Ross, Sinclair (Harry) 1885-1951

Sinclair Lewis was an American novelist, short-story writer, and playwright. Born in the small town of [Sauk Centre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauk_Centre,_Minnesota), in [Minnesota](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota), Lewis was the youngest of three boys: the eldest, Fred was born in 1875, followed by Claude in 1878. Lewis was a sensitive and bookish boy, un-athletic and vulnerable. His, father Edwin J. Lewis, a doctor and a strict, domineering father, had a hard time understanding his youngest son, and sadly Lewis's mother, Emma Kermott Lewis, died when he was six years old; her death had a lasting impact of Lewis’ life and writing. In 1892, Edwin J. Lewis remarried Isabel Warner: a kind and deeply maternal woman who became a friend and confidant to the lonely Lewis.

Lewis’ works are known for their satirical representation of the pettiness of American life and values, revolving around such icons of Americanism like religion, patriotism, small-town life, and commercial capitalism. The narrowness of this lens, however, must be located within the broader realm of turmoil against a world order which Lewis felt was all about commerce: a buying and selling that produced only greed and dissatisfaction.

Lewis frequently situates his novels within small, provincial towns. Acting on personal agency and individualism, his protagonist often try to change their environment for the better, but in the process became alienated, and, in the end, they decide to live within their society and adapt. Lewis satirizes their eventual conformity and turns it into a subtle tragedy -- they are crushed and beaten down by social mores. Yet, their attempt to break free from narrow traditionalism also makes these protagonists heroic, as they are at least *thinking*, and so in Lewis’ words, “*alive*.”

His wildly successful novel, *Main Street*, portrays Carol Kennecott, a young woman who has recently married a small town doctor. Full of dismay when she first sees the town’s insignificant, drab “Main Street,” Carol attempts inject some sophistication into the small, provincial town, but her attempts are rejected by the townsfolk and she finds herself socially ostracized until she succumbs to social pressure and conforms. *Main Street’s* enormous commercial success placed Lewis suddenly into the literary spotlight. *Main Street* was followed by *Babbit*, another novel that satirizes American life.

Lewis was nominated the Pulitzer Prize for his third novel, *Arrowsmith*, but refused it. After eleven more novels, Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. He went on to write eleven more novels before dying in Rome in 1951 of acute alcoholism.

Works

* *Hike and the Aeroplane* (1912) (as Tom Graham)
* [*Our Mr. Wrenn*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Mr._Wrenn) (1914)
* [*The Trail of the Hawk*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Trail_of_the_Hawk) (1915)
* [*The Innocents*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Innocents_(novel)) (1917)
* [*The Job*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Job_(1917_novel)) (1917)
* "The Willow Walk" (1918) (short story)
* [*Free Air*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Air) (1919)
* [*Main Street*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Street_(novel)) (1920)
* [*Babbitt*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babbitt_(novel)) (1922)
* [*Arrowsmith*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrowsmith_(novel)) (1925)
* [*Mantrap*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantrap_(novel)) (1926)
* [*Elmer Gantry*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elmer_Gantry) (1927)
* *The Man Who Knew Coolidge* (1928)
* [*Dodsworth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dodsworth) (1929)
* [*Ann Vickers*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Vickers) (1933)
* *Work of Art* (1934)
* [*It Can't Happen Here*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_Can%27t_Happen_Here) (1935)
* *Jayhawker* (1935) (play)
* *Selected Short Stories* (1935)
* "Little Bear Bongo" (1936) (short story)
* *The Prodigal Parents* (1938)
* *Bethel Merriday* (1940)
* [*Gideon Planish*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gideon_Planish) (1943)
* [*Cass Timberlane*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cass_Timberlane) (1945)
* [*Kingsblood Royal*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsblood_Royal) (1947)
* *The God-Seeker* (1949)
* *World So Wide* (1951) (posthumous)

References and Further Reading

Bloom, Harold., ed. *Sinclair Lewis*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers,

1987. [Lingeman, Richard R.](http://voyager.library.uvic.ca/vwebv/search?searchArg=Lingeman,%20Richard%20R.&searchCode=NAME&searchType=4) *Rebel from Main Street*. New York: Random House, 2002.

Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.