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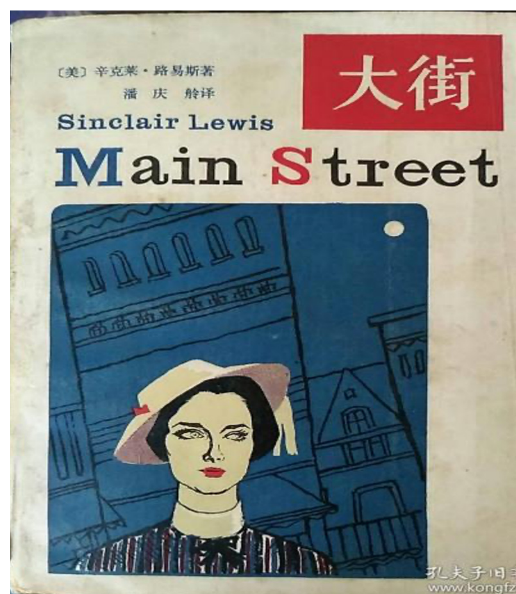
ARROWSMITH ENDURES IN THE PANDEMIC

Ralph Goldstein

When Dr. Solbert Permutt was a youngster in Birmingham, Alabama, his mother took him to see the 1932 film version of Sinclair Lewis's classic story of humankind's battle against disease. "From the time I saw that movie, I dreamed of becoming a medical scientist like Arrowsmith," Permutt wrote later (qtd. in Pelton). "Although the work might be dangerous, it would also be adventurous, and I was willing to take the risks in the same way that a policeman or a fireman does." He made good on his dreams, going to medical school and then doing four decades of pulmonary research at Johns Hopkins before his death in 2012.

Annotating a tattered copy of *Arrowsmith* while he was in medical school when he says he "should have been committing to memory the intricacies of the brachial plexus," Dr. Howard Markel was inspired by Martin's dedication to science ("Reflections" 371). For Markel, the novel depicts tensions extant in the profession: competition between clinicians and scientists; conflict between pharmaceutical companies and health officials over fast-tracking vaccines; political rifts in community health programs; and the evolving societal role of the doctor. Now a professor at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, Markel ranks *Arrowsmith* equal in importance to Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, and Larry Kramer's AIDS pandemic drama *The Normal Heart*, but not

—— *Arrowsmith* Endures in the Pandemic *continued on page 4*



Cover of the 1983 Chinese translation of Main Street *by Sinclair Lewis.*

MR. LEWIS GOES TO CHINA: STUDYING SINCLAIR LEWIS'S NOVELS IN CHINA

Chen Ying
College of Foreign Languages
Inner Mongolia University, China

As a teacher in the College of Foreign Languages at Inner Mongolia University, China, our literary teaching team set up an elective course in 2016 titled "Introduction to Contemporary Foreign Literature and Culture" for all undergraduate liberal arts and science majors. The main purpose of this course was to introduce great writers and their works to all students to cultivate their multidisciplinary thinking. As one of the team members, I chose for my teaching project "Sinclair Lewis and American Popular Culture."

There were three challenges. The first was the differing academic backgrounds of students, who ranged from freshmen to seniors and specialized in a variety of disciplines from philosophy to computer science. Because they lacked the same academic foundation, it was impossible for them to analyze the works by applying abstract literary theories. I needed to use concrete examples with plain words to help them understand Sinclair Lewis's works since this was the most important goal for my teaching. Second, the students were unfamiliar with Lewis. Compared with other Nobel Literature laureates, Lewis has lagged behind in popularity, so the challenge was to make students understand Lewis and appreciate his being the first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in

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The
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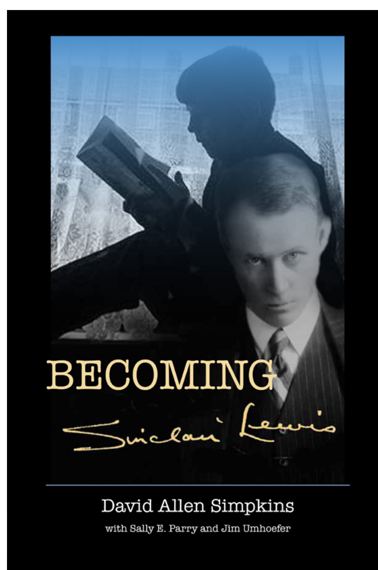
Introducing Sinclair Lewis: A Review of *Becoming Sinclair Lewis* by David Allen Simpkins with Sally E. Parry and Jim Umhoefer. Free Air Publishing, 2020

Ted G. Fleener

Dave Simpkins earned his living in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, where he was owner of the local newspaper, the *Sauk Centre Herald*. His enthusiasm for Sinclair Lewis was always present. There seems to be no better way to begin this review than with the following quote from Jim Umhoefer's introduction to the book:

> His work-in-progress focused on young Lewis and his growing-up years in Sauk Centre, his early manhood and blossoming writing career, through to his emergence on the world literary stage with the publication of *Main Street* in 1920. As a Lewis scholar, Simpkins respected both the Schorer and Lingeman biographies of Lewis, while wishing to add a fresh perspective on Lewis's development and rise as a man and an author.



For each writer who becomes successful, there is a formative background and many experiences before they arrive at that point. This work by Simpkins explores the people, influences, and forces that were part of Lewis's training for the writer he became.

The influences were many and varied. From an early age Lewis kept meticulous journals and notes. He was also a keen observer of people. Whether working on a cattle boat to England, chatting with a classmate on a "tramp" around New Haven, or driving on a motor trip to Seattle, he noted his experiences and they often found their way into his writing.

In the first chapter of this book, many of the early influences for Lewis's writing are laid out. Lewis was truly a "sponge," absorbing what was around him. When his notes didn't fully detail something, his "phonographic" memory did.

One early form of experience which helped Lewis acquire knowledge was what he referred to as "tramping." This itch for travel and adventure included two cattle boat trips to England and a boat trip to Panama. These adventures are fictionalized in *Our Mr. Wrenn* and *The Trail of the Hawk*. In 1916, Lewis and his wife drove a Model T from Sauk Centre to San Francisco. This "tramping" adventure would become the basis for *Free Air*. Simpkins also notes that knowledge obtained from "tramping" shows up in *Dodsworth*.

One early part of his education in how to write was received at the age of fifteen from Charles Hendryx, owner and editor of the *Sauk Centre Herald* (1879–1903). Lewis was working as an unpaid reporter as well as doing other tasks in the newspaper office. As he later recounted the lesson in his notes, Lewis remembered writing a short piece on cocoa and donuts served at a ladies meeting. The article was "blue penciled" by Hendryx because Harry, Lewis's boyhood name, had not asked questions, but based the entire story on what usually happened rather than on confirmed facts about

——Introducing Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 10*

New Members

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

Brett Brunmeier
Asheville, NC

Elaine Denniston
Dorchester, MA

Carter La Vay
Riverside, CT

Melvyn New
Gainesville, FL

Shaun F. Richards
Spencerport, NY

Michael and John Russell
Riverside, CT

John Welckle
St. Paul, MN

Sinclair Lewis's Stop in Taylors Falls in 1942

Jack P. Liljenberg

In an article published in the *Minneapolis Tribune* on June 2, 1942, Sinclair Lewis indicated that his favorite place in Minnesota (up to that time) was in the St. Croix Valley, particularly where one begins the long descent into Taylors Falls from the south on Highway 8. The year 1942, incidentally, was the first full year of the United States' involvement in World War II.

Four months later in 1942, on Sunday, October 4, and at the height of the fall leaf color season, Mr. Lewis was motoring through the St. Croix Valley and stopped to eat an afternoon lunch at one of the Taylors Falls cafés, the Green Feather.

Taylors Falls 1942 © Fay L. Heath

The *Taylors Falls Journal* reported on Thursday, October 8, 1942, "*Taylors Falls had a very distinguished visitor last Sunday in the person of Sinclair Lewis, Minnesota's literary celebrity. Mr. Lewis stopped at the Green Feather Cafe for lunch in the afternoon*."

The Green Feather was then operated by Elmer P. "Ike" Reynolds (1907–1997) and his wife, Dorothy (1911–1983), and was situated in the former Chisago House/Dalles House (hotel) building from 1936 to 1947. Russell and Doris Burris purchased the café from Ike Reynolds and operated it for its last two years, from 1945 to 1947.

Ike Reynolds was said to have named his café after a posh establishment of the same name located somewhere else, possibly in Chicago, Illinois. The former hotel building that in part housed Ike's café stood from 1851 to 1956 on the northwest corner of Bench and First Streets. It stood where now stands the 1973, two-story, south portion of the Chisago House Restaurant.

Sinclair Lewis sometimes wrote negatively about small-town life so his works are not praised by everyone. Yet, if for no other reason, Mr. Lewis should be admired for his willingness to stop and eat in the flyspeck town of Taylors Falls, which was not and still is not to be found on some maps. He probably was curious about what he might find to tickle his fancy in a café called the Green Feather. ✍

Arrowsmith Endures in the Pandemic *continued from page 1*

as high as Albert Camus's *The Plague* ("*The Plague* Perfectly Captures").

Dr. David J. Eisenman, a professor of otorhinolaryngology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, has long recommended *Arrowsmith* to aspiring students, and he now finds the novel even more timely and pertinent. "It is indeed humbling," he says, "to see history repeat itself without our having resolved some fundamental scientific unknowns or learned some of its most important lessons." Still, he believes reading *Arrowsmith* makes optimism possible, even "in the face of a halting or disorganized national public health response." On September 25, Dr. Eisenman joined Sinclair Lewis Society Executive Director Sally Parry in a virtual discussion of *Arrowsmith* sponsored on Facebook by the *Scientist* magazine.

The twenty-first-century audience for *Arrowsmith* goes well beyond medical professionals. Echoing John Updike's assessment of Lewis's achievement in the pages of the *New Yorker*,

—*Arrowsmith* Endures in the Pandemic *continued on page 6*

Trapped on *Main Street*

Max Holleran, on the website Public Books, wrote an appreciation of *Main Street*, "The Secluded Self: Sinclair Lewis's 'Main Street' @100" (https://www.publicbooks.org/the-secluded-self-sinclair-lewiss-main-street-100/), in which he asks the questions, "How exactly did Americans begin distrusting small towns? How did American small towns stop being great?"

> And of all the books to change this perception, of all the books that extolled cities and deplored small towns, one shines out: Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. First published in 1920 and a runaway best seller, Lewis's novel may have single-handedly, and radically, transformed American perceptions of life outside cities.
>
> The book is a corrective to previous novels that depicted rural American life as an honorable struggle among kindhearted folk, expunging colonial slaughter, forced labor, casual violence, and lamentable opportunities for women. Basically, *Main Street* overturns the tendency to make frontier development all *Little House on the Prairie* with no *Deadwood*. The book is an *anti*-bildungsroman: a tale not of progressive growth but of progressive confinement. Of course, the protagonist who gets trapped is, by no accident, a woman.

Holleran focuses on the tedious existence of Carol, "the incomplete progress of a woman who, though afforded a college education, is thrust back into domesticity." He provides a plot summary through a feminist lens, including the near rape of Fern Mullins as an example of how small towns can be the site for violence when women seem to act outside of society's gender expectations. Cities provide less surveillance on women, allowing them greater job opportunities and independence. He calls Will Kennicott "complacent and uninteresting," but not abusive, and more of an idealist than George Babbitt.

Carol's trepidation about having children and being even more trapped in town is explored, as children become "a social cudgel in Gopher Prairie: they connect people more intimately to stringent social norms, and fear for their future makes those like Carol acquiesce to the system."

Although Carol escapes briefly and moves to Washington, DC, "a daring social faux pas," she returns to Gopher Prairie due to increasing cynicism about reform, an unsatisfying job, and real loneliness. Most residents of Gopher Prairie are delighted to see her back, with some happy to see her comeuppance.

Holleran ends with Carol's speech about her daughter as "a bomb to blow up smugness." He notes, "It is already 2020, and that bomb has not yet detonated. But it is ticking faster and faster."

The essay prompted much discussion on the Lewis listserv, some of which is reprinted below.

Benjamin R. Beede: I am glad to have seen Holleran's article, but I do not agree with many of Holleran's assertions. For me, Lewis's *Main Street* is much more than the "denunciation of a provincial Minnesota town" portrayed in Holleran's article.

In *Main Street* Lewis expresses his criticisms of a wide span of behaviors that he finds distasteful. Speaking through Carol, Lewis says that "[v]acuousness and bad manners and spiteful gossip—that's what I hate" as she explains her dislike for Gopher Prairie. Her stay in Washington, DC, shows Carol that there is much of Main Street in a large city and that there are worse small towns than Gopher Prairie. Thus, Lewis wrote on a larger canvas than Holleran maintains.

In *Main Street*, moreover, there are a fair number of favorable references to Gopher Prairie. Lewis values service opportunities, such as Dr. Kennicott's medical practice, which Holleran notes, and simple pleasures, such as winter sports. Clearly, the town could be better, but patience is needed to achieve results. By the end of the novel, Carol "saw [Gopher Prairie] now as a toiling new settlement."

I am astonished by Holleran's statement that *Main Street* "focuses on the petite bourgeoisie of Gopher Prairie." It is evident that the book deals primarily, although not entirely, with the upper class in the town. I find that Holleran's description of Carol's departure for Washington, DC as a "daring social faux pas" also curious. The phrase "faux pas" taken from French means an error or blunder, literally a "false step." Can one really speak of a "daring error" or "daring blunder"? Was her stay in Washington, DC a "blunder"? On the contrary, she seems to have developed a broader perspective on life.

Holleran thinks that "[t]oday, small towns are ridiculed as cultural and economic backwaters," but that is a generalization. In the metropolitan New York area, for example, there are many calls these days for "walkable" municipalities that allow people to live, work, and play without going farther than a single town.

———Trapped on *Main Street continued on page 11*

Arrowsmith Endures in the Pandemic *continued from page 4*

Adam Gopnik calls *Arrowsmith* "a now mostly forgotten novel, by the now mostly forgotten American novelist Sinclair Lewis," yet within it "the brutal but essential logic of plague science has never been more lucidly dramatized." While hero-scientist Martin diminishes the plague, he does so at great personal cost, Gopnik observes, and he credits Lewis "as a writer and a moralist (who) does not spare any side its responsibility."

Questions of responsibility abound in what Professor Yeonsik Jung of Sungkyunkwan University, Seoul, South Korea, calls his 2016 biopolitical reading of the novel. Jung sees *Arrowsmith* "as a colonial text," and Martin's Caribbean mission the "culmination of the American imperial project hinging on the pathologization of the bodies of the colonized." Not to be confused with "a philanthropic, idealistic, and scientific endeavor that transcends the ugly politics of racism and imperialism," tropical medicine as practiced by the American providers reproduces "a pseudo-scientific discourse of racism that consolidates the alleged biological superiority of white colonizers" (186). Among Jung's evidence are the early titles Lewis suggested to publisher Alfred Harcourt disparaging of the colony's indigenous people: "Barbarian," "The Savage," and "Strange Islands" (185–86). Although Lewis may have desired to create a heroic character who retains his idealism, Jung declares that Martin's "biopolitical practices in the tropical colony, tainted by the twin scourges of racism and imperialism, stigmatize him as an *American* physician-politician" (198).

Can literature and science escape today's polarized, hyperpoliticized environment? Theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss, citing incidents of what he deems ideological encroachment on scientific inquiry in the United States and abroad, argues that scientific leaders must "stand up not only for free speech in science, but for quality, independent of political doctrine and divorced from the demands of political factions."

In a comment following Krauss's *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, James N. Suojanen, MD, reminds readers that in *Arrowsmith* "Lewis succinctly describes how politics, greed, power, sex, jealousy and stupidity influence those in medicine and corrupt scientific medical research."

Ninety-five years on, *Arrowsmith* continues to inspire, comfort, humble, and spark debate.

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Mr. Lewis Goes to China *continued from page 1*

America. The last course objective was for students to realize the detailed description of popular culture in Lewis's works and make a connection with contemporary Chinese culture.

In the first class, when I presented the title, "Sinclair Lewis and American Popular Culture," to the students, their blank looks indicated that they were familiar with neither Lewis nor popular culture. To reach my teaching purpose, I decided to separate my course into three parts. The first part introduced the study of popular culture, then we explored the writings of Lewis, then we linked the two together.

At the beginning, I reviewed the history of American culture and emphasized the development of American society in the early twentieth century to pave the path for the students'

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What Were They Reading Then? *Parnassus on Wheels* and *The Haunted Bookshop* by Christopher Morley, 1917 and 1919 (reprinted with illustrations by Douglas Gorsline, 1955)

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

An occasional feature on books that were popular when Sinclair Lewis was writing.

These two charming novellas were written by Christopher Morley (1890–1957), who was a founder and contributing editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, one of the first judges of the Book of the Month Club, editor of two editions of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, and a founder of the Baker Street Irregulars. His 1939 novel, *Kitty Foyle*, was unusual in its open discussion of abortion and was a best seller, selling over a million copies. Ginger Rogers played the title role in the 1940 film and won an Academy Award for best actress.

Christopher Morley, 1932

These were his first two novels, introducing the characters of Roger Mifflin, also known as the Professor, and Helen McGill. Helen provides the narrative voice for *Parnassus on Wheels*, and although her story is in some ways a love story, it's also a bildungsroman, except that her coming-of-age years happen after 40. She is a spinster whose life is spent keeping house for her brother Andrew, a part-time writer and part-time farmer in upstate New York. It's not a bad life, but it is a pretty boring one, and when the opportunity comes to buy a traveling bookstore, Parnassus on Wheels, she decides to take the plunge. The Professor had actually stopped by the farm because he admired her brother's writing and wanted to sell him the caravan. Helen is afraid that this would encourage Andrew to do even less work on the farm so she buys it herself. She's never had an adventure and thinks time is passing her by so she empties out her bank account and starts traveling with the Professor to learn the bookselling business.

The Professor is in some ways a stand-in for Morley, whose love of books is very evident in both volumes. He talks to Helen about his philosophy of literature and teaches Helen how to gauge what books would interest various kinds of people both at farms and small towns that the Parnassus visits. His philosophy is that as a bookseller he is "a specialist in adjusting the book to the human need. Between ourselves, there is no such thing, abstractly, as a 'good' book. A book is 'good' only when it meets some human hunger or refutes some human error" (*Haunted Bookshop* 17). However, the novel is also a picaresque story as they are pursued by Andrew, who thinks his sister has been taken advantage of, and set upon by hoboes. Roger is arrested for supposedly getting money from Helen under false pretense, but she springs him from jail and marries him.

The Haunted Bookshop is a sequel and not quite as successful because it's a mishmash of genres, including a philosophical tome on the nature of books and the nature of war, a World War I spy thriller, a satire of advertising, and a love story. Roger and Helen now run a bookshop in Brooklyn and take in a rich young woman, Titania Chapman, whose father is the owner of the Daintybits Corporation. Mr. Chapman wants his daughter to learn about books and ordinary life. She is so winsome and charming that Aubrey Gilbert, a young advertising man who includes Daintybits among his accounts, falls in love with her at first sight. However, all is not well in the borough of Brooklyn. World War I has just ended and President Wilson is about to sail to Paris for the peace conference. There are German agents who don't want this to happen and use a book, *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, in the bookstore as a way to exchange secret messages. Aubrey rents a room across the street from the bookstore to keep an eye on Titania who is set upon by the spies when the book goes missing, gets beaten up by German agents, and discovers just in time the nefarious plot where the book was going to be used to hide a bomb that would be placed in Wilson's cabin on the ship. Roger feels passionately about people realizing the "brutalizing absurdity" of war, and that truth was rationed during the war itself, so he is truly appalled when he finds out that his bookshop is being used as a way station for more violence. He says, "Of course one can't help loving one's country.… I love mine so much that I want to see her take the lead in making a new era possible" (111, 113). The bomb goes off in the bookstore, killing one of the spies and the Mifflins' beloved dog Bock. But Mr. Chapman is so thrilled that his daughter is safe that he announces that he will fund ten Parnasses, the traveling book-wagons, for next year and make Aubrey assistant advertising manager at Daintybits. ✍

Mr. Lewis Goes to China *continued from page 6*

understanding about the time of Sinclair Lewis's life and his works. Next, I explained the different meanings of "popular culture," as well as its characteristics, such as commodity, standardization, entertainment, and technology. Mastering all these terms would be essential for students to comprehend concrete forms of popular culture in Lewis's works.

The second part of this course focused on the introduction of Sinclair Lewis's personal experiences, his writing career, and his works. In China, many people know more about other Nobel Prize-winning writers, such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, than Sinclair Lewis. In fact, few had heard about him. Therefore, in this course segment, my role was more like a storyteller than a teacher. I hoped through my teaching students could know and understand Lewis and his great works, as well as his profound impact on American literature and history. Ultimately, I hoped students would realize that even in modern times, his predictive novels serve as a warning.

Cover of the 1983 Chinese translation of Babbitt *by Sinclair Lewis.*

To make it easier for them to understand, I chronologically arranged his works and connected them to key events during the historical development of America, so the students could see the relationship between the cultural background and the writer's creation. I introduced the six works of Sinclair Lewis for which there are Chinese translations, as most of his works hadn't been circulated in China, nor translated. We read *Free Air*, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Kingsblood Royal*. Fortunately, these six novels spanned different writing periods and featured totally distinct themes, which somewhat made up for the scarcity of translated versions. It was a tough task to give a detailed explanation for each novel in such a short time, so after my overall introduction, students did intensive reading and filled out a table with the work's time, topic, fate of the protagonist, and the influence of each novel after it was published.

At the beginning of the next class, we discussed their assignments. When I asked which character they liked most, the students gave me some quite surprising answers. Some of them said they preferred Elmer Gantry, for he was very cunning and even in modern times a man like him could also be popular. Some students said they felt deeply sorry for Babbitt. He represented their own experiences about not "being their true selves." After the discussion, the most delightful thing for me was the fact that though Lewis had until recently been a stranger, the students had already transformed into his big fans.

In the third part of the course, I used *Babbitt* as my example to help students understand how his themes extended into popular culture. We started with how advertisements promoted popular culture. Students were quite familiar with advertisements, but when they were asked to explain if they influenced or controlled our daily choices and lifestyles, they had nothing to say. Therefore, we looked for some clues from the novel to figure out how advertisements connected to popular culture. At the beginning of the novel, Lewis depicted how happy Babbitt felt about his alarm clock. "It was the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial. Babbitt was proud of being awakened by such a rich device" (3–4).

Students discussed the real reason for Babbitt's pride. Could it be that it was just a "nationally advertised alarm-clock" or something else? They all agreed that the alarm-clock was a kind of symbol for being wealthy. Babbitt felt proud because the clock made him feel like the rich. His identity and social status were connected to products which were advertised commodities. If our values can be embodied by advertisements, then we lose both spiritually and morally. Popular culture, through advertisements, could control our lives.

Then our class found examples of words in advertisements which frequently appeared in the newspaper and attracted or perhaps trapped Babbitt's son Ted. Sentences such as "There's MONEY in it, BIG money," "contact with influential men based on the basis of equality" (84), and "holding out your hand for a coin" (80) contained enticing words that could capture people's fragile and vain hearts. These ads stimulated desires to be immersed in a dream. Students said that even today these kinds

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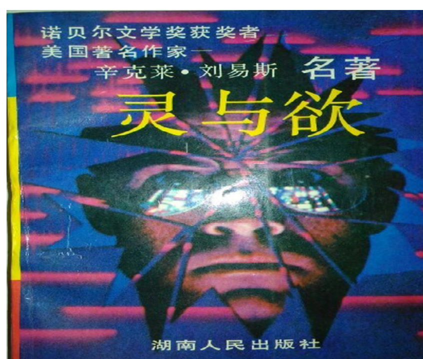
of advertisements provoked a similar response. Lewis truly understood human psychology in popular culture.

For a second example, I chose the concept of movies. When the students were asked, "Is there a difference between the movie world and the real world?," they could figure out the difference between them. However, in *Babbitt*, Lewis showed readers other vivid examples to reflect the profound influence of movies on teenagers. First, Tinka, Babbitt's eleven-year-old daughter was unsatisfied with her once-weekly visit to the movies. Tinka demanded to go to the movie theater three times a week, just like other girls. Additionally, Ted, a seventeen-year-old high school student, didn't want to study at all, but put his heart into becoming a movie star. Furthermore, Eunice, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Babbitt's neighbor, was the most obsessive about stardom. Her ambition was to be a cinema actress, so she "did not merely attend the showing of every 'feature film;' she also read the motion-picture magazines" (225). She not only read them, but she also researched those handsome actors and memorized their resumes. The craziest thing was that on "the wall of her room, her father reported, she had pinned up twenty-one photographs of actors. But the signed portrait of the most graceful of the movie heroes she carried in her young bosom" (225). From these descriptions, Lewis made us see the infinite attraction of movies for teenagers.



Cover of the 1988 Chinese translation of Elmer Gantry *by Sinclair Lewis.*

Students who had experiences like Ted or Eunice recognized Lewis's purpose in depicting the powerful sway of cinema and noted that they understood the distance between the movie world and the real world only after they grew up. As teens, they also dreamed of being famous and successful without working hard. They too had once rejected their forefather's diligent lifestyle. What most concerned Lewis was that those youngsters would indulge too much in the movie world, which could separate them from the real world and made them less serious. From our analysis, everyone sensed Lewis was concerned that teenagers would become movie star fanatics instead of the backbones of the American future.

Cover of the 1987 Chinese translation of Arrowsmith.

After several weeks of group discussion and plot analysis, students had a thorough understanding of the detailed depiction of popular culture in *Babbitt*, so for the last course segment, I chose an interesting topic—the transformation caused by reading.

Sinclair Lewis himself loved reading very much and gained a lot of insights from a variety of authors. During Lewis's time, reading changed both in form and in essence and these changes were portrayed in *Babbitt*. First, the changes in form were exemplified when Ted complained to Babbitt about his school's requirement for them to read classical literary works:

> "I don't see why they give us this old-fashioned junk by Milton and Shakespeare and Wordsworth and all these has-beens," he protested. "Oh, I guess I could

Mr. Lewis Goes to China *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 the following: Benjamin R. Beede, Chen Ying, Patrick Coleman, Sean Denniston, David J. Eisenman, Ted G. Fleener, Mitchell Freedman, Jim Gambone, Ralph Goldstein, Michael Goodell, Darryl Henriques, Rahul Kamath, George Killough, William Kraemer, Richard Lingeman, Dave Lull, Siobhan McCleary, Robert McLaughlin, Susan O'Brien, Charles Pankenier, Bob Ruggiero, Dan and Mary Stroeing, Ed Tant, and Teo Žagar.

Mr. Lewis Goes to China *continued from page 9*

> stand it to see a show by Shakespeare, if they had swell scenery and put on a lot of dog, but to sit down in cold blood and *read* 'em—These teachers—how do they get that way?" (76)

All of the students had quite an understanding smile after reading this paragraph. Then I asked them if they would prefer reading a novel or watching the movie which was adapted from the novel. Most of the students preferred the latter, even if there were significant changes from the novel. They thought that a movie version could save much time and was more appealing. Although reading a book and watching a movie were both visual, a novel requires the reader to think critically while a film just presents the words and action through visual art. Obviously, readers were more likely to accept a movie's delightful visual pleasure over the additional effort to think and interpret the meaning required by a novel. Therefore, our class concluded that the form of reading was changed from thinking minds to viewing eyes by film.

Another kind of transformation was in essence, for the function of books in *Babbitt* changed from supplying knowledge to decorating the house. For example, there was a book with colored pictures in Babbitt's bedroom, though nobody knew what it was about because no one in his family had read it. The role of this book was to show others that his family *had* this book. It was just a symbol of education within Babbitt's family, although it represented countless American families. Through the analysis of the transformation of reading in both form and nature, the students all agreed that at present *books* and *reading* had almost lost their spaces in the entertainment world. By then, the students had a more emotional affinity for Lewis because they understood his mission and also found themselves in his novel.

After we had learned so much about Sinclair Lewis and his depiction of popular culture, I asked the students if they could describe him in a single word. The most frequently mentioned ones were "brave," "accurate," "detailed," and "predictable." At last we concluded that he was "a faint light in the darkness," because in the darkness, faint light will draw on others and they will illuminate each other, just as Lewis used the strength of his faint light to enlighten the whole world.

Work Cited

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Introducing Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 3*

that specific meeting. This lesson reinforced the need that Lewis felt throughout his life to research what he was writing about.

One piece of advice experienced writers give to newbies is to write what you know. Lewis took this to heart. His novels before *Main Street* were well researched before they were written. Attention to detail was a continuing thread in anything written by Lewis.

In the writing of *Becoming Sinclair Lewis*, Simpkins and his two collaborators followed this rule as well. The references and notes encompass 21 pages. Both he and his collaborators, Jim Umhoefer and Sally E. Parry, showed incredibly thorough attention to detail. Their writing and work blended well with the work done by Simpkins.

One of the surprises in this book is the list of famous people Lewis met or heard speak, including William Butler Yeats, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Edna Ferber, and Eugene V. Debs. Simpkins also noted that Lewis sold story plots to Jack London.

Lewis was an early advocate of women's rights and this was noted in the chapter "The 'Suffragent,'" a name that Lewis coined as a man who supported women's suffrage. Both of his wives were intelligent, accomplished women. He enjoyed being around successful and independent women and learning from them.

Lewis also had experience in both the newspaper business and publishing. He knew what it meant to meet deadlines and how to market a book. He was a household name before *Main Street* was published. His stories and serials in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines were eagerly devoured by readers across America.

In Missouri we say that if someone didn't just fall off the turnip truck on the way to town, they are smart enough to know what's going on and can do what needs to be done. Simpkins makes it pretty clear in his book that Lewis didn't fall off the turnip truck. He was prepared for the tasks at hand.

The book is organized into ten chapters, as well as subchapters, which makes it easy to read. It expands upon the work done by Lewis's major biographers Mark Schorer and Richard Lingeman and provides a welcome addition to their work and another perspective for Lewis scholars. It also stands

Introducing Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 11*

Introducing Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 10*

as a memory to the research and devotion that Simpkins gave to the project and is a tribute to Jim Umhoefer and Sally Parry, who picked up the torch with assistance from a "brain trust" of Lewis scholars and ran the book across the finish line.

Perhaps the best description of the passion Lewis had for life is a Kathleen Norris story. She related that he was fun to be with, but if he went to a circus, he would insist on "riding the elephant." As Jim Umhoefer notes, this meant that Lewis wanted to be a part of the show, not just see it.

Becoming Sinclair Lewis is a well-written addition to other books about Sinclair Lewis, well worth reading to learn more about Lewis's life and times. It is a labor of love well done by Simpkins and his collaborators.

A Personal Note

The story of this book begins ten years before the sudden passing of David Allen Simpkins on his family farm south of Vining, Minnesota. Dave was struck with the idea of writing a book that encompassed the early life and forces around Lewis that helped shape him into the writer he became. Dave's early gathering of material for the project was greatly assisted by Richard Lingeman, who gave him a photocopied transcript of Lewis's early boyhood diaries. At Dave's passing, eight of the ten chapters of the book were essentially done, leaving only the first and last chapters to be completed. For those chapters, he left outlines of what he wanted to include. Along the way, he involved some of his fellow Lewis enthusiasts in the progress of the book. This inclusionary act made completing the book after his passing a much easier task than it would have been otherwise.

I was privileged to know Dave for several years. Like Jim Umhoefer, I visited his farm, both as a dinner guest and at the Midsommarfest put on by the Sons of Norway. He also visited our family farm near Wadena, Minnesota, and enjoyed a walleye dinner.

I wasn't "Present at the Creation," but I had some involvement with the book, mainly as a listener and sharing my thoughts when Dave asked for them. He did send me two of the chapters to look over in their initial stages, including the chapter that became "The 'Suffragent.'" On one occasion I visited the study at his farm and he showed me some of the things he was working on. In one message to me, Dave said he should write a book on Hemingway in Minnesota. The wheels in his head were always turning.

Most of you who have read the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* on a regular basis are aware of my love for the writing of MacKinlay Kantor. His research was meticulous when he wrote a book, whether nonfiction or fiction, and I commented to Dave on the parallels I saw between his work and Kantor's. He told me in July 2016, "The research has paid off because I've uncovered some real gems."

This book came to be because it was meant to come to print and Dave's friends made it happen. The eight complete chapters were edited and all that remained were the first and last chapters. Jim Umhoefer, a friend of Dave's, agreed to write the first chapter and Dr. Sally E. Parry, Executive Director of the Sinclair Lewis Society, agreed to write the last chapter. Both utilized Dave's outlines and added their own creative touches. The results of their efforts flow well into the entirety of the book. ✍

Trapped on *Main Street continued from page 5*

Mitchell J. Freedman: I agree with Ben that one of the things I found surprising about *Main Street* when reading it for the first time in my 30s was how kind he was to Gopher Prairie overall, compared to the caricature of the book. It is not to say there isn't a sense of oppression from everyone knowing everyone's business, and there is the way in which people there are stuck in a set of ways that make change difficult. However, there is something kindly in various actions and something to be said for a less hectic lifestyle.

However, I would demur from Ben to say, while Lewis was focused on the wealthier folks in Gopher Prairie, they were certainly petit compared to wealthier people in the larger cities. Therefore, the writer's characterization is more from an assumption of comparison with larger towns and cities in the US at the time. I also would say the writer's point about "cultural and economic" backwardness is more about the politics of culture and political economy than whether one can have a

Trapped on *Main Street continued on page 12*

Trapped on *Main Street continued from page 11*

walk across town without the noise and bustle of NYC. Finally, I saw the writer's "daring faux pas" as less of a contradiction and more a paradox—and a literary minded one at that. It was daring for Carol to leave to go to DC, but what she found was, despite her having been in the "city" before going to Gopher Prairie, she was a bumpkin compared to how people behave in the nation's capital, and she found herself out of place, and ironically (ah, Lewis!) longing to return to Gopher Prairie.

Richard Lingeman: Excellent critique. Sinclair Lewis is often taken as the wild "Red" blasting Gopher Prairie, but *Main Street* is more than an attack. Lewis thought deeply about the various perspectives on his town, including those that justified an attack. Still, he had the story of his protagonist Carol to tell, which he does very fairly, for all her flaws she was still a clear-eyed observer from outside, an innocent Margaret Mead perhaps. Over the years I've come to see *Main Street* as a richer, more multi-faceted picture than just the cutting edge of the "revolt from the village."

Above all, Sinclair Lewis was honest: he was trying to render the complexity of truth about a sociological phenomenon of the USA, which the great sociologist Thorstein Veblen identified in his "The Country Town" essay and which the Lynds later examined in their "Middletown" series.

Ralph Goldstein: Let's not forget that Carol reads Thorstein Veblen, albeit a page at a time. Reference to it closes the 131-word sentence in chapter XXII capturing Carol's day from the time she rises to the time she falls asleep.

And let's be glad when social scientists turn their attention to Lewis. Consider Isabel Marín Gómez's treatment of *Ann Vickers*. But Mr. Holleran falls into the trap of seeing Carol as trapped, that she fails in her quest for reform, that in part what leads her back to Gopher Prairie is a surrender to institutional tyranny she can at best laugh about. That's a fair conclusion if you don't read beyond chapter XXXVII. In chapter XXXVIII, after nearly two years in DC, Carol sees herself as "not a defiant philosopher but a faded government clerk." At dinner with "a generalissima of suffrage" who gave up "father and mother and children" for the cause, Carol confronts the question whether she can make a similar sacrifice. If not, according to the feminist leader, there's one attack she can make:

> Keep on looking at one thing after another in your home and church and bank, and ask why it is, and who first laid down the law that it had to be that way. If enough of us do this impolitely enough, then we'll become civilized in merely twenty thousand years or so, instead of having to wait the two hundred thousand years that my cynical anthropologist friends allow.

That's the turning point for Carol, leading to her affirmative declaration "I will go back!" and a new acceptance of her town, where

> she would not be utterly defeated. She was glad of her rebellion. The prairie was no longer empty land in the sun-glare; it was the living tawny beast which she had fought and made beautiful by fighting; and in the village streets were shadows of her desires and the sound of her marching and the seeds of mystery and greatness.

Why do some readers give those lines short shrift? Nuance, folks! Mr. Holleran ends with a nod to current political tension and Carol wondering what her daughter "will see and meddle with before she dies in the year 2000." Imagine Carol's granddaughters in 2016, perhaps canvassing for a doomed candidate, the first woman nominee of a major party, who lost 78 of Minnesota's 87 counties. The struggle continues.

Trapped on *Main Street continued on page 13*

Trapped on *Main Street continued from page 12*

Benjamin R. Beede: Ralph hits the mark. Most of Lewis's chief characters sustained severe blows, but they kept their integrity and kept moving without being discouraged, well, without being *too* discouraged.

Carol, Arrowsmith, Dodsworth, Jessup, and Kingsblood were some of those "sluggers" who refused to give in. Babbitt did not seem to fit into that pattern, and, surely, Gideon Planish did not do so.

I would have liked Lewis to say more about the importance of participating in organizations. Arrowsmith, for example, might have tried starting a committee of the American Medical Association. In *Gideon Planish*, of course, Lewis gave us candid views of a variety of organizations that were dysfunctional in one way or another. In *Kingsblood Royal*, however, the protagonist and his wife seemed to have learned why group action is often necessary. There are decided limits to what most individuals can do on their own.

Charlie Pankenier: Holleran is apparently part of the long cavalcade that views *Main Street* through the lens of a one-dimensional screed, overlooking the essential ambivalence at the heart of this, and other, Lewis novels. We are invited to admire Carol's high-minded idealism at the same time we join in ridiculing her fumbling and largely ineffectual fish-out-of-water behaviors, for example. And, in the end, she joins other Gopher Prairie matrons in placid domesticity. (Nearly a quarter-century later, a similarly idealistic Ann Vickers ends her pilgrimage by accepting the same domesticity.) The boy can take himself out of Sauk Centre … ✍

DEPARTMENTS

Inquiring Minds

I'm writing to learn whether this story about Sinclair Lewis is true or apocryphal. It sounds untrue to me, and I could not find any corroborating evidence for it (though I also didn't try too hard). I thought I might ask the experts. It is found in the book *Heart of the Enlightened* (1986) by Anthony de Mello, which is a book of parables … some of which may be true, but others of which may not be. I like the story, and I'm interested to know who to truly attribute this to. Thank you for your time.

The story: A group of college students begged novelist Sinclair Lewis to give them a lecture, explaining that all of them were to become writers themselves. Lewis began with: "How many of you really intend to be writers?" All hands were raised. "In that case, there is no point in my talking. My advice to you is: go home and write, write, write … " With that, he returned his notes to his pocket and left the room.

[Editor: Thanks for writing. It actually sounds like Lewis although a quick search didn't give me this exact anecdote. Lewis did teach creative writing briefly at both the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of Minnesota. He said on more than one occasion that if people wanted to write they should go home and do so. He only taught five sessions of his creative writing class at Wisconsin, dismissing the students after the fifth class, telling them that he had told them everything that he knew about writing and that now it was up to them. Versions of this story are in both the major biographies, by Mark Schorer and Richard Lingeman.]

Sauk Centre News

Diane Leukam, in "Touring America from Home" (*Sauk Centre Herald*, March 30, 2017: 6), wrote an article based on Melia Robinson's "The Most Famous Book that Takes Place in Every State" (*Business Insider* April 2016).

> Of course I had to check what Minnesota's was right away and you might have heard of this book too: *Main Street*, by Sinclair Lewis. I wasn't surprised.
>
> I'd like to take a poll of every person over 40 that lives in the town of Sauk Centre to see what percentage of the population has read this book. We had to read it in a high school English class, but I'm not sure

> they still do. It's easy to take for granted living here, the impact this novel has made on American culture. Most of us just celebrate Sinclair Lewis Days with crazy days, a parade and all the other activities without giving Lewis himself much thought.

Here's a sampling of other novels connected to a particular state:

Alabama: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
California: *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck
Kansas: *The Wonderful Wizavrd of Oz* by L. Frank Baum
Kentucky: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
Montana: *A River Runs through It* by Norman Maclean
Oregon: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey
Wisconsin: *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference Roundtable

The Sinclair Lewis Writers' Conference, which was scheduled for October 2020, was postponed until October 2021. For a preview of the 2021 Writers' Conference, go to https://youtu.be/smhaUx-6FTg or https://sinclairlewiswritersconference.org for a roundtable discussion with Jim Umhoefer, Don Shelby, Jim Gambone, Bob Beverage, Ashley Shelby, Freya Manfred, and Thomas Pope, which includes information on *The Life and Loves of Sinclair Lewis* by Bob Beverage, based on a story idea by director Jim Gambone, and the new book *Becoming Sinclair Lewis* by Dave Simpkins.

Condolences to two Sauk Centre people who helped support Sinclair Lewis studies. Harry Hanson, a longtime writer for the *Sauk Centre Herald*, died in September at the age of 95. He taught American history and social studies in the high school for many years as well as coached golf, basketball, and baseball. He wrote sports columns for the *Herald* and moved into human interest stories, which sometimes included mentions of Lewis.

Irene Bromenshenkel Trisko volunteered for many different organizations in Sauk Centre. She was the treasurer of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation for many years, "not because she read any of his books or was a great admirer of the author, but because she liked the people it attracted" (*Sauk Centre Herald* Sept. 24, 2020: 6).

"One Man's Biography, Two Men Remembered" by Ben Sonnek in the September 17, 2020 issue of the *Sauk Centre Herald* celebrated the release of *Becoming Sinclair Lewis* by David Simpkins (see review, page 3). Although Simpkins died two years ago, the book was about 80% complete and was finished by his friends Jim Umhoefer and Sally Parry. Umhoefer, who was interviewed for the article, noted,

> This particular book was done as tribute to both Sinclair Lewis and Dave Simpkins; … the purpose is to shed new light on Sinclair Lewis in a way that was not done before and was also the passion project of Dave Simpkins, who meant so much to the community.

"I am very proud of David and very, very grateful to all of the people who put so much work into getting this dream done because it meant the world to him," said Linda Simpkins, Dave's widow. "It was a treasure of his heart to get this book done as a tribute to Sinclair Lewis whom he truly, truly did love as a brother."

Sinclair Lewis Miscellany

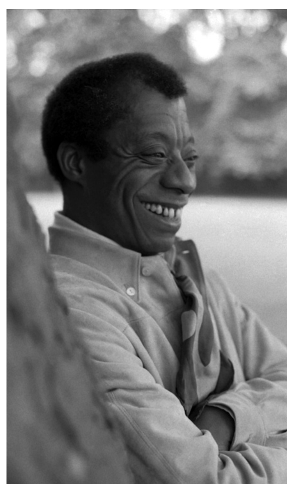
In Sinclair Lewis's 1926 novel *Mantrap* Ralph Prescott is suffering from a midlife crisis and jumps at the chance to go camping in the Canadian wilderness, to "Get out among real men and eat real grub and sleep on Mother Earth" (18). However, despite the idea of roughing it, he wants to get enough gear so that the trip won't be too rugged [and besides he's been told that there are guides that will carry most of the camping equipment, "cook the chow and clean the fish and put up the tents. And when we don't use the outboard motor, they do the paddling not us" (14)]. Although Lewis was poking gentle fun at folks who want to experience the wilderness, but not too much, he was ahead of his time in predicting the current craze for "glamping." A *Chicago Tribune* article, "'Glamping' Gear Lifts Outdoor Markets" (July 7, 2019, sec. 2:1, 4), mentions the many luxuries that might be too much, even for Ralph. These include battery-powered air mattresses, solar-powered lanterns and phone chargers, insulated coffee presses, and lightweight hammocks that allow users to sit upright and use laptops while swinging in them.

Joy in the Morning (1963), a novel by Betty Smith, best known for *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, is the story of the first year of marriage for a young couple, set in 1927. Like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Joy in the Morning* draws on elements

of Smith's own life. Annie is just eighteen, and travels from Brooklyn to the Midwest where her husband-to-be is studying law. Although she has little education, she is a voracious reader, reading books about the Midwest, including *Winesburg*, *Ohio*, *Sister Carrie*, and *Main Street*, to understand the part of the United States to which she's moving. She visits the university library "and took out *Babbitt*. She had read *Main Street*, had been impressed by a new kind of writing, and looked forward to reading this book" (47).

Annie hangs around a literature classroom, listening in because she's so fascinated. Eventually the dean tells Annie that she can sit in on the class because it's obvious how much learning means to her. When the class is assigned a short essay on realism and naturalism, using *Babbitt* and *Crime and Punishment* as examples, Annie writes an essay as well, and is singled out by the professor for her fresh point of view. "Here is what Mr. Sinclair Lewis did. He did not give Babbitt one big fault, and harp on that. No. He gave him all the little faults there are. He stacked Babbitt. Then he made fun of him. Mr. Lewis never felt sorry for Babbitt because Mr. Lewis had no come-passion" (100). (Page numbers from the HarperPerennial edition, 1992).

The New Yorker's Dec. 3, 2018 issue was an archival one with essays and reviews from a variety of writers over the decades. One of the reprinted essays was "Letter from a Region in My Mind," by James Baldwin from the Nov. 17, 1962 issue (30–39 in the reprint). Much of the essay deals with a prolonged religious crisis that Baldwin underwent at the age of fourteen, as he questioned the faith in which he was brought up and in which his father preached. However, he saw himself as saved and preached as a youth minister for three years. His awakening to the hypocrisy of organized religion echoes Sinclair Lewis.



James Baldwin, London, 1969

> Being in the pulpit was like being in the theatre; I was behind the scenes and knew how the illusion worked. I knew the other ministers and knew the quality of their lives. And I don't mean to suggest by this the "Elmer Gantry" sort of hypocrisy concerning sensuality; it was deeper, deadlier, and more subtle hypocrisy than that, and a little honest sensuality, or a lot, would have been like water in an extremely bitter desert. I knew how to work on a congregation until the last dime was surrendered—it was not very hard to do—and I knew where the money for "the Lord's work" went. (37)

In another essay from the same issue, "A Diamond to Cut New York: Vignettes of the Bohemian Low Life and the Literary High Life," by Dawn Powell, reprinted from the June 26 and July 3, 1995 issue (48–53 in the reprint), she lists the "novels I liked best" (52). Among them are Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Lewis's *Dodsworth*, and Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and *David Copperfield*.

Michigan Today, the alumni magazine of the University of Michigan, published "Arrowsmith's Inspiration: The Michigan Scientist Who Was 'Arrowsmith,'" by James Tobin in their June 13, 2019 issue. The article focuses on Paul de Kruif, an alumnus of the University of Michigan, who received his PhD in microbiology in 1916. De Kruif worked with Frederick Novy, a research scientist known for his "scientific integrity and zeal." Like Martin Arrowsmith, de Kruif moved on to a research institute. At the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research de Kruif worked with renowned German American biologist Jacques Loeb, before being fired for writing an article critical of the medical establishment. The article discusses the collaboration between Sinclair Lewis and de Kruif on *Arrowsmith*, including the development of characters, their travels in the Caribbean, and the controversy over authorship. It's part of a longer piece, "The Michigan Scientist Who Was Arrowsmith," which can be found at

https://michigantoday.umich.edu/2019/06/13/arrowsmiths-inspiration/.

From *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (2020) by Kristin Kobes Du Mez: "By asserting this militant masculinity in the postwar era, however, fundamentalists found themselves increasingly out of step with mainstream American Christianity, and with American culture more broadly. Authors like Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken made a sport of ridiculing the retrograde muscular Christianity of fundamentalists as further evidence that they were hopelessly relics of a time gone by."

A question on *Jeopardy!* on Thursday, April 23, 2020, asked the name of the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. None of the three contestants knew the answer. Sad that people who are smart enough to be on *Jeopardy!* still didn't know about Sinclair Lewis. Somebody connected with the *Jeopardy!* show must be a fan of Red because there have been quite a few questions about Lewis over the years.

Wickford Point, the first novel John P. Marquand wrote after the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Late George Apley*, focuses on the eccentric New England Brill family who live at Wickford Point and have for generations. Part of the novel is an academic satire, lampooning a Harvard professor who has written one well-known book and because of that aspires to be like "Professor Phelps of Yale" (3). Phelps was one of Sinclair Lewis's professors, a very popular lecturer, and remained a friend after Lewis graduated.

In *Wickford Point*, Bella Brill, granddaughter of a transcendentalist poet known as "the Wickford Sage," tries to impress her cousin Jim Calder with her acquaintance of a man named Howard Berg. "He knows a great many writers who would cut you on the street, and playwrights and producers. Howard Berg is a very intimate friend of Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Booth Tarkington, and James Branch Cabell" (113). Because Jim is a writer of fiction for popular magazines Bella looks down on his work. When Jim asks if Mr. Berg knows John Galsworthy, Bella says that Berg had lunch with him just last week. She does not seem abashed when Jim points out that Galsworthy had died five years ago.

Later in the novel Bella marries the novelist Joe Stowe, who someone mentions "looks just like Sinclair Lewis" (138). When Jim points this out to Joe, he is not amused. "'I don't look like Red Lewis at all,' he said. 'Do you think I look like Red?'" (138).

"Novelists were mythical figures to Willie—dead giants like Thackeray, or impossibly remote, brilliant rich men like Sinclair Lewis and Thomas Mann."—Herman Wouk, *The Caine Mutiny*.

In the March 19, 2020 online issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, one of their features was "11 Fiction Stories to Read during Quarantine,": "If you're stuck at home, take advantage of social distancing to dive into some of the best new and classic fiction from the *Post*'s archives." The introductory paragraph on the link:

> If you're stuck at home and have already resorted to organizing your sock drawer, take the opportunity to dive into some of the best new and classic fiction from the *Post*'s archives. We've handpicked contemporary fiction from new writers and classics by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis, and we promise they will spark more joy than those old tube socks.

The eleven stories are quite a nice variety, some from well-known authors of the teens and 1920s, and others more recent. Included were short descriptions and their publication dates. If you're looking for some reading suggestions, these are good ones.

"Wolf," by Lucy Jane Bledsoe, published on December 17, 2012: "As Jim tries to identify with the Yellowstone wolf trackers, both he and his wife have an awakening that changes their lives forever."

"I Want to Smoke Pot," by John Skow, published on January 27, 1968: "A personnel director spins a web of lies to satisfy his wife's mod curiosities."

"They Grind Exceeding Small," by Ben Ames Williams, published on September 13, 1919: "A miserly lender goes about his cynical existence until he meets a shocking, ironic fate."

"Melodramas for Depressed Persons," by Rolli, published on July 17, 2015: "A depressed writer braves gloom and doom on a sarcastic quest for catharsis."

"The Refugees," by Edith Wharton, published on January 18, 1919: "Two well-meaning caregivers mistake one another for Belgian refugees in 1914 London."

"The Ice Palace," by F. Scott Fitzgerald, published on May 22, 1920: "A small-town southern girl wants to be 'where things happen on a big scale,' but the dreariness of the North will test her resilience."

"Crack," by Myles McDonough, published on December 22,

2016: "A chance encounter between an Iraq War vet and an Iraqi immigrant awakens painful memories."

"Hobohemia," by Sinclair Lewis, published on April 7, 1917: "A Midwestern lumber businessman pens a pessimistic Russian novel to win back his poet lover."

"What's the Worst a Date Can Do?," by Michael McGlade, published on February 19, 2016: "After Aileen leaves him, Eóin copes by living according to a strict routine. Now Ciara threatens that routine just by showing an interest."

"Every Hero an Hombre, Every Wolf a Clown," by Doug Lane, published on February 26, 2016: "In a Texas town where luchadores and clowns just don't mix, one father risks exposing his double life to grant his son's birthday wish."

"The Life of the Party," by Irvin S. Cobb, published on January 25, 1919: "Mishaps and mayhem befall a wealthy lawyer that finds himself on the wrong side of town in an outlandish costume after a theme party."

Lauren Weiner's review essay, "'Under the Red White and Blue' Review: The Greatness of Gatsby" (*Wall Street Journal* July 17, 2020), celebrates F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and his intertwining of love and money in the American Dream. The review includes the provocative sentence "Though Lewis won the Nobel Prize, Fitzgerald is the one we love."

Find it online at ameliapodcast.com.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE
BOOK

Toxic populism isn't new. Sinclair Lewis lanced it mercilessly in this 1935 portrait of a Depression-walloped America as vulnerable to fascism as Germany was. Lewis's novel is the perfect chaser to "The Plot Against America" (the series, the Philip Roth novel, or both). Hungry for more? Dip into Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men" (1946).

LAURA MORTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Helen Verongos, an editor on the Culture Desk (of the *New York Times*) hasn't found her TikTok niche, but she embraces pop culture tips from her kids. Her daughter, Clare, 17, introduced two of these picks and actually endorsed a few (OK, one of hers).

Sinclair Lewis Scholarship —

Ralph L. Goldstein's "The View from Summit Avenue: Inspiration Point for Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*" (*Ramsey County History* 55.2 [2020]: 12–23) provides commentary on Lewis's life as a Minnesotan and, in particular, his connections with St. Paul, from taking his entrance exams at St. Paul's Central High School while a high school senior hoping to get into Yale University to living in the "lemon meringue pie" house on Summit Avenue in 1918 while thinking about the material that would eventually become *Main Street*. As Goldstein notes, Lewis was "always a Minnesota boy," spending time in Minnesota in the 1940s, including two months in St. Paul in 1947 while doing research for his historical novel *The God-Seeker*.

Philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, in "The Morning and the Evening Star: Religion, Money, and Love in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*" (*Power, Prose, and Purse: Law, Literature, and Economic Transformations*. Edited by Alison LaCroix, Saul Levmore, and Martha C. Nussbaum. Oxford UP: 2019. 95–124), argues that Elmer Gantry, despite being representative of mercenary religion, is a much more positive character than George Babbitt, who seems representative of the joyless and depressed state known as the "American condition." Using Dante's account of the "aspirations and errors of love," Nussbaum reads the character of Elmer Gantry as being full of life despite his flaws and preferable to Frank Shallard, who is punished for the sin of intellectual pride. Babbitt has a "deep sadness" because his energy goes toward moneymaking, leaving him lonely and longing for a love that seems only assuaged by the imaginary fairy girl.

Wheeler Winston Dixon's "Sinclair Lewis and the Failure of Hollywood" (*Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 36.3 [2019]: 202–16) discusses how the archetypes that Lewis created still have cultural currency today, but despite that, few of the films based on his writings were successful. Dixon provides a brief description and analysis of these films, noting that only the films of *Arrowsmith*, *Dodsworth*, and *Elmer Gantry* were successful in treating the source material with fidelity.

Ian Afflerbach's "Sinclair Lewis and the Liberals Who Never Learn: Reading Politics in *It Can't Happen Here*" (*Studies in the Novel* 51.4 [2019]: 523–45) is a thoughtful analysis of the novel as it became popular again during the 2016 presidential election. Lewis distinguished between fascism and liberalism through reading cultures, with Buzz Windrip's short pedestrian list of favorite authors contrasted with Doremus Jessup's reading of progressive journals and classic and contemporary fiction. Noting Lewis's ambivalence toward liberalism, Afflerbach argues that the novel is evidence of Lewis's "conflicted satirical imagination" with liberalism coming back but not in any smarter way than before.

Tales of Research Misconduct: A Lacanian Diagnostics of Integrity Challenges in Science Novels by Hub Zwart (Springer 2017, vol. 36 in the Library of Ethics and Applied Philosophy series) analyzes seven novels—*Arrowsmith* by Sinclair Lewis (1925), *The Affair* by C. P. Snow (1960), *Cantor's Dilemma* by Carl Djerassi (1989), *Perlmann's Silence* by Pascal Mercier (1995), *Intuition* by Allegra Goodman (2006), *Solar* by Ian McEwan (2010), and *Derailment* by Diederik Stapel (2012)—in terms of scientific misconduct and questionable research practices. Zwart provides a Lacanian reading of *Arrowsmith*, what he calls the "first real science novel." He examines the dialectic between physician and researcher, focusing on Arrowsmith's ethical dilemma when he is sent to St. Hubert to help quell the bubonic plague. He also considers Arrowsmith's relationship to Gottlieb who serves as mentor, father figure, and super ego. "According to Arrowsmith, what is considered integrity in the realm of basic research is regarded as misconduct in medical practice, and vice versa." An interesting approach from a scientific perspective, but with the heavy reliance on Lacan it is slow going.

Arrowsmith News

Because *Arrowsmith* treats a number of public health issues including a plague, it has been getting a lot of press. Below are some of the more interesting commentary. The *Scientist* also sponsored a national book discussion with Sally E. Parry, Executive Director of the Sinclair Lewis Society, and David J. Eisenman, Department of Otorhinolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore. The hour-long discussion is available here: https://www.bigmarker.com/labx-media-group/TS-Social-Club-Book-Club-Arrowsmith-by-Sinclair-Lewis?bmid=ceca98191443.

The Scientist Book Club: *Arrowsmith* by Sinclair Lewis

Arrowsmith by Sinclair Lewis was published in 1925 and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1926. Set in the beginning of the twentieth century in the fictional Midwestern state of Winnemac, the novel follows the education and career of the titular protagonist, Martin Arrowsmith, as he progresses through medical school, into private practice, and onto the front lines of a pandemic. We will convene to discuss the book, raise questions, share observations, and draw parallels between the fictional world of *Arrowsmith* and our modern, pandemic-wracked world on *The Scientist*'s brand new Social Club Facebook group and in a September 25th webinar attended by two special guests, *The Scientist*'s editorial staff, and members of *The Scientist* Social Club.

JAMA sponsors a fascinating website, *The Arts and Medicine* (https://jamanetwork.com/collections/44037/the-arts-and-medicine).

"Rereading *Arrowsmith* in the COVID-19 Pandemic," by David J. Eisenman, MD (June 26, 2020) connects the novel to current health issues and argues that it is just as relevant as ever (https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2767891?resultClick=1).

"'You should read *Arrowsmith*,' I have long told aspiring clinician-scientists I interview, as a way of getting them to think about which of the 2 career tracks drives them more. That recommendation is even more timely and broadly relevant now in the midst of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic."

Eisenman discusses how Martin Arrowsmith "finds himself drawn to research but gathers no moss as he tries out roles as a clinician, scientist, and public health specialist, seeking models and mentors at each turn and finding them all unworthy of his ideals," until he becomes a researcher at a well-funded private institute in New York. When he is sent to St. Hubert to fight the plague,

> the widespread death he encounters on the island forces him to choose between his ideals and identity as a scientist (studying the treatment first) and as a humanitarian and clinician (treating everyone). It takes what may be the only fate worse than dying in a pandemic to shock him into a direction, and it is left to readers to judge the merits of his choice, which in the end disappoints even Arrowsmith himself.

Noting that the novel was likely influenced by the influenza pandemic of 1918, Eisenman finds parallels with much of today's pandemic, comparing the fictional Almus Pickerbaugh, a regional public health director, for example, to a Twitter influencer, "believing and persuading others that 'because he was sincere, therefore his opinions must always be correct,' and focusing more on style than substance."

> But the delight and comfort we might take from seeing a send-up of our professional communities in great literature turns unsettling given the persisting challenging behavior and unknowns that traverse the century since the novel was written. We read of social distancing born of fear rather than concern for others, denial of the reality of infection, economic and political objections to quarantine and other top-down proclamations (chapter 31.3), and of distrust of unproven claims for the value of face masks in

influenza epidemics (chapter 21.2). The book tells of early therapeutic interest in antibiotic properties of quinine derivatives, and we read about the same rush to recommend them before completion of adequate testing (chapter 38.1–2) … It is indeed humbling to see history repeat itself without our having resolved some fundamental scientific unknowns or learned some of its most important lessons. Reading *Arrowsmith* now we are humbled, if not puzzled, that so many of the same questions remain unresolved.

The novel also tackles research ethics questions still relevant today, as the challenges Arrowsmith faced trying to maintain the scientific integrity of his clinical study during a pandemic have again become all too familiar. …

This conflict between learning and doing has always hovered quietly over clinical research, roaring back now in the COVID-19 pandemic, and in *Arrowsmith*, the commitment to scientific integrity is easier made than honored. Perhaps we should be reassured that we are rethinking things a century later, but reading the novel now provokes at least as much frustration that we have not learned from the past.

Arrowsmith *movie poster (United Artists, 1931)*

Despite these frustrations, *Arrowsmith* provides a long view of the challenge. Medical and scientific knowledge were far less advanced in the early 20th century, and yet both the real influenza and fictional plague pandemics ended. Despite many scares and some horrific outbreaks, we have not had such a widespread and indiscriminately transmissible outbreak since 1918. That historical perspective makes it possible to retain some optimism, even in the face of conditions we have not experienced in a long time and in the face of a halting or disorganized national public health response that seems as if it could have made things worse. That alone is a good reason to reread *Arrowsmith* now.

"With *Arrowsmith* (1925), a Nobel Novelist Foretold Our Mishandling of the Coronavirus," by Michael Hiltzik (*Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2020), agrees with Eisenman's recent *JAMA* article that the novel remains relevant. Inspired by Eisenman to reread *Arrowsmith*, Hiltzik writes, "It was a revelation." He then notes America's "curious relationship with Sinclair Lewis, the very first of our Nobel laureates in literature." Although he's not read as much as he once was, "he left behind, if not a particularly influential style, a galaxy of recognizable American types—the provincial middle-class conformist George Babbitt, the evangelical charlatan Elmer Gantry—and, less well-known but more relevant to our current healthcare crisis, the idealistic physician Martin Arrowsmith."

Hiltzik provides a summary of the novel and discusses Paul de Kruif's contributions, followed by commentary on his career. "It may be that Lewis's flat prose and straightforward storytelling fail to grip modern audiences. His first wife, Grace Hegger, observed in a 1955 memoir, 'It is significant that he created no school of writing as have Hemingway and Faulkner, Henry James and Flaubert. He influenced public thinking rather than public writing.'"

With enthusiasm Hiltzik writes, "A rereading of *Arrowsmith* today might revive a Lewis vogue. He set out to create a heroic character and succeeded admirably not only in giving us a three-dimensional hero with feet of clay, but also in placing him on a stage of outstanding scientific and medical verisimilitude."

He ends the essay with some parallels between Arrowsmith's work as a bacteriologist and epidemiologist and today's public health crisis. Arrowsmith endures resentment from citizens as he tries to eradicate tuberculosis and typhoid in a small city and is criticized both for telling them what to do and not doing enough: "he doesn't do a darn thing but shoot a lot of hot air about germicidal effect or whatever the fool thing is."

On the Caribbean island of St. Hubert, Arrowsmith encounters administrators who want to ignore the plague because it will ruin the tourist business. He also gives up having a control group for the vaccine due to a personal tragedy so is never able to determine how much the "phage" helped. "The very same conundrum confronts us now, as medical providers ply COVID-19 patients with untested treatments in desperation to stave off an infection with no established cure."

"Like all great novelists, Sinclair Lewis was writing about his own time, and teaching us about our time too. We should be reading him again."

J. Russell Teagarden's "Reading *Arrowsmith* During the 2020 Pandemic" from his May 29, 2020 blog post "According to the Art" (https://www.accordingtothearts.com/2020/05/29/reading-arrowsmith-during-the-2020-pandemic/) draws

parallels between the events in Lewis's novel and the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, which "make us wonder if the outcomes of pandemics will forever be determined by the contest between human folly versus rational and organized application of scientific methods, public health principles, and public administration fundamentals."

The essay includes a short plot summary of the novel, then pairs statements made by current US government officials as reported by National Public Radio, *Rolling Stone*, and *Mother Jones* to those made by officials in *Arrowsmith*. He starts with statements made on the plague-ridden island of St. Hubert by Inchcape Jones, the island's surgeon general: "[Lewis] mines for it in reactions to the epidemic itself, research methods proposed, moral choices faced, self interests revealed, and personal and institutional vanities exposed. The same reactions could be mined in the US during 2020 pandemic" in topics ranging from how many people are affected and how many could die, to not wanting to frighten the public and spreading rumors based on public relations concerns rather than science.

Dr. Arrowsmith also served as a public health official in Nautilus and "encountered reactions to protective measures he recommended that also correspond to reactions seen to recommendations for protective measures in the US during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic." He also spoke of the "value of face-masks in influenza epidemics" and received pushback not only from citizens, but from his boss who didn't want him to annoy people.

Arrowsmith also urges local farmers to take measures to protect against tuberculosis. The farmers cited their rights in responding to Arrowsmith's recommendations for protection: "This was infuriating, because none of their rights as American citizens was better established, or more often used, than the privilege of being ill. They fumed, 'Who does he think he is? We call him in for doctoring, not for bossing.'"

Teagarden concludes,

> Through this novel, Lewis speculates about what the responses to life-threatening infectious epidemics would look like in the 1920s, mostly based on the experience he creates for an island in the West Indies overwhelmed by the bubonic plague. He sees that the responses would come from a host of constituencies and interests, including scientists, public health officials, government leaders, health care providers, and the general public among others. He sees that many of the responses would be uninformed, irrational, dangerous, or only serve institutional or personal interests. Comparisons of these responses to those seen during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in the US give credibility to Lewis's speculations. Sound public administration directed at serious infectious epidemics will thus need to anticipate and overcome irrational and dangerous responses, otherwise the results will be what comes of human folly.

Patrick Coleman, from the Minnesota Historical Society, shared a Facebook video (https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=273641393804218&_rdr) in which he promotes their fall exhibit on *Main Street* (now postponed until spring 2021) and reads a section from chapter 33 of *Arrowsmith*, in which Martin Arrowsmith is sent to St. Hubert to help deal with the plague. The parallels with today are disheartening.

It Can't Happen Here News

Sarah Churchwell's essay, "American Fascism: It Has Happened Here" (*New York Review of Books*, June 22, 2020) is a lengthy and terrifying look at how fascism has lurked in American society for years (https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/06/22/american-fascism-it-has-happened-here/).

Opening with the quote that has been attributed to Lewis, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross," she notes that the saying may have come from James Waterman Wise,

> son of the eminent American rabbi Stephen Wise and one of the many voices at the time urging Americans to recognize fascism as a serious domestic threat. …
>
> An American fascism would, by definition, deploy American symbols and American slogans. "Do not look for them to raise aloft the swastika," Wise warned, "or to employ any of the popular forms of Fascism" from Europe. Fascism's ultra-nationalism means that it works by normalizing itself, drawing on familiar national customs to insist it is merely conducting political business as usual.

Churchwell draws parallels between Hitler's Germany and Jim Crow America, noting that W. E. B. Du Bois saw white supremacy as a form of fascism with the KKK as their storm troopers.

> As James Waterman Wise repeatedly explained, "the various colored shirt orders—the whole haberdashery brigade who play upon sectional prejudice," were

> "sowing the seeds of Fascism" in the United States. The Black Legion was an offshoot of the Klan that flourished in the Midwest, whose leader spoke of seizing Washington in a revolutionary coup, called the New Deal a Jewish plot "to starve the Gentiles out," and espoused the extermination of American Jews by means of poison gas dispensers in synagogues on Yom Kippur. Anyone wondering "what fascism would be like in this country" should look to the Black Legion, with its "odor of Hitlerism," its "anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-Negro, anti-labor platform, its whips, clubs and guns, its brazen defiance of law and order and the due processes of democracy," warned a widely syndicated 1936 editorial. "These are the attitudes and equipment of fascism."

She mentions political figures from the 1930s that Lewis drew on to create Buzz Windrip including Huey Long; Father Charles Coughlin; and Rev. Gerald B. Winrod, the "Kansas Hitler."

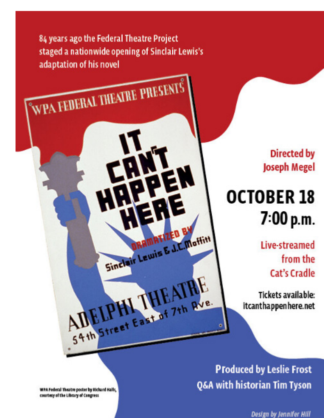
> That Lewis also viewed the Klan as a fascist movement is clear from an extended denunciation that opens the novel, in which Lewis rips through a genealogy of American proto-fascist tendencies, including anti-Semitism, political corruption, war hysteria, conspiracy theories, and evangelical Christianity, before ending on the "Kentucky night-riders," the "trainloads of people [who] have to gone to enjoy lynchings." "Not happen here?… Where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!" …
>
> "When Americans think of dictators they always think of some foreign model," Dorothy Thompson said, but an American dictator would be "one of the boys, and he will stand for everything traditionally American." And the American people, Thompson added, "will greet him with one great big, universal, democratic, sheeplike bleat of 'O.K., Chief! Fix it like you wanna, Chief!'" A year later, a Yale professor named Halford Luccock was also widely cited in the press when he told an audience: "When and if fascism comes to America it will not be labeled 'made in Germany'; it will not be marked with a swastika; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called, of course, 'Americanism.'" And Luccock went on: "The high-sounding phrase 'the American way' will be used by interested groups, intent on profit, to cover a multitude of sins against the American and Christian tradition, such sins as lawless violence, tear gas and shotguns, denial of civil liberties."

Churchwell ends by drawing parallels between the 1930s and now.

> Trump is neither aberrant nor original. Nativist reactionary populism is nothing new in America, it just never made it to the White House before. In the end, it matters very little whether Trump is a fascist in his heart if he's fascist in his actions. As one of Lewis's characters notes of the dictator in *It Can't Happen Here*: "Buzz isn't important—it's the sickness that made us throw him up that we've got to attend to."

Sarah Churchwell is interviewed by Ian Masters at https://soundcloud.com/user-830442635/the-deep-roots-of-fascism-in-america.

Teo Žagar, who is currently working on a documentary on Dorothy Thompson, created a promotional video for the local theater company in Barnard, Vermont, which was performing socially distanced readings of *It Can't Happen Here* across the state in October 2020, including on the lawn of the Vermont State House (https://vimeo.com/464878862). Barnard is where Lewis wrote the bulk of *It Can't Happen Here*.



Several other theater companies performed versions of *It Can't Happen Here* in October 2020.

In North Carolina, Cat's Cradle theatre did a livestreamed version of the 1936 script, with noted actor David Strathairn as Doremus Jessup. Here is the press release that went with it.

> It can't happen here.
>
> No matter what authoritarian designs this American president may possess.
>
> It can't happen here.
>
> Even though institutional norms have been trampled and processes by which our nation is governed have been corrupted. Even though in America Black brothers and sisters still cannot breathe free.
>
> It can't happen here.

We can vote so it can't happen here.

Join us October 18 in the heart of a battleground state as a scrappy band of professional and community actors livestream a Zoom adaptation of a play written when fascism was new.

Let's affirm resistance to authoritarianism together.

It Can't Happen Here tells the story of the fascist takeover of the United States by an American president. It was first staged by the Roosevelt administration's Federal Theatre Project October 26, 1936. Fascism and right-wing violence were on the rise both at home and abroad, more than at any time in our nation's history.

Until now.

Gather your quarantine circles, your book clubs, your civic organizations, your families and friends. Gather with members of a community committed to democratic ideals, social justice, and decency. Let's unite to celebrate an American vision borne of our continued fight for the full realization of our founding ideals. Equality. Justice under the law. Freedom.

United, we will win.

A free audio drama based on the Berkeley Rep's 2016 stage production of *It Can't Happen Here* was available on their YouTube channel from October 13 to November 8, 2020. A live Q&A with the creative team took place October 13 after the broadcast.

Much of the original cast, including David Kelly as candidate Buzz Windrip, were joined by Academy Award nominee David Strathairn as the liberal protagonist Doremus Jessup.

Written in 1935 during the rise of fascism in Europe, Lewis's darkly satirical *It Can't Happen Here* follows the ascent of a demagogue who becomes president of the United States by promising to return the country to greatness. In 2016, Berkeley Rep unveiled a new stage adaptation of Lewis's prescient novel; one week after that production ended, the presidential election roiled our nation. Now, Berkeley Rep reprises that production with the same director, but this time as a radio play in four episodes, just in time for the 2020 election.

A review of the HBO miniseries of Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) in the *Chicago Tribune* references Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. "Miniseries Imagines That It Did Happen Here," by Michael Phillips (Mar. 15, 2020: sec. 4, p. 2), draws parallels between the two works. "Like Sinclair Lewis's rollicking bummer *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), which imagined Roosevelt losing a second term to a Huey Long-style tyrant in populist's clothing, *The Plot Against America* takes the fascist impulse as an ever-present possibility." In Roth's novel and the miniseries, aviator Charles Lindbergh becomes president and anti-Semitism becomes institutionalized, as Jewish teenagers are relocated to Midwestern Christian families to "encourage" them to assimilate. "A year before his death in 2018, Roth told the *New Yorker* magazine: 'My novel wasn't written as a warning. It was just trying to imagine what it would have been like for a Jewish family like mine, in a Jewish community like Newark, had something even faintly like Nazi anti-Semitism befallen us in 1940.' He also said, in effect, that it *could* happen here—the 'it' imagined by Sinclair Lewis."

Lewis served as a touchstone for Roth in his writing more generally. In *The Patriot* (*New Yorker*, November 13, 2017, 74–77), a review of Philip Roth's nonfiction collection *Why Write?*, Adam Gopnik notes that Roth's work is

> rooted not in the duly intoned roster of high modernism, Kafka and Beckett and Joyce, but in a certain vein of American … regionalism—in a didactic democratic propaganda that was at large in the nineteen-forties. [Roth wrote,] "The writers … of America were mainly small-town Midwesterners and Southerners," includ[ing] in this group Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Erskine Caldwell, and Theodore Dreiser.

Mentions of both Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson appear in the fascinating "The Future of Democracy: In Every Dark Hour" (*New Yorker* Feb. 3, 2020: 20–24), by Jill Lepore. The subtitle, "In the thirties, democracy's survival was in question. What was our answer?," raises the specter of the "last time democracy nearly died." In the early 1930s, at the start of the Depression, infant democracies fell, Japan invaded Manchuria, and Adolph Hitler came to power. "'What Does Democracy Mean?' NBC radio asked listeners. 'Do

we Negroes believe in democracy?' W. E. B. Du Bois asked the readers of his newspaper column. Could it happen here? Sinclair Lewis asked in 1935. Americans suffered, and hungered, and wondered."

Dorothy Thompson, in response to Hitler saying that Germany had achieved a "beautiful democracy," remarked, "If it is going to call itself democratic, we had better find another word for what we have and what we want." Lepore explains that

> in the nineteen-thirties, Americans didn't find another word. But they did work to decide what they wanted, and to imagine and build it. Thompson, who had been a foreign correspondent in Germany and Austria and had interviewed the Führer, said, in a column that reached eight million readers, "Be sure you know what you prepare to defend."

Lepore notes that "It's a paradox of democracy that the best way to defend it is to attack it, to ask more of it, by way of criticism, protest, and dissent." She then quotes again from Dorothy Thompson. "The war against democracy begins by the destruction of the democratic temper, the democratic method and the democratic heart. If the democratic temper be exacerbated into wanton unreasonableness, which is the essence of evil, then a victory has been won for the evil we despise and prepare to defend ourselves against, even though it's 3,000 miles away and has never moved."

Lepore's full article can be found here: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/02/03/the-last-time-democracy-almost-died.

Jennifer Szalai posits Lewis's intentions further in "The Debate Over the Word 'Fascism' Takes a New Turn" (*New York Times*, June 10, 2020):

> And maybe it's telling that Americans have traditionally been so preoccupied with a nightmare scenario that has "the coverlet of European fascism draped over it," as Gerald Early put it recently in the journal the *Common Reader*. Early was reflecting on the novelist Sinclair Lewis, whose fictional depiction of Nazism in the United States—"with all its brutal and arbitrary violence, police state surveillance and unrelenting incarceration"—bore more than a passing resemblance to the historical reality of American slavery.
>
> Lewis had a "keen awareness of race in America" and was probably thinking ironically when he decided to call his 1935 novel *It Can't Happen Here*, Early writes. "He knew, as any aware American must, that it already had."

Here is the link to the entire article:

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/books/fascism-debate-donald-trump.html?searchResultPosition=1.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

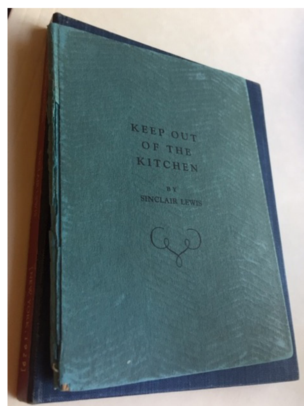
—Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently.

Randall House Rare Books
835 Laguna Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
Phone: (805) 963-1909 Fax: (805) 963-1650
Email: pia@RandallHouseRareBooks.com
www.RandallHouseRareBooks.com

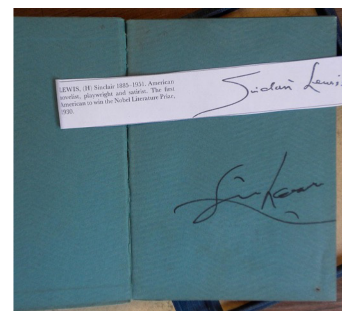
Lewis, Sinclair. *Keep Out of the Kitchen*. *Cosmopolitan*, 1929. $300.00

12mo, blue boards, lettered in black, in cloth slipcase. Spine chipped, else a very fine copy. Signed in ink by Sinclair Lewis.

An advance printing from the October, 1926 issue of *Cosmopolitan*.



Cover of Sinclair Lewis's Keep Out of the Kitchen, *1929*.



Interior signature with a note that reads: "LEWIS, (H) Sinclair 1885–1951. American Novelist, playwright and satirist. The first American to win the Nobel Literature Prize, 1930."

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