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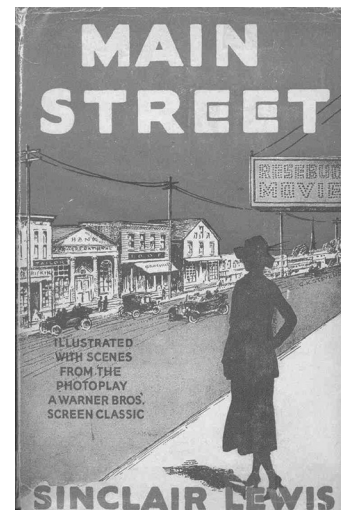
MODERN SCIENCE AND BIBLICAL LITERALISM IN *ARROWSMITH* AND *ELMER GANTRY*

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Despite the critical attention Sinclair Lewis continues to attract, two significant subjects he treats remain seriously understudied—and this notwithstanding that they are interlocking and illuminate a cultural chasm still with us in America today. This chasm emerged out of the bitter confrontation between supporters of modern science and defenders of biblical literalism. The dynamic relationship between them is dramatized with admirable penetration in Lewis's brace of novels, *Arrowsmith* (1925) and *Elmer Gantry* (1927). Both novels treat clashing belief systems, between those of secular modernists, who see America progressing through the accumulation of scientific knowledge, and those who see America as possessing a unique identity issuing from God's special favor and who hold fast to an unchanging doctrine of truth embodied in the Holy Bible, literally understood.

Lewis's *Arrowsmith* brings to culmination the celebration, approaching idolization, of the research scientist. It had never been done before. True enough, *Arrowsmith* is one of several late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novels that dramatize the effects of deadly pathogens while also popularizing preventive measures of vaccination and comprehensive health practices. Earlier novels such as Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884), Edward Eggleston's *The Faith Doctor* (1891), and Robert Herrick's *The Web of Life* (1900) and *The Healer* (1911) all express such ideas. However, Lewis's novel alone celebrates in Martin Arrowsmith and his scrupulous medical school teacher, Max Gottlieb, the vocation of the research scientist (as contrasted with the practicing physician), who creates new knowledge, thereby enlarging the domain of modern science in the world.

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A BOOK CLUB VISIT TO *MAIN STREET*: ONE READER'S UNSETTLING JOURNEY

Mary-Margaret Simpson

In the fall of 2013 eight women gathered around a table with glasses of wine, full of ambition and ideas. This collection of women have found themselves, by dint of being female, well educated, most with grown children, all but one not working *outside the home*, fighting against type: she who joins groups, who donates to charities, who serves on boards, who decorates or gardens or bakes well. And tonight we would embody yet another cliché: women in a book club.

In the same year in which we celebrated the reading of our 200th book together, our club chose *Main Street*. While only a few of us majored in English, we are all voracious readers with a passionate desire to express ourselves, to do something that matters. Had we known how much we had in common with Carol Kennicott, we would have welcomed her years ago.

We live in a university community teetering on the eastern edge of a state that is both beautiful (home to the largest unplowed tall-grass prairie in North America) and hateful (a

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“EIN SCHLAGER!”: THE SERIALIZATION OF SINCLAIR LEWIS’S NOVEL *DAS IST BEI UNS NICHT MÖGLICH* IN THE NEW YORK *NEUE VOLKS-ZEITUNG* (1937–38)

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On February 6, 1937, the New York *Neue Volks-Zeitung*, a German Social Democratic newspaper (see Cazden 32–34, Schneider 347–77) and successor to the Marxist *New Yorker Volkszeitung* (1878–1932; see Buhle 168–81), announced the serialization in German of Sinclair Lewis’s novel *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935), heralding it in bold headlines as “Ein Schlager!” (A Best Seller!) and claiming to be “the only German newspaper in America” to publish a serialization of the American Nobel Prize winner’s “world famous novel,” beginning on March 6 of that year (5). The half-page advertisement also identified Lewis as the author of such well-known works as *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth*, and noted that *ICHH* had already been adapted for the stage and the cinema (see Betz, “Here is the story”), illustrating the extraordinary success of the novel. Readers were therefore urged to subscribe to the *NVZ* to be in a position to start reading *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich* on March 6.

In an unsigned editorial on the previous page (4), most likely written by the editor Gerhart H. Seger (see Ubbens) or the columnist Artur Fischer (see Hartmann), the *NVZ* elaborated on its reception strategies for the unabridged serialization of Hans Meisel’s translation *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich*, which had been published by Querido Verlag in Amsterdam in 1936, but was immediately put on the index of banned books by the Literature Chamber of the Third Reich (see Betz, “The German Translator”), thus depriving most, especially recent German immigrant and/or exile, readers of the opportunity to peruse Lewis’s literary warning against the threat of fascism in America. Of the “good number” of contemporary books devoted to the fight against fascism by

both American and German exile authors, hardly any had had, in the opinion of the *NVZ*, “such an overwhelming impact” as *ICHH*; for “Millions” had read Lewis’s novel, either the original book publication, which had sold over 300,000 copies in the fall of 1935 alone (see Schorer 610; Betz and Thunecke “Sinclair Lewis’s” 41), or in “numerous serializations in American newspapers,” and “hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions” more had seen some 23 productions of the Federal Theater play version (starting in October 1936) in at least eighteen U.S. cities and on tour for a total of 260 weeks around the country (see Schorer 623–25). The *NVZ* was therefore “all the more proud” to announce—in bold print—to its readers that it had “received permission from the author” himself to serialize the German translation of “this historic work,” although Lewis’s wife, the famous journalist Dorothy Thompson, undoubtedly the greatest single source for her husband’s composition of *ICHH* (see Betz and Thunecke, “Sinclair Lewis’s” 38–39), and a contributor of numerous articles to the *NVZ* in the early 1940s, may also have encouraged the paper’s editors to serialize the German translation.

The editorial furthermore urged its readers—also in bold print—to bring the serialization to the attention of friends and acquaintances, as well as all German Americans with whom they had any contact, especially in labor organizations and unions, clubs, and societies. For its part, the *NVZ* was publishing *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich* in support of Lewis’s and its own “fight against Fascist tendencies” in the United States, while hoping at the same time to increase the *NVZ*’s circulation.

————— “Ein Schlager!” continued on page 10

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 Frederick Betz, Michael Goodell, Jackie Koenig, Patricia Lewis, Christian Long, Quentin Martin, Robert McLaughlin, Susan O’Brien, Charles Pankenier, Steve Paragamian, Roberta Parry, Tom Raynor, Rebecca Reagan, Mary-Margaret Simpson, Jörg Thunecke, and Albert Tricomi.

In *Arrowsmith* these values are presented against a background of Christian conventionality, piety, and commercialism. In *Elmer Gantry* this background becomes foreground as Lewis fashions his title figure to embody the hypocrisy and greed tainting the Christian revivalist movement in the opening decades of the twentieth century. For contrast Lewis presents the Oberlin-educated preacher Frank Shallard, who finds much fundamentalist dogma insupportable and who endorses both scientific study and liberal education. Taken together, *Arrowsmith* and *Elmer Gantry* comprise a complementary exploration of the cultural chasm in American society.

In championing the laboratory scientist's dedication, Lewis went out of his way to ensure that his novel was technically well-informed. Not nearly well enough appreciated is that Lewis composed *Arrowsmith* with the substantial assistance of bacteriologist Paul de Kruif, who with the publication of *Microbe Hunters* became a famous popular science writer. So extensive were de Kruif's contributions that he wanted the novel to bear his name as coauthor. In the end, Lewis agreed to consign to him 25% of the novel's profits, but not coauthorship (Schorer 361; Lewis, *From Main Street to Stockholm* 121–26). Lewis wrote a graceful acknowledgment of de Kruif's contribution in the first edition (Schorer 407). However, not all modern editions reprint it. Yet the debt to de Kruif, especially in respect to laboratory methods and procedures, is profound. We know this because Lewis's notebook on *Arrowsmith* contains five pages bearing the heading, "BACTERIOLOGICAL NOTES" (Hutchisson 52). So extensive is this scientific content that the *Herald Tribune* reviewer exulted, "I suppose there is more science and scientific talk in 'Arrowsmith' than in any other novel that has hitherto appeared in the world" (Sherman 2).

The novel's awareness of itself as presenting modern science as a full-blown belief system, capable even of replacing traditional religion, can be illustrated straightforwardly. Early in the novel, Lewis indicates that to the dedicated scientist the practice of science is a mode of religious experience, as, for example, when Martin, inspired by the difficulty and precision required in experiments, exclaims, "You think Gottlieb isn't religious... Why, his just being in a lab is a prayer" (*Arrowsmith* 30). There is also a palpable transference of devotional language that infuses Gottlieb's invocations of the founders of immunology, "Father Koch and Father Pasteur," and of the free-thinking philosophers, "Father Nietzsche and Father Schopenhauer" (39), as well. Later Gottlieb is revealed as a spiritual practitioner of scientific truth as "clean, cold, unfriendly truth" as Martin characterizes it (226). Yet Gottlieb warns that Martin can hardly be a "miracle man" and a scientist

too (316). Moreover, just as Gottlieb had preached to him "the loyalty of dissent, the faith of being very doubtful, the gospel of not bawling gospels," Martin teaches a gospel of skepticism (227). Ironically, however, near the novel's end, Martin is hailed, somewhat inappropriately, as the miracle worker who rescued the inhabitants of Saint Hubert island from the bubonic plague with his vaccine.

The exploration of this heterodox religion of science culminates in Martin's recitation of the novel's most quoted passage, called "the prayer of the scientist":

God give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste.
God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all
pretense and all pretentious work and all work left
slack and unfinished. God give me a restlessness...
till my observed results equal my calculated results...
God give me strength not to trust to God! (280–81)

Essentially a devotional apology for scientific humanism, the invocation expresses the religious-like dedication of the individual scientist. But there the parallel ends, for the prayer affirms its faith in the scientist's own agency, not God's. Furthermore, in this and other passages on the nature of science, *Arrowsmith* and Gottlieb place their faith in the provisional nature of scientific truth ("doubt"), the necessity that inquiry express itself in exacting empirical measurements, and the need for validation through replication. With complementary emphasis, Gottlieb's speech, called "the religion of a scientist," identifies the enemies of science as the pretenders to knowledge—in particular, the religious pretenders—"the preachers who talk their fables" and "the ridiculous faith-healers" (279). By this means, Lewis depicts genuine as well as ersatz claimants to truth. Together they constitute the magnetic poles of Lewis's novel, which irresistibly repel one another.

By treating science as a kind of religion, Lewis, a patent modernist, clearly sought to show that the values of science can sustain the human spirit as fully as traditional religion. Yet the notion of science as a form of religion runs quite counter to the trend today, in which for tactical reasons, mainline scientists are keen to affirm the separateness of the two realms. For example, biologist Stephen Jay Gould claims that religion and science are "nonoverlapping magisteria" in that they operate in separate domains (19). Creationism, Gould argues, does not conflict with science because it "does not raise any unsettled intellectual issues about the nature of biology or the history of life" (16). In the Catholic and Judaic traditions, the Bible

LEWIS AS THE MAN WHO KNEW COOLIDGE

Frederick Betz

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The *New Yorker* for March 11, 2013, features a critical review by Thomas Mallon of Amity Schlaes's new 576-page biography of the 30th president of the United States (1923–29), Calvin Coolidge. Mallon is the author of such historical novels as *Henry and Clara* (1994), *Dewey Defeats Truman* (1997), and *Watergate* (2012), as well as of such literary studies and volumes of critical essays as *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries* (1984), *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (1989), and *In Fact: Essays on Writers and Writing* (2001). *In Fact* contains the essay "Babbitt Redux" (118–25), reprinted, but not verbatim, from Mallon's new introduction (vii–xiv) to the Signet Classic paperback edition (1998) of *Main Street*. Schlaes, a former member of the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* and currently director of the 4% Growth Project at the George W. Bush Institute and a Bloomberg View columnist, is also the author of *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (2007).

Before focusing on Schlaes's book, Mallon discusses Lewis's *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* (1928), noting first that the Kansas newspaperman William Allen White had "nicely captured the mismatch between President and nation in the title of his Coolidge biography, 'A Puritan in Babylon' (1938). As White saw it, America felt moved to 'erect this pallid shrunken image of its lost ideals and bow down before it in subconscious repentance for its iniquities'" (66). In "Babbitt Redux," Mallon endorsed White's characterization of Coolidge as "a Puritan in Babylon," but thought that there were actually "two Puritans" in America of the Twenties, the second being "Sinclair Lewis, an altogether more sophisticated scold, a small-town boy turned cosmopolite, who between 1920 and 1929 scorched the national landscape and pride with five programmatic novels: *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*" (*In Fact* 118). Reviewing Schlaes's book, Mallon notes that Lewis, "the literary Nobel laureate of Coolidge's era, detested both the idol and its worshippers," as demonstrated in *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, published during the president's last full year in office (66).

The Man Who Knew Coolidge is "less a novel than a grindingly obvious series of monologues by Lowell Schmaltz, an office-supplies salesman from George F. Babbitt's fictional Midwestern city of Zenith" (66). Schmaltz is "an endlessly digressive gabber," who will "tell you that a sense of humor means more than intellect" and who will "try to gain admittance to a New York speakeasy with his Zenith Elks Club

card." Schmaltz "pronounces Calvin Coolidge—whom he lies about having known at Amherst College [*The Man Who Knew Coolidge* 23]—to be a leader by virtue of 'his profound thought, his immovable courage, his genial and democratic manners' [*The Man Who Knew Coolidge* 41] and much besides" (66). Lewis's book, which, according to Mallon, "annoyed Coolidge," is "an extreme example of the imitative fallacy, by which an author replicates the disagreeable characteristics—in this case, self-satisfaction and verbosity—that he seeks to suggest" (66, 68). Coolidge himself, however, in an obvious but provocative allusion to Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Captain Ahab, "winds up unscathed, a sort of gray white whale that has eluded its baleful hunter" (68), which challenges Schlaes's contention that Coolidge was more specifically the target of Lewis's satire than the man who knew Coolidge.

Mallon gives no immediate source for Coolidge's annoyance with Lewis's book, and neither does Schlaes, who notes only that Lewis was "working [in the fall and winter 1927–28] on a novel mocking Coolidge, targeting the president and his admirers as the ultimate in empty-headedness and banality" (396), and that by April 1928, he "had finished his book... titled *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* [which] was an attack on middle-class culture generally, and Coolidge specifically," but that "Coolidge hardly cared" (416). Schlaes writes later, however, that in December 1930 "the Nobel Prize Committee awarded its prize in literature to Sinclair Lewis, the author who had published *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*" (446), giving the general reader the wrong impression that it was one of the novels for which Lewis had been selected, but implying that Coolidge had *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* specifically in mind when he, now the former president, wrote in his nationally syndicated column "Thinking Things over with Calvin Coolidge" for December 15, 1930, that "presentation of a Nobel prize to Sinclair Lewis has aroused considerable discussion," adding that "whether his books will survive as literature remains to be seen" (qtd. by Schlaes 446). Defending the United States and himself in the process, Coolidge noted, "the world waits in our anteroom for our advice and assistance.... The name Mr. Lewis gives us is unimportant. The record of our deeds will surpass all books" (qtd. by Schlaes 446).¹

In her previous book, *The Forgotten Man*, Schlaes had argued, as Mallon points out, that "between 1929 and 1940,

————— Lewis as the Man *continued on page 14*

is interpreted; only a “fringe” set of Protestants, which Gould describes as a “local and parochial movement,” reads the Bible literally (16, 18). This disparaging characterization notwithstanding, Gould’s theory of nonoverlapping magisteria does not apply to biblical literalists. When such readers claim that Noah’s Ark spared from the Flood a pair of each kind of land creature, and, furthermore, that the age of the earth as derived from the Bible is approximately 6,000 years, then religion and science do obviously compete with one another.

Lewis apprehended this contestation with passionate clarity. As atheistic scientist Richard Dawkins frames this ineluctable conflict, religion cannot be divorced from the physical world because biblical literalists make dogmatic claims about material reality. To illustrate, he relates that one of Gould’s students, Kurt Wise, went through his Bible cutting out every verse that did not accord with scientific truth and in the end had very little of the Bible left (Dawkins 321–23). Such is the extent of the contestation. Dawkins’s confrontational exegesis also captures the tonality of our own parlous era. By extension, it also calls attention to the pertinency of *Arrowsmith* in our time, for it was the first major American novel to identify and dramatize what has proven to be the enduring hostility between scientific empiricism and dogmatic biblical literalism.

The publication date of *Arrowsmith*, 1925, also marks the year that these two belief systems clashed on a public stage in the famous Scopes “monkey” trial in Dayton, Tennessee. There prosecutors challenged John Scopes’s prerogative to teach the “‘godless’ theory, the bloody, brutal doctrine—evolution,” in the public schools (Kazin 295, 286). Written in the aftermath of this trial, *Elmer Gantry* (1927) contains direct references to it (389–90). As a modernist, Lewis was determined to use the novel to expose the meanness, cultural isolation, and downright ignorance of the evangelical preachers who denounced the evolutionary sciences and according to the contemporary pamphlet by the Reverend L. M. Birkhead, he accurately portrayed the deficiencies of these men of the cloth (7–13). Lewis, in fact, traveled to Kansas City to garner evidence for his book and was soon introduced to the city’s evangelical preachers, including Birkhead (Schorer 446–48). Lewis, however, made no bones about his atheism, for at one point he actually assumed the pulpit to perform an experiment, took out his watch, and dared God to strike him dead within the following fifteen minutes (Schorer 447).

Subsequently, Lewis shaped his novel to dramatize his belief that evangelical preachers were not intellectually or morally qualified to instruct their flock by repeatedly contrasting them with liberal or atheistic intellectuals. In this spirit,

Lewis made Elmer’s roommate, Jim Lefferts, an atheist who embarrasses the Terwillinger College president with scriptural questions reminiscent of the Scopes trial, such as why Joshua needed to have the sun stand still since he already had trumpets to blow down the walls of Jericho. Similarly, Lefferts’s atheistic father, a medical doctor, functions as a foil to the theologically reactionary Eddie Fislinger.

A more major pairing contrasts Elmer, with his parochial, Bible-driven education, with Oberlin-educated preacher, Frank Shallard. Elmer, brought up by his mother who “was owned by the church” (28), has a worldview shaped by her, the Baptist Church, Sunday School, and a library consisting almost entirely of the Bible, McGuffey’s moralized Christian readers, the Weekly Bible, and Church History (56). Similarly, Elmer’s Christian college education is rooted in dead languages and other traditional subjects but offers no laboratory sciences. Open and exploratory, Shallard’s liberal education features studies in literature, the French Revolution, and skeptical approaches to the Bible. Furthermore, Shallard’s intellectual curiosity prompts him to borrow books that include Ernest Renan’s naturalistic biography, *The Life of Jesus* (1864), and E. D. White’s renowned *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). Through this rival curriculum, as it were, Lewis reveals that the battle between science and religion is a matter of competing philosophies of education. As the dean of Christian Terwillinger College characterizes the conflict, “all our ideals [exist] in opposition to the heathenish large universities”(68).

In the novel, the outcome of this competition turns on Gantry’s pulpit characterization of Shallard as an “Infidel”(386), after the latter states publicly his doubts about numerous doctrinal fundamentals. Eerily, Shallard’s career recalls the travail in the 1920s of liberal Baptist clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick, who composed a sermon-turned-pamphlet, entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?,” and who, like Shallard, was subsequently denounced by Billy Sunday as a spokesman for agnosticism and modernism (Marsden 171; McLoughlin 446). Echoing Fosdick’s title, Shallard gives a lecture called “Are the Fundamentalists Witch Hunters?”(389–90). Then too Fosdick’s and Shallard’s publicly stated doubts about the Virgin Birth and other doctrinal matters leave them vulnerable to attack by right-wing religious opponents (Marsden 171). Though Shallard fights back, delivering a speech sponsored by “the League for Free Science” against the fundamentalist crusade (390), he, like Fosdick, loses the battle. However, in a still darker vision

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE IN HOLLYWOOD

There has been quite a bit of commentary recently on Ben Urwand's new book *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler* (Harvard UP, 2013), which alleges that the Hollywood studios in the 1930s were actively collaborating with Hitler and the Nazi government. This is refuted to a great extent by Thomas Doherty in *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933–1939* (Columbia UP, 2013) which covers much of the same material and same time period but offers a much more nuanced analysis of how studio heads tried to negotiate a very unsettled time in world history and not offend too much any government that might be deciding which films could enter a country. It's true that Hollywood was very cautious about specifically attacking fascism in the mid-1930s and usually refrained from mentioning the word Jew. The film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* in 1939 was one of the first to examine the spread of Nazi influence, specifically as fifth columnists within the United States. In an interview with Alexander C. Kafka in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ("When Hollywood Held Hands with Hitler," Aug. 2, 2013: B6–9), Doherty said, "I'm always leery of history that allows the present to feel smugly superior to the past."

David Denby in the *New Yorker* (Sept. 16, 2013: 75–79) writes in "Hitler in Hollywood: Did the Studios Collaborate?" that in addition to financial pressures, there were those brought to bear by Joseph Breen with the Production Code, a form of self-policing that tended to make studios very cautious in what they released for fear that the films would not receive a Production Code seal, and, without that, they would not receive wide distribution.

In 1936, M-G-M acquired Sinclair Lewis's best-seller "It Can't Happen Here," a semi-satirical fantasia about American totalitarianism: a Huey Long-type demagogue takes over the Presidency, and rules by means of the secret police. When M-G-M geared up to shoot the movie, with prominent actors, including Lionel Barrymore and James Stewart, Breen wrote a letter to Will Hays, saying, "It is hardly more than a story portraying the Hitlerization of the United States of America. It is an attempt to bring home to American citizens, through the instrumentality of the screen,

that which is transpiring in Germany today." (That it certainly was.) Breen also wrote Louis B. Mayer, the president of M-G-M, a seven-page letter proposing sixty cuts in the screenplay—in effect, making a Production Code seal hostage to impossible demands. Even if the cuts were made, he wrote to Mayer, the movie would be subject "to the most minute criticism on all sides," which "may result in enormous difficulty to your studio." Mayer cancelled the project. (Denby)

Many film historians agree that studio heads "helped finance efforts to spy on and sabotage American Nazi groups like the German American Bund and the Silver Shirts in Los Angeles." Steven J. Ross, a film historian who is writing a book on German Bund sabotage plans in the 1930s, sees the "rise of dangerous politicians such as Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, and Rick Santorum—I call them dangerous because they pit American against American—reminds us of what prescient Sinclair Lewis warned citizens in 1935: *It Can't Happen Here*, but *only* if we remain vigilante in opposing fascism, Nazism, and all political hate groups" (qtd. in Kafka B9).

The timidity of studio heads, most of whom were Jewish, was partly due to the anti-Semitism rampant in the United States. Many feared that if they drew attention to what seemed a Jewish issue of Nazi persecution, they would drive away viewers. Organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee supported this idea, taking "the line that the Jews had to be careful about thrusting themselves before the public" (Denby). Melvin Jules Bukiet, in a critical review in the *Washington Post*, "Hollywood Studios Didn't Dare Snub Nazi Germany's Wishes" (Sept. 29, 2013: E8), refutes the charges against these moguls—"minorly venal minor men. They're certainly not heroes, but neither are they villains. They're merely human." Denby contends that Urwand's book is way too sensationalistic and wonders what would have happened if anti-Nazi films had been made earlier in the decade: "Would many people have gone to them? Could the studios have alerted the world to the threat of Nazism? It's hard to say. Still, it would have been nice if they had tried." ✍

NEW MEMBERS

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

Lewis Coffey
Sartell, MN

Alexandre Fachard
Lausanne, Switzerland

Teresa Samscock
Ronceverte, WV

Gary Simons
Land O'Lakes, FL

Albert Tricomi
Vestal, NY

of a plausible future that presages *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) Lewis has Shallard (unlike Fosdick) beaten up so badly by the vigilantes of orthodoxy that he becomes a broken man.

Whether this dystopic vision of struggle between modernists and those committed to biblical literalism will be realized in our own time by the spilling of blood remains to be seen. What is clear is that two of Lewis's best-known novels enact a struggle that has transhistorical significance. Today it expresses itself in the construction of two virtually alternate realities. For instance, if our great science museums present a prehistoric world of dinosaurs that became extinct sixty-five million years ago, creationist museums (easily accessed under this title on the Internet) totaling well over a dozen, existing or planned, contrariwise, present dinosaurs and humans as coexistent on an earth no more than ten thousand years old. Similarly, public school textbooks offering biological and evolutionary perspectives are repeatedly challenged by numerous public boards of education seeking to curtail the authority of scientific explanations by introducing competing biblical perspectives via an appeal for equal time. An entire issue of the *Reports of the National Center for Science Education* is devoted to these public education issues. So too, large numbers of this nation's congressional representatives, most of them on the religious right, deny climate change and resist proposals to alleviate its ever more apparent effects. So programmatic is this antiscientific position that journalist Chris Mooney wrote a leading book about it called *The Republican War on Science*.

Those of us who seek historical perspective can regard the unforgettable humiliation that William Jennings Bryan as "the Defender of the Faith" (Levine) suffered at the conclusion of the Scopes trial and draw from it a compelling irony. Confounding the predictions of contemporary intellectuals that literal Bible readers would soon cease to exist as a force in American culture, this group has proven to be a resilient, durable, even potent, presence in American life. Lewis's perspectives on the conflict are thus timely and constitute a significant part of his legacy; he heralds the disquieting cultural divisions we now dub "the culture wars."

Note: This essay draws on an interpretation of Sinclair Lewis that is part of a book-length study I am preparing on the clash of science and religion in American fiction.

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THE FASCINATING RUTH CHATTERTON

Susan O'Brien

Susan O'Brien provides us with more information on Ruth Chatterton following the reference to her in the last newsletter. Having read Scott O'Brien's biography, *Ruth Chatterton: Actress, Aviator, Author* (BearManor, 2013), she writes the following:

Thank you for your reference to Scott O'Brien's article in *Classic Images*, "Ruth Chatterton: Self-Reliant Star," in the Fall 2013 *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. As a result my local library purchased his biography. O'Brien's title would be too long if it included her other talents: musician/composer, translator/producer of French plays into English, serious and influential social activist. She also kept bees, spoke two foreign languages, and maintained a personal library of 1,600 books.

O'Brien devotes an entire chapter to *Dodsworth*, focusing on Ruth's screen performance as Fran, but beginning with the role of Fran as established by Fay Bainter in the play:

Sinclair Lewis assisted Sidney Howard in the stage adaptation of *Dodsworth*. During rehearsals, Lewis was emotionally involved with how his characters came across. While watching Fay Bainter as Fran, something didn't ring true. Using his pet name for Bainter, he called out, "Come on, Gracie, you can be much better than that!" Bainter complied, offering an unflinching portrait. "If anyone thinks the part of Fran is easy to play," said Bainter, "he should just try it for himself sometime." (291-292)

[Editor: Schorer describes this scene in similar ways, but says that Lewis called out, "Come on, Gracie, you can be much bitchier than that!" Schorer says that Bainter was so spot on playing Fran Dodsworth as Grace Hegger Lewis that Sinclair conflated the two—a compliment to Bainter certainly. (596-97)]

Regarding the film, O'Brien maintains "Ruth had to be coaxed (by Sam Goldwyn) for a year to be in the film, although she would reap more accolades for her Fran Dodsworth than any other role" (292). He further comments, "Immediately following the film's release, Sinclair Lewis was so impressed



Ruth Chatterton portrait 1914

with the film treatment of his story that he sent a telegram of congratulations to Sam Goldwyn. The author was quoted as being 'highly pleased' with Chatterton's portrayal of Fran."

O'Brien says it was probably Ruth's that was the best of all performances in *Dodsworth*. In the end she had given in to director William Wyler's concept of Fran, although not without battling him on the set.

As your article pointed out, *Dodsworth* is listed in the *All-TIME 100 Movies* (since 1923) compiled by Richard Schickel and Richard Corliss for Time.com. In his enthusiastic commentary on TCM's showing of *Dodsworth*, Robert Osborne said so many people wanted to see it at the 2006 Telluride Film Festival, it was

"shown three times to sold-out crowds."

After Hollywood, Ruth moved to Redding, Connecticut, where she wrote novels. Her first in 1950, *Homeward Borne*, was the story of a Holocaust orphan adopted by a Vermont woman whose husband has returned from WWII with anti-Semitic views. *Homeward Borne* was on the *New York Times* Best-seller List for 23 weeks. I happened on a signed copy of it in a used bookstore, and I think it is a very good piece of fiction; reading it sparked my interest in learning much more about her. Her "scalding" attack on the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) came in her novel *The Betrayers*, and *Southern Wild* took on racism. She published five novels altogether and had a sixth manuscript in progress when she died. Celebrated now for her writing, Ruth presented all the writing awards at the 1951 Academy Awards. The screen project for *Homeward Borne* fell victim to HUAC after the producer was called before the Committee, refused to name names, and was blacklisted. O'Brien says the loss of the film project was a crushing disappointment to Ruth.

————— Fascinating Ruth Chatterton continued on page 16

local family of religious fanatics regularly pickets funerals and arts events). That night our table included women who head the United Way, who raise money for the public library, who deliver meals on wheels, and who read books for the visually impaired. In other words, we may not always win the good fight but we are, in our own way, reformers.

We started in 1992 and have read a few book club standards (*A Thousand Splendid Suns*), classics (*The Odyssey*), nonfiction (*Undaunted Courage*), and one I wish I'd never laid eyes on (*The Road*). It's not surprising that the same woman who suggested *Main Street* chose *Great Expectations* a few years back. We're fearless and prefer long, panoramic books with multiple characters. But *Main Street* hit a unique nerve with us.

Whether because of our ages (early forties to late sixties) or our somewhat anachronistic roles by today's standards (all college graduates, fewer than half of us have worked full time in twenty years), Carol Kennicott's life bore a disquieting resemblance to our own.

Case in point: one of our members went on hiatus awhile back, moving to a smaller town where her husband was named interim president of a religious-affiliated college. She trooped along...and came back before his term was finished. "I felt like I had to dress up to go to the grocery store," she said. "Everyone was watching me."

Several of us had, indeed, moved to new communities as young, trailing spouses, daunted if not unnerved by what we found. We had all struggled to find a niche, a place, whether in the PTO, in local musical groups, and in arts organizations, and not always landing firmly.

We were buffeted by the waves of our families' professional and financial fortunes, smiling gamely when, in a fairly tight-knit community, a backstory rarely stays back.

"Ein Schlager!" *continued from page 3*

In consideration of the length (458 pages) and significance of Lewis's novel, the NVZ furthermore decided to temporarily expand the paper's literary section to accommodate an unabridged version of it. Following another advertisement, which the NVZ placed in the March 1 issue of the New York weekly *Aufbau* (5), founded in 1934 and aimed at the German-Jewish community, but primarily post-1933 immigrants to the United States (see Cazden 61-63), the NVZ began the publication of *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich* on Saturday, March 6, 1937, followed by 58 weekly installments (mostly on page five) of the 38 chapters of the novel, concluding on April 16, 1938.

We argued for change but were sometimes resisted by more powerful forces.

Most of all, we were working brains struggling to find meaningful work. Sound familiar?

At one point, finally, one of us came right out and said what had been noodling away under the surface throughout the night's discourse: "Do you think this book group is our own version of the Thanatopsis Club?" We laughed. And then we shuddered.

No! No, we are not lightweights, featherheads, not us, we insisted. We felt for Carol Kennicott but could hardly bear those moments when she embarrassed herself or idealized foolish dreamers like Guy Pollock.

So we skirted away from answering that question even though I am still pondering the truth.

Here's one thing that came from our experience with reading *Main Street* that should gladden the hearts of Sinclair Lewis scholars.

Most of us, when we can, borrow our book club selections from the public library (where there is no one resembling Miss Villets, thankfully). The library is building a new \$18 million home due, in no small part, to several of the women sitting around the table that night who campaigned tirelessly to pass a bond issue during a recession. But most of us resorted to buying our copies of *Main Street* because, in 2013, nearly 100 years after *Main Street* was published, and despite the numerous copies in the library's system, **there was a wait list to check it out.**

So, in our own, arguably privileged way, book clubs like ours are doing their part to achieve an ideal. Whether we exemplify the clichés or not, whether we succeed in creating great things on a small scale or not, we're doing something right. We're reading Sinclair Lewis. ✍

Although the NVZ claimed in its unsigned editorial of February 6, 1937, that "numerous serializations" had already appeared "in American newspapers," only one previous one has been documented (see Betz, "Here is the story") in the liberal democratic *New York Post*, which ran an unabridged serialization of *ICHH* in English from July 9 to September 5, 1936, against the background of foreign and domestic threats of fascism, while endorsing and promoting the re-election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in November of that year. Indeed,

————— "Ein Schlager!" *continued on page 11*

“Ein Schlager!” *continued from page 10*

the serialization in the *New York Post* is the only one named by Artur Fischer (1882–1941) in his article on the Federal Theater play version of *ICHH* in the *NVZ* for December 5, 1936. Here Fischer argues, in what appears to be the first mention of *ICHH* in the *NVZ*, that the novel, in its original publication, in inexpensive reprints (Sun Dial Press, Collier & Son), and in “serializations in widely read newspapers around the country, such as in the *New York Post*,” would have much greater and more sustained “educational impact” than the play version (8).

Although Fischer conceded that the play version had the great “merit” of attracting to theaters around the country “thousands of working people who, after a day’s work, would not feel like settling down to read the book,” he argued, as had John Mason Brown in his review of the play in the *New York Post* on October 28 (see Betz, “Here is the story,” 38–39), that the play showed the main characters only “as they had become, not, as in Lewis’s novel, as they were developing.” What was missing in the play version was Lewis’s “unequaled literary talent” for detailed and vivid “description of the milieu” and “psychological terror” in the imagined fascist takeover of the country (see also Philip Roth’s *The Plot against America* and Betz and Thunecke, “We’re headed”). Lewis’s novel would influence every “politically enlightened reader” to do his part to help prevent fascism in America; even the “average, politically indifferent reader” would recognize that he should no longer ignore the growing “political gangsterism” in the U.S.A., “encouraged by the mania for dictators in Europe” (8).

As political refugees from Nazi Germany, Gerhart Seger (1896–1967), who became editor of the *NVZ* in May 1936, and other émigré Social Democrat journalists and politicians (see Ragg), such as Rudolf Katz and Friedrich Stampfer, who later became coeditors (see Cazden 32), were acutely aware of the threat of fascist demagogues and their movements in both Europe and America. Seger, a former Social Democratic member of the Reichstag (1930–33), had escaped from a concentration camp outside Berlin at the end of 1933 and published an eyewitness account of his experience in *Oranienburg* (1934), translated and published in the United States as *A Nation Terrorized* (1935), which may well have been one of the books about life in German concentration camps that Lewis consulted for his portrayal in *ICHH* (chapters 31–32) of his main character Doremus Jessup’s experience in such a camp (see Betz and Thunecke, “Sinclair Lewis’s” 46, 50). Seger had visited the United States in October 1934/35, and after an extensive lecture tour around the country, he wrote in his travel diary *Reisetagebuch eines deutschen Emigranten*

(1936) about his “experiences as an anti-Fascist speaker” (109–33), “Fascist tendencies in America,” as exemplified by Dr. Townsend, Father Coughlin, and Huey Long (163–78), as well as German American Nazi sympathizers and the Friends of New Germany, founded in 1933 (134–46). For its part, the *NVZ* was dedicated to the exposure of all “Fifth Column” groups in the United States and of such threatening figures as Coughlin, Jersey City Mayor and Democratic “Boss” Frank Hague, and Fritz Kuhn and his German American Bund, founded in 1936 (see Schneider 366). The *NVZ* was, therefore, all the more keen on publishing a serialization of *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich* for the benefit of its “politically enlightened” readers, who could readily identify both German and American models for Lewis’s characters and parallels between Nazi Germany and the Corpo State in *ICHH* (see Betz and Thunecke, “We’re headed”).

It does not appear, however, that the serialization of *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich* greatly helped to increase the circulation of the *NVZ*. Although Gerhart Seger reported in an anniversary article (“60 Jahre”) that the paper’s circulation had started at 5,500 in December 1932 (1) and stood at 21,836 in 1937 (see N.W. Ayer & Son’s Directory for 1937), it fluctuated from 21,850 in 1934 to 17,632 in 1949, with a low of 9,068 in 1946 (see Cazden 33, Arndt and Olson 385). By 1937 the threat of fascism also appeared to be fading in the United States, following the landslide re-election of FDR over the Republican candidate Alf Landon (see Betz, “Here is the story”), and also in some parts of Europe, as for example in the United Kingdom, where Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists no longer posed a threat after the “Public Order Act” of 1936—which came into effect in January 1937—banned all quasi-military style organizations. The British edition of *ICHH* was published in October 1935 as a timely warning (see Betz and Thunecke, “Sinclair Lewis’s” 51); and the publication of the French translation, *Impossible ici*, on April 30, 1937 (see Betz, “*Impossible ici*”), followed the high point of French fascism in the 1930s between May 1936 and April 1937, when the Popular Front had been most threatening to conservative interests (see Soucy 35–36).

On the other hand, fascism was of course firmly established in the Third Reich, and after Nazi Germany had declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, the *NVZ* promoted itself on its masthead in 1941 and 1942 as “The Oldest Anti-Nazi Newspaper” and as “Published in the USA since 1932—Banned in Germany since 1933” (see Cazden 33).

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“Ein Schlager!” *continued from page 11*

On January 4, 1941, it had already declared that it was “the only German language paper in the United States of America which, according to the principles of Social Democracy, [was] opposed to, and ha[d] for years fought against, dictatorships of all colors” and that it stood “for human rights as expressed in the Constitution of the United States, for democracy and social reforms” (Statement of Policy 1). The *NVZ* was therefore staunchly anti-Nazi, but equally staunchly anti-Communist, as Gerhart Seger emphasized in his policy declaration before the general meeting of the paper’s sponsor, the Progressive Publishing Association, on November 6, 1937, when he firmly rejected any attempt to merge the *NVZ* with the Communist weekly *Deutsches Volksecho* (“Wofür tritt die ‘Neue Volkszeitung’ ein?” 3). The stance of the *NVZ* echoed that of the middle-class intellectual Doremus Jessup, who in his debates with the socialist John Pollikop and the communist Karl Pascal (chapters 13, 20, 29, 30), steadfastly stood for individual freedom and tolerance in democracy against totalitarianism and bigotry in dictatorships, whether of the fascist Right or the communist Left (chapter 29), as subscribers to the *NVZ* would soon read in chapters 29 and 30 of Lewis’s novel in installments 43 (January 1), 44 (January 8), and 45 (January 15, 1938) of the serialization of *Das ist bei uns nicht möglich*.

After the United States joined the war against Nazi Germany at the end of 1941 and even more refugees, mainly Jewish, flooded to America, the *NVZ* increasingly became an exile newspaper, serving primarily a middle-class émigré population, thus effectively turning into a bourgeois paper. And as the war turned against Germany, and as plans by the Soviets to annex all German territories east of the Oder-Neisse Line and the Western Allies’ plans to de-industrialize Germany (the so-called “Morgenthau Plan”) became public, the *NVZ* increasingly adopted a nationalistic stance in its campaign for a so-called “Other Germany” (see Thunecke, “Friedrich Stampfers Rolle”) and against demands for demilitarization, occupation, and re-education of all Germans, espoused in particular by Lord Robert Vansittart in Britain and Emil Ludwig in the United States (see Thunecke, “From Humanity”; “Ludwig Asks”). After the war, when many German-speaking refugees either repatriated to Europe or became naturalized American citizens, the *NVZ* gradually lost its readership and eventually ceased publication in the summer of 1949. Seger remained editor to the very end and stayed in the United States, but many of his colleagues were among those who returned to Germany and Austria. However, as a German American Socialist paper, the *NVZ* would most likely have been doomed to extinction in any case, since, in the words of sociologist Daniel Bell: “By

1950 American socialism as a political and social fact had become simply a notation in the archives of history” (qtd. by Cazden 34).

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LEWIS AND ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE WRITE *DAD*

Sally E. Parry
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Mark Schorer and Richard Lingeman both note Lewis's friendship with successful American author Albert Payson Terhune, best known today for his 1919 novel *Lad, A Dog*. Although it's not clear where they met, they were close enough in 1914 for Terhune to serve as an usher at the Sinclair Lewis-Grace Hegger wedding (Schorer 215). In his memoir, *To the Best of My Memory*, Terhune recalls his duties as an usher, which included guiding guests to the wedding and away from an undertaking establishment in the same building.

That same year Lewis was hired by William E. Woodward of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency to edit a syndicated book supplement called Publishers' Newspaper Syndicate which contained reviews and advertisements of new books, underwritten by publishers. Lewis and his assistant George W. Bunn wrote most of the reviews under pseudonyms or their own names. Lewis "seemed to love playing host to the visitors, taking time out to concoct plots for Albert Payson Terhune, later a successful writer of dog novels" (Lingeman 61). Schorer quotes a letter from Lewis in which he exults over receiving \$40 for a plot he sold to Terhune. Lewis's vivid imagination was such that he sold plots to other writers as well, including Jack London [see Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin's "Harvey Taylor and Jack London's Purchase of Sinclair Lewis's Plots: A Posthumous Saga," *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* (3.2: 1995)].

In 1914 Lewis also helped Terhune out with the plot of *Dad* and wrote chapters 21–23 because Terhune was pressed for time in writing the serial, published as a novel later that year. Terhune remembered, "this was wholly a business arrangement. I gave him 25 per cent of the serial's price and of the subsequent book royalties" (qtd. in Schorer 217). Schorer notes, "A close reading of *Dad* does not enable one to isolate one man's prose from the other's in the general wash of it" (217).

Lewis was a great mimic of authors' styles so in a sense it's a great compliment that Schorer couldn't detect any differences. Despite this, there are a few aspects that seem to me very Lewis-like that I'd like to discuss.

For those unfamiliar with *Dad* (and I doubt that it is read very often these days), the plot is as follows. Lieutenant-Colonel James Brinton, who has been serving on the personal staff of General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War, is delegated to bring his commander's greetings to General Winfield Scott on the day celebrating the surrender of Mexico. Scott is taking credit for winning the war, despite Taylor's major role in the army's success, and only as an afterthought invites Taylor or his

representative to the celebration. Brinton is delegated to ride a long distance very quickly, is angry at Scott's usurpation as the winning commander, and on the way to the ceremony drinks an unfamiliar alcoholic beverage to slake his thirst. When Brinton arrives with the remarks, he speaks his own instead, insulting "old Fuss-and-Feathers" (9). He is put under arrest, degraded from rank, and dishonorably discharged. Expelled from the army base, he slowly and painfully makes his way back home, mostly on foot, and becomes a pathetic drunkard in his hometown of Ideala, Ohio. The management of his store falls on his pompous son Joe who merely tolerates his father and provides him with just enough to live on. The only one who really loves him is his grandson Jimmie, who calls him Dad.

Fourteen years later, at the beginning of the Civil War, Joe enlists in the army for one year, primarily because he thinks it will be good for business rather than for patriotic reasons. Dad, 54, is jealous and wants to enlist as well, despite his tarnished record. After Joe leaves, Jimmie encourages his grandfather to enlist in another town under an assumed name, James Dadd. James does and although he starts out as a private, his military training comes through and he is promoted to sergeant. Despite great odds, he delivers a message to General Hooker and receives a promotion to lieutenant. Along the way, he is chased by some Confederate guerillas and wounded in the arm. He takes refuge at the plantation of Mrs. Emily Sessions, a Yankee widow, who nurses him and with whom he falls in love. James is involved in numerous battles, and at one of them meets Battle Jimmie, a well-known youngster around the army camps, who bangs a drum and encourages the Yankees in battle. Battle Jimmie is discovered to be James's grandson and together they find a message that lays out the battle plans of the Confederates and which they are able to get to Yankee headquarters at Frederick. Through all this action, James and his grandson become close comrades, and they even help nurse Joe, who has been wounded and made a better man by his time in the army. By the end of the novel, James has been promoted to Brevet-Major, proposed to Emily, and traveled to Washington, D.C., to be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by President Lincoln.

The battle sequences, especially those at Chickahominy Swamp (also known as the Battle of Gaines's Mill or the First Battle of Cold Harbor) and Antietam, are very exciting. The

——— Lewis and Albert Payson Terhune *continued on page 16*

“from Hoover to Roosevelt, government intervention helped to make the Depression Great,” and that therefore “Americans should stop ‘glorifying the New Deal’” (Mallon 68). *Coolidge* evidently represents, in Mallon’s view, “the next initiative in Schlaes’s revisionist campaign”; here she “blows a bugle for Silent Cal, ‘a rare kind of hero: a minimalist president, an economic general of budgeting and tax cuts’” (68). Noting from the dust jacket that Schlaes is a trustee of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, Mallon suggests that “her biography is unblushing in its mission to secure a new deal for the laissez-faire Chief Executive whom Theodore Roosevelt’s daughter, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, judged to have been ‘weaned on a pickle’” (68).² Among American presidents, Coolidge is, as Schlaes argues, “our great refrainer” (qtd. by Mallon), an epithet which, in Mallon’s view, “doesn’t cry out for an obelisk, or even an auditorium, but which she urges on us with an

unflagging nineteen-twenties sort of pep” (68), ironically associating Schlaes’s promotion of Coolidge with the boosterism and pep satirically celebrated in *Babbitt*. To Mallon, Schlaes “seems engaged not so much in history as in leafletting, pushing her neglected subject back onto a platform that he departed in 1929, prematurely but also in the nick of time” (68).

Reviewing at some length the president’s life and career, Mallon thinks that Schlaes “wisely avoids trying to invade every recess of Coolidge’s mentality,” but judges her to have “no particular gift for the simpler business of biography,” as she “tends to leave out information crucial to an understanding of whatever matter she’s just taken up,” and “her paragraphs don’t so much segue as skip onto and off the page, like the fast-playing, quickly changed records on a nineteen-twenties

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Victrola” (71). From Schlaes’s introductory praise of a predictable tax policy to Congressman Paul Ryan’s endorsement of her book as “a must-read for policy makers and citizens alike” on the back cover, *Coolidge*, in Mallon’s words, “seeks to demonstrate the thirtieth President’s current economic and political relevance.” But Mallon is not convinced that Schlaes has made “a reader feel Coolidge’s applicability to the present day” (71).³

Notes

¹ Alluding to *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, Richard Lingeman notes that Coolidge, “a past target of Lewis’s parlor impressions,” wrote, in his daily column for December 16, 1930, that Lewis had “found favor in some foreign quarters because they like to believe our life is as he represents it,” but that “no necessity exists for becoming excited,” for “what is important is not what some writer represents us to be, but what we really are” (353). Lingeman has Coolidge saying inimitably that “no necessity exists for becoming excited,” while Mark Schorer characterizes what the former president said as “one of the great English sentences” (553).

² Schlaes notes in her introduction that “Coolidge’s budget vigilance was so steadfast it lent itself to caricature,” that “some artists depicted the thirtieth president as a Victorian throwback” (5).

³ It was Mencken who encouraged Lewis in 1927 to write up the long monologue that he had been reciting, often while drunk, at parties, “supposedly spoken by an imbecile Rotarian who claimed some sort of acquaintance with Calvin Coolidge, then President.” In January 1928, Mencken published it in the *American Mercury* under the title “The Man Who Knew Coolidge.” The monologue, which would become the first of six monologues in the subsequent book publication, had no title when Mencken first heard it, and it was his recollection that he “gave it the one under which it was printed” (*My Life* 330–31).

Upon Coolidge’s death (January 5, 1933), it was, however, none other than Mencken, a libertarian who believed that “all government is evil, and that trying to improve it is largely a waste of time” (“The Coolidge Buncombe” 109), who appears to be the first to make the case for Coolidge’s rehabilitation, when he wrote in his obituary for Coolidge: “We suffer most when the White House busts with ideas. With a World Saver [Wilson] preceding him (I count out Harding as a mere hallucination) and a Wonder Boy [Hoover] following him, he begins to seem, in retrospect, an extremely comfortable and even praiseworthy citizen” (“The Coolidge Mystery” 136).

But Schlaes makes no mention of Mencken in this regard, perhaps because Mencken is irreverent in his faint praise of Coolidge,

for he goes on to say: “His failings are forgotten; the country remembers only the grateful fact that he let it alone. Well, there are worse epitaphs for a statesman” (136). Mencken’s irreverence is even more pointed in the revised version of his obituary in the *American Mercury* for April 1933, when he wrote of Coolidge: “There were no thrills while he reigned, but neither were there any headaches. He had no ideas, but he was not a nuisance” (390). In *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, Mencken changed the last sentence to read: “He had no ideas, and he was not a nuisance” (254), a change which could not, according to Charles Fecher, “seem more minor,” but whose “effect is magical” and “makes all the difference in the world” (348).

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Fascinating Ruth Chatterton *continued from page 9*

For her work on behalf of Israel, Ruth received awards. Despite her incredible accomplishments (the list of her credits goes on for 28 pages at the end of the biography), she never made Redding, Connecticut's "List of Famous People" (there is even a published book with that title) either in the "Actors" or "Authors" category.

We stopped in Redding a few years ago seeking information about Ruth, and although she was far more famous and accomplished than many of the names on the "Famous" list, there was no record anywhere of her having lived there: no files in the library, no one who even knew she had been a resident for six years. Perhaps it is not coincidental that Redding is a mere twenty miles from Darien, the setting for Laura Z. Hobson's novel of anti-Semitism, *Gentlemen's Agreement*.

Ruth married three times, to movie stars Ralph Forbes and George Brent, and finally to a younger actor named Barry Thomson with whom she remained for seventeen years until his death (although it is unclear if Ruth and Barry were ever actually legally married; if not, it's another aspect of Ruth that would have been ahead of her time).

Finally, "In 1968, New York film critic Pauline Kael christened her 'the great Ruth Chatterton.' High praise from the opinionated Miss Kael, the most influential film critic of her day" (O'Brien, "Introduction").

I found the biography well worth reading, not only for details of Ruth's life, but for the numerous, sometimes rare, always beautiful photographs of Ruth. Learning about her many talents enhances my viewings of the great *Dodsworth*. ✍

Lewis and Albert Payson Terhune *continued from page 13*

descriptions of the burgeoning love affair between James and Emily are charming even though they are often described as an elderly couple, and she is called a little old lady, although she has just turned 50!

The chapters that Lewis wrote focus on James's discovery of his wounded son and his second meeting with Emily Sessions. There is the sentimental introduction of a mongrel dog, named by Jimmie "Emperor Napoleon Peter Bub Bonaparte Brinton Dog, Esquire," which seems like a name Lewis would have come up with when he was writing children's verse. The other aspect that seems Lewis-like occurs when Emily, who has become a volunteer nurse for the

Yankees, arrives to nurse Joe. When James asked what made her decide to leave her comfortable home to volunteer, she replies: "These men folks! They will always be taking the high and sacred rights for themselves, while of course we poor women just sit home and keep the wood-box filled and pick lint and don't have any high aspirations. Of course my mother back in Wilbr'am never wanted to do anything but cook father's vittles. Oh, no!" If Carol Kennicott had lived during the Civil War she might have espoused similar sentiments. Although *Dad* is footnote in Lewis's career, it does provide insight into some of the feminist values that he would develop in his later writing. ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation now has a website at sinclairlewisfoundation.com. The site includes great quotes from many of his novels, information on the Boyhood Home and Sinclair Lewis Museum, links, quick facts, and news on the fundraising connected with finding a secure home for the Foundation and Museum since the land on which it currently sits has been put up for sale by the city of Sauk Centre.

Steve Paragamian, Sinclair Lewis Society member: Talked to my aunt Frances in Lenox, Massachusetts, recently. She's 95, and worked as a personal secretary for Lewis, I believe. She told me about the time (1943?) he took her, her husband James, and "an actress named Lillian Gish" to supper at the Brown Derby when she lived in California. I said, "Hey, Sinclair Lewis, great," when Frannie remarked, "But Steven, at the next table, was WILLIAM FAULKNER, eating alone!"

Business Insider has created a map of the United States with one book tied to every state: businessinsider.com/most-famous-book-set-in-every-state-map-2013-10. For Minnesota, of course, it's *Main Street*.

Arrowsmith is mentioned in a "By the Book" interview with Francis S. Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health and author of such books as *The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Personalized Medicine* and *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, in the online *New York Times* "Books Update" (July 26, 2013). Asked if he could meet any writer, dead or alive, Collins said he would go with Luke the physician, the author of the third Gospel. Asked if he could be any character from literature, Collins responded that he would be "tempted to go with Martin Arrowsmith (the title character of Sinclair Lewis's 1925 novel)—an early model of the modern medical researcher."

Bacteriophage, a virus that attacks bacteria, was the medical remedy that Martin Arrowsmith used to fight a plague in the Caribbean back in the 1920s. Although it fell out of favor as a treatment in the United States, it was still a focus of research in Russia and Eastern Europe. Now, as Maggie Koerth-Baker reports in "Raiding Grandma's Medicine Cabinet" (*New York Times Magazine* April 21, 2013: 15–16), it is being reinvestigated in the United States as an alternative treatment for bacterial infections.

Tom Perrotta, novelist and author of *The Leftovers*, was interviewed by the *New York Times* for its "By the Book" feature in the December 1, 2013, *Book Review*. When asked if he had a favorite suburban novel, he replied,

Suburban novels are really just small-town novels in contemporary clothing, and my favorite small-town book is *Winesburg, Ohio*, by Sherwood Anderson, a heart-breaking collection of stories about thwarted dreamers and lost souls in the kind of idyllic community you might expect to see in a Norman Rockwell painting. Anyone who thinks suburban malaise or small-town despair is a recent invention should go back to the 1920s, when Anderson and Sinclair Lewis were mapping what they considered to be the spiritual wasteland of America.

One of Lewis's favorite writers was the orator and intellectual Robert Ingersoll who was also a favorite of Miles

Bjornstam in *Main Street*. Jennifer Michael Hecht, in a review "That Old-Time Irreligion" (*New York Times Book Review* March 10, 2013: 10) of the new biography *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* by Susan Jacoby (Yale, 2013), describes Ingersoll as one who "kept the ideals of secularism alive during his own era and passed them on to us." Ingersoll campaigned for women's rights, against racism, and against the death penalty, but Jacoby contends that he has faded from memory partly because his fame was as an orator which can be ephemeral, and because he denounced religion in a time of strong religious belief.

Michael Goodell, the author of *Zenith Rising*, and a member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, has a second novel, *Rebound*, which was published at the end of 2013 by White Bird Publications. It's a postmodern take on the hard-boiled detective novel. Originally set in Zenith like his first novel, he decided to set this one in Detroit and Grosse Pointe. Reviews on Amazon.com have been very positive.

In a conversation on the Lewis listserv, Charlie Pankenier noted:

It's possible that the paperbacks [of Lewis novels] are channeling the spirit of Lewis himself, who was an accomplished promotion man. In 1914, he was hired by publisher George Doran who admired his "fine qualities of editorial judgment and publicity." In his biography on Lewis, Schorer records (219) that Lewis worked zealously and effectively for Doran, learning so much that in later years he was able to astonish editors who were happy to have him sit in on sales conferences where they discussed the promotion of his own novels. The commercial failure of *The Trail of the Hawk* prompted Lewis to write a long letter to Harper & Brothers, outlining ideas for a promotion campaign, including a large advertising block beginning as follows:

THE REAL AMERICA REVEALS ITSELF!

They have come! For years Americans have been crying for a group of young novelists who should express America as it is, today—as Wells and Bennett have expressed England. They have come! Booth Tarkington in *The Turmoil*, Ernest Poole in *The Harbor* have made America real, and fascinating, and now they are joined by

Sinclair Lewis

in

THE TRAIL OF THE HAWK

It was to be followed by quotations from reviews which Lewis happily supplied (Schorer 227); only slightly less purple than the latter-day paperback puffery, and just about as breathless.

Rebecca Reagan commented: My copy of *Gideon Planish* declares that Peony Jackson is “a human bombshell—and the single greatest passion of his life!” I also enjoy my copy of *Elmer Gantry* that shouts in lurid red letters “Sinner! Elmer Gantry wants you!...He wants you to know all about heaven... but not about his whiskey and his women!” The last phrase is also underlined in red lest it should seem too subtle.

Steve Paragamian commented: Don’t you just love and cherish the blurbs on the Lewis paperbacks?

Kingsblood Royal: “A mixed marriage that violated every code but its own”

Work of Art: “Power, money, women—none could appease this man’s driving hunger”

Gideon Planish: “Peony—unbearable, yet physically irresistible”

Cass Timberlane: “The towering classic of a man’s passions”

SINCLAIR LEWIS SCHOLARSHIP

Christian Long, in “Mapping Suburban Fiction,” in the *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 60.3 (2013): 193–213, discusses *Babbitt*, Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* in terms of commuting, that is, what happens in transit between the home and the office. As he notes, “While the experience of commuting offers chances for reflection and self-knowledge for the suburbanite’s psyche, that time for introspection comes at the cost of ignoring the built environment.” A notable exception to this ignorance is *Babbitt*, precisely because he does pay attention to his surroundings and actually enjoys the commute. “In fact, Lewis’s representation of the commute equates excitement and escape with the very process of getting to work.” The familiarity of his route and the buildings that Babbitt admires as he drives by are perpetually fascinating to him. When he drives through areas, both in Zenith and in Monarch, where there are signs of economic distress, he becomes both sad and nervous, the sight of “poverty so close to Floral Heights reveals how tenuous the suburban good life is.”

In a special edition of *Journal of American Studies* on oil (46.2: 2012), Frederick Buell, in an overview, “A Short History of Oil Cultures: Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance” (273–93), connects the psychic energy of the 1920s to the literal energy of biofuel:

Sinclair Lewis’s title character Babbitt, for example, “whose god was Modern Appliances,” embodied his ego in his Dutch colonial home in Floral Heights and his automobile, which he drives and parks in “a virile adventure masterfully executed.” He commutes to work in Zenith, a city transformed, so that new “clean towers...thrust” “old factories with stinky and sooted windows, wooden tenements colored like mud” from the business center. Further, he smugly sees himself as filled with new energy, as “capable, an official, a man to contrive, to direct, to get things done.” Exuberant in his views of himself and his world, Babbitt is, however, Lewis makes abundantly clear, psychologically, socially, and aesthetically a catastrophe—an emblem of the stupidity and vulgarity that the new modern energies are in fact bringing about. These are qualities Babbitt has mostly not because he partakes too fully of modern energetics, but because he partakes too little: he is, in short, a dim bulb.” (287–88)

James L. W. West III, in *Making the Archives Talk: New and Selected Essays in Bibliography, Editing, and Book History* (Penn State UP, 2012), discusses the process of creating scholarly editions of novels, focusing on his experiences editing Dreiser’s *Jennie Gerhardt* and *Sister Carrie* and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*. An especially interesting chapter focuses on editing the diary of Mencken, including where Mencken refers to Marcella Powers as “a young Jewess.” West notes in a later chapter that there are no collected works of Edith Wharton or Sinclair Lewis, indicating the need for such a project.

The Dictionary of Literary Biography has brought out volume 368: *Theodore Dreiser: A Documentary Volume* (2012). The *DLB* volumes are fascinating as they provide the life of an author through letters, diaries, quotes from the works, pictures, and contextual material such as the politics and history of the time. In this volume, there is a quote from Sinclair Lewis’s Nobel Prize speech about the influence of Dreiser:

And I imagined what would have been said had you chosen some American other than myself. Suppose you had taken Theodore Dreiser.

Now to me, as to many other American writers, Dreiser more than any other man, marching alone, usually unappreciated, often hated, has cleared the trail from Victorian and Howellsian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness

and passion of life. Without his pioneering, I doubt if any of us could, unless we liked to be sent to jail, seek to express life and beauty and terror.

My great colleague Sherwood Anderson has proclaimed this leadership of Dreiser. I am delighted to join him. Dreiser's great first novel, *Sister Carrie*, which he dared to publish thirty long years ago and which I read twenty-five years ago, came to house-bound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman.

DOROTHY THOMPSON NOTES

Check out facebook.com/TheSilencingofDorothyThompson, a fascinating site on Dorothy Thompson. While announcing a 90-minute documentary on her life, the site states: "After publishing her column for seven years, the *New York Post* dropped Dorothy Thompson's 'On the Record' column, saying 'Space is tight.' But the *New York Times* explained that her unpopular views on Palestine, the reconstruction of Germany and Soviet Russia were really the cause. She said only, 'I have always believed in a free press and the free speech.' She was sad to lose her column in a New York City newspaper, and she never got another outlet there."

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

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Susan O'Brien: A Dorothy Thompson opinion piece is mentioned in the recent PBS *American Experience* documentary on the CBS radio adaptation of the H. G. Wells science fiction novel, *War of the Worlds*, performed by 23-year-old Orson Welles on Halloween evening, 1938. The radio show, concerning a fictional attack of Martians on the small town of Grovers Mill, New Jersey, was so believable that it was assumed to be truth by thousands of Americans, many of whom fled their homes and otherwise reacted in panic.

Dorothy wrote the piece about the ease with which Americans were deceived (*New York Herald Tribune*, 1938) comparing the seemingly sudden, brain-washed state of the panicked listeners to the success of Hitler's propaganda machine and others of the time. She proposes that Orson Welles be given a "Congressional medal" for exposing witless reactions. Here is the link:

mstoneblog.wordpress.com/2009/10/06/an-interesting-read-from-dorothy-thompson/.

American Experience analyzes some of the reasons why Americans were so susceptible to a false belief at that particular time in history. I think Dorothy would see these reasons as "excuses." It would be interesting to learn specifically what Dorothy and Sinclair would say about extremists today; I imagine it would not be pleasant. Once again, however, we see Dorothy Thompson's writing as presenting issues and opinions very relevant to what is happening today.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

CATALOGUE 212

103. Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt, 1922. \$150.

First edition, first issue. Prepublication copy stamped in red ink on the title page: "SAMPLE COPY Publication Date September 14, 1922." Lacking front free endpaper, a little loose, a used and worn copy without dust jacket. A rare issue of an American classic.

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