

# **Lewis, Sinclair (1885-1951) Encyclopedia Article**

## **Lewis, Sinclair (1885-1951)**

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## Lewis, Sinclair (1885-1951)

Born in 1885 in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, Sinclair Lewis would become one of America's most forceful social critics during the 1920s. After attending Yale, he had held an assortment of editorial and journalistic positions by his mid-twenties, including the dubious honor of selling short-story plots to Jack London. Lewis wrote seven fairly pedestrian novels, notable for their bourgeois sentiments, before he struck literary gold in 1920 with *Main Street* and the novels of social criticism that followed in its wake: *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Dodsworth*, and *Elmer Gantry*. Finally Lewis felt free to express his radical self, his feelings of dissatisfaction with American complacency, mediocrity, and moral narrowness. In 1930, his honesty earned him the first Nobel Prize for literature awarded to an American. Sadly, of the ten novels that followed until his death in 1951, only two—*It Can't Happen Here*—caught further significant attention. Lewis had lost his moorings as a writer once the world of the 1920s, about which he had written so searingly, receded behind the Great Depression and World War II.

### Further Reading:

Bloom, Harold, editor. *Sinclair Lewis: Modern Critical Views*. New York, Chelsea House, 1987.

Hutchisson, James M. *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920-1930*. State College, Pennsylvania State University, 1996.

Parrington, Vernon. *Sinclair Lewis: Our Own Diogenes*. New York, Haskell House Publishing, 1974.