

# The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWENTY-SEVEN, NUMBER TWO

SPRING 2019

## LEWIS'S LASTING *CONOCIMIENTO*: ANN VICKERS IN SPAIN

*Ralph Goldstein*

While the cultural critiques within Sinclair Lewis's fiction have long been dismissed by his detractors as "journalistic" or "sociological," without finer literary merit, this quality of verisimilitude is for others a virtue. Such is the case in a recent article found in *Historia Social*, a journal published



four times a year by the Institute of Social History in Valencia, Spain, where Isabel Marín Gómez, a professor of Social Work at the University of Murcia, maintains that fiction writers can illuminate cultural periods in ways that historians cannot. As she asserts in "The History of Social Work in Contemporary Literature: Sinclair Lewis's *Ann Vickers*," analyzing

literary texts "offers an opportunity to make an unwavering Gordian knot between emotion and reason to explain social realities from a wider historical perspective." For Marín Gómez, Lewis's 1933 novel centering on social reformer Ann Vickers offers plenty.

Depicting Lewis's novel as "rooted in the vibrant changes in North America and Europe interweaving women's suffrage, feminism, pacifism, and social equality," Marín Gómez sees him sharing the social-critic mantle held by Charles Dickens, particularly in his indictment of the penal system. Social work's development along "an eminently feminine profile," going

## ZENITH ON THE LIFFEY: SINCLAIR LEWIS AND JAMES JOYCE

*Robert L. McLaughlin*  
*Illinois State University*

Sinclair Lewis and James Joyce might seem an odd pairing. While they were both fiction writers and contemporaries, Joyce born in 1882 and Lewis in 1885, they at first glance have little else in common. Lewis was born in rural Minnesota, Joyce in a suburb of Dublin. Lewis was one of the great practitioners of satiric realism; Joyce influenced several subsequent generations of fiction writers with his experiments in form, style, point of view, and language. Finally, Lewis, of course, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature; Joyce, in perhaps the most shocking literary scandal of the twentieth century, never won.

Looking more closely, however, we can find some important similarities. Each man considered himself exiled from his hometown but nonetheless continued to represent it in his fiction. Both were influenced by the end-of-the-nineteenth-century realism movement in literature. While focusing on Joyce's modernist experiments, we can forget that this is the man who described his ambition for *Ulysses* this way: "I want [...] to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book" (qtd. in Budgen 67–68). As he worked on the novel in Trieste, Zürich, and Paris, he continually wrote letters to an aunt in Dublin asking her to confirm various physical details of the city. More important than the description of the physical features, however, was the commitment to represent life as it is, without the sugarcoating, false nostalgia, or happy moralizing of much conventional turn-of-the-century literature. Both Lewis and Joyce reacted against movements in each of their respective countries to find virtue in the rural. Both Lewis and Joyce sought to reveal the corruption at the heart of their

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## A NOTE TO SUBSCRIBERS

To receive an electronic version of the *Newsletter*, which includes color versions of the photos and images, e-mail Sally Parry at [separry@ilstu.edu](mailto:separry@ilstu.edu).

## The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

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## *IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE: A DRAMATIC READING OF THE PLAY, A REVIEW*

*Jim Umhoefer*  
President of the Sinclair Lewis Foundation

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“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” George Santayana’s prophetic remark has been making the rounds on today’s national and international stage.

Mark Twain, in a twist of Santayana’s statement, reportedly said “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes!”

Whatever one’s political leanings, it is wise to study and learn from the past. That was one of James Gambone’s inspirations to produce and direct a dramatic reading of the play *It Can’t Happen Here* before a sold-out audience of 280 at the Sabes Jewish Community Center in Minneapolis on October 30, 2018.

Gambone is an accomplished multimedia writer, producer, director, and distributor from the Twin Cities. His award-winning documentary and short dramatic films and videos have been aired on PBS, local and regional cable networks, and distributed in Australia, Norway, and Germany. Gambone, like Sinclair Lewis, is concerned about rising antidemocratic activities occurring throughout the country and the world. Lewis, in his novel, offered a stern warning about the fragility of democracy. *It Can’t Happen Here* demonstrated how quickly things can move towards more authoritarian rule when people are divided, slogans begin replacing real dialogue, and cooperative action regarding social and economic issues fails.

Lewis, as usual, didn’t pull any punches in his novel. And, like his other literary themes, the message still resonates today. Maybe that’s why Gambone was able to attract twelve A-list professional actors from the Twin Cities who donated their time for this production—because they believed in its broader purpose. As an audience member at this dramatic

reading, it was enlightening and frightening at the same time to see parallels with the world that Lewis witnessed in 1935 and today.

Based on the success and audience response to this dramatic reading of the play *It Can’t Happen Here*, Gambone

is expanding on his effort over the next two years. Specifically, he will:

- Produce a 1930s-style, hour-long radio play based on Lewis’s novel and the two plays that Lewis created, distributing it to radio stations throughout the United States. The radio production will be rich in effects. This project has never been done before with the book or play.
- Contact national theater companies and urge them to put a dramatic reading of *It Can’t Happen Here* or a full production of the play on their 2020 theater schedules.
- Create a website for this expansion of the project during 2019 to launch January 1, 2020, and be monitored during 2020.
- Create and promote a podcast to explore the rise of authoritarianism and produce a study guide for book clubs and high school and college classes. The podcast would be available through the website created for the project.

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation of Sauk Centre is serving as the fiscal agent for Gambone’s project over the next two years.

To learn more about the project, to contribute funds, or to offer assistance with its realization, please contact Jim Gambone at: [JimG@PointsOfViewInc.com](mailto:JimG@PointsOfViewInc.com). ✍



### **MAIN STREET TURNS ONE HUNDRED!**

The Sinclair Lewis Society and the Sinclair Lewis Foundation will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Main Street* during Sinclair Lewis Days, July 16–19, 2020. A call for papers for the conference associated with the celebration will be sent out this summer.

## BOOK BURNING: NOT THE SPARK OF FASCISM BUT THE ASHES OF DEMOCRACY

Andrew Stevens  
Illinois State University

Historically, book burning has been a favored form of censorship by powerful, usually tyrannical, governments. The Romans notoriously burned down the Library of Alexandria, the crusaders frequently burned Islamic texts, and the conquistadors in the New World burned the records of the Aztecs and Mayans. Burning books goes hand in hand with domination and conquest. The 1930s saw a worldwide rise in fascism, and with it, a reemergence of totalitarian censorship. During the writing of *It Can't Happen Here* by Sinclair Lewis, book burnings were again becoming a favorite weapon of dictators, whether it was Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, or Franco in Spain. This was done to control what the populace read (and in turn what they thought), and to eradicate sentiments that opposed a regime. Burning books also doubled as a form of destroying a nation's identity, as books are intrinsically tied to the identity of a people. "There is not only a symbolic and ideological but also a strong circumstantial connection between the burning of books and the burning of men. The Nazis viewed their ideological and racial enemies and their books as ineluctably one, the living and printed embodiment of the 'un-German spirit' and the contemporary civilization they despised" (Hill 33). The Nazis needed to destroy the books of those they hated because they felt that their new political order was being threatened.

Book burning is not the start of fascism but a sign that fascism has taken over. It's a sign that a regime is now powerful enough to control the information available to the people, and by extension the people themselves. The German poet Heinrich Heine once wrote, "There where one burns books, one in the end burns men" (qtd. in Hill 9). No regime starts with book burning. Those in power practice more subtle acts before stacking the pyre. They start by gaining support and testing the waters for their ideas carefully. It is not until their cancerous ideas have taken hold that they feel safe enough to censor books and control information. Once the fascists are

this powerful, it is not long before they can begin to burn men, either metaphorically or literally.

This is true for the fascist Corpus in *It Can't Happen Here*. Throughout the novel, there is mutual resentment between the educated and uneducated, exemplified by the uncomfortable relationship between Doremus Jessup and his former employee Shad Ledue. It's also demonstrated in many of the excerpts from Buzz Windrip's campaign biography *Zero Hour*. In particular, Windrip's resentment against the educated is shown in his appeal to the uneducated in the epigraph of chapter 8.



I don't pretend to be a very educated man, except maybe educated in the heart, and in being able to feel for the sorrows and fear of every ornery fellow human being....  
...we haven't got time for anything in literature except a straight, hard-hitting, heart-throbbing Message! (Lewis 74).

This captures Windrip's stigmatization of the educated and his eagerness to speak for the common man who feels overlooked. He calls for a simplification of literature, urging authors to keep away from flowery language and pretentious themes. Instead, he wants writers to write for the common man, like himself. This type of discourse sets the tone for most of his tactics and decisions as crafted by Lee Sarason, "his secretary-press-agent-private-philosopher" (Lewis 62).

Before Windrip was able to order books to be burned, he worked hard to gather enough support to be elected. His followers turned a blind eye to many acts of violence. His personal army of goons, the Minute Men, shut down protesters at his rallies and events. On the day of his inauguration, he was able to arm the Minute Men, and then use them to enforce the passing of a bill supporting "Point Fifteen of his election

Book Burning *continued on page 14*

## WHAT WERE THEY READING THEN? WEEDS BY EDITH SUMMERS KELLEY, 1923

*Rebecca Pugsley  
English Graduate of the College of St. Scholastica*

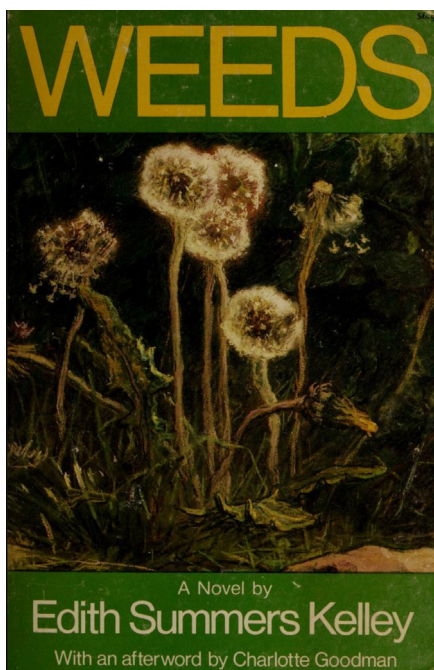
*An occasional feature on books that were popular when Sinclair Lewis was writing.*

*Weeds* was the very first novel written by Edith Summers Kelley, and it probably never would have been published without the help of Sinclair Lewis. He was engaged to her for a brief period of time, and it is obvious that they were very good friends who also happened to share a common interest in books and writing. He believed in her and encouraged her; even to the point of writing to his own publisher and advocating for her writing—entreatings them to publish *Weeds* for her. Though it wasn't as popular as Lewis's novels, it is a wonderful read that gives a realistic insight into the life of the tobacco farmers of Kentucky, particularly the lives of the farmers' wives and mothers. In it Kelley probes into the hardships that women endured on these impoverished tobacco farms—physically, emotionally, and socially.

Kelley drew upon her own life experiences, as she briefly lived on a tobacco farm with her husband, C. Fred Kelley, and integrated her own thoughts and experiences of that period of her life into her novel. However, unlike her isolated protagonist, Kelley was a voracious reader and writer with friends that included Floyd Dell, Upton Sinclair, and of course, Sinclair Lewis. She only wrote two novels in her lifetime, but it is clear that she was supported and encouraged by the very best—and her writing proves that she belongs with them.

*Weeds* begins when Judith Pippinger is very young and focuses mainly on her family, which consists of her father, mother, and five siblings. It is clear that though she is from a typical tobacco farm family, Judith is different from the other children. She is vivacious, a bit wild, very intelligent, and introspective. She loves the outdoors and the natural world and prefers to help her father with chores rather than do the household work with her mother and sisters. She excels at school and is quite intelligent, but instead of being the perfect pupil, she draws funny cartoons and goofs off. Farm life seems to have dulled everyone around her, even her siblings, but

Judith is confident, happy, at peace with her life and herself, and enjoys life to the fullest. Everyone notices it; some look down on her for it, some are concerned she has too much spirit for this kind of life, while others are relieved and happy to see that she thrives in a world where weeds are more common than blossoms.



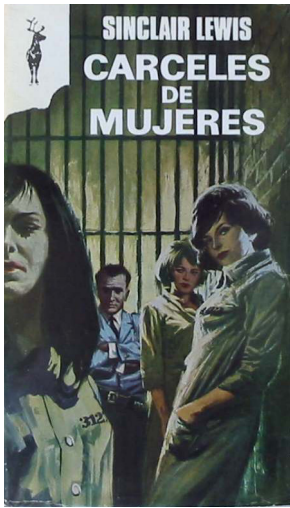
Throughout the novel Judith slowly grows older than her physical age. Her mother dies and she and her sisters are forced to take on more of the household responsibilities. Judith tries to help her sisters with the inside chores but quickly tires of being cooped up indoors and is always finding ways to go outside and help where she can without being confined in the house. Eventually she goes off to work for a neighbor and stays there for a couple of months until she earns enough money for herself and her family. She is even able to splurge on a new dress in anticipation of a neighbor's party. While there, a neighborhood boy, Jerry, falls in love with her. Though she isn't very interested at first, she soon begins to fall for him too—though she

doesn't give in easily, pretending she is interested in another neighborhood boy.

However, Judith eventually chooses Jerry and soon they are married, happily living together on a small farm. They are happy, hopeful, and optimistic about their plot of land and all the tobacco they plan to farm and sell. Before too long, Judith has her first child.

Life on the farm is hard on everyone—neighbors, family, and friends alike. They all face many of the same trials and tragedies. The tobacco's growth and quality controls almost every aspect of their lives. Judith has remained vivacious, strong, and optimistic up until then. However, with the birth

*Weeds continued on page 16*



beyond faith-based philanthropy to demand that the state tackle social problems, is Lewis's carefully documented backdrop, yielding for Marín Gómez a "literature of extraordinary richness of social work history, up to that time unexplored." Its panoramic vision depicts historical trajectories of social issues while at the same time attesting to the close relation between Lewis's life experiences and his novel's characters. She places him writing at a time when

the focus of social historians was polarized as "black or white, but [Lewis] sees the greys, what we are and what we could be." Crediting his Yale studies that revealed to him the contrast between the traditional Midwest and the intellectual currents of the East, his time at the experimental Helicon Hall, his generally leftist sympathies, and his earlier satirical critiques of conservative society, Marín Gómez views these involvements as part of what enabled Lewis to create "Ann Vickers with her virtues and her defects, with her values and contradictions, who reaches her goal of maximum professional recognition." She also acknowledges the meteoric rise of Lewis's second wife, dynamic journalist Dorothy Thompson, to whom Lewis dedicated the novel, as a concurrent influence informing his physical conception of Ann as well as the intelligence, decisiveness, courage, and strength with which Ann pursues her personal life and her work in the settlement movement and women's prison.

Validating the close relationship between history and literature, Marín Gómez cites the late Spanish novelist Rafael Chirbes, who proclaimed "literature that isn't *conocimiento* is nothing." His use of this single word, variously translated as knowledge, awareness, familiarity, consciousness, cognizance, acquaintanceship, fame, privacy, conversance, and light, helps to bolster Marín Gómez's claim that literature can explain, interpret, and narrate the present as connected to the past. Spanish historian Jordi Canal sharpens the point, affirming that "the attitudes, reactions, emotions or feelings that are hard to reach for the historian can be reconstructed or imagined through literature." Here Marín Gómez mentions some of Lewis's critical defenders and detractors. The late Italian poet and translator Cesare Pavese complained about "the poor invention of an author who only varies external circumstances reproducing

without changing the constructive and psychological patterns of history," but conceded that Lewis produced "a picture of real human beings who can be found in the U.S." Ever on the Nobel short list but never a winner, Jorge Luis Borges carped that Lewis was "an individualist at first, a socialist later, and essentially and irreparably a nihilist" without clarifying how he came to this perception of Lewis.

It was in Borges's Argentina that *Ann Vickers* was first translated into Spanish in 1947 under the title *La Rosa de los Vientos* (Rose of the Wind). Ten years later publishers in Spain reproduced the Argentine edition, changing the title to *Carceles de Mujeres* (*Womens' Prisons*), staying that way through the 1960s, then in 1971 issued it for the first time under the name *Ann Vickers* but sub-titled *Carceles de Mujeres*. During the 36-year dictatorial rule of Francisco Franco censorship affected all publications, and in the case of *Ann Vickers* Spanish censors took their cues from the book's earlier condemnation in the United States by the Catholic Church and where under the Hays Code the film version was deemed vulgar, offensive, and dangerous. The bowdlerizing distorted the novel's plot thread that includes adultery and Ann's abortion, but in the more open 1970s, coinciding with the international wave of feminism, the fullness of the novel finally reached its Spanish audience. As Marín Gómez explains, "Ann has many doubts and contradictions that impact her and without a doubt impact female Spanish readers who are immersed in a traditional patriarchal system and could see themselves reflected in her."

All in all, Marín Gómez lauds Lewis for imagining "the life of a social worker who represents the paradigm of the profession of that time," interweaving historic and geographic contexts within his fiction. With Lewis situating Ann's birth in rural Illinois, as distant as he was in Minnesota from centers of power and influence, Marín Gómez senses he knew well the impulses of young Midwesterners bent on "independence, determined to fight for humanity, fleeing the mediocrity conservative society offered them and into which they were born." Her appreciation of the novel comes amidst our currently frayed social fabric, increased inequality, demonizing of migrants, and lack of common vision. Yet it is heartening to know that Lewis continues to attract readers worldwide who recognize his work as having *conocimiento*.

## Notes

This article was produced with translation assistance provided by Dr. Barbara Comoe Goldstein. ✍

## IN PRAISE OF NEGLECTED NOVELISTS

Constance Lyons  
Fauquier Times (Warrenton, VA)

Novelists can be classified as the (very few) truly great (Tolstoy, Proust, Joyce, George Eliot, Faulkner for example); the near-great (D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Dickens, the Brontës); the very good; good; and the writers of trashy but inexplicably good reads. Among the good to very good writers are a number of twentieth-century authors, in their time famous creators of books that were at once popular best sellers and winners of prestigious awards, who are now, inexplicably, forgotten or nearly so. Their books are absorbing good reads, as well as intelligent, thought provoking, and incisive. They are available from the library and from Amazon; owners of Kindles can download many of them free, or almost so.

### **OF HUMAN BONDAGE BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**

Largely autobiographical, the novel recounts the life of its protagonist, Philip Carey, from childhood into his middle years when he finally attains emotional and professional maturity. The middle section is an engrossing study of obsessive carnal love. One of the most popular writers of his time, Maugham was a wonderful storyteller; he effortlessly spun out large volumes of brilliant short stories as well as a number of fine novels. *Bondage* was three times made into a movie, as were many others of his stories and novels (*The Razor's Edge* and *The Moon and Sixpence* among them).

### **MAIN STREET AND BABBITT BY SINCLAIR LEWIS**

Studies of Midwestern small-town life and conformity. These books were enormous best sellers; the word “Babbitt” even entered the English language as synonymous with a “person and especially a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards.” Lewis was an advocate for feminism; the heroine of *Main Street*, Carol Milford, is an early feminist forced to deal with the pettiness and bigotry of small-town minds. “I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous than Europe! I

do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women! I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith!” she says defiantly at the end of the book. Lewis was the first writer from the United States to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

### **THE LATE GEORGE APLEY BY JOHN P. MARQUAND**

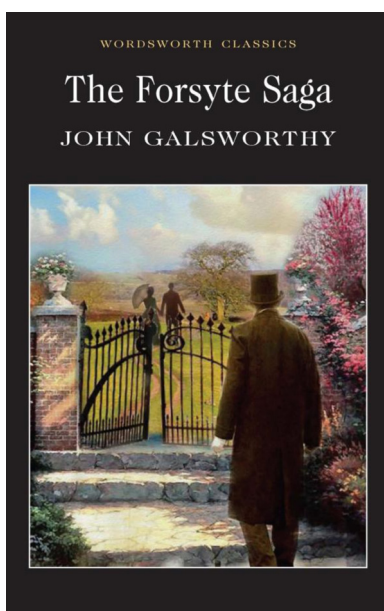
“The very rich are different from the rest of us,” sentimentously intoned F. Scott Fitzgerald, to which Ernest Hemingway sardonically replied, “Yes; they have more money.” Marquand’s subject is angst among the upper classes; his protagonists are riven at once by struggling towards the social heights to which they aspire and chafing under the restrictions imposed by the society in which they live and move and have their being. Marquand both satirizes his characters and respects and sympathizes with them. *Apley* won the Pulitzer Prize in the Novel (now Fiction) in 1938.

### **THE FORSYTE SAGA BY JOHN GALSWORTHY**

A series of three novels and two interludes, the *Saga* is a chronicle of a wealthy British family in the early 1900s. The family is keenly aware that they are “new money,” industrialists, and as such looked down on by those in the upper crust—those born to the stratosphere of wealth and position. The book was made into a movie and a television series. Galsworthy won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1932.

### **THE FIXER BY BERNARD MALAMUD**

A Jewish handyman moves from an impoverished village in the steppes of Russia to the city of Kiev, where he hopes



————— In Praise of Neglected Novelists *continued on page 17*



James Joyce

societies through a close examination of the faults and foibles of the middle class. A side-by-side exploration of the techniques and preoccupations of Lewis in *Babbitt* and Joyce in his story collection *Dubliners* will show similar considerations of compromised ideals, narrow minds, and encaged lives.

Lewis's and Joyce's biographical paths seem to have crossed only once. Grace Hegger Lewis, the first Mrs. Sinclair Lewis, reports that the two met when she and Hal visited Paris in September 1921, in the wake of the success of *Main Street*. The visit wasn't a completely happy one: *Main Street* hadn't yet been translated into French, and the expatriate artists who populated Paris, most of them under the spell of literary modernism, were determined not to be impressed by this more traditional writer from the heartland. Grace writes, "One of the Americans took us to Michaud's restaurant on the Left Bank and there we met James Joyce, with Mrs. Joyce complaining of the horror of four people living in one large room divided into bedroom, salon, workroom and *bathroom*, if ye could call it that, glory-be-to-God! The boy and girl asked questions about the Hollywood stars. Mr. Joyce was silent behind his dark glasses" (183).

If Joyce had anything to say about Lewis or his work, it's been lost to history, but Lewis occasionally commented on Joyce. Lingeman speculates that Lewis read Joyce (he reports that Grace ordered a copy of *Ulysses* from Shakespeare & Co) (233), and Lewis seems to have had a complicated response to the Irishman's fiction. Schorer concludes that Lewis had almost no esteem for Joyce and the other high modernists (274). Certainly, Lewis couldn't resist throwing a little shade at Joyce in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, when he said of the American writers living in Paris that "most of them [are] a little insane in the tradition of James Joyce" (17). In reviewing *Manhattan Transfer*, he made a point of remarking that he preferred Dos Passos to Joyce (Schorer 424). At least once, however, Lewis seems to have desired Joyce's approval. In a

December 27, 1924, letter to his publisher, Alfred Harcourt, Lewis suggested that an advance reading copy of *Arrowsmith* be sent to "James Joyce in Paris" (qtd. in Smith 168). Beyond this, there were times when Lewis defended Joyce, as in a December 1924 letter to Hugh Walpole:

They can co-exist, *The Cathedral* and *Ulysses*. Personally I would rather read the first than the second, but why should you or I dictate to others or even reason with them if they prefer it the other way? And I do not think you make valid your case against Joyce by asserting that he has neither nobility, fine feeling, nor any other restraint. [...] "Joyce [...] says, 'Let us look into life and see if it can not be made interesting as the devil without any of the customary and lying bedizenments with which the romantics seemingly have to smear their characters to make them tolerable.'" He could answer thus and otherwise. It seems to me the best condemnation of Joyce, if one wants to condemn him, is a curt "I find him uninteresting and unimportant." (qtd. in Schorer 410)

In June 1930 Lewis offered this measured response to a questionnaire sent by *La Grande Revue*:

The fact that in my own work I have perhaps, up until now, met with the populist demand to concentrate on depicting the popular classes of the nation, in terms, largely, of behavior, does not encourage me to elevate my own interests, or way of looking at life, into a rule for all novelists. I could not, for instance, write like Mr. Aldous Huxley, nor of Mr. Huxley's characters, but I find that *Point Counterpoint* is an admirable novel. And although I am inclined to think, with you, that contemporary novelists have become excessive in psychological analysis, sometimes to the sacrifice of all form, I bow my head to Mr. Joyce in his greater moments [...] (qtd. in Smith 289)

————— Zenith on the Liffey *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.*

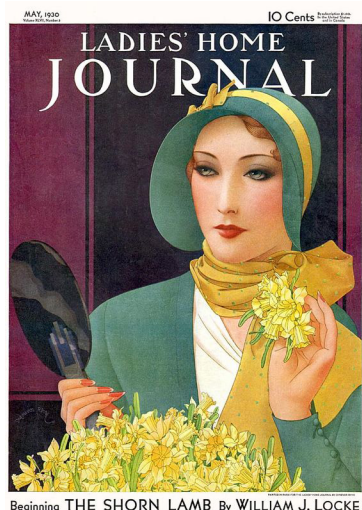
Thanks to Ted G. Fleener, Barbara Comoe Goldstein, Ralph Goldstein, Pat Lewis, Constance Lyons, Robert McLaughlin, Roberta Olson, Larry Parnass, Rebecca Puglsey, Andrew Stevens, Ed Tant, and Jim Umhoefer.



## DOROTHY THOMPSON AND HER ADVICE TO AMERICAN WOMEN

Sally E. Parry  
Illinois State University

Much has been written about Dorothy Thompson and her political acumen, as she reported on world affairs leading



May 1930

up to and during World War II. Her expulsion from Germany, her advising President Roosevelt, and her radio broadcasts both in the United States and to Germany, have been the subject of articles and books. However, her advice to women, through her monthly column in *Ladies' Home Journal*, has been given short shrift. Nancy A. Walker, in *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (Jack-

son: UP of Mississippi, 2000), rectifies this to some extent, as she uses Thompson as a touchstone for her advice to women on both international politics and the politics of gender. Focusing on American women's magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, Walker discusses the "the shift in cultural values that redefined American domestic life during and after World War II" (vii). This is evident in Thompson's writing, as she negotiates the changing nature of what it meant to be a woman in the mid-twentieth century.

The general editorial policy of women's magazines was against focusing too much on international events, preferring to leave that to the newspapers and radio. Eleanor Roosevelt and Pearl S. Buck engaged the question in *Ladies' Home Journal*, with Roosevelt in her column being cautiously isolationist (July 1941), while Buck, in May 1940, felt that women "could exert the moral force necessary to prevent war" (73). Dorothy Thompson, who started writing for *Ladies' Home Journal* in the late 1930s,

took a different kind of isolationist tack in the July 1940 issue. Responding to a number of letters complaining that women's clubs failed to discuss matters weightier than flower arranging and eighteenth-century English literature, Thompson defended the women's club agendas on two different grounds. One, which some readers must have found condescending, was that there was little point in fretting over

problems beyond one's ability to solve: "Most of the great problems perplexing the world are beyond the solution of the statesmen and economists, and are certainly beyond the solution of the Ladies' Sodality of Grovers' Corners." Thompson's second point was that the arts traditionally practiced by women made an important contribution to civilization: "It is a noble thing to save mankind, but it is also a contribution to humanity to be able to bake a good coconut cake or a first-rate apple pie. No civilization can stand more than one Joan of Arc at a time, but it can do with an almost unlimited number of good cooks." Sounding a note that would gain force during World War II and the Cold War, Thompson argued for the domestic as the ultimate antidote to war: "Anything that increases consideration for human life helps toward the eventual abolishing of war." (73–74)

Thompson here is somewhat hypocritical in that she was often accused of trying to solve the world's problems. Sinclair Lewis famously quipped that if he were going to divorce Thompson (and he eventually did), he would name Franklin Roosevelt as correspondent because of the amount of time Thompson spent advising the president.

She occasionally weighed in on postwar international issues, although *Journal* editors did not want this to be the focus of their writers' columns. Her January 1946 column took the form of a letter from "Mary Doe" to the United Nations Security Council asking them to do everything possible to prevent another war. In August 1950, she wrote "A Primer on the 'Cold War,' advising that America should be strong, but not bellicose or provocative" (149). At the end of the decade, in a December 1959 column, "The Challenge from Russia Is Not Communism," she wrote that both systems have increased national wealth, but that Russia believes that "the world of the future belong[s] to the Slavs." She was also concerned with the "alarming signs of physical, moral and intellectual decadence" brought on by capitalism (194).

Thompson's thoughts on women's role in society were often traditional. In the 1920s and 1930s there was tremendous interest in motherhood and children, with a number of experts encouraging well-educated and higher-class women to have

————— Dorothy Thompson *continued on page 17*

Sadly, we don't know where in Joyce's fiction Lewis's idea of the greater moments might be found. Perhaps my best evidence for a Lewis-Joyce connection is an ambiguous comment that Lingeman finds in the manuscript of "The Labor Novel": "Sure I'm a photographic realist. Like James Joyce—only a hell of a lot less so" (qtd. in Lingeman 232–33).

Before looking at the fiction, I want to emphasize that I'm not proposing that Joyce influenced Lewis or vice versa. Rather, I want to see what the differences and, especially, the similarities in their styles and thematic interests can tell us. The most important difference for us to note is that while *Dubliners*, Joyce's 1914 collection, presented contained, slice-of-life pictures of his characters at moments—what Joyce called epiphanies—that reveal a hitherto unrecognized truth about their lives, *Babbitt*, Lewis's 1922 novel, spends 400 pages exploring the title character's life and tightening and relaxing the tension between his money- and status-conscious middle-class existence and his underlying desire for something more. Nevertheless, the two authors' attitudes toward the urban middle class are strikingly similar. They both see the middle-class mentality as trying to reduce the universe to its own narrow worldview and to envelope the variety of the world into its own homogenized existence. Both authors also make use of similar techniques. Lewis and Joyce both possessed sensitive ears for the way their countrymen spoke, and they were masters at letting their characters damn themselves through their own discourse. In *Dubliners* Joyce rarely introduces commentary but lets the events and the way the characters talk about the events tell the story. Lewis more frequently supplies, often ironic, commentary, but in the places where I see similarities with Joyce, the characters' discourse does the work of critique and revelation.

Both Joyce and Lewis allow their characters to display their ignorance. We frequently see these middle-class good fellows use misinformation, half-heard and half-remembered from somewhere, to support their opinions. In Joyce's story "Grace" a committee of responsible businessmen calls on Mr. Thomas Kernan to stage what we would call an intervention owing to his alcoholism. Their plan is to get him to join them at a Church retreat, not an easy prospect, because Kernan is only a casual Catholic, having converted from the Church of Ireland in order to marry. The conversation drifts over Church doctrine and history, with the committee's arguments undercut by their own lack of knowledge of such things, lack of knowledge that they cover up with confident misinformation. At one point they talk about papal infallibility. Martin Cunningham begins:

—In the sacred college, you know, of cardinals and archbishops and bishops there were two men who held out against it while the others were all for it. The whole conclave except these two was unanimous. No! They wouldn't have it!

—Ha! said Mr M'Coy.

—And they were a German cardinal by the name of Dolling ... or Dowling ... or—

—Dowling was no German, and that's a sure five, said Mr Power, laughing.

—Well, this great German cardinal, whatever his name was, was one; and the other one was John McHale.

—What? cried Mr Kernan. Is it John of Tuam?

—Are you sure of that now? asked Mr Fogarty dubiously. I thought it was some Italian or American.

—John of Tuam, repeated Mr Cunningham, was the man. (169)

Mr. Cunningham is off the mark on his historical, biographical, and theological points, but except for Mr. Fogarty's brief demur, the group accepts his account as factual.

There's a similar conversation in *Babbitt*, at George and Myra's dinner party, when the men hold forth on prohibition:

Howard Littlefield observed, "What isn't generally realized is that it's a dangerous prop'ition to invade the rights of personal liberty. Now, take this for instance: The King of—Bavaria? I think it was Bavaria—yes, Bavaria, it was—in 1862, March, 1862, he issued a proclamation against public grazing of live-stock. The peasantry had stood for overtaxation without the slightest complaint, but when this proclamation came out, they rebelled. Or it may have been Saxony. But it just goes to show the dangers of invading the rights of personal liberty."

"That's it—no one got a right to invade personal liberty," said Orville Jones. (114)

Here, as in the *Dubliners* example, individual ignorance becomes collective ignorance as the listeners accept false information, and in the process reinforce groupthink and, perhaps more important, cement the group. Misinformation serves to confirm conformity and community.

A second shared characteristic is a tendency toward leveling, bringing the seemingly superior or exalted down to

## WHY WRITER SINCLAIR LEWIS KEEPS PAYING DIVIDENDS FROM PITTSFIELD, AND WILL FOREVER

Larry Parnass  
*The Berkshire Eagle*

PITTSFIELD—Winning the Nobel Prize in Literature fixed the fame of a writer from Minnesota—and no, we’re not talking about Duluth native Bob Dylan.

Eighty-seven years before Dylan grudgingly accepted writing’s greatest prize, it went to Sinclair Lewis, whose satirical novel *Babbitt* skewered hubris and greed in American culture. Lewis’s star was still rising when he used his Nobel lecture on December 12, 1930, to dissect his country’s strange fear of literature.

Then, in the 1940s, Lewis came to Berkshire County to briefly lord over Thorvale Farm on Oblong Road in Williamstown, a Georgian mansion with outbuildings, a tennis court, and, of course, a writing study. He rented, then bought. Thorvale sat awaiting Lewis’s return from a European trip when the writer’s star burned out.

Lewis died January 10, 1951, in Italy at age 65, his death attributed to alcoholism.

Today, provisions of his will continue to occupy officials with the Berkshire Probate and Family Court in Pittsfield, along with lawyers and accountants, who arrange for yearly payments from interest earned on the writer’s estate.

That duty gears up this week as a deadline approaches at 10 a.m. Wednesday [October 10, 2018] for anyone to object to how the estate is overseen.

Whether or not people keep reading Lewis, his name will continue to appear in yearly legal ads and on the local court docket.

“This thing is going to go on in perpetuity,” said John J. Martin Jr., the Pittsfield lawyer who helps JP Morgan Chase

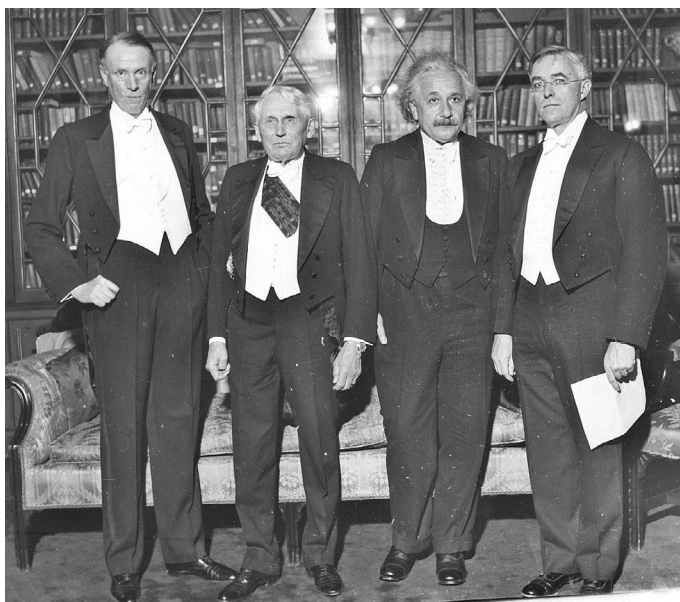
Bank handle estate business. Together, they are asking the court to allow the new distributions from Lewis’s financial legacy—including, at one point long ago, proceeds from the sale of Thorvale Farm.

It’s not much money, but because the payments draw off only interest, the estate will live on, regularly replenished by royalties.

In his will, recently unfolded for examination atop a table in the court’s cramped public area, Lewis provided for the care of his son, Michael Lewis, marking half of the estate’s value for his support until age 25, when he would get his half-share.

The will is just one of many papers growing brittle inside a thick folder bound with a fabric ribbon.

At the time of his death, the estate, not counting Thorvale Farm, was valued at \$211,361.04. In today’s dollars, that would



*Nobel Prize winners and guests of honor Dec. 18, 1933, in the Hotel Roosevelt in New York to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alfred Nobel. From left: Sinclair Lewis (literature); Frank B. Kellogg, former secretary of state; Albert Einstein, world-famous scientist; and Irving Langmuir (chemistry).*

————— Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 18*

### NEW MEMBERS

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

Sinclair Lewis Foundation  
Sauk Centre, MN

Terry Hill  
Ojai, CA

the characters' sensibilities and experiences. One example in *Babbitt* involves the visit of Sir Gerald Doak to Zenith. He is lionized in the small city, and the chance to interact with him is limited to Zenith's upper crust. A few weeks later, however, Babbitt runs into Sir Gerald in Chicago where, as they share a movie and then drinks in Sir Gerald's hotel room, the realtor discovers the peer is just a regular fellow. Afterward, Babbitt imagines taunting Lucile McKelvey,

You're all right, Mrs. Mac, when you aren't trying to pull this highbrow pose. It's just as Gerald Doak says to me in Chicago—oh, yes, Jerry's an old friend of mine—the wife and I are thinking of running over to England to stay with Jerry in his castle, next year—and he said to me, "Georgie, old bean, I like Lucile first-rate, but you and me, George, we got to make her get over this mighty-tighty hooptediddle way she's got" (248).

In Joyce's "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" a gathering of Dublin politicians debate how the Irish should receive King Edward VII during his proposed visit. Mr. Henchy argues,

—Now, here's the way I look at it. Here's this chap come to the throne after his old mother keeping him out of it till the man was grey. He's a man of the world, and he means well by us. He's a jolly fine decent fellow, if you ask me, and no damn nonsense about him. He just says to himself: *The old one never went to see these wild Irish. By Christ, I'll go myself and see what they're like.* And are we going to insult the man when he comes over here on a friendly visit? Eh? Isn't that right, Crofton?

Mr. Crofton nodded his head.

—But after all now, said Mr Lyons argumentatively, King Edward's life, you know, is not the very ...

—Let bygones be bygones, said Mr Henchy. I admire the man personally. He's just an ordinary knockabout like you and me. He's fond of his glass of grog and he's a bit of a rake, perhaps, and he's a good sportsman. Damn it, can't we Irish play fair? (129)

In both examples the speakers seek to take something different, other, and make it relatable by rhetorically insisting that it is "like you and me." This strategy seeks to absorb the other into our group and our groupthink, so we can better understand

it and need not fear its difference or, the more terrifying possibility, its superiority.

Another example of this desire to level and reduce can be seen in the characters' attitudes toward religion. In *Babbitt* the Reverend Doctor John Jennison Drew asks Babbitt and some other businessmen to work on the problem of the Chatham Road Presbyterian Church's Sunday School, which is only the fourth largest in Zenith and lacks "pep and get-up-and-go" (210). After researching a number of professional journals, Babbitt realizes that running a successful church is a lot like running a successful business, "Sort of Christianity Incorporated, you might say" (212). He concludes, "The more manly and practical a fellow is, the more he ought to lead the enterprising Christian life. Me for it!" (212). In Joyce's "Grace," when Martin Cunningham and the others convince Mr. Kernan to accompany them to the retreat, the climax of the story is Father Purdon's sermon, presented in indirect discourse:

He came to speak to business men and he would speak to them in a businesslike way. If he might use the metaphor, he said, he was their spiritual accountant; and he wished each and every one of his hearers to open his books, the books of his spiritual life, and see if they tallied accurately with conscience.

[...] But one thing only, he said, he would ask of his hearers. And that was: to be straight and manly with God. If their accounts tallied in every point to say:

—Well, I have verified my accounts. I find all well.

But if, as might happen, there were some discrepancies, to admit the truth, to be frank and say like a man:

—Well, I have looked into my accounts. I find this wrong and this wrong. But, with God's grace, I will rectify this and this. I will set right my accounts. (174)

Lewis and Joyce might be anticipating late twentieth-century neoliberalism wherein all things are valued only in terms of the marketplace. More than that, however, they are critiquing their characters' tendency to encounter the transcendent and the complexities of theological inquiry in terms that they already

understand, the familiar and functional discourse of business. Rather than broadening their worldview or asking them to look beyond their everyday, dollars-and-cents lives, religion as they perceive it serves to reify what they already believe in and justify the ways of the business world.

A third leveling strategy concerns art. In *Babbitt* there's a great deal of concern with social status, and appreciating art is one means of acquiring cultural capital. Art is thus valuable to the denizens of Zenith only to the extent it helps build such capital. For example, the main reason to support the proposed symphony orchestra isn't that it will bring great music and the educational opportunities connected with it to the city; no, it's just another attempt to put the city on the map, to compete with larger metropolises for reputation. Art that serves no such purpose is dismissed as impractical and unnecessary. Vergil Gunch makes just such a point about Dante: "I suppose Dante showed a lot of speed for an old-timer—not that I've actually read him, of course—but to come right down to hard facts, he wouldn't stand one-two-three if he had to buckle down to practical literature and turn out a poem for the newspaper-syndicate every day [...]" (126). Babbitt makes a similar point in his famous Real Estate Board Address:

In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man; and I, for one, am only too glad that the man who has the rare skill to season his message with interesting reading matter and who shows both purpose and pep in handling his literary wares has a chance to drag down his fifty thousand bucks a year, to mingle with the biggest executives on terms of perfect equality, and to show as big a house and as swell a car as any Captain of Industry! (182)

The novel offers an example of art that's approved by Babbitt and his fellows, a poem composed by their friend Chum Frink on the topic of alcohol:

I sat alone and groused and thunk, and scratched my head and sighed and wunk, and groaned, "There still are boobs, alack, who'd like the old-time gin-mill back; that den that makes a sage a loon, the vile and smelly old saloon!" (113)

This poem is invoked, of course, while George, Chum, Vergil, and the others are enjoying some bootleg gin. The poem is

valued because it's practical and intended for the regular guy (Chum's poems are printed daily in newspaper syndication), it echoes the official discourse about prohibition, and, most important, it allows the men to feel virtuous about what they believe while discounting their actions. In other words, rather than challenging what they believe or how they act, it allows them to be comfortable in their hypocrisy.

There's a similar example in *Dubliners*. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" takes place on the anniversary of the death of Charles Stuart Parnell, the great political leader who fought for Irish independence but whose career was ended when his party and the Irish bishops abandoned him in the wake of a sex scandal. While a bottle of ale sits near the fire so that the heat will open it (there's no corkscrew), one of the politicians, Joe Hynes, recites a poem about Parnell:

He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.  
O, Erin, mourn with grief and woe  
For he lies dead whom the fell gang  
Of modern hypocrites laid low.  
He lies slain by coward hounds  
He raised to glory from the mire;  
And Erin's hopes and Erin's dreams  
Perish upon her monarch's pyre. (131)

The poem goes on for quite a while and greatly affects the listeners. Beyond the poem's obvious problems—near rhymes, troubled meter, clichéd images—lies its content, on which Joyce makes an unmistakable comment: to punctuate the end of the poem, the ale bottle finally opens with a loud "Pok!" (132), like the poem, so much hot air. The poem allows the listeners to align themselves with Parnell against those who betrayed him, but the entire story has demonstrated their venal mendacity. They are no Parnells, but the poem allows them to believe they are, as in *Babbitt*, making them comfortable with their hypocrisy.

Lewis and Joyce, then, share an understanding of and a method of critiquing their middle-class contemporaries. Rather than expanding their minds to engage the complexities of the universe, these characters insist on reducing the universe to fit inside the narrow confines of what they already know, what they already believe, what they already can conceive of. Babbitt's tragedy is that while he senses that there is something beyond these narrow confines, he lacks the guidance to find

it, and so he flails wildly for a bit and then submerges back into conformity. The same year that Lewis published *Babbitt*, Joyce published *Ulysses*, in which his narrative technique goes far beyond what he had done in *Dubliners* and, indeed, beyond what anybody had done. Still, the center of that novel, like *Babbitt*, is the story of two questing consciousnesses, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, who long to move beyond the limitations of turn-of-the-century Irish society. Both authors, though their techniques continued to diverge, were committed to an art that explodes such limits and offers the possibility for more.

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### Book Burning *continued from page 4*

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platform—that he should have complete control of legislation and execution, and the Supreme Court be rendered incapable of blocking anything that it might amuse him to do” (Lewis 162). When Congress refused to pass the bill, the Minute Men arrested over one hundred congressmen and charged them with “inciting to riot” (Lewis 163). When the jails became full, the Corpos set up concentration camps. Once Windrip was truly in power his minions were able to destroy books and control the media.

Book burning is an example of how the rhetoric of the Corpos is turned into action. The endgame isn’t to burn books, but to stop resistance by attacking the truth and to ruin the lives of those who oppose them. In order to keep their movement alive, the Corpos depend on the support of the uneducated and angry, and so need to dispose of any text that might be a threat. We see this reinforced when Shad Ledue is raiding Jessup’s book collection and finds his Dickens collection. He asks Emil Staubmeyer, who’s assisting him on the raid, “That guy Dickens—didn’t he do a lot of complaining about conditions—about schools and the police and everything?” (Lewis 267). Dickens’s ideology seemed to threaten the values and objectives of the Corpos, so the books had to be burned. Although Ledue has a certain personal malice behind the burning of these particular books, because Jessup prizes them, the official reason had to do with Dickens’s inability to remain complacent, but rather raise questions about inequities in society.

In the same raids in which Jessup’s books were burned, Karl Pascal’s books were seized. Rather than burning them

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with the others, the police held his books at the police station as evidence of treason. When Pascal arrived at the burning of Jessup’s books, Ledue ordered him to be taken away, and he became the second person to be held in the Trianon Concentration Camp (Lewis 269). Knowing how Lewis named his characters, I doubt Karl Pascal’s name is accidental. I find it interesting that he shares a name with Karl Marx and Blaise Pascal. Both are celebrated philosophers: Marx, the father of communism, and Pascal, the theologian—two intellectuals whose ideas are inimical to the Corpos state. Though he wasn’t literally burned, the fate of Pascal is emblematic of the punishment of those who even think about challenging the regime.

A broader problem than book burning within this government is the eradication of intellectualism. John Milton wrote, “who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God’s image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself” (qtd. in Pugliese 47). Fascist regimes try to control the truth through the dissemination of false information, as well as intimidating people into believing lies.

[F]ascist elements use similar means to gain and retain power; all use, for instance, a strong military and police and all gain the consistent approval of religious leaders. However, ... the media are the most effective agents for the public’s acceptance of the sub-

sequent encroachments on their freedoms, and while the threat of a police officer's billy club and eternal perdition are powerful inducements to submit, so are the techniques of dissimulation available through the media. (Jacobi 89)

Under the supervision of the Secretary of Education, Dr. Hector Macgoblin, the Corpos convert the school system to serve their purposes. We're told that a Corpo education is one that omits "all snobbish tradition" (Lewis 251); subjects such as classical languages, literature, archaeology, philology, and "all history before 1500—except for one course which showed that, through the centuries, the key to civilization had been the defense of Anglo-Saxon purity against barbarians" (Lewis 251) were to be eliminated. The Corpos reject disciplines seen as highbrow and sophisticated in favor of those that fit their agenda and keep the students from thinking too much.

And no scholastic institution, even West Point, had ever so richly recognized sport as not a subsidiary but a primary department of scholarship. All the more familiar games were earnestly taught, and to them were added the most absorbing speed contests in infantry drill, aviation, bombing, and operation of tanks, armored cars, and machine guns. All of these carried academic credits, though students were urged not to elect sports for more than one third of their credits. (Lewis 252)

This is clearly an education devoid of learning. Instead, the schools prepare young men to be future Minute Men.

Similar to the education provided in *It Can't Happen Here*, the Nazis used schools to persuade the next generation of their ideology.

Under these conditions of ruling interests in schooling and its function in maintaining the State, as well as the competing interests in reform on the part

of the labour movement and reformist pedagogies, the Weimer Republic is exemplary of the newly formed mediation between political culture and the education system. (Sünker 5)

The pedagogy and curriculum were replaced with an overtly political one. The educational institution became one aligned with the ruling interests.



*A Nazi book burning, similar to those portrayed in It Can't Happen Here.*

Doremus Jessup's grandson, David, is a demonstration of this education in action. David is regularly depicted to be an ordinary and kind boy. He seems to be well behaved and love his family. This carefree and wholesome description of him makes it all the uglier when he is given a Minute Man uniform by his uncle Philip. Sissy is furious at her brother and wants to yell at him. "She earnestly desired to, when she found that he

had brought David an M.M. uniform, and when David put it on and paraded about shouting, like most of the boys he played with, 'Hail Windrip!'" (Lewis 404). This passage is startling and entirely reminiscent of the Hitler Youth. It's disturbing to see that not only can a nice boy like David be taught to romanticize the Minute Men, but we learn that this is common playground behavior. Rather than playing cops and robbers, children in Windrip's America play Minute Men, an effect of the revised and bastardized schooling the children receive.

We also see this tactic of fear employed when the government deals with the media, shutting down those opposed to the government, keeping the public ignorant and afraid. "To the journalist Doremus and his family it was not least interesting that among these imprisoned celebrities were so many journalists ... men who differed grotesquely except in their common dislike of being little disciples of Sarason and Macgoblin" (Lewis 264). This squashing of dissent directly affects Doremus even more than most of the changes around him because he himself is a journalist. The Corpos not only stop information against the regime from being spread, but support

those like newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst who actively worked with the Windrip regime. His media empire served as propagandists for the Corpus, which had dangerous and far-reaching effects.

His government conducts business in near-total secrecy, acting to suppress or control the press while the right-wing Hearst media serve as propaganda outlets for the Windrip administration, lavishing praise upon the president and all his works, including his plans for a preemptive war on Mexico. As he explains, there is no need for a free and informed press, run by “those smart alecks in New York and Washington,” because “it is not fair to ordinary folks—it just confuses them—to try to make them swallow all the true facts that would be suitable to a higher class of people.” (Conason 6–7)

By getting the people to unconditionally side with him, Windrip is able to make the media seem like the enemy. He says that they only serve to confuse, and he is the one to trust and believe in.

Eventually the Corpus’ determination to allow only certain information to be made public starts to be undone by the New Underground. The NU’s prime objective is to spread truthful information and keep people aware of the wrongdoings of the tyrannical Windrip and his henchmen. The members of the NU write articles and disseminate them to expose what Windrip and his team are doing right under their noses—or even to their faces. It turns out that information is one of the strongest weapons they have, and it is what Windrip fears most. We see that violent, physical protests are easily shut down

with the force of the Minute Men, but this quiet infiltration of knowledge is more dangerous, and ultimately contributes to better prepared rebel movements.

Within the context of the novel, book burning marks a culmination of the fascist efforts of Buzz Windrip and the Minute Men. It is the pinnacle of their anti-intellectual crusade and has a deep impact on Doremus Jessup, moving him from complacency to action. Book burning is not the start of fascism—it is the final nail in the coffin of democracy.

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of her first child things become much harder. She no longer has as much time to help her husband with the tobacco. Both of them work long, hard days, and Judith starts to resent being cooped up in the house and chained to the baby. She loves her child but finds she is no longer able to enjoy as much time outdoors doing the things she loved most.

Time passes and Judith has more babies. Life becomes much harder: the tobacco does not fetch enough money and it becomes harder and harder to care for the children, herself, Jerry, and the farm. She becomes depressed at times but cannot give up. She has a secret affair in the hopes that she can spice up her life and return to the vivacious, joy-filled young girl she used to be. Her husband has an affair as well as a way

to hurt Judith back, but eventually they decide to make up and get on with their lives—their only hope of survival is if they work together.

However, Judith has changed; she realizes that she is no longer a carefree, happy child or a vivacious, joy-filled young lady. She is resigned to her role in life as a wife and mother, knowing full well that this role has diminished her spirit and will continue to do so. The pressures of farm life, the social expectations of her, and the constant worry and emotional toll of keeping up her household have finally broken her.



Weeds continued from page 16

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*Weeds* is a wonderful read that paints a realistic portrayal of rural farm life as well as provides powerful insights into the lives of women and the trials they faced emotionally, socially, and economically. Throughout the novel, *Weeds*

reveals a common theme—the universal struggle of survival. It is a well-written, beautifully worded story that captures your attention and takes you on a journey as only the best novels can do. ✍

In Praise of Neglected Novelists continued from page 7

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to find work and lift himself out of poverty. Instead, after a small initial success, he is framed and imprisoned for the ritual murder of a Russian child. This is a riveting, harrowing tale of degradation, courage, and redemption; in 1967 it won both the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and the National Book Award. It was made into a movie starring the late great actor Alan Bates. Malamud was one of a trio of acclaimed Jewish writers working in the mid-1950s, and the least remembered. (The others are Phillip Roth, arguably the best known and in my opinion the least gifted, and Saul Bellow.)

### **THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH BY SAUL BELLOW**

At once a picaresque novel with a raffish hero rambling his way toward maturity, and a bildungsroman, tracing the development of its protagonist through a series of encounters,

occupations, and relationships from boyhood to manhood. It was the winner of the 1954 National Book Award for Fiction; Bellow eventually won the Nobel Prize. *Henderson the Rain King* also deserves attention. Bellow's later work became so intricately cerebral as to be almost unreadable; when this was pointed out to him, he is said to have responded, "So?"

Other almost forgotten writers of good reads, eminently worthy of attention, are Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*; Ellen Glasgow, *Barren Ground*, *Vein of Iron*, and *The Sheltered Life*; Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, *The End of the Affair*, beside thrillers like *Brighton Rock* and *The Quiet American*; Henry Roth, for one little-known but magnificent novel, *Call It Sleep*; and C. P. Snow, *Strangers and Brothers*, an eleven-volume series that explores Britain's "corridors of power."

Email the writer at [lyonsconstance@gmail.com](mailto:lyonsconstance@gmail.com) ✍

Dorothy Thompson continued from page 9

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more children, as this would improve the country. This concern for eugenics was a troubled one, as it seemed connected to ideology about racial purity that National Socialism was touting. This topic about whether the "right women" were reproducing appeared in numerous women's magazine in the late 1930s.

In her inaugural May 1937 monthly column in *Ladies' Home Journal*, Dorothy Thompson warned middle-class women against refusing to have children in order to afford more of life's luxuries. Thompson noted with alarm that birth rates in countries such as Sweden and England were falling and cited a professor of anthropology who believed that "humane measures to keep alive the unfit and prolong old age—while the birth rate declines—were increasing the numbers of the inferior, giving us an old population and diminishing the level of general intelligence." In her preference for the middle-class values of *Journal* readers, Thompson did not agree with Anderson and Goodenough that the top of the social scale produced

the best citizens; instead, she asserted that the people "whose achievements adorn our society" do not come from either "wealthy homes" or "deeply impoverished ones" but instead come from middle-class homes with "cheerful, robustly sensible parents." A dozen years later, Thompson was still concerned that the proper people were failing to have enough children, but she was less worried about the cultural pursuit of luxuries and—reflecting the changes caused by World War II—more preoccupied with what she terms the "so-called 'emancipation' of women." Thompson's starkly titled "Race Suicide of the Intelligent," published in the May 1949 *Journal*, chided educated, childless women for "violating their own biological natures." Whereas "the intelligent of the nineteenth century used their relative prosperity to feed, house and educate substantial families," Thompson was distressed

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Dorothy Thompson continued on page 18

Dorothy Thompson *continued from page 17*

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that in the middle of the twentieth century, “every year thousands of women leave our colleges and universities determined to make careers for themselves. They marry, but find many reasons to postpone having children.” While Thompson devoted much of her article to outlining the negative effect that having few or no children would have on the women themselves—“psychoneurosis,” unhealthy (because late-born) children, loss of the mother-child bond, disappointed husbands, and the loneliness of the only child—it is clear that her real concern was the diminishment of a ruling elite who can “leaven and lift the level of the masses, who never can lift themselves alone.” (115)

Thompson’s pronouncements could also be seen as hypocritical, in the do as I say, not as I do category. Thompson had one child, Michael, with Sinclair Lewis, when she was 37.

Her conservative values were on display in a June 1955 column entitled “Can Women be Ladies?” Decrying an advertisement about a foundation garment to give women “the ladylike look,” Thompson discussed the terms “lady” and “gentleman,” acknowledging that women tended to be portrayed as either better or worse than men. Her behavioral advice for ladies seems very old-fashioned: “They will wear shingly washed hair, simply dressed; they will throw out the musky perfumes and return to mignonette [a garden annual with fragrant, whitish flowers] and Parma violets; they will enhance their charms by the most subtle concealment of them; they will lower their voices; they will retreat from advances; they will assume a mien of gentle pride, mind their manners, and be known for their sexual morality and their good works” (140). Walker notes that this advice would have been just as appropriate in the nineteenth century.

Thompson seemed a little more progressive in her September 1952 column “The Employed Woman and Her Household,” where she notes as absurd the societal expectation that women who hold full-time jobs should do all the housework as well.

“Our society is still organized on the assumption that the conduct of the home is every woman’s natural function, [but] no one has expected men to work from nine to five in an office and then come home and cook a dinner for four or five people; or get up hours before time to go to work in order to sweep, dust, make beds and prepare breakfast” (206). The conflict between office work and housework was visited again in an August 1953 column, “What Is Wrong with American Women?” Her answer was nothing, “their environment is not yet adjusted to their needs” (157). She did address how women feel torn between their duty as wives and mothers, and a desire to work outside the home, even proposing daycare centers in workplaces. In 1957, she was one of thirteen prominent women interviewed for “Why I Like Being a Woman,” and the only one refusing to acknowledge significant differences between sexes, “the highest satisfactions are happily open to persons of both sexes” (157). Others interviewed included anthropologist Margaret Mead, actress Arlene Dahl, and president of Wellesley College Mildred McAfee Horton. Author Betty MacDonald sarcastically noted how lucky she was that as a woman she was expected to clean up after dinner parties.

In a column on women’s education in May 1960 Thompson wrote in favor of women’s higher education, even when only a small percentage would have full-time work outside the home. Part of the reason was that there was little tax deductibility for childcare expenses, so it cost too much to work. She encouraged her readers to work to change policies that hurt them. “Women have had the vote for over forty years and their organizations lobby in Washington for all sorts of causes but why, why, why don’t they take up their *own* causes and obvious needs” (205–06).

Thompson’s columns provide insight into her thoughts on the political and cultural scene of the time, but for a very specific audience—middle-class, primarily white American women. A fascinating research project or dissertation is waiting to be done on the sweep of these columns written between 1937 and 1961. ✍

Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 11*

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be worth \$2,049,762, according to an inflation calculator. The adventurous writer preferred safe stocks, especially industrials and utilities. Though only a recent arrival in the Berkshires, Lewis, as an investor, seemed to favor the General Electric Co. He held GE shares worth about \$27,000—or \$261,000 in today’s dollars.

At the bottom of one page in the first tally, completed in September 1951, executors noted that Wilson Perkins still owed Lewis \$100. The documents don’t say why.

An early audit estimated the farm’s value at \$50,000. When the 720-acre property went up for sale, advertised in a fancy brochure produced by a New York City broker, it was listed at \$65,000—the equivalent of \$630,365 today. A 1946 article in *The Eagle* said Lewis had bought the tract for \$45,000.

Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 19*

Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 18*

The writer invested heavily in renovations at the farm but was soon restless and ready to move on. In 1949, before leaving for Europe, Lewis confirmed to the paper that the farm was for sale, listed at \$75,000.

Lewis's will, signed October 4, 1948, and witnessed by three Williamstown residents, is perhaps Lewis's least-known work. But thanks to the court, there's no forgetting its contents.

One-fourth of the estate's value went in four equal shares to friends Marcella Powers Amrine, Carl Van Doren, Mrs. Sewell Haggard (her first name lost in the mists of time) [her first name was Edith and she was Lewis's longtime literary agent] and to one other: Joseph Hardrick, whom Lewis identified as "my faithful driver."

Lewis gave his papers to Yale University, his alma mater, along with "pictures of every sort and description."

Today, the shares continue to flow to their descendants, with checks mailed to people in Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Louisiana, and Washington, DC.

Lewis also gave portions of what he had amassed through his successful writing career, which included a stint writing for Hollywood, to the NAACP and the National Urban League.



*Sinclair Lewis sits with actress Hedy Lamarr in this undated United Press Association photo.*

## WRITER'S SPIRIT

One of Lewis' novels, *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), was based on the real case of an African American doctor from Detroit who was barred from buying a house in a white section of the city. Lewis is said to have worked on the book in Williamstown; today, it is considered by some to be an early instance of a best-selling white writer raising issues of racial justice.

In his first news conference after getting the nod in 1930 from the Nobel committee, one journalist needled the writer about what aspect of American life he planned to criticize next.

The Nobel committee had lauded the writer for "his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humor, new types of characters."

According to one biography, Lewis played dumb that day. But when he delivered his Nobel lecture later that year, he pulled no punches.

"[I]n America, most of us—not readers alone, but even writers—are still afraid of any literature which is not a glorification of everything American, a glorification of our faults as well as our virtues," Lewis said. He called the United States "the most contradictory, the most depressing, the most stirring, of any land in the world today."

One of his admirers, the journalist H. L. Mencken, hardly a shrinking violet himself when it came to critiquing American foibles, said of Lewis: "[If] there was ever a novelist among us with an authentic call to the trade... it is this red-haired tornado from the Minnesota wilds."

Historian and journalist William L. Shirer, a Lewis friend with Berkshires connections, once wrote that critics were wrong to place Lewis lower on the list of writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner.

"Lewis lacked style," Shirer wrote, "yet his impact on modern American life ... was greater than all of the other four writers together."

The National Association of Scholars recommends *Babbitt*, Lewis's 1922 novel about a materi-

alistic, social-climbing real estate agent, for college common reading programs. And just this year, writer Ryan Holiday, in an essay published on [medium.com](https://medium.com), put Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here* on the list of must reads for 2018. The book, published in the 1930s as Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany, imagines the election of a populist demagogue as president of the United States.

## TIME CAPSULE

The court file is a kind of time capsule of the writerly life and Berkshire farm affairs.

Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued on page 20*

Why Writer Sinclair Lewis *continued from page 19*

It fell to executors to keep track of the estate's rising value as royalties flowed in and disbursements went out. Two of the writer's local friends, Melville H. Cane and Pincus Berner, took on the task of steering his affairs. Early on, a handwritten list notes that \$25 was fetched by selling a cover for a Jeep. The sale of hay brought in \$100.

The move to Ob-long Road wasn't Lewis's first stay in the Berkshires. He is believed to have received treatment for alcoholism for ten days in 1937 at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge. A doctor with the program later wrote that Lewis appeared not to grasp the threat alcohol posed to his health.

Thorvale Farm eventually became a residence for the religious order known as the Carmelite Fathers, according to Sarah Currie, who runs the Williamstown Historical Museum on New Ashford Road. The farm is privately owned today, she said.

While the museum has no Lewis artifacts, Currie said materials about the Carmelite presence offer a look back. "It lays out some of the history of that land," she said.

## ROYALTIES FLOW

Over many years, royalties have continued to buck up the estate's balance. It opened in 2017 at \$11,097, but took in

\$41,838 during the year, all but \$149 of it from royalties. At year's end in 2017, its managers paid out \$28,000—each party getting a few thousand dollars at best.

The biggest check, for \$8,400, went last year to Gregory Lewis; \$5,600 was paid to the estate of the writer's son, Michael, who died in 1975 of bacterial pneumonia. Descendants of the original friends given money by Lewis received shares worth \$2,916. The NAACP and National Urban League each got \$1,166.

"I don't think this is JP Morgan's most lucrative account," said

Martin, the estate's Pittsfield lawyer.

This year's distributions, he said, will be the 38th from the estate. While the balance is modest today, the probate process demands continued audits, tax filings, and other paperwork.

"It's kind of a workout," Martin said.

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*Thorvale Farm, located on 720 acres in Williamstown, was the Berkshire home of writer Sinclair Lewis. It eventually became a residence for the religious order known as the Carmelite Fathers and is privately owned today.*

## DEPARTMENTS

### SINCLAIR LEWIS MISCELLANY

Ed Tant, a Lewis Society member from Athens, Georgia, had a letter in the Sunday Review section of the [New York Times on January 20, 2019](#), in reaction to a column by Bret Stephens from December 28, 2018, "When Fiction Most

Becomes Trump." His was one of several letters mentioning other writers who could fictionally capture Trump, including Shakespeare, Voltaire, and Cervantes.

Bret Stephens is right that the greatest writers throughout history could have featured Donald Trump as a villain in their works. One novelist who brought to life a fictional demagogue was Sinclair Lewis.... In his 1935 tale... *It Can't Happen Here*, Lewis imag-

ined America under the iron heel of an authoritarian president named Buzz Windrip, a homegrown fascist who rallies his base with bellicose speeches, soaring promises and shifting facts.

Windrip and his supporters are challenged by a small-town newspaper editor, Doremus Jessup, who speaks words in fiction that still are relevant in fact today: “Where in all history has there ever been a people so ripe for a dictatorship as ours!”

If Sinclair Lewis were alive today, he would find plenty of material in Mr. Trump and the people who continue to support his presidency.



Thanks to Roberta Olson who tracked down the mystery of the house owned by Sinclair Lewis in North Dakota, which was mentioned in the last *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter*. The house is in Park River, North Dakota, and it is referred to in the Federal Writers’ Project book, *North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State* (1938). “Sinclair Lewis, the novelist, owns a farm 1 m. S. of Park River, which he has never seen” (189).

Clinton D. Lord of Park River was the land agent for Sinclair Lewis who owned the farm, later known as Pleasant Groves Farm, and sold it to Jay Penas in 1944. Philip Matthews, son of Jay and Mary Penas, was born November 2, 1925, in North Dakota and passed away in 2007. Matthews served in the US Seventh Army in France and Germany during World War II. He spent most of his life as a journalist, reporting for the *Fargo Forum* for 40 years. He was a reporter there when the newspaper was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for local reporting in covering the June 1957 tornado that swept through Fargo.



A query to the Lewis Society:

Over the past couple of years I have made a point of reading the classics. I have found the Barnes & Noble Classic Series a great resource.

I just finished reading *Babbitt*. It was an enjoyable read, and I find it as relevant today as it must have been when it was first published. I do have a question you might be able to answer:

*Babbitt* and Paul Riesling are in New York awaiting their train to Maine. In order to kill some time, Paul wanted to see an ocean liner. They proceed to a pier where the liner *Aquitania* is docked. *Babbitt* asks Paul if he would like to go to Europe on such a ship. Paul, however, is “standing with clenched fists, head drooping, staring at the liner as in terror.” He whispers, “Oh, my God!” And, “Come on, let’s get out of this.”

I assumed that the story would later reveal the reason for Paul’s reaction, but nothing was ever revealed.

Did I miss something? Perhaps it was just indicative of Paul’s feeling of confinement at the hands of his wife. What do you think was Paul’s rationale?

[Editor: Thanks for writing. You’ve picked out a really interesting passage. It reminds me of why I enjoy Lewis so much since he leaves so much ambiguous about characters’ motivations that rereadings always give me new insights. I think this passage in chapter 11 could be read as you suggest, that Paul is feeling so confined by his life that he realizes his hopes for traveling abroad are so unlikely that he’s both sad and angry. Another way to look at it is to think that Paul is overwhelmed by what’s he always hoped to do, get on a liner, that when he comes face to face with it he realizes that it’s really out of his reach because he doesn’t deserve it. Until that point in the novel most of what we know about Paul is from George’s perspective and George thinks he’s wonderful. This may be an indication that Paul is a lesser person than George thinks, which will be borne out later of course.]



*The Week* (January 11, 2019) names Twin Farms, former home of Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson, as “Hotel of the Week” (25). “‘Twin Farms is one of those rare hotels that allows its guests to pretend, for a short while, that the world around them is flawless,’ said Flora Stubbs in *Travel + Leisure*. That wasn’t hard when my husband and I visited the Vermont resort and ‘found it swaddled in a fairy-tale blanket of foot-deep snow.’ All 20 rooms in the 1795 farmhouse and surrounding cottages are unique, and mine had clear views of nearby Pico Mountain. Though you can ski on the hotel’s private slope, ‘looking out at the chocolate-box scenery from under a furry blanket was far more enjoyable.’” [twinfarms.com/press-room/](http://twinfarms.com/press-room/); doubles from \$1,600, all-inclusive.



Thornton Wilder’s *Heaven’s My Destination* seems to draw on *Babbitt* in its celebration of the American businessman according to Dennis Lloyd in “‘By George, We’ve Met Before’: George Babbitt and George Brush as American Heroes” (*Thornton Wilder: New Essays*, ed. Martin Blank, Dalma Hunyadi Brunauer, and David Garrett Izzo. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1999: 217–24). The novel, published in 1935, focuses on George Brush, a fundamentalist traveling book salesman. “Both are products of early twentieth-century America with its heavy emphasis on success and materialism.... Both men blend the peddler, or salesman (*Babbitt*’s real

estate and Brush's textbooks), using their Yankee ingenuity to achieve financial success" (218–19). They each gain some success, Babbitt by his public speaking, Brush by his singing. Each loses someone special in his life, and that leads to a reversal of some of their seemingly core beliefs. Babbitt, after his best friend Paul is sent to jail for shooting his wife, rebels against his marriage, his religion, and his business friends. A fellow boarder in Brush's boarding house dies, and he promises to take care of the man's mother and his young daughter. He also loses his faith, takes up smoking, and becomes very social. Both, at least externally, return to their old natures, although sadder and wiser. Lloyd sees their progenitors in Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards, all looking for an American Dream, but for Franklin and Babbitt the focus is on the material, while for Edwards and Brush, it is on the spiritual.



James Mustich, in his *1,000 Books to Read before You Die: A Life-Changing List* (Workman, 2018), an eclectic collection ranging from Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968) to Carl Zuckmayer's *A Part of Myself* (1970), includes *Main Street*, which he calls "A Love-Hate Affair with Small-Town Life." There's a short plot summary and commentary, which ends,

More than eighty years on, Lewis's satire remains brisk and keenly observed, his targets not as far from our experience as we might hope. And tellingly, his acerbic vision is not without a veiled affection for the comforts of conformity that shaped his own youth; indeed, that affection sharpens the focus of his portraits of the people of Gopher Prairie. As *Time* magazine noted in its 1951 obituary of Lewis, "His great merit was that he gave the US and the world a sense of the enduring strength (ugly or not) of Main Street; and that he made Americans on all main streets [...] stop hustling long enough to wonder uneasily where they were going" (490).

[There's a mention of Zuckmayer, a friend of Dorothy Thompson's, in Frederick Betz's review of *Dorothy Thompson and German Writers in Defense of Democracy* in the Fall 2018 Newsletter.]



The *Debs Foundation Newsletter's* lead article for their Spring 2017 issue was "It Must Not Happen Here" by Noel Beasley. It celebrates the publication of *It Can't Happen Here*, including a short plot summary and connecting it to

current events. Beasley contends that among the reasons that there was not a fascist coup in the United States in the 1930s was the presence of a powerful Left, including strong trade unions. "Many of the accomplishments of the New Deal had their origin in the platforms and campaigns of the Socialist Party under the leadership of Gene Debs" (1). Sinclair Lewis thought very highly of Debs, sending a copy of *Main Street* to him while he was in prison, and traveling to Terre Haute to visit Mrs. Debs. On August 26, 1922, Lewis visited Debs at a naturopathic sanitarium near Chicago. In a letter to his wife Grace, Lewis wrote "Gene really is a Christ spirit. He is infinitely wise, kind, forgiving—yet the devil of a fighter.... He has told me of his boyhood (he was an awkward, odd boy who never could swim or dance & who read Voltaire & the encyclopedia)" (qtd. in Schorer 337). No doubt he felt an affinity with Debs, both for his beliefs, and for the similar boyhoods they seemed to have shared.

## IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE NEWS

Thanks to Pat Lewis for sending along the following newspaper clippings discussing the contentious production of the movie version of *It Can't Happen Here* in February 1936. The clippings are from the collection of her husband Dick's uncle, Bob Lewis, Fred Lewis's youngest son.

### Sinclair Lewis Novel Banned From Movies

Washington, Feb. 15.—(AP)—Sinclair Lewis, the novelist, said in a statement here today he had been informed that Will Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, had forbidden the filming of his latest novel, "It Can't Happen Here", partially on the contention that it would cause "international complications".

Lewis said he had been informed Hays objected on the ground that "the film industry is opposed to using the motion picture for controversial politics, and that the film will have international complications, and may offend Mussolini and Hitler, the leaders of 'friendly powers'."

Sidney Howard, the playwright who prepared the script for the picture, reported to him, Lewis said, "that Mr. Hays told the producers that he didn't know which way the next elections might go, and he certainly did not intend to offend the Republicans."

"If Mr. Hays thinks," Lewis declared, "that an anti-Fascist film might be interpreted as anti-Republican that ought certainly to be interesting to a lot of Republicans. . . ."

"Democracy is certainly on the defensive when two European dictators, without opening their mouths or knowing anything about the issue, can shut down an American film, causing a loss of \$200,000 to the producer. I wrote 'It can't Happen Here', but I begin to think that it certainly can."

### DEATHS AMONG S. D. FARM HORSES REPORTED

Ipswich, S. D., Feb. 15.—Several farmers in Glover township, according to reports, have lost horses apparently from dietary causes. Reinholdt Stern and A. P. Dowher, among those reporting, asserted the belief that horses have been eating too much chaff mixed with light grain in the straw stacks.

## LEWIS SAYS HAYS BANS FILM OF BOOK

Screening of 'It Can't Happen Here' Is Barred Because of Politics, Author Charges.

### DENIED BY 'CZAR'S' AIDE

Studio Also Makes Denial, but Admits 'Temporary' Deferring of the Production.

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15.—A ban against the filming of any motion-picture version of "It Can't Happen Here," Sinclair Lewis's most recent book, which deals principally with fascism, was reported by the author here tonight.

He said that after "several weeks of negotiation" and at a time when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was prepared to start production, Will H. Hays, motion-picture "Czar," had categorically forbidden production of the picture for the reported reason of "fear of international politics and fear of boycotts abroad."

Mr. Lewis said in a statement that while his volume was a "propaganda book," it was "propaganda for only one thing: American democracy," and he termed the action "a fantastic exhibition of folly and cowardice."

#### Lewis Issues Statement.

He said that he was disinterested in the decision from a financial standpoint as he had sold the film rights to his novel outright before the book was published.

"I wrote 'It Can't Happen Here,'" he added, "but I begin to think that it certainly can."

Mr. Lewis's statement was as follows:

"Any film version of 'It Can't Happen Here' has been categorically forbidden by Will Hays. The final action follows several weeks of negotiation. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer bought the film rights to the

## LEWIS SAYS HAYS HAS BANNED FILM

Continued From Page One.

book outright in the early Autumn, actually on the strength of the manuscript and before the book appeared. I am therefore financially uninterested in this decision. The preparation of the film script was turned over to the well-known playwright, Mr. Sidney Howard, who prepared a script which I thought was admirable. Most of the casting was already completed. Lionel Barrymore had been engaged to play the leading rôle of Doremus Jessup. Sets had been finished and shooting was to begin Monday.

"Today I have heard from my agent in New York, Miss Ann Watkins, Mr. Howard and from my publishers, Doubleday, Doran & Co., that the final decision has been made to shelve the whole business. The reason officially given to Miss Watkins, as contained in her telegram to me, is, 'Can't Happen Here definitely shelved in fear of international policies and threat of boycott abroad, according to wire received this morning from Matson.'

"Mr. Matson is Miss Watkin's associate in Hollywood. Mr. Howard confirms this, attributing the ban to these and also to domestic political grounds.

#### Refers to Mussolini and Hitler.

"I think this decision raises an extremely important and critical question concerning free speech and free opinion in the United States. Mr. Hays was appointed dictator by the motion picture industry, presumably to see that they didn't get into trouble with official authorities and that indecent films would not be made which would offend the general public. I hear from Mr. Howard that Mr. Hays will probably base the suppression on two grounds, first, that the film industry is opposed to using the motion pictures for controversial politics, and second, that the film will have international complications and may offend Mussolini and Hitler, the leaders of 'friendly powers.'

"Mr. Howard further reports that Mr. Hays told the producers that

he didn't know which way the next elections might go, and that he certainly didn't intend to offend the Republicans.

"Now all of this seems to me a fantastic exhibition of folly and cowardice. 'It Can't Happen Here' has been read by more people in the United States in the last months than any other novel precisely because it deals with something that is very much in the public mind. It is completely non-political in the sense of being non-partisan. It is a propaganda book. I admit it. But it is propaganda for only one thing: American democracy.

"In describing the forces which eventually rallied against fascism in my imaginative picture, I made the anti-Fascist leader a Republican supported by many Democrats, and if Mr. Hays thinks that an anti-Fascist film might be interpreted as anti-Republican, that ought certainly to be interesting to a lot of Republicans. As a matter of fact, I received the most enthusiastic letters about the book from Republicans and Democrats alike. One of the Republicans who wrote to praise it is talked of as a possible Presidential candidate.

"The main issues, however, are on the grounds openly given. Is Mr. Hays going to rule once and for all that fiction or drama dealing with public problems cannot be considered film material? The radio certainly takes no such stand. And are we, in the second place, to be delivered over to a film industry whose every step must be governed by whether or not the film will please or displease some foreign power?

"The world is full today of Fascist propaganda. The Germans are making one pro-Fascist film after another, designed to show that Fascism is superior to liberal democracy. The Italians are doing the same. On the other side the Russians are making films to show that communism is superior to everything else.

"I have yet to see Hollywood and its satellites threaten to ban all German, Italian and Russian pictures from the market on this ground. But Mr. Hays actually says that a film cannot be made showing the horrors of fascism and extolling the advantages of liberal democracy because Hitler and Mussolini might ban other Hollywood films from their countries if we were so rash.

"Democracy is certainly on the defensive when two European dictators, without opening their mouths or knowing anything about the issue, can shut down an American film causing a loss of \$200,000 to the producer. I wrote 'It Can't Happen Here,' but I begin to think it certainly can."

A New York Times article from February 15, 1936 on Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer halting production of the movie version of It Can't Happen Here.

Thanks to Pat Lewis for sending along these clippings!

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