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- 1 *Unseen Upton Sinclair*. Edited by Ruth Clifford Engs. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing Co., 2009. Pp. 187. ISBN: 978-0-7864-4518-9.
- 2 The reputation of one of the most prolific American writers was revived recently, after the successful cinematic adaptation of his novel *Oil* by director Paul Thomas Anderson. Sinclair had been highly successful in the early years of the twentieth century, but despite his astonishing productivity (over ninety books), his work has been neglected by later generations of readers, critics and academics.
- 3 The present volume consists of nine unpublished pieces of writing by Sinclair: a one-act play, two short sketches for comedies, three short stories, two essays and one excerpt of a novel in serialized form. The editor also adds an enlightening short biography which avoids well known details while providing a helpful sense of perspective. Though Sinclair flirted with realism and naturalism in his better known works, these writings are characterized by both daring humor and an almost shocking willingness to address taboo issues for the conservative American society of the early twentieth century. One cannot help but wonder whether this admirable directness was the reason that these pieces were never published. Sinclair doesn't hesitate to satirize the hypocrisy and double standards of judgment when it comes to men and women. In his story *A Single Mother* he exposes the stereotype that a male-privileged society has created for women: one of passivity, sacrifice of every sense of personal happiness and lack of initiative. This becomes even more relevant when we keep in mind the suffragette movement which was in full force at the time, and Sinclair pokes some fun towards it as well, in his one-act play *The Emancipated Husband* and his sketch for the comedy *Suffragetteland*.
- 4 There are also three texts regarding one of Sinclair's favorite subjects: personal and public health and hygiene. After all, *The Jungle*, his most successful novel and the one that secured his reputation, dealt with the terrible conditions of hygiene and the exploitation that prevailed in slaughterhouses. In yet another of his sketches, Sinclair exposes the hacks who propose unscientific ways of treatment, taking advantage of the naïve and uneducated.

- 5 Whether Sinclair's works can still sustain a careful re-reading in a contemporary context or can be almost dismissed as period pieces, remains a topic for discussion. What is beyond doubt however, is his works' significance to anyone who wishes to trace the modern literary and social history of the United States in early 20th century.
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