Notes

THE UNDESERVED DEGENERATION OF "BABBITT"

Within a year or two of the publication of Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* in 1922, the name of its protagonist began a pejorative generalization that finally found *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (G. & C. Merriam, 1961) listing the term, along with its derivatives, in lower case (although *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, based on the *Third*, retained the upper case in 1963). *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (World, 1964) lists "Babbitt" under both lower and upper case; *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton Mifflin, 1969) uses only upper case. The orthography of "Babbitt" is obviously catching up with its sense — even though its sense as an accepted noun is unjust to Babbitt, the man in Lewis' novel, who has been widely misinterpreted. That is, the dictionary entries for "Babbitt" reflect a partial, not a whole, Babbitt.

The misreading of *Babbitt* was well established in the first decade of the novel's life, for in the early thirties, a quarter of a century before Webster's *Third*, the second edition of that unabridged dictionary defined "Babbitt" first as a specialized term in a novel ("a prosperous, vulgar, middle-class realtor") and second as a pejoratively generalized term ("... a business or professional man who strictly adheres to the social and ethical standards of his group; used derogatorily"). The appearance of "babbitt" in Webster's *Third* indicates its present status after a half century of existence:

> a person (as a business or professional man) who conforms unthinkingly and complacently to prevailing middle-class standards of respectability, who makes a cult of material success, and who is contemptuous of or incapable of appreciating artistic or intellectual values.

Clearly the dictionaries bear the record of George F. Babbitt's detractors, who early overlooked the "other" Babbitt that Sinclair Lewis created: Babbitt_2 lived the second year of the novel — roughly, from April 1921 to April 1922 — and developed out of Babbitt_1 that most readers remember from the first year of the book, April 1920 to April 1921. That first-year Babbitt is now memorialized in dictionaries as the stereotype of an American businessman who deserves Lewis' satire. But Babbitt_2 is an individual who deserves the sympathy of the reader, not the derogation in the dictionaries.

Babbitt_2 is the heart of Babbitt; Babbitt_1 is his skin. And Babbitt's history deserves that correction. Babbitt_2 may have capitulated to Babbitt_1, but Babbitt_2 hardly merits the dictionaries' differentiating characteristics accorded Babbitt_1: one "who strictly adheres to the social and ethical standards of his group," one "who readily conforms to the views and standards of his set" (Mitford Mathews' *A Dictionary of Americanisms*, 1951), or one "who conforms unthinkingly and complacently to prevailing middle-class standards of respectability." The dictionaries are right in their record; the readers, who have turned Babbitt into a stereotype, are wrong. From broadly satirical treatment of Babbitt_1 in the first year, the book shifts to sympathetic comic treatment of Babbitt_2 in the second. Lewis, of course, uses two-thirds of the book for Babbitt_1 so emphasis by sheer weight as well as by initial tone establishes Babbitt_1 as today's "babbitt."

The first year of the novel monopolized the famous satirical episodes. A typical day (April 1920) in the life of Babbitt_1, the typical businessman of Zenith who vaguely dreams of a "fairy child," requires the first seven chapters; Chapters 8—9 complete Spring 1920

with the Babbitts' dinner party and the preliminaries to the Maine trip. Chapters 10—11 cover the trip to Maine, but Chapter 12 merely outlines various summer activities. Chapters 10—11 show Babbitt with some possibilities of becoming an individual, but Chapters 12—13, followed by Chapters 14—16 (Autumn 1920) — with George's rise as an orator, his desire for social prominence, and the beginnings of his Sunday school campaign — continue $Babbitt_1$ on a satirical level as a stereotype. Winter 1920—1921 closes the first year: George reorganizes the Sunday school, Ted has his party, George has much family business and falls ill, Ted and his father go to Chicago, and George fails in his attempt to patch the Paul-Zilla marriage.

If the Babbitt of the first year is a skin for the heart of Babbitt of the second year — then the skin almost obscures the fact of the heart; $Babbitt_2$ is certainly lost in the satirical vignettes of $Babbitt_1$ who can exist out of specific chronological time and who invites satirical, even sociological, treatment. But Babbitt the individual emerges late, as he gets involved in Paul's affair with Mrs. Arnold. During the transition from $Babbitt_1$ to $Babbitt_2$, George tries to save the Riesling's marriage but fails when Paul shoots his wife. When Paul is sentenced to three years in prison, probably in early April of 1921 — $Babbitt_2$, the individual, has taken over the book with $Babbitt_1$, the caricature, almost forgotten during the second year.

For a time this new Babbitt, now aware of a world that is meaningless, contemplates leaving his wife and family, but another stay in the Maine woods changes his mind. When he returns to Zenith, he takes up a life of political liberalism with the help of Seneca Doane and of social freedom and dissipation with the help of Tanis Judique. In February and March (1922), he quarrels successively with his wife Myra, with his beloved Tanis, with his friends at the Boosters' Club, with his partner and father-in-law, and with his sterling secretary Miss McGoun. Such a rebellion could not have been part of $Babbitt_1$, the Babbitt of the average reader's experience and the Babbitt of the dictionaries. $Babbitt_2$ tries to control his destiny by fighting back against all that held him down, but circumstances that began with Myra's illness are too strong.

In March 1922 Myra has an operation for appendicitis: the quarrel between the two is healed (George has already broken permanently with Tanis), he joins the Good Citizens League, he begins going to church again, he finds once more the pleasure in his own home, he reinstitutes himself with the Boosters' Club, and he regains his father-in-law's confidence. The sum of them is defeat. But then, $Babbitt_2$ returns through a surrogate, his son Ted, who comes home one weekend from the university and marries Eunice Littlefield without warning. In the crisis, the personally defeated $Babbitt_2$ backs Ted: "Take your factory job if you want to. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go...ahead, old man! The world is yours!"

The book therefore ends on "balance" with the skin (of $Babbitt_1$) healed and with the heart (of $Babbitt_2$) still beating and living in his son Ted. The twist from type to individual that occurs after Chapter 21 is a parallel of the twist in the book from broad satire to warm comedy. The Babbitt of the first year deserves defeat and the dictionaries' history; the Babbitt of the second year deserves some other reward for trying to break through the old man. $Babbitt_2$ takes the sting away from Lewis' satirical view of $Babbitt_1$. But Lewis' strong handling of $Babbitt_1$ will probably lead Webster's *Fourth* to continue the record of "babbitt" as a pejorative term: how many readers by 2020 will see the courage of $Babbitt_2$?

T. J. Kallsen

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PLACE-NAMES ON ST. DAVIDS ISLAND IN THE BERMUDAS

There was no native population on any of the islands in the group known as Bermuda, or the Bermudas, which make up a British colony in the North Atlantic about 580 miles east of the North Carolina coast.[1] Thus, there were no place-names of any kind prior to the coming of the first Europeans. A Spaniard, Juan de Bermúdez, discovered the islands in the early 1500's, and a shipwreck brought the first English settlers in 1609 to St. Georges Island. The English settlement was later enlarged by an influx of Negroes as well as American Indians imported as slaves.[2]

Today on St. Davids Island, which is about two and one-quarter miles long and four-fifths of a mile wide at its widest point, there is a community of perhaps 600 to 700 mixed-blood people. These people are tri-racial in origin, preserving the strain of Indians brought from the North American mainland. Long ago the Indian dialects gave way to English, and other Indian cultural elements were also obliterated. Some of these mixed-blood people are conscious of Indian ancestry, but they are as vague about their original tribal affiliations as they are about the part of North America from whence their ancestors came.[3] Apparently no ethnographic studies have yet been made of this mixed-blood group and a folklorist would have no difficulty uncovering information of interest.[4] The substitution among the people of *v's* for *w's* ("rewolve" instead of "revolve");[5] the use of the broad *a*

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[1] Evidence that Bermuda was unoccupied before the arrival of Europeans is made clear in the account of the shipwreck of Sir George Somers, *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. Edward Arber, the A. G. Bradley edition (Edinburg, 1910), 2:635–640.

[2] Van Wyck Mason, "Bermuda's Pequots," *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* (Feb 26, 1937), 39:616–620. This author states that following King Philip's War, which broke out in 1675, the Massachusetts authorities sent 40 or 50 of the most truculent warriors to Bermuda; also that the Pequot and Mohican were reduced to slavery and sent to Bermuda. *Cf.* Major Gen. J. H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlements of the Bermudas* (Bermuda Government Library reprint, Jan. 1932), 1:157, wherein it is stated that two Indian women arrived from Virginia, not as slaves, but to be married to anyone who would have them.

[3] An awareness of Indian ancestry is strong among persons bearing the family names of Minors (pronounced Minous), Lamb, Fox, and Pitcher, but is by no means limited to them. One of the patriarchs, the late Jacob Minors, had long straight black hair and unmistakable Indian features. He was a descendant from an earlier Jacob Minors, who, according to tradition, was driven in a canoe with his wife and three children off the North American coast, and was rescued by Captain Fox, master of a privateer, who brought the Indian family to Bermuda as his slaves [E. A. McCallan, *Life on Old St. Davids* (Hamilton, 1948), p. 39].

[4] With the cooperation of our Bermuda taxi driver, Archibald "Woody" Brangman (a Minors descendant), Dr. Ralph Shrader and I on January 14, 1967, visited Jeremiah Pitcher, an 87-year old islander, whose coppery complexion and facial features were unmistakable indications of his American Indian antecedents. His daughter served us a slice of casava cake from a recipe handed down to her from the past; he showed us a bottle of oil extracted from a shark liver used in the family to foretell the weather — the liquid clouds up when storms are brewing; he told us a mixture of rum, sugar, lemon, and shark oil was an excellent medicine for colds; he described in detail how arrowroot flour was made during his boyhood, which, for a short time, was an important industry on St. Davids Island

[5] The alternation of *v's* and *w's* in Bermuda ("Some of these vomen are wery wicious".) was briefly noted in *American Speech* (April 1933), 9:154.

("*grawss, lawst,*" etc.), in combination with words like *onliest,* also suggests that the speech patterns of the St. Davids Islanders may be worthy of study.

As one reviews the place-names on St. Davids Island, and the adjacent St. Georges Island, it is apparent that English names predominate, many dating back to the seventeenth century. Because of the absence of place-names before the English settled Bermuda, and because the islands have been under continuous British rule since 1612, it would be unusual if this were not the case. The place-name complex is characterized by self-descriptive topographical terms, *i. e.*, "little" names, which originated with the people. Among these names are Round Island, Little Round Island, Great Bay, Cemetery Hill, Little Head, Great Head, The Crack, Red Hole, The Sink, Red Bay, etc., and a host of "surname" names, *e. g.*, Fox's Hill. Smith's Hill, Skinner's Hill, Jacob's Point, Robert's Point, Davis's Hole, Burgess Point, etc.[6] Three redundant names were noted: Mount Hill (147 feet elevation, St. Davids highest point), Fractious Street Road, and Bailey's Bay Bay.

Of particular note are the number of female Christian names appearing on certain physical features, *e. g.*, Dolly's Bay, Emily's Bay, Annie's Bay,[7] Ruth's Bay, Ruth's Point, Grace's Island, and Peggy's Island.[8] One of our native informants, Grover Lamb, then 76 years of age, and having distinct Amerind features, told us that these names were those of local womenfolk no longer living. Dolly and Emily he believed to have been Haywards; Annie and Ruth (or "Ma" Ruthie, as he remembered her) were, he believed, Foxes.

Among the St. Davids place-names two with non-English elements are of particular onomastic interest, and may possibly have some connection with the enslaved Indians. Both features lie in Dolly's Bay and are commonly known as Great Island and Little Island, but they also bear the names *Oswego Island*[9] and *Little Oswego Island,* the *w* pronounced with the *v* sound. Of the several hundred place-names in the Bermuda group these two are unique because they are the only ones derived from American Indians. Both islands lie within 70 yards of the north shore of St. Davids Island; Oswego, which is wooded, has a land area of 2.50 acres and the adjacent Little Oswego has an area of .70 acre. At the time of our visit neither was occupied, although there has been intermittent occupation of both islands in past years. Grover Lamb told us that Oswego was called by that name during his boyhood, but it also had several alternate names, one of which was Johnny Tappin's Island. Mr. Lamb unknowingly provided an excellent example of folk etymology by stating that he believed this name was derived from an early resident, John Smith, who tapped his cane as he walked.

Oswego, an Iroquoian place-name in New York state, appears as early as May 9, 1727 in a report by Governor William Burnett who wrote, "I have this spring sent workmen to build a stone house of strength at a place called *Oswego,* at the mouth of the Onondaga's

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[6] These are reminiscent of early place-names on Ocracoke Island of English origin; *cf.* C. A. Weslager, "Place-Names on Ocracoke Island," *North Carolina Historical Review* (Jan. 1954), 31:41–49.

[7] McCallan, 1948, refers to "Mis' Annie's Bay," and "Mis' Emily's Bay," pp. 152, 194.

[8] These names all appear on the official Bermuda map published by the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton, England in 1901, based on surveys made in 1898–99 by Lt. A. J. Savage. Much of this map, which so far as I am aware is the only official government map of Bermuda, is obsolete because of major changes in the landscape made by the United States during the construction of the Kindley Air Force Base. In connection with this installation, more recent maps have been made by the U. S. Naval Oceanographic Office as I was advised by Gordon Hamilton.

[9] Lt. Savage shows "Great Island or Oswego Island" on his map and the adjacent "Little Island," but without the word Oswego. However, the full name for the smaller island, *i. e.* "Little Oswego Island," was recorded by McCallan, 1948, p. 232.

River."[10] The Onondaga were tribal affiliates of the Six Nations, and the river bearing their name on the south shore of Lake Ontario is today called Oswego River. The place which Burnett called Oswego and where Fort Oswego was subsequently built, was known to the French as *Chouaguen, Choueguen.* or *Ochouguen;* the aboriginal pronunciation was *Osh-wa-kee,* a name the Iroquois applied to both Lake Ontario[11] and Lake Erie.[12]

Evidently there was never an Indian town at Oswego, and the meaning of the word is obscure. Alleged meanings range from such fanciful interpretations as "I see everywhere — see nothing"[13] to the more plausible "flowing out of the water."[14]

How and why this Iroquoian place-name from New York state was transferred to St. Davids Island in far-away Bermuda, and there applied to two insignificant islands are questions this author cannot answer. Even more tantalizing is a name by which the mixed-blood peoples of St. Davids are called for reasons that neither they, nor white Bermudians, who use the term can explain — *Mohawks.*[15] This was a tribal name of one of the Six Nations affiliates who also lived in New York state.[15]

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[10] *Landmarks of Oswego County, N. Y.*, ed. John C. Churchill (Syracuse, 1895) 2:41 fn. *Cf.* Joshua V. H. Clark, *Onondaga or Reminiscenses of Earlier and Later Times,* 2 vs. (Syracuse, 1849).

[11] Clark, 1849, 2:326.

[12] *History of Oswego County, N. Y.*, L. H .Everts & Co. (Phila., 1877), p. 20; *cf.* William Beauchamp, *Indian Names in New York* (Fayetteville, N. Y., 1893) p. 64.

[13] Clark, 1849, 2:326.

[14] *History of Oswego County,* p. 20.

[15] "St. Georgians and other rude persons called the [St. Davids] Islanders 'Mohawks,' and we retaliated by crying 'Town Crawler,' across Town Harbour. Whether the Island nickname owed its origin to the North American Indian tribe, or to the scandalous Mohawk Club which existed in London in 1711—12, I cannot say, but the former I hope. Crawler is the vernacular for the little blue-gray crustacean common on the southern shore of St. Georges Island and a favourite bait of small boy fisherman" [McCallan, 1948, p. 63].

The possibility that Mohawk may merely be a distinguishing name for a tri-racial group should not be discounted; *cf.* A. R. Dunlap and C. A. Weslager, "Trends in the Naming of Tri-Racial Mixed-Blood Groups in the Eastern United States," *American Speech,* (April 1947) 22:81—87.