).<sup>4</sup> He hoped to amuse her and surely refreshed himself by exercising his wit. Notably, nearly

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## ROGER FORSETH, ACCLAIMED LEWIS SCHOLAR, DIES

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Dr. Roger Forseth, one of the founding members of the Sinclair Lewis Society, has died at the age of 89. Although his dissertation was on Romantic lyric poetry, after a battle with alcoholism, Forseth became interested in the study of addiction and the writer, and founded the influential journal *Dionysos*, which he edited from 1989–2000. He taught at the University of Wisconsin–Superior from 1964 to 1991, then continued to teach online until 2014. His most important writings will be published in book form later this year under the title *Alcoholite at the Altar: The Writer and Addiction*. The title comes from one of his most important articles, “‘Alcoholite at the Altar’: Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination” (*Modern Fiction Studies* 31.3 (1985): 581–607).

Forseth was a founding member of the Sinclair Lewis Society and served as the first Secretary-Treasurer. He was also a member of the board of directors of the Sinclair Lewis Society and wrote a number of articles for the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. He attended several of the Sinclair Lewis conferences in Sauk Centre, usually bringing his lovely wife Grace and his daughters with him. He was a charming and intelligent man who brought a sense of humanity to the authors he wrote about, rather than condemning them for their addictions.

List of articles on Sinclair Lewis by Roger Forseth, in reverse chronological order.

“You Can Go Home Again: Sinclair Lewis—Biography and

Short Fiction.” *Resources for American Literary Study* 31 (2006): 331–35.

“Two Notes to a Low, Dishonest Decade: Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here* and Saul Bellow’s ‘The Hell It Can’t.’” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 10.1 (2001): 3, 8, 10–12.

“‘The Education of the Eye:’ Review of *Minnesota Diary, 1942–1946* by Sinclair Lewis. Edited by George Killough.” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 10.1 (2001): 1–2, 4, 6.

“Walden Pond and Tin Lizzie: Sinclair Lewis Records the Great Plains.” *Midwestern Miscellany* 29 (2001): 20–28.

“From the Lewis Archives II.” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 5.2 (1997): 2–4.

“Can You Go Home Again? Sinclair Lewis: Main Street and Paris.” *Sinclair Lewis: New Essays in Criticism*. Edited by James M. Hutchisson. Troy, NY: Whitston, 1997. 185–201.

“From the Lewis Archives I.” *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* 3.2 (1995): 2–4.

“The First Infirmity of Noble Mind: Sinclair Lewis, Fame—and Drink.” *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics*. Edited by Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell, and Tim Armstrong. Sheffield, United Kingdom: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994. 216–24.

“‘Alcoholite at the Altar’: Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 31.3 (1985): 581–607.

“Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination.” *Sinclair Lewis at 100: Papers Presented at a Centennial Conference*. Edited by Michael Connaughton. St. Cloud, Minnesota: St. Cloud State University, 1985. 11–26. ✉

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## IT CAN’T HAPPEN HERE NEWS

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*It Can’t Happen Here* has become a big best-seller again, over 80 years after its publication. Penguin Random House reports that physical books saw a 2,611% increase (fewer than 100 copies to almost 20k) and ebooks saw a 1,528% increase (fewer than 2k copies to almost 30k) in sales from 2015 to 2016. There have been further readings of both the 1936 and 2016 versions of the play around the country. And there are literally thousands of articles that mention the novel. “Reading the Classic Novel That Predicted Trump” by Beverly Gage, *New York Times*, January 17, 2017 is a good example: [nytimes.com/2017/01/17/books/review/classic-novel-that-predicted-trump-sinclair-lewis-it-cant-happen-here.html](http://nytimes.com/2017/01/17/books/review/classic-novel-that-predicted-trump-sinclair-lewis-it-cant-happen-here.html).

There is great interest in *It Can’t Happen Here* in Great Britain as well. Brian Wheeler of the BBC wrote on Sinclair Lewis and *It Can’t Happen Here* in “The Trump Era’s

Top-Selling Dystopian Novels,” BBC News, January 29, 2017: [www.bbc.com.uk/news/magazine-38764041](http://www.bbc.com.uk/news/magazine-38764041). *It Can’t Happen Here* is the top novel discussed among dystopian novels that speak to the Trump regime. Other novels mentioned include George Orwell’s *1984*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. The *British Weekly Standard* ran an article by Alice Lloyd, “4 Sinclair Lewis Novels More Relevant than *It Can’t Happen Here*,” which mentions *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth* as all helping to explain the American psyche: [www.weeklystandard.com/4-sinclair-lewis-novels-more-relevant-than-it-cant-happen-here/article/2006586](http://www.weeklystandard.com/4-sinclair-lewis-novels-more-relevant-than-it-cant-happen-here/article/2006586). In addition, Executive Director of the Sinclair Lewis Society Sally Parry was interviewed by Orla Barry,

————— *It Can’t Happen Here News continued on page 15*

all his nicknames for Powers are diminutives, indicating not only affection but also underscoring their extreme difference in age and social status. These names range from the alteration of Marcella as “Silly Milcella,” to “the Darling Fuherin of the S[mall] S[ecret] S[pies]” to small animals (“My Mouse of Immaculateness,” “Monkey,” “Chipmunk,” “Lamb,” “Panda,” “the Small Sable,” “the Bright Bug,” and “White Wool Cat”). He also adopted traditional endearments such as “Angel,” “my little love,” “my small divinity,” “your jeweled smallness,” “Darling,” “Dearest,” and “Baby.” This last makes us consider that Powers was near the age of the Lewis children, Wells and Michael. Lewis enjoyed pretending Marcella was “my darling wife” and “the smallest of my nineteen wives” (November 7, 1943), and marking anniversaries of their meeting with reflection and gifts. He had long asserted to Powers the fiction that the two were married from the “Sacred Summer” when they met (July 24, 1943), and Lewis celebrated, for example, their four-year anniversary: “... next month, August, we will have been married for four years—longer than any marriage on record, at least in New York and Hollywood” (July 26, 1943). He also endowed her name with their mutual hopes for her career success when he named her “My True North Star” or “My Bright Peculiar Star.”

Lewis attempted to entertain Powers with creative “typewriter art,” using keys to create cartoon faces or affectionate messages. He also drew cartoons by hand. The last cartoon he sent Powers, after she married Amrine, displays a marked malice towards her, at the occasion of her birthday. Lewis drew Powers with a large hook for a hand, implying she had maintained the relationship for what she could grab from his wealth (April 12, 1947).

Lewis developed the role of cajoler as he psychologically bribed Powers into sharing his life by taking her on exotic trips. He escorted small-town Powers to Key West and Miami, Florida, and also to Cape Cod, Hollywood, New Orleans, New York, Madison, Minneapolis, and Duluth, along with invitations to Bermuda, Buenos Aires, London, the Riviera, Rome, Mexico, Paris, and Scotland. For prolonged periods, 1941–1943, he tempted her repeatedly with the offer of a \$2,500 mink coat, a most coveted clothing item of the era, but he never made good on the offer, though mentioning it provocatively in at least ten letters, promising that he could be “an unquenchable fount of mink coats” (August 11, 1943). Powers did, however, receive a monthly \$155 stipend

and the furnished apartment in the same building as his in New York City, overlooking Central Park. His ultimate offer was the Thorvale mansion on the East Coast, after she failed to be awed by visits to the stately home he bought in Duluth and refurbished with her mother’s assistance. Lewis’s last lovely estate in Williamstown, Massachusetts, Thorvale Farm featured a swimming pool, tennis court, and archery range built especially for Powers (Lingeman 517). Lewis wrote to Powers, “It’s time for me to leave Duluth ... but I have been thinking of the East as home and been restless to Start Home ... with you possibly in it, could that be?” (August 30, 1945). He clung to the furniture he bought for her, shipping it from his New York apartment to his Duluth home and back across the country to the Massachusetts house, where he promised there would always be a room for her if the marriage to Amrine was a disappointment (Lingeman 510).

Lewis often tried the role of Cupid for his case. He wrote, “My darling, if something just would make you jealous, and very keen to hold me ...” (July 24, 1942). He named other young women in Hollywood who thought he was “not so very funny-looking” and who were supposedly tempting him away from Powers (July 17 and 31, 1943) such as the “radiantly beautiful stenographer” to whom he dictated filmscripts (July 21, 1943). He tried inciting jealousy by asserting, “I am handsome, robust ...” (July 29, 1943), also writing that “... I hope to make you so jealous that ... you will come flying out here where you belong while I’m here” (July 17, 1943). He offered examples of other May-December marriages such as Hollywood director Peter Godfrey and his twenty-two-year-old wife Renee, who were “the happiest people I’ve seen ...” (December 29, 1941 and August 25, 1943). Further, he maintained the fiction that he and Powers were age-mates, saying wistfully that both were “beginning to grow up” (July 19, 1942).

Lewis displayed more delusional grandiosity in his role as a pipe dreamer for Powers. The creator of Carol Kennicott, Sharon Falconer, and Ann Vickers understood that ambitious young Powers was drawn to the theater in hopes of an acting career. However, it was not enough for her to get a role. Lewis subsidized the Peterborough, New Hampshire, summer theater where she was acting and made inflated promises of “a summer theater of your own” in the future (August 17, 1942). A year later he offered her authorship



Lewis cartoon of Marcella Powers (April 12, 1947)

## THE MANY LIVES OF FLOYD DELL

Ted Fleener

Waterloo Community Schools (retired)

*Floyd Dell was a contemporary of Sinclair Lewis, and often crossed paths with him in Greenwich Village in the 1910s. His most famous novel, Moon-Calf, was published in 1920, the same year as Main Street.*

When one writes or talks about Floyd Dell, the dilemma is to decide which Floyd Dell is the topic. He had many personas during his life. He was a lover, Bohemian, critic, socialist, novelist, family man, government bureaucrat, and revolutionary, among other things. During his life he wrote twelve novels, many works of nonfiction, plays, and numerous short essays. In his role as a critic, he furthered the careers of many writers, including Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson.

Dell was born Floyd James Dell on June 28, 1887 in Barry, Illinois, a small town just a few miles east of Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. His mother Kate was a schoolteacher who instilled in him a love of books. Dell's father Anthony, a Civil War veteran, failed at being a butcher, then held a series of odd jobs. To improve their fortunes, the family moved to Quincy, Illinois, with, as Douglas Clayton wrote in his biography of Dell, "their meager belongings and threadbare dreams" (12). Dell's literary ambitions were developed when he discovered the Quincy public library, where he was taken under the mentorship of a very encouraging librarian. She allowed him to roam freely through the stacks of books, where he discovered many hidden treasures. He also did well at Franklin Junior High School, where he was introduced to Elizabethan and Romantic poetry. He became so comfortable with public speaking that he was asked to speak at his graduation. The address, "The Influence of Oratory upon History," was printed in part, with his picture, in one of the Quincy newspapers. This may be the first time this future prolific author had something in print.



Image of Floyd Dell

While still in high school, he became fascinated with socialism and radical literature. His reading was varied, including Emerson, Carlyle, Kropotkin (a Russian anarchist), and the socialist newspaper the *Appeal to Reason*. Dell also read socialist novels, especially those with a utopian theme, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. He read a wide range of poetry and was able, while still in school, to sell poetry to national magazines, such as *McClure's*. Toward the end of his time in Quincy, he worked in a hot, sticky candy factory with a girl named Margaret. Although attracted to her, he was so timid that he didn't even try to kiss her. His feelings for her, based both on physical attraction and politics (her family were ardent socialists), were later captured in his novel *Moon-Calf*. When his family moved to Davenport, Iowa, in 1903, he felt he had failed her and did not even say goodbye.

When the Dells as a family moved to Davenport, they settled in another decrepit rental house, and his father worked at a series of menial jobs. Many radicals and intellectuals lived in the city, as well as various ethnic groups including Germans, Hungarians, and Irish. Floyd enrolled in high school and became fascinated by politics and literature, including A. E. Housman's works, such as *A Shropshire Lad*. He was also befriended by Marilla Freeman, a local librarian, who encouraged him and his writing, especially his romantic poetry. They would later have a brief summer romance, setting a pattern for later romances where he was taken under the wing of an older woman. He even had a piece

————— Lives of Floyd Dell *continued on page 15*

### NEW MEMBERS

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

Cynthia L. Poor  
Roslindale, MA

Dolores Ferri  
Bloomington, IL

Lewis's Romantic Role-playing *continued from page 6*

on a movie script: "our movie" in Hollywood (July 17, 1943). Fatuously, he assured her she had a "divine gift" for humor writing (August 23, 1942), and predicted she would become "a heck of a good poet" like "Emily Dickinson" (August 26, 1943). And with the relationship a year from collapse, when Powers revealed her plans to marry, Lewis offered to set her up as a literary agent in "a firm of our own" (August 30, 1945).

While dwelling on the impractical and fantastical aspects of Lewis's relationship with Powers, the letters show he played the physical role of lover—at first. With the sexual revolution and women's liberation at least thirty years in the future, the advice to unmarried women of the day was to avoid premarital sex and the risk of pregnancy. Even Lewis's feminist former wife, Dorothy Thompson, promoted traditional morality. Writing in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1948, Dorothy Thompson was aware of the extramarital romance her ex-husband had pursued before their divorce and insisted that moral standards be inflexible (Zube 389). Marital sex manuals of the era were popular sellers, advocating orgasm for both partners and putting the man in charge of the woman's pleasure, but they were definitely *marriage manuals*, underscoring the honeymoon as the onset of intercourse and the expectation of marital fidelity (Neuhaus 451). Lewis, by contrast, wanted Powers to recall their "furious and *shameless* lovemaking" (italics added, August 7, 1943) and an intimate memory of "chasing you off to bed, my baby" (November 28, 1945). These remarks raise the practical question of how sexual encounters were conducted.

In *Ann Vickers* Lewis highlights his titular character's lack of birth control, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy and consequent abortion, but never specifies what means of birth control Ann uses in her later romance with a married lawyer, likely because the Comstock Law, prohibiting the dissemination of birth control information, was still in effect, not being struck down until 1936 (Gamson 267). Lingeman supports the interpretation that Lewis and Powers dealt with an unplanned pregnancy and likely a miscarriage or abortion given this wistful reference by Lewis: "I wish we did have our little Junior that we almost have [Lewis crossed out 'have' and wrote 'had']. I would love him or her very much, because he would be you" (August 29 and 20, 1943).<sup>5</sup> If Powers indeed underwent an abortion, she was fortunate that antibiotics were available by 1943; the cause of death prior to 1940 was usually "fatal infections in a pre-antibiotic era" (Caron 3). Moreover, Powers likely found a sympathetic partner in Lewis, in light of his sensitive treatment of abortion in *Ann Vickers* and in *Kingsblood Royal*. Sally E. Parry evaluates Lewis's tone regarding abortion: "In neither case is Lewis or his narrator judgmental about the

woman's decision, but allows each character the freedom to make her decision without condemnation" (72).<sup>6</sup>

Although Lewis was prolific in endearments, as a lover he remained modest in his references to the physical appearance of Powers. He mentioned only facial features, complimenting her lips and eyes only twice in the 262 letters, and never remarking on kissing or embracing, apart from the "furious and shameless lovemaking" noted above. He indulged once in a mildly off-color joke about being at a YMCA camp—"22 acres right on the lake, deep virgin forest—no, no, it was the forest, I said" (July 24, 1942). He obliquely praised the physical attributes of Powers, describing her as "the goddamnest, sweetest, funniest, gracefulest, best built gal since Cleopatra" (December 21, 1942) and "you sounded [on the telephone] so round and soft and downy and warm and young" (August 20, 1943).

Right alongside the role of lover, we see Lewis in the paternalistic and aggravatingly pedantic role of Powers's teacher. He labored, for example, to correct her bad manners in not returning phone calls or, worse, calling back in the middle of the night. He counseled her to write thank-you notes and issue invitations to lunch (December 22, 1941). Although early on he discussed the possibility of her going to college at Barnard or Smith, when she aimed for a career in lieu of college, he heavily advised her on which American and British classics to read in a program of self-improvement. Although Lewis would rhapsodize to Powers that "you're going to write brilliantly—are doing so now in fact" (August 1, 1943), he could not suppress his inner pedant and proofreader when reading her compositions. Consider this meticulous response to the lax grammar and poor penmanship Powers apparently exhibited in a letter:



Image of Dorothy Thompson

In your first [letter] you say 'Division three.' Should be 'Division Three,' or else both D and T lowercase ... You spell the store M Klien when it should be Klein. Your second letter was undated. And in both, in writing the address on the back of the envelope, you leave out your name—though your initials would be enough—and you still make the 5 like a cross between a 3 and an S. For an exercise, sit right down and write

————— Lewis's Romantic Role-playing *continued on page 9*



5, 3, and S each twenty times, making them clearly distinguishable. (March 18, 1942)

Lewis felt confident in his role of career counselor to Powers. She tried out at least four careers in their eight years together, from stage actor to assistant at *Ladies Home Journal* and *Vogue* magazines to freelancer to literary agent. She took a course in shorthand. He wrote nothing negative to her about her disastrous acting debut on Broadway, though he warned her against overreaching in the literary world:

As I said, I don't think that without training you'd have a chance to get on a New York City newspaper or into a publishing house ... I think that just now you ought to do one of two things: Go on—since you don't particularly need the money—devoting everything to trying to get a stage job ... OR go to college ... [where your] “knowledge of the world” will be greater than that of many of your teachers. (December 23, 1941)

In another sample of his career advice, he felt fully qualified to assist Powers in writing for magazines, though she proved to have no success in this area:

You think [you will] maybe write something for *Liberty*. Now the first and immensely important rule for people beginning to sell writings. Read and study several copies of *Liberty* (or whatever magazine you might want to aim at) to see just what sort of thing they want—short stories, articles, what type of articles (whimsical, informative, advisory, etc.) they are actually taking. If you did that cat thing, just for instance, it might go with *N. Yorker*, maybe couple of the women's magazines, probly [sic] not for *Liberty*. (August 17, 1944)

Lewis in the role of “Sugar Daddy” was clearly generous, paying for Powers's furniture, as already noted, and, also her dentist bills, dresses, theater tickets, war ration books, professional photos, and a kitten (they shared a fondness for cats), not to mention the monthly stipend. However, these expenditures were easy to afford when compared with the \$25,650 loss he sustained in the 1941 Broadway flop *Good Neighbor*, which was Marcella's Broadway debut and closed after one night (Lingeman 455). In the financially difficult year of 1942, Lewis rented the Manhattan Central Park apartment he dubbed “Intolerable Towers” and rented another for Powers called “Little Towers,” which he hired her to decorate (meanwhile he made only \$15,000 on *Gideon Planish*) (Lingeman 473). By 1945, the dream of Powers becoming an actor had perished, and ironically, Lewis ultimately found a job for her at *Good*

*Housekeeping*, a magazine very much like *Ladies Home Journal* where his second wife, Dorothy Thompson, had warned against youthful female immorality. Next, he set her up with a position at the Leland Hayward Literary Agency. Finally, in 1946, he created for Powers her own literary agency where she was tasked with finding publication for his play scripts (Lingeman 502).

After failing to secure Powers's affection, in the end Lewis adopted the role of family caretaker. Powers's mother, Katherine, began accompanying Marcella on all visits to Lewis in Minnesota. Katherine Powers, whom Lewis called “Mother Povah,” while, as noted, he began to call Marcella “Baby” (August 18, 1946), stayed on with Lewis by herself, as a housekeeper. Lewis perhaps hoped to ingratiate himself with Marcella and to normalize their connection in Marcella's view. However, Lewis realized that he was losing Marcella:

there was always a shadow of you in the place, but with her [Katherine Powers] gone, I miss you terribly. I want to go so many places, to do so many things with you, make good on your job—you're doing magnificently—but don't let it absorb you for more than [sic] three or four years ... I miss you so. I want to sit with you on a heather-covered Scotch moor looking to the Northern sea, and on a Paris boulevard, and in Provincetown and on a balcony in Beverly Hills. (June 22, 1945)

Lewis was fortunate in that he had actually enjoyed all these travel adventures romantically described here. However, he would be forced to relinquish hope for further travels with Marcella Powers.

Ironically, Powers's work at women's magazines—*Good Housekeeping* and *Vogue*—towards the end of World War II placed her in a media environment emphasizing that young women should now leave the world of work where they had supported the war effort and retreat to the marital home for domesticity and motherhood. In a study of the rhetoric of the era's women's magazines, Sarah Burke Odland finds, “The pronatalist message of the postwar was ubiquitous; discussions and images of motherhood dominated national discourse” (64). Lingeman concludes that Powers “wanted a husband, a house in the suburbs, kids—all the normal stuff. And Red was too old” (510). Just as Lewis was moving back to Massachusetts from Minnesota and laboring to create an ideal domestic space at Thorvale Farm, Powers chose a permanent domestic space at last—one that left Lewis behind for good.

————— Lewis's Romantic Role-playing *continued on page 10*

Many casual observers of the spurned Lewis as he traveled abroad with his age-mate Katherine Powers must have thought these two were a married couple. Lingeman reports how marvelously Katherine Powers fared under Lewis's friendship in his last years. She enjoyed extensive domestic and foreign travel and lavish rooms and meals in various Lewis domiciles, a tremendous improvement of lifestyle for this former boarding-house matron. She also fared remarkably well in Lewis's will. Lewis awarded Katherine Powers one-fourth of his estate at death. Marcella, married by then, was awarded 1/16 (Lingeman 516–17). Therefore, the final role Lewis played in his relationship with Marcella Powers was benefactor.

The month after Powers wed, Lewis halted her small monthly stipend of \$155 (Lingeman 514). But he had given so much more to Powers in funds, time, and romantic hopes over the course of their eight years. Marcella Powers's last gift to Lewis was a handmade chess set, as he had taught her the game he adored. Perhaps her greatest gift to Lewis was the delusion of love she allowed him to prolong and ponder. We don't know if—or where—Powers traveled on her honeymoon, but Lewis's first trip after her marriage was to Italy, where he had so often invited Powers to accompany him. He would die of complications of alcoholism in Italy three years after she married.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The correspondence between Sinclair Lewis and Marcella Powers may be accessed from the Minnesota Digital Library: Minnesota Reflections located at [reflections.mndigital.org/index.php](http://reflections.mndigital.org/index.php)

<sup>2</sup>According to Lingeman, during the years Lewis courted Powers, he managed to achieve sobriety for extended periods. Before they met, he showed the deterioration of an active drinker: a fatty liver, DTs, malnutrition, and hospitalizations after binges, all of which led to his physician's dire warning that further drinking would be lethal (422). Several years after meeting Powers, he relapsed into binge drinking when Powers dated another man. Lewis began drinking steadily again, though secretly, in 1945 until his life ended in 1951. For analysis of Sinclair Lewis's struggle with alcoholism, see the following articles by Roger Forseth: "That First Infirmity of Noble Mind: Sinclair Lewis, Fame—and Drink," "The Alcoholic Writer by Any Other Name," and "You Can Go Home Again: Sinclair Lewis—Biography and Short Fiction."

<sup>3</sup>During his eight years with Powers, Lewis published four major novels: *Bethel Merriday* (1940), *Gideon Planish* (1943), *Cass Timberlane: A Novel of Husbands and Wives* (1945), and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947).

<sup>4</sup>This is a list of nicknames Lewis contrived for himself in writing to Powers, in alphabetical order: "Brunswick," "the Canon,"

"Charles of London," "Chesterfield Levy, LLD," "Daryl," "Ed," "Edouard," "Elgar," "Emil," "F. D. Roosevelt Jones," "Franz Liszt," "the Judge," "L. C. Smith," "Lewis and Clarke," "the Marquis Bjorkman," "Me the Mouse," "Milton Fetherstonaugh," "Mr. Zero," "Nat M.," "Pedro the Grik," "Prince Sargon," "Reginald Boyer-Menjou," "Sir Cedric Gump," "SSS [Small Secret Spy] #2," "Stan Mac Gopher," "T. Kett [Ticket]," "Vaughn," "a wily old professional badger," "Volunteer Farm Worker 6#aJ259B6 Dirty or Ground Vegetable Div. Spinach Section, Battery B," "your professor," "the Zebra," and "Zed."

<sup>5</sup> Simone M. Caron's research on abortion practices in Rhode Island from 1876 to 1938 provides "insight into trends in [abortion and] abortion deaths in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (1). Although female physicians, female midwives, and untrained males performed abortions, the most common provider was the male physician. The cost of an abortion in the Great Depression was fifty dollars (4). An abortion occurred most typically in the doctor's office with the use of instruments as opposed to drugs (6). According to Caron, abortion deaths were not high, but "Most women who died were single, in their twenties, and sought abortions because their lovers were married or engaged, or they feared parental confrontation" (2), which epitomizes the situation of Powers and Lewis.

<sup>6</sup> Given that Lewis and Powers did not have to evade the Comstock Law, the contraceptive devices available would be what was called the "Dutch cap" or diaphragm, a latex condom, or a vaginal suppository, according to Andrea Tone's *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (2001). Single women like Powers would have been unlikely to visit a doctor for birth control information or devices. All the means noted above were available at drugstores (and even tested by the Food and Drug Administration for efficacy). Homemade contraceptive efforts were douches and withdrawal (70). As a twice-married man in his late fifties, Lewis would have had years of birth control experience and information to offer Powers.

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————— Lewis's Romantic Role-playing *continued on page 11*

Lewis's Romantic Role-playing *continued from page 10*

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Lewis's Problems *continued from page 1*

In the 150 years since Otto von Bismarck defined politics as "the art of the possible," novelists have created fiction that mirrors and sheds light on actual and conceivable political realities. Among the significant American political novels of the twentieth century, *The Jungle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *All the King's Men*, and former Vice President Spiro Agnew's favorite, Allen Drury's *Advise and Consent*, it's no surprise that Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* is gaining renewed attention. One example of this revival is the dread-inspiring headline *New Yorker* editor David Remnick gave to his assessment of the aftermath of Donald Trump's victory, "It Happened Here." This allusion to the nightmarish presidency depicted in Lewis's novel may be unfair, as expectations of a dictatorial Trump have yet to be fully realized. But mindful of American democracy's fragility, Lewis envisioned the possibility of it being undermined by a combination of corruption, deceit, and voter apathy.

Although sympathetic to underdogs, Lewis was careful not to align himself too closely with a specific political persuasion, which frustrated critics on the left. In his scathing review of Lewis's 1938 novel, *The Prodigal Parents*, Granville Hicks in the *New Masses* proclaimed, "Among the many persons annoyed by Sinclair Lewis, none has a better right to be irritated than the Marxist critic," going on to complain that he'd hoped for a stronger pro-labor, anti-capitalist approach from Lewis after the publication of *It Can't Happen Here*. Hicks should have known

better, recalling what Lewis told him and other left-leaning members at an otherwise friendly 1935 meeting of the League of American Writers, "I don't believe any of you have *read* the book; if you had you would have seen I was telling you all to go to hell." Daniel Aaron, in *Writers on the Left*, identifies Lewis among the strongest writers of the thirties who "used politics and were not used by it." Lewis's unwillingness to subordinate himself to a single ideology is reflected in the declaration of his character Doremus Jessup: "There is no Solution! There will never be a state of society anything like perfect!" Six decades later, in an irritable review of Richard Lingeman's biography of Lewis, John Updike sided with those he called Lewis's "more politically committed critics," seeing the novels' happy endings as capitulations to the bourgeois values Lewis satirized and rendering him unfit to write the labor novel he long envisaged.

Yet within Lewis's critical explorations of American behavior—its business practices, consumption habits, conservative parochialism, organized religion, medical research, gender relations, bigotry, and racism—there is unmistakable compassion for characters oppressed by external forces. Now at a time of extreme income inequality and political polarization, political science professor Steven Michels is among those calling for greater consideration of Lewis and the ways he

————— Lewis's Problems *continued on page 12*

Lewis's Problems *continued from page 11*

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approached his subjects. In his latest book, *Sinclair Lewis and American Democracy*, Michels sees Lewis operating out of a humane, rational skepticism, with each of his works having its own purpose, and being "part of a larger and more substantive project." Viewing Lewis as a writer whose "talent lies in presenting the great institutions and most common habits of modern life as problems to be faced or solved," Michels follows the thread of Lewis's ongoing quarrels with the amorality and baseness of his day. The book is made up of chapters organized by themes, with discussion framed around political theory and philosophy going back to the Greeks. As Michels expects many of his readers to be unfamiliar with Lewis's less popular novels, he provides extensive plot summaries that aid in sussing out the political meaning inherent in Lewis's work. In this study that eschews postmodern literary analysis, the suitability of Michels's strategy is captured in a statement by the late novelist and critic John Gardner calling plot "the writer's equivalent to the philosopher's argument."

Believing that "Lewis's problems are still our problems," Michels proceeds through the chapters encouraging readers to regard the novels "as models for how to navigate our social, political, and professional lives, such that we might come to a fuller understanding of the human condition and become better citizens and better people." He starts on a positive note, linking four disparate works—*Arrowsmith*, *Hike and the Aeroplane*, *Trail of the Hawk*, and *Bethel Merriday*—to show how science and the arts share a common path toward devotion to a constructive purpose greater than oneself, and how the concerns of philosophers including Aristotle, Bacon, Rousseau, and Hannah Arendt are germane to the discussion. Negative examples follow, with the protagonists of *Work of Art*, *Babbitt*, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, and *Our Mr. Wrenn* dealing with social conformity and striving for material gain, highlighting the debate among the Founders over "the tension between democracy and commerce," and including mention of economic philosophers Adam Smith and Herbert Croly. Michels finds common links among *Cass Timberlane*, *It Can't Happen Here*, *The Prodigal Parents*, and *Gideon Planish* with respect to the quest for power within family life, civic associations, and political organizations, and he sees Lewis

aligned with Madison, Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill on questions of individual and social liberty. He groups together *The God-Seeker*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*, arguing that "Lewis presents a religion that enables and excuses the vices necessary for the unabashed and unapologetic self-interest at the heart of American economic life." Several of the novels mentioned above are discussed in greater depth in a subsequent chapter that includes the 1917 novel *The Innocents*, where Lewis focuses on love and the tension between commitment and personal autonomy. That Lewis carefully considered employment relations is evident in the chapter on *The Job* and *Ann Vickers*, where the discussion broadens to issues of gender equality and sexual freedom, including a close look at the relative situations of Carol Kennicott and Myra Babbitt. *Main Street*, *Free Air*, and *Mantrap* form the basis of the chapter on small-town life, where he concludes that Lewis is at odds with small-community advocates Aristotle and Montesquieu, because, for Lewis, "familiarity and proximity lead to surveillance and conformity." Michels completes his study by focusing on racism, nationalist bigotry, and, with *Dodsworth* and *World So Wide*, the view of America from Europe. *Kingsblood Royal*, whose protagonist suffers social isolation after revealing that he has a black ancestor, is Lewis's most thorough exploration of race relations, and as such has attracted more recent critical interest than any of his other later novels.

Finally, Michels speculates what satirical targets would be in Lewis's sights today: hostility toward immigrants, opposition to scientific research, weak responses to climate change, and the giddy rush to acquire electronic gadgetry made by low-wage labor offshore. One also wonders if Lewis had been healthy enough to live into his eighties, what position he would've taken on US intervention in Asia and Latin America. Would he, like fellow Nobel laureate John Steinbeck, have supported LBJ's policies? And what would he think of religious groups supporting for the US presidency a thrice-divorced owner of gambling dens known for making salacious comments about women and minorities? Who would ever conceive of a story like that?

All in all, Steven Michels has delivered an important contribution to Lewis scholarship, valuable both in and out of schools. ✍

"Publicist in Fiction" *continued from page 3*

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element throughout. With carefully selected direct addresses, a skillful orator manages to keep listeners' attention directed to his speech. In *Babbitt*, George Babbitt's speech to the Zenith Real Estate Board is organized with real skill; he's a master of oration. Before each major section of his speech, Lewis places

the proper direct addresses, such as "gentlemen."

Now, gentlemen, standing up here before you, I feel a good deal like Pat, and maybe after I've spied along

—————"Publicist in Fiction" *continued on page 13*

“Publicist in Fiction” *continued from page 12*

for a while, I may feel so darn small that I’ll be able to crawl into a Pullman hammock with no trouble at all, at all! (180)

Another rhetorical trope is to present linguistic novelties such as neologisms, that is, newly coined words or rearrangements of words to express a new meaning. The newspaper “is very quick to react to any new development in the life of society, in science and technology” (Galperin 298). Lewis’s novels are enriched with different kinds of neologisms that give a sense of freshness and temporality to his writings.

Babbitt spoke well—and often—at these orgies of commercial righteousness about the “realtor’s function as a seer of future development of the community, and as a prophetic engineer clearing the pathway for inevitable changes”—which meant a real-estate broker could make money by guessing which way the town would grow. This guessing he called Vision. (43)

The expression “real-estate broker” was a neologism in the 1920s. Lewis used it to make the protagonist seem very modern. This quote also capitalizes the word Vision to stress the importance of Babbitt’s belief.

Newspaper articles often use “non-term political and economic vocabulary” (Galperin 298) in order to make the reader aware of the complexity of an issue. Lewis makes use of such vocabulary as well. In this example, again from the Real Estate Board speech, Babbitt’s first statement about the specifics of the population census demonstrates the novel’s business atmosphere.

It is true that even with our 361,000, or practically 362,000, population, there are, by the last census, almost a score of larger cities in the United States. But, gentlemen, if by the next census we do not stand at least tenth, then I’ll be the first to request any knocker to remove my shirt and to eat the same, with the compliments of G. F. Babbitt, Esquire! (185)

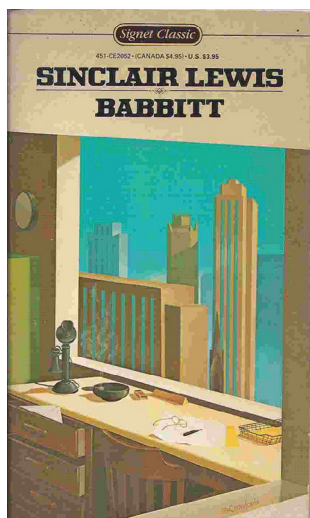
The business-like nature of the first sentence is undercut by the second, where, with the use of the vocative, he demands the audience’s attention; then he uses the slang term “knocker,” followed by calling himself Esquire, as though that will restore dignity after basically daring someone to contradict him and then eat his shirt.

The “convinced rebel in a restless generation” (Coard 23), Lewis revels in taking terms, especially political and business jargon, that sound good and emptying them of meaning. Babbitt often uses complicated terms—and you’ll note that they are capitalized—to make himself sound smart, even when it’s clear he really doesn’t know what he’s talking about. The satiric effect of his character’s words is evident in the example below when he’s talking to his son Ted about the importance of education, even though to him, education is useful mostly because you can earn more money when you have it.

Trouble with a lot of folks is: they’re so blame material; they don’t see the spiritual and mental side of American supremacy;...whereas to a real thinker, he sees that spiritual and, uh, dominating movements like Efficiency, and Rotarianism, and Prohibition, and Democracy are what compose our deepest and truest wealth. (85)

It’s evident that Lewis is mocking Babbitt here, because he inserts the sentence filler, “uh,” which indicates that George is searching urgently for something to say to impress his son.

Newspaper articles of the time often used complex sentences and complex verbal constructions (Galperin 300); that is, structures that say things in a more complicated way to try and impress the reader. Lewis’s use of big, important sounding concepts in his creation of an article in the *Zenith Advocate-Times* about Babbitt’s address to the Zenith Real Estate Board is an excellent example.



One of the liveliest banquets that has recently been pulled off occurred last night in the annual Get-Together Fest of the Zenith Real Estate Board, held in the Venetian Ball Room of the O’Hearn House. Mine host Gil O’Hearn had as usual done himself proud and those assembled feasted on such an assemblage of plates as could be rivaled nowhere west of New York, if there, and washed down the plenteous feed with the cup which inspired but did not inebriate in the shape of cider from the farm of Chandler Mott, president of the board and who acted as witty and efficient chairman. (179)

The praise leveled by the newspaper doesn’t use two words when four would do. What they drank uses up over two

“Publicist in Fiction” *continued on page 14*

“Publicist in Fiction” *continued from page 13*

dozen words and becomes an advertisement for the product of the president of the board.

Lewis’s novels call attention to the embedded newspaper articles and advertisements by varying the fonts or inserting images. A good example are the advertisements that Ted shows his father while trying to convince him that even finishing high school is a waste of time.

WHAT WE TEACH YOU!

How to address your lodge.

How to give toasts.

How to tell dialect stories.

How to propose to a lady.

How to entertain banquets.

How to make convincing selling-talks.

How to build big vocabulary.

How to create a strong personality.

How to become a rational, powerful and original thinker.

How to be a MASTER MAN! (78)

In the above example, the body of the announcement differs from the main text with its all-capitalized words in the title of the ad that immediately attract attention. Readers can easily guess that the text differs from the rest, giving a much more heteroglottal aspect to the novel. And at the end of the advertisement is the use of capitalization again, to stress the action that the reader should have.

Galperin also comments on the “specific word order” (300) seen in advertisements in newspapers. In this example, the abbreviations and order are a kind of jargon. They are perfectly clear to those who know what the words stand for, and they are like a mysterious code to those who do not. Babbitt seems exercised by the following advertisement, although his wife could care less.

Mrs. Babbitt was strangely unmoved by the tidings from the Real Estate and Building column of the *Advocate-Times*:

Ashtabula Street, 496—J. K. Dawson to  
Thomas Mullally, April 17, 15.7 X 112.2,  
mtg. \$4000.....Nom (22)

Each item has its proper place in the announcement, and in any announcement of this kind the details would be the same. Because Babbitt is part of this discourse community, he has strong feelings about it.

There are sometimes other reasons to change the font size and type. Below is an example from *Main Street* where a poem that Carol repeats differs from the whole text with its font.

The turbulent voices, even Guy Pollock being connotative beside her, were nothing. She repeated:

*Deep on the convent-roof the snows  
Are sparkling to the moon.* (205)

This excerpt (italics ours), from Tennyson’s “St. Agnes’ Eve,” indicates not only that it is a text other than the novel itself, but also gives a sense of the magic the poem invokes. In the novel and the poem there is a great deal of snow, as well as a certain spiritual sense, which is especially interesting, given Lewis’s agnosticism at this point in his life.

Lewis was not only a successful writer and rhetorician, but also a good sociologist. Lingeman says, “He was a literary sociologist who believed in seeing America first and knew his country better than most writers of his generation” (555). As a sociologist, Lewis was able to see the peculiarities of middle-class life and reflect them in his novels. As a rhetorician, he chose the right moment to present how he had heard people talk. Finally, as a writer, he managed to organize his stories in such a way that they are real works of art.

The best words about Lewis may have been said by the author himself: “Whether or not there is any merit in my books, I do not know and I do not vastly care, since I have had the somewhat exhausting excitement of writing them. But, good or not, they have in them everything I have been able to get from life or to give to life” (“Self-Portrait” 46).

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*It Can't Happen Here* News continued from page 5

presenter of the arts and culture show *The Green Room* on *Newstalk* in Ireland, February 2, 2017.

In Penguin Random House's "From Orwell to Atwood: 14 Visions of a Dystopian America," *It Can't Happen Here* rounds out the list. The others on the list are George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*, Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Don DeLillo's *Americana*, P. D. James's *Children of Men*, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, and Jack London's *The Iron Heel*.

The Sinclair Lewis Society has been asked for interviews by national radio stations, including NPR stations, as well as the *Chicago Tribune*, the BBC, Irish radio, and the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Below are some examples of the new-found popularity of Lewis. Penguin Random House arranged a radio tour for Sally Parry as well. Below are some of the interviews.

*Steve Fast Show*, WJBC-AM, interview with Steve Fast, Peoria-Bloomington, Illinois, market.

*Having Read That*, KSCJ-AM/FM, interview with Brian Vakulskas, Sioux City, Iowa, market.

*Radioactivity*, WMNF-FM (NPR affiliate), interview with Rob Lorei, Tampa, Florida, market.

*The Bill Newman Show*, WHMP-AM, interview with Bill Newman and Monte Belmonte, Northampton, Massachusetts, market: [whmp.com/podcasts/shows/bill-newman/](http://whmp.com/podcasts/shows/bill-newman/)

*Warren in the Morning*, WKNY-AM, interview with Warren Lawrence, Kingston, New York, market.

*Morning Drive*, WNDB-AM, interview with Al Smith, Daytona Beach, Florida, market.

Lives of Floyd Dell continued from page 7

accepted by *Harper's*. However, he had to quit high school to help support his family.

Through a very large bit of luck, he landed a job as reporter at the *Davenport Times* in the winter of 1904. He had a gift for the newspaper business, especially in writing personal stories. The *Davenport Democrat and Leader* lured him away from the *Davenport Times*, although he was fired from there in 1907. He also worked as an editor of a workers' magazine, the *Tri-City Workers Magazine*. During his time in Davenport, Dell had his first serious relationship with a woman he called Joyce in his autobiographical novel *Moon-Calf*. The relationship ended, in large part due to class differences. With the loss of his love and his employment, the winter of 1907–08 was a hard one. During the spring of 1908, he became romantically

*Writer's Voice* with Francesca Rheannon, @WritersVoice, interview with Francesca Rheannon, national market.

*Columbia Morning* with David Lile, 1400KFRU, interview with David Lile, Columbia/Jefferson City, Missouri, market.

*The Roundtable*, WAMC-FM / A M (NPR affiliate), interview with Joe Donahue, regional market/northeast public radio: [wamc.org/programs/roundtable](http://wamc.org/programs/roundtable)

*Conversations with Jeff Schechtman*, Napa Broadcasting, interview with Jeff Schechtman, Napa, California, market.

*Perspectives*, KTEP-FM (NPR affiliate), interview with Louie Saenz, for the El Paso, Texas, market.

*Good Books Radio*, KMBH-FM/KEOS-FM (NPR affiliate), interview with Dr. Bill Strong, for the Brownsville/McAllen, Texas, and Waco, Texas, markets.

DIY MFA, interview with Gabriela Pereira for episode 134: "Literature as a Reflection of Society: Interview with Sally Parry about Sinclair Lewis's Portentous Book." Available on iTunes at [itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/id907634664](http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/id907634664) [diymfa.com/podcast/episode-134-sinclair-lewis-sally-parry](http://diymfa.com/podcast/episode-134-sinclair-lewis-sally-parry). ✍



involved with his mentor, Marilla Freeman, then decided to move to Chicago in November.

In Chicago, he immediately became caught up in the intellectual and political life of the town. He met Margery Curry, another older woman (she was 33 to his 22), who encouraged his intellectual life, and he married her. He was asked to write a book review for the *Friday Literary Review*, and his writing was so well received that editor Floyd Hackett made him associate editor, with his name on the masthead. The *Friday Literary Review* was published by the *Chicago Evening Post*, a very centrist, establishment paper, that wanted to extend its coverage of the world of letters and literature. The *Friday Literary*

Lives of Floyd Dell continued on page 16

*Review* developed a very good reputation for well-written reviews on a wide variety of books. By the time Dell was 23, he was a powerful figure in Chicago's literary scene, responsible in part for the creation of the literary avant-garde in Chicago. By 1911, Dell became the editor of the *Friday Literary Review* and greatly assisted the careers of Theodore Dreiser and others with his reviews and his connections. He saw himself as the radical literary editor of a conservative newspaper.

Dell carried on a series of adulterous relationships, a pattern that repeated itself until his second marriage. Despite this, he wrote a series of essays in support of the women's movement, "Women as World Builders." These short biographies focused on individual feminists, including Emma Goldman, Isadora Duncan, and Jane Addams. Although his primary purpose was to inform readers about the spirit and optimism of the women's movement, his writing was somewhat patronizing, especially in his praise for women's intuition and the need for women to satisfy men.

Dell's marriage fell apart, due primarily to his unfaithfulness. After spending some time in the bohemian community of Chicago, he moved to Greenwich Village in New York City in October of 1913 where he soon made connections with various radical organizations and people. He wrote a short play satirizing bohemians, and by December was hired as the associate editor of the *Masses*, a leftist radical magazine. He brought focus and discipline to the magazine, as well as put its finances in order. Under his direction, the magazine became more diverse in exploring facets of literature and culture. Dell was an excellent editor, possessing the skills and journalistic expertise the magazine needed.

After the war started in Europe in 1914, Dell became deeply involved in the American anti-war movement. He found it a challenge to keep the different factions of contributors to the *Masses* happy. When the United States entered the war in April 1917, the magazine strengthened its opposition to the war. By July 1917, the New York City Postmaster told the editors that the magazine could not be mailed because it violated the newly passed Espionage Act. In November, Dell, Max Eastman, and others were indicted under the Espionage Act for, as the indictment stated, "Conspiring to cause mutiny and refusal of duty of the military services, and to obstruct recruiting and enlistment to the injury of the service" (qtd. in Clayton 162). After a tumultuous trial, a mistrial was declared. In an interesting twist for an anti-war editor, Dell was drafted and reported to boot camp in July 1918. He found it ironic, but was happy to participate in defeating Germany, which he saw as a danger to Soviet Russia. When military authorities discovered that Dell

had been tried for espionage, he was honorably discharged, ten days after beginning his military career. A second indictment also resulted in a mistrial. With the war drawing to a successful conclusion, no charges were filed again.

During the war, Dell also became involved in a very intense romantic relationship with the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. She even went to court with him when he was indicted. The relationship eventually burned out, much like her candle poem, but they remained in touch until her passing. Their relationship is well documented in Nancy Milford's *Savage Beauty*.

After the demise of the *Masses*, Dell worked for the *Liberator*, another left-leaning magazine. He remained fascinated with Millay and even wrote a long sonnet for *Pearson's Magazine*, recalling the dinner he and Millay shared the night before he left for boot camp!

After the war, Dell became more serious in his novelistic aspirations, resulting in the publication of *Moon-Calf*, which he had started work on in 1915. This was the first in an autobiographical series of novels, with the protagonist Felix Fay as a thinly disguised Dell. The novel was published in 1920, shortly before Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, and became a best-seller.

In what was perhaps the most positive event of his life, Dell fell in love with Berta Marie Gage, who was called B. Marie. He was smitten. She was robust, outgoing, honest, bohemian, and wanted a family. After months of wooing and persuasion, she consented to marry him. Unlike his first marriage, this was a long, enduring, and faithful relationship, ending only with his death in 1969. She gave him the freedom and encouragement to write. The couple had two sons, Christopher and Anthony.

In 1919, they moved to Croton-on-Hudson in New York, where they lived for many years, before moving to Washington DC in 1935. Dell wrote several more novels, including *Janet March*, which was pulled off the shelves after publication because it addressed the sexual coming-of-age of two young people, a topic not addressed so boldly in novels of that time. Dell also wrote *Love in Greenwich Village*, a collection of vignettes and essays from his time in Greenwich Village. He also wrote the play *Little Accident* with actor Thomas Mitchell, which was produced in 1928 and was a financial success, running over 300 performances.

In 1935, finding little market for his novels, he took a job with the Federal Writers' Project of the WPA. Dell felt his work contributed to lifting America out of the Great Depression. He saw the New Deal connected to his own lifelong dream



of liberal socialist reform in America. Dell wrote detailed and well-received reports on the programs of the WPA, suggesting that government play an active role in a humane national life, since this aspect would be neglected by the private sector. He became frustrated with bureaucracy, deploring the level of productivity and the slow pace, referring to himself as a “minor government bureaucrat” (Clayton 277). He was with the WPA until it was dissolved in 1943 and then stayed with the Information Service for four more years, where he completed the final report on the WPA in 1947. Then, having turned 60, he retired on his government pension and left his professional life as a bureaucrat behind.

During World War II, Dell and B. Marie had very intense feelings toward the Communist/Nazi conflict, and when Russia was invaded by Germany, they became supporters of the American war effort. Both of their sons were in the armed forces during the war.

In 1947, after his retirement, Dell returned to his writing full time, including a memoir he wrote for the *American Mercury*. He stressed the modern rupture with the past, a rupture filled with glitter and false sentiment. Dell felt the new generation had lost the idealism and independence his generation had possessed.

He wrote long letters to friends on a variety of subjects. Dell and Max Eastman traded letters and barbs concerning Joe McCarthy and McCarthyism. Dell saw through McCarthy, while Eastman was his ardent supporter. Despite this, their friendship endured. He corresponded with Edmund Wilson, another lover of Millay. In correspondence with his friend Joseph Freeman, Sinclair Lewis was noted as one of the writers of a golden age. Freeman wrote that Dell was the best critic of that age. Dell was firm in his beliefs of what he considered to be good writing. He was not impressed with European modernists such as Joyce and Kafka. He was also concerned that a writer like Dos Passos allowed his politics to dominate his novels. Dell believed that Hemingway’s novels allowed sentimentalism to be a dominant factor.

Dell spent much of the 1950s at his writing desk in Ingleside Terrace, his home in Washington DC where he spent that time surrounded by friends and family. B. Marie worked at the Mt. Pleasant library and wrote many stories about her family and her early life. Their son Christopher and his wife had two children, and his granddaughters were often mentioned in his letters.

In the 1960s, they moved to a smaller home in Bethesda, Maryland, where Dell wrote about his recollections of Millay and the bohemian world in which they lived. Dell also assisted

Miriam Gurko in her biography on Millay. He maintained interest in the happenings of the 1960s, finding the politics and culture of the times somewhat like that of his own generation. A series of strokes and emphysema made Dell increasingly feeble, and a lifetime of heavy smoking robbed him of his strength. Dell lived to see his fiftieth wedding anniversary in February of 1969. His granddaughter Jerri was at the celebration and commented on how wonderful it was they had stayed married so long and so happily. Both Dell and B. Marie commented that it had taken “a lot of damn hard work” (Clayton 310).

Dell died on July 23, 1969. Illness and emphysema had wasted him to 85 pounds. He had said in a poem to B. Marie that he wanted his ashes scattered in the countryside near their summer home in New Hampshire. His ashes were buried there, to be held in safekeeping until her ashes could join his. By the time of his death, most of his New York and Chicago friends, including Max Eastman, were dead.

Dell always had a desire for personal freedom and stayed a bohemian at heart. He believed in private happiness, progress, and human decency and loved the unexpected nature of life—the sadness and the pleasure. As Clayton notes at the end of his biography of Dell, “Such delight had been part of Dell’s abundant lifelong faith” (313).

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*I would like to thank Dr. Sally Parry for the opportunity to write a short biography on the life and times of Floyd Dell, a writer whose work is little known today. He had a very fascinating life and truly devoted himself to the craft of writing. His life touched that of many well-known American writers of the day, including Sinclair Lewis. A very contradictory person in many ways, but one truly devoted to the craft of writing, the belief in the dignity of man, and to his family. ✍*

## DEPARTMENTS

### SAUK CENTRE NEWS

The selling of the land on which the Interpretive Center was built led to an article in the Minneapolis's *StarTribune*, another in the *St. Cloud Times*, and a lively discussion on the Sinclair Lewis listserv.

#### **Sauk Centre is Booting Hometown Legend Sinclair Lewis to Make Room for a Chain Store**

*Sinclair Lewis Satirized Commercialism; Now His History Center Is Being Sold to Developers.*

by John Reinan

*Star Tribune* Staff Writer



*From left, Dave Simpkins, Joyce Lyng, Roberta Olson, and Colleen Steffes, board members of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, stood in front of the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center. The Center, fronting Interstate 94 in the famed author's hometown, is being sold by the city to a Wayzata developer.*

*(Photo by Jerry Holt, StarTribune)*

Sinclair Lewis surely would appreciate the irony: One of Minnesota's greatest literary lions, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, is being replaced by a chain store.

It's unclear exactly which species of cookie-cutter retail will displace Sauk Centre's memorial to the author who burst onto the national scene in 1920 with *Main Street*, a scathing look at small-town life based on the central Minnesota village of his youth.

What's certain, though, is that the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center is closed and the valuable property fronting Interstate 94 is being sold by the city to a developer. The Sinclair

Lewis Foundation, which was housed at the Interpretive Center, is looking for a new home.

"Babbitt won out," said Dave Simpkins, a Foundation board member, referring to the real estate booster and title character of the Lewis novel of the same name. "George Babbitt would have loved to develop that land."

The end of the Interpretive Center reflects both the financial pressures faced by small towns and a sense that perhaps Lewis has lost some relevance nearly a century after his literary peak.

"You talk to kids in school now, and they either don't know or don't care who he is," said Sarah Morton, Sauk Centre's city planner.

And it's not just the kids, she added: "I tried to read *Main Street*. I start it every winter. I still can't get through that book."

The ouster really comes down to money, said Vicki Willer, the Sauk Centre city administrator. The Interpretive Center, dedicated in 1975 by US Sen. Hubert Humphrey, was simply no longer the best use of that land.

"A lot of people felt the government didn't need to hold that prime property and it should be in private hands," Willer said. "We were getting a lot of push on that."

"We really heard it more from the business community: 'We need more people to contribute to our tax base. Spread the load.' The City Council would hear about it. I would hear about it. We struggled for many years with the decision to sell it."

Sauk Centre has a deal in principle with Oppidan Inc., an Excelsior-based developer specializing in big-box retail, fast-food restaurants, and other franchise outlets. Oppidan's price for the 4-acre parcel will be somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1 million, Willer said.

The deal should bring in tens of thousands of dollars each year in tax revenue once the land is developed, Willer said, as well as provide jobs for residents and entice more travelers off I-94 than Lewis was able to do.

Residents, she said, are actually more concerned with losing a popular sledding hill that's on the property.

"People have been doing that since they were children," Willer said. "So we'll try to find another sledding hill."

With the loss of the Interpretive Center, the Foundation's base of operations will shift several blocks north to the author's boyhood home, on Sinclair Lewis Avenue and not far from Main Street.

That building has its own issues; the Foundation is currently trying to raise \$8,500 to replace the heating and air conditioning system.

Jim Umhoefer, the Foundation's president, doesn't think there's been a loss of interest in Lewis. The city is gearing up for the 27th annual Sinclair Lewis Writer's Conference on Oct. 8, which typically draws 100 or more attendees.

Umhoefer said people in Sauk Centre are still willing to support the Lewis legacy. "They understand his significance, even though they may not have read his works," he said.

The city has helped with the move out of the Interpretive Center, he said, offering the Foundation space at City Hall to store many of its Lewis artifacts. In the long term, Umhoefer and other Foundation members hope to see the city build a new community center that would include space for a Lewis museum.

Lewis's No. 1 fan might be Sally Parry, an English professor and associate dean at Illinois State University. Although Lewis "certainly is not in the teaching canon the way someone like Hemingway or Fitzgerald is," she said, he still has much to offer modern readers.

"I've always found him able to get at the nub of what is going on in American society," she said. "Obviously some of the trappings are kind of dated. But what's behind it—the religious hypocrisy of *Elmer Gantry*, the consumerism of *Babbitt*, the tendency towards fascism in our country of *It Can't Happen Here*—in some ways, I wish he weren't so relevant."

Instead of banishing Lewis's museum, Sauk Centre should be doing even more to take advantage of him, Parry said.

The Interpretive Center "was a wonderful way for the town to say, 'Come visit us,' as opposed to somewhere else," she said. "If it's just going to be another Burger King, there are a lot of Burger Kings on I-94.

"I sometimes think that the folks in Sauk Centre don't appreciate what they have."

Simpkins, who's also the publisher of the *Sauk Centre Herald*, said the Foundation is "undaunted. We still have a story to tell." But, he added, "I think authors in general don't fare well as tourist attractions.

"As Lewis said himself, America is not very good to its authors."

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## Comments from the listserv on the selling of the Interpretive Center land.

Susan O'Brien: My husband is a Selectman in our small New Hampshire town so I am familiar with how small-towns work when making decisions. In this story, there is absolutely no solid survey with real numbers to back up what the town administrator and planner say, that "a lot of people" want this land sold to a big-box store. There isn't even an attempt to estimate how many want it. All too often such decisions are made with wishful thinking and glittering-generalities assumptions, or assumptions that may be true only in the short term. If such surveys or referendums were done, they are not reported here, which would be highly unusual for the *StarTribune*.

I've always felt since first seeing the Lewis home decades ago that there was a residual resentment of Lewis in Sauk Centre, passed down through the generations; family members who knew Lewis agreed with me some years back. A few forward-thinking officials began the process of connecting Sauk Centre with one of the 20th century's most famous and honored authors, but somehow, unlike Fitzgerald in St. Paul, it never became a priority. Yet in purely historic terms, Lewis was the more important of the two authors (Fitzgerald never won the Nobel Prize, for example). A town official who "can't get through *Main Street*" is deciding Lewis isn't relevant? My reaction to that was "wow."

We had a similar mind-set in North Conway, New Hampshire, when ten years ago local officials decided to extend New Hampshire's worship of the sacred-cow motorcycle by creating the "Rally in the Valley" week, assuming—not documenting—that large groups of bikers bring in a lot of profit to local businesses. Unfortunately, except for a few motels that has not proven to be the case. I was up there during this summer's Rally and the main shopping area of outlet stores, always otherwise jammed in the summer, was all but dead. The reason, I think: the bikers make horrific noise and pollute the air so much with their open pipes that shopping anywhere along Main Street is miserable. No discussion was ever commenced on the negative effect of inviting this mythological "revenue-generating" group of people compared to the damage they do to the local economy by driving the main tourist-shopping group away. It was simply assumed the Rally would be a good deal.

Short-term solutions may bring in some tax money, but small businesses inevitably suffer when a big-box store comes in. Has the Chamber been consulted about inviting in a big-box store? If small businesses die, what is that impact on the tax base? Who will really get the profit from a big-box store? Have the citizens been informed what has happened elsewhere when such a store came in? One Texas town lost all its food stores to Wal-Mart, then Wal-Mart pulled out, leaving the town with

no local grocery. Wal-Mart, of course, cared less than nothing about those citizens. And PS the local jobs touted by developers tend to be extremely low-paying with no benefits, for the most part. If other stores go out and Wal-Mart leaves, then there are zero jobs in that type of retail. Can I really believe that a big-box store right off the highway will entice many shoppers to come into Sauk Centre and spend money there?

An example of this is nearby Osakis, where I spent summers as a child. It is shocking to me to see the result in Osakis, once a thriving little village, of big boxes going into nearby Alexandria: empty store fronts, few patrons to what is left, the loss of conveniences.

Numerous other arguments against big-box stores can be made. When all is said and done, some things beyond tax money are worth saving as a reflection of intrinsic value.

Meanwhile, thanks to Joyce and all the others who so diligently maintained the Center for so long and in the face of “Main Street” politics. I remember so well the wonderful exhibits, especially the map Lewis drew of one fictional locale. It was a great place to visit, and if there is any justice it will return.



Catherine Arnott Smith: As a going-on-11-year resident of Madison, Wisconsin, I’ve been fascinated by the Frank Lloyd Wright phenomenon, in which you have a very prominent figure who left a physical legacy (i.e., buildings) all over the world, including his personal home in Spring Green, so recognition is not the issue; his personal reputation is very much the issue, though, and Spring Greeners have a very, very different take on the man and his legacy than any of the architecture scholars do. This is despite the fact that FLW brings in many, many tourist bucks to the area. I continue to find Lewis’s work so relevant to the present time that it astounds me he isn’t taught in school more ... but I’ll take ignorance over hostility, I guess!



Rusty Allred: Susan’s comment about the “residual resentment” reminded me of an incident that occurred when I visited Sauk Centre with my wife and adult son a few years ago. We were at a local store buying some Main Streeters spirit wear when one of the clerks asked my son if he’d read Lewis’s book. Knowing that Lewis wrote many, my son had a confused look on his face until I whispered *Main Street*, assuming that if anyone in Sauk Centre knew of only one, that would be the one.

While Susan’s comment is very likely correct, this particular story doesn’t suggest necessarily that this clerk resented Lewis, only that she didn’t really know much about him. I’d

guess the percentage of people who enjoy literature is not much different in Sauk Centre than anywhere else.



Joshua Preston: I’ve enjoyed following this email chain, and I’m reminded of a letter I received from former poet laureate Ted Kooser (I’d written to discuss writing/literature):

“Unfortunately, because we live in an age of celebrity, dead authors don’t much interest the public. I doubt if Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Lewis, are ever read unless in college classes. And that’s true of the poets, too. Lewis is all but forgotten because he can’t go on the Letterman Show!”

He’s got a point!



Sherry Kelly: Sinclair Lewis was “spot on” almost a century ago. You just have to read the beginning of *Main Street*—wish the *StarTribune* writer would have referenced this passage!

“Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters.”

Simply replace “Bon Ton” with “Big Box.”

I would like to donate a plaque to be placed on the Big-Box store with that passage!

Thank you, everyone, for keeping the spirit of Sinclair Lewis alive for future generations.



Dave Rowe: I think it’s a crime the Sinclair Lewis Interpretive Center land is being sold to a private developer. I live in Asheville, NC, the town where Thomas Wolfe grew up. The former boardinghouse, immortalized in *Look Homeward, Angel* is preserved as a regional landmark—Lewis and his works deserve similar treatment.



Dave Simpkins: Thanks for the comments. While it is sad to see the Center go, we’re pushing ahead with upgrading the home and hoping for a grander Sinclair Lewis Cultural Center.



Michael Goodell: When I came to Sauk Centre some 35 years ago it was specifically to visit Sinclair Lewis’s boyhood home. I thought he would have gotten a kick out of seeing the intersection of Sinclair Lewis Avenue and the Original Main

Street. We spent the night in town, eating (and staying?) at the hotel in town whose name escapes me (Palmer House?). My experience was perhaps not residual resentment, but certainly a profound disinclination to discuss Lewis or anything relating to him. Perhaps it was born of ignorance, perhaps resentment, perhaps just boredom at having to answer the same old questions one more time.



Ted Fleener: It is hard to say what the big-box stores do. From looking around Sebeke and Menahga, I think being bookended by Wal-Marts has hurt. I liked the center. Used to stop there on my way to our place at Wadena. That is where I met Joyce. As Dave said, Babbitt is very much alive!



Dave Simpkins: Mel Elhert, who is now 93, was one of the original Sinclair Lewis Foundation board members. He says to the city and chamber it was never about the books, it was about business.

But we're pushing on. We're putting a new furnace into the Boyhood Home and a Minnesota Historical Society architect was evaluating what we need to do to firm up the foundation. We're working with the Society on ways to do more interpretation in the house. Many museums do some creative things with iPads in cabinets. This will all take money and we've been doing well with grants and donations, but this will be an ongoing project. The city has also told us they plan to dedicate some of the proceeds of the sale to the SL Foundation.



In "*Main Street Takes a Hit in its Hometown. Prime Location of Site on Interstate Pushes City to Sell It to Developer Known for Retail, Fast-Food Outlets*" (*St. Cloud Times*, Sept. 30, 2016), Barbara Banaian notes that the Interpretive Center was dedicated in 1975 by Hubert Humphrey.

Most of us have read at least one of his novels. The characters are unforgettable! Consider Carol and Will Kennicott and the rest of the gang from Gopher Prairie. Or George F. Babbitt, developer and profit seeker, searching for the meaning of life in the novel *Babbitt*. . . . Although George Babbitt might approve, I feel sad the Interpretive Center lost its home and may not survive. The interstate already has lots of chain stores and fast-food restaurants; it doesn't need more, especially if they replace this Interpretive Center. This seems like a great loss to our area.

She, too, comments on the city's contention that the new business will do more for Sauk Centre's tax base, and stresses the importance of Lewis to the city.

"Unlike his boyhood home, there is not something special about that land where the Interpretive Center has been. Like many small towns, the city has services to provide, paid for by a population of little more than 4,000—three times the size when Lewis was a boy.

The memory of Sinclair Lewis will stay in Sauk Centre. His home still sits on Sinclair Lewis Avenue with materials to see there. So I guess "paradise" will be where the new Interpretive Center will be located.

Although if they threaten to take down his boyhood home, don't be surprised to see me chained to the door."



### Annual Report of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation

The annual meeting of the Sinclair Lewis Society took place on February 4, 2017. February 7th would have been Sinclair Lewis's 132nd birthday. Among the items discussed was how to proceed since the Interpretive Center closed as of January 1, 2016. At present, the City is storing the archives in a storage room at City Hall, some furniture has gone to the Boyhood Home, and some to the Palmer House, thanks to Kelley Freese. The Foundation has also received a grant for structural improvements to the Boyhood Home and an archival curator.

The 27th annual Sinclair Lewis Writer's Conference took place on October 8 with special guest James Bradley, author of *Flags of Our Fathers*. About 90 people attended.

The Sinclair Lewis Days Parade in the summer of 2016 was cancelled due to bad weather, but Roberta and John Olson, who were scheduled to ride in the parade, were taken along the parade route where they waved to folks along the way.

Nearly 500 hundred people visited the Boyhood Home during 2016, including foreign visitors from Australia, Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Scotland, and Wales, as well as all fifty states.

## SINCLAIR LEWIS NEWS

Snopes.com has cited the Sinclair Lewis website for the quote "when fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." It's under our frequently asked questions, and although it certainly reflects what Lewis thought, we can't find any proof that was what he ever said. See [www.snopes.com/sinclair-lewis-on-fascism/?utm\\_source+facebook&tum\\_medium=social](http://www.snopes.com/sinclair-lewis-on-fascism/?utm_source+facebook&tum_medium=social)



Lewis is used as a critical touchstone in Sadie Stein’s “The End of Relaxation” (*New York Times* Nov. 13, 2016: 33–34), which focuses on wellness vacations of various sorts, from sanitariums to the Chautauqua movement.

For many middle-class Americans, the opportunity for continuing education, communion with nature and polite, wholesome society—absent of evils like alcohol or dancing—would have been a luxury indeed. But sophisticates like Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken mocked the earnestness of communities like Chautauqua; Lewis described this survey-course learning as ‘nothing but wind and chaff and ... the laughter of yokels.’ Lewis is lucky that those early Chautauquans didn’t have smartphones.

Stein defends various kinds of mindfulness as important, even though, as they “move into the cultural mainstream and lose their purity—as they become inextricably tied up with capitalism, really—it’s easy for us, Lewis-style, to sneer.”



*Boston Globe*, September 30, 2016: headline: “Texas Prisons Allow Books by Hitler but not Alice Walker.” The story, originally written for the *Washington Post* by Derek Hawkins, notes,

Other books on Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s (banned) list include former Senator Bob Dole’s *World War II: An Illustrated History of Crisis and Courage*; Jon Stewart’s *America: A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction*; *Shakespeare and*

*Love Sonnets*, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. TDCJ also bans, perhaps most ironically, *It Can’t Happen Here* by Sinclair Lewis, a novel that describes the fictional election of a fascist president in the U.S. who imposes totalitarian rule on the country. *Mein Kampf*, on the other hand, which laid the ground work for an actual fascist takeover in a democratic society, is fair game.

In addition, the article lists six criteria for determining whether a book should be banned. Some are clear, such as a book that contains contraband or information about making explosives, drugs, etc. But other criteria are more subjective, particularly the third which states that a Texas prison can ban a book if it’s deemed to have been written “solely for the purpose of achieving the breakdown of prisons.” [Editor: I guess *Ann Vickers* would be on the banned list too.]



In *Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington* (Avery, 2013), author Terry Teachout discusses the Duke in light of the Roaring Twenties, the end of Prohibition, and the emergence of jazz, both live and recorded. “Americans had more money to spend and longed to be told how to spend it, and other Americans obliged them. Not only did Harry Pulham, Jay Gatsby, and George Babbitt need music to dance to, but they needed someone to sell it to them—and that was where Irving Mills came in.” Irving Mills was a music publisher, musician, and promoter of jazz.



Thank you to Andrew Baumgardner who donated a second edition of *Main Street* to the Lewis Society.

## NEW PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS NEEDED TO SERVE FIVE-YEAR TERM

### President:

*Will work with the Executive Director to help set policy and provide leadership in the Society’s work*

### Board of Directors:

*Will collaborate on policy and provide help in the various activities connected with the Society*

### Nominations:

Nominations are due by **October 1, 2017**.

You may nominate others or yourself for positions.

Please send a **short statement of interest** in the Society to be used on the ballot.

Please e-mail Sally Parry at [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu) with nominations or questions.

Call for Officers

—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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### DECEMBER MISCELLANY 2016

83. Lewis, Sinclair. *Mantrap*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926. \$1,850.

First edition. Review copy with rubber stamp on front flyleaf. "Advance Copy." A fine book in an unusually bright crisp dust jacket that has had two long tears to rear panel, and one to spine panel, expertly repaired with Japanese paper. Split at front and rear flap folds have similarly been reinforced. Nonetheless, an exceptionally fresh copy of a scarce jacket with virtually no paper loss.

84. —. *John Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926. \$250.

First edition. One of 975 numbered copies. Fine copy in glassine dust jacket (glassine chipped). Highly uncommon in the original glassine jacket.

### JUNE MISCELLANY 2016

81. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. With a special introduction by the author. And illustrations by Grant Wood. \$650.

Chicago: printed for members for the Limited Editions Club at the Lakeside Press, 1937. First illustrated edition. One of 1500 numbered copies by Wood. Fine clean copy in original glassine dust jacket in a near fine original box. Original prospectus laid in. Easily one of the more attractive LEC books.

### JULY MISCELLANY 2016

92. Lewis, Sinclair. *Work of Art*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1934. \$250

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

93. —. *Selected Short Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935. \$450

First edition. Fine fresh copy in dust jacket with some very minor wear at edges. Uncommon title.

94. —. *Bethel Merriday*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1940. \$150.

First edition. Fine copy in bright unfaded dust jacket with some minor edge wear at spine ends.

### Royal Books

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### CATALOG 55

67. Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1947. \$475

Vintage oversized double-weight photograph from the 1947 film, showing its star, Spencer Tracy, striking a convincing pose with a baseball glove during a break in shooting. With a printed mimeo snipe on the verso explaining that Tracy, whose character is umpiring a baseball game pitched by Lana Turner during their meet-cute, wanted to prove to his co-stars that he could still play. Based on the 1945 novel by Sinclair Lewis, Tracy stars as an officious judge who falls for and marries Turner, a younger woman from the wrong side of town. Bored with life in a small town, she runs off with lawyer Zachary Scott, but returns to Tracy after an accident leaves her bedridden. 10x13 inches (25x33 cm). Near fine.



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