

"Social Critique and Satire: The Portrayal of American Society in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis."

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Abstract

Sinclair Lewis gained the Nobel Prize in Literature as the first American writer because he mastered sharp critiques of American society. Through his novels like *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *It Can't Happen Here*. In all his writings, he presents a realistic depiction of the society, politics, and cultural elements from his era while incorporating satirical aspects. Through his writings, he reveals societal problems in the United States during the early 1900s, which stem from the materialistic society and the hypocritical attitudes and ethical carelessness that existed during that time. Through his portrayals of several main characters who reflect small-town traditionalists and urban professionals, as well as corrupt systems, he criticizes societal practices that obstruct self-actualization and scholarship development. Through his novels, he presents a dominant narrative about how social expectations battle against individual ideals. The writer illustrates how provincial areas have limited perspectives through *Main Street* and demonstrates, through *Babbitt*, how consumer-oriented middle-class culture becomes meaningless. In *Arrowsmith*, the author critiques scientific research turned commercial, while *It Can't Happen Here* illustrates the potential of fascist rule to gain power. Through his application of satire and realism, Sinclair Lewis reveals how American society creates psychological and ethical dilemmas for individuals seeking honest living. Through his writings, he makes a portrayal of society that functions both as an expression of American life and an evaluation of its fundamental flaws. The research examines how the author utilizes his characters as a means to address his stance on social justice topics, including class disparities, institutional misconduct, and personal identity corruption. Through his ongoing investigation of social standards, he continues to be an important literary figure in America who provides an enduring understanding of how people behave alongside social structures.

Keywords: Corruption, Culture, Expectations, Hypocrisy, Provincialism

Sinclair Lewis, an American novelist, was a significant figure in the literary and dramatic arts, beloved for his biting social commentary. Growing up in a small, conservative town, he became acutely aware of the moral dogmatism and provincialism that would later inspire his writing. The inconsistencies of American culture were vividly depicted in his works, which frequently featured his contempt for narrow-mindedness and societal complacency. Growing up in a society that valued conformity and narrow viewpoints strengthened Sinclair Lewis's resolve to highlight the shortcomings of the American Dream. Materialism, the hollowness of middle-class ideals, and the corruption that frequently followed social advancement were all subjects of his harsh criticism. He examined the tension between societal standards and personal goals as he analyzed the intricacies of human behavior through his sarcastic writing and acute observation. The capacity of him to develop imperfect, likable people who personified the ethical quandaries of their day was a key component of his literary voice. His criticism extended beyond personal flaws to encompass more significant institutional and cultural issues. Although he received both praise and condemnation for his uncompromising dedication to presenting hard facts, his work remains an essential window into early 20th-century American culture. His unafraid examination of societal concerns, which forced readers to face their world's reality, is what made him famous. He is a pivotal character in American literature due to his perceptive observations and relentless criticism, which continue to have an impact today. His writings had a profound effect on the literary world, providing a strong voice against moral complacency, conformity, and hypocrisy.

Sinclair Lewis aims to provide an accurate portrayal of human life. He wants to break people out of their provincialism and comfort zone by telling the truth. The reason for Willa Cather's gloomy and dark mood is that her novels are studies of how American life has deteriorated. The novels by Theodore Dreiser explore how America is spiritually empty, despite its abundance of material possessions. She explores the conflict between money and human needs, illustrating how the desire for wealth often interferes with greater moral and personal fulfillment. They emphasize the challenges that arise when individuals strive to be successful at work while also maintaining honesty and integrity. Dreiser thought it was essential to paint a clear picture of modern life, with all its pain and illness.

The period from 1920 to 1929 is known as the Jazz Age, and Scott Fitzgerald wrote about this era. The era was also known as "The flapper generation" because during that time, the writers wrote about women who had lost their jobs. Fitzgerald explores the lives of the sad yet wealthy young men. He is clearly interested in flappers, college students, and wealthy heirs; however, he paints them in a very realistic manner.

William Faulkner says it is his most important job to write about how things are in American life right now. William James has been interested in facts, action, and having power. He says that a pragmatist. Sinclair Lewis focuses on making characters come to life, rather than portraying real people. He writes about what he has done or seen in his life. Sinclair Lewis had a provocative writing style and was critical of his time. He paints a picture of society and everyday life as he views them. Mark Twain's magnum opus novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, is admired by Ernest Hemingway, who says the novel is the source of all modern American literature. He believes that's where all American writing originated. Sinclair Lewis disagrees with the mistaken idealization of truth. Instead, he deals with how ill and unhappy American society is, and he says the most honest things that people of his time could say.

Sinclair Lewis, growing up in a small town in Minnesota, had numerous opportunities to learn about the people who lived there and how they behaved. What he encountered and learned at Sauk Center made him strongly disapprove of small-town ways. His father's provincial bigotry and complacency, as exemplified by Edwin J. Lewis, did little to calm his anger and resentment. He had been hurt too much by the villagers' cruelty, insensitivity, and smugness as a child, young adult, and even as a married young man to forgive those or their ways. In fact, his soul was revolting against those narrow villages and small towns that stood for this background, which helped him to write *Main Street*, which was actually the result of all this anger, allergy, and resentment.

While *Main Street* is a critique of regional narrowness and bigotry, it is also not a critique of small towns and villages. Sinclair Lewis was an avid hiker when he was younger and again when he was older, so he couldn't have been blind to the beautiful scenery of the village. He found corruption so common in society that he couldn't help but write strongly against it. His short story "Land" (1931), in which the main character, a dentist living in Joralemol town, shows how he feels about village life and himself:

"So Sidney came to feel as it was some wickedness in him that made him prefer trees and meadows and kind cattle to trolly cars and people who made little flat, worried jokes all day long" (*Land*, 7).

Sinclair Lewis didn't like complacency, pride, and racism because he experienced them everywhere, in the city and the country. In the eighteenth century, writers' portraits of America were given a beautiful picture of the American village in the nineteenth century by authors such as Booth Tarkington and Meredith Nicholson, similar to British author Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. He thought that this fake picture of a perfect life in the villages and small towns kept Americans from understanding how things really were there. American towns were already changing because it was hard for independent farmers to make a living in a society that was very competitive. However, people were leaving small towns for cities, where life and jobs were better, and people had more freedom. Those who stayed behind tried to justify their actions with ego, pride, and a false impression of being better than others.

Sinclair Lewis sounded the alarm against this story to the villages and put forward his harsher but more truthful and realistic account. He spoke out about the unhappiness that a few other men and women felt, and his version went from coast to coast and even further afield. For the most part, his vivid coverage of a national crisis was what made him "arrive" after an arduous apprenticeship.

The research emphasizes that no novel is perfect, and *Main Street* is no exception. The novelist, to begin with, puts together two very different themes in the same plot. In the author's sketch, the story is about Carol's fight against the narrowness and racism in her village. It's the story of a marriage that falls apart because the two people don't get along. If Sinclair Lewis's goal in *Main Street* was to create a paradise on earth, then his shift in *Arrowsmith* (1925) was to protest against situations and Social institutions that try to destroy the soul of an idealistic truth seeker. *Arrowsmith* is the debut novel of Sinclair Lewis. Here to connect with the main character, in addition to being a novel of protest like *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith* could also be seen as an affirmative novel. Just like the person who made him, Martin Arrowsmith doesn't like any Babbitt. Sinclair Lewis says:

"Martin was alienated from the civilized, industrious, nice youngmen of Digammna. Pi, in whose faces he could already see prescription, glossy white sterilisers, smart enclosed moters, and glass office-signs in the best gilt lettering. He preferred a barbarian loneliness" (*Arrowsmith*, 38).

The main character develops a strong desire to live for others, especially those who are humble and straightforward. He is a revolutionary at heart, reminiscent of Sinclair Lewis, and can't wait to rid society of all the accumulated trash over the years.

While *Arrowsmith* is the main character of the novel, Sinclair Lewis's idea of a true scientist comes to life in the personality of Max Gottlieb, who is Arrowsmith's teacher, mentor, and lifelong hero. Sinclair Lewis created Otto Lebrun, a German and a Jew, likely to disabuse readers in the United States of the racism that existed against Jews after the war. While *Arrowsmith* is primarily a story about the main character's struggles against a society that gets in the way of being idealistic, it does contain some irony and social critique.

Sinclair Lewis's satire, as portrayed through the character McGurk, about the institute hits close to home and shows that even the most prestigious institutions for science and study can be found to be dishonest and average.

The study explores one thing that can be said about Sinclair Lewis's satire and social criticism: it remains consistent in *Arrowsmith* as it was in his previous two novels, *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. He pokes fun at the same stupidities and social problems in *Arrowsmith* as he did in *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. Sinclair Lewis also ensured that irony and ridicule were more effective.

After discussing the kind of scientist who works there, he says, "No rocking Chair clique on a summer hotel porch, no knot of actors, ever whispered more scandal or hinted more warmly of complete idiocy in their confreres than did these uplifted scientists". Along with *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Arrowsmith*, it could be thought of as one of Sinclair Lewis's three best novels and a masterpiece of American literature. It is also a satire on the social conditions that slow down the progress of science and its pursuit of idealistic resources.

Sinclair Lewis, another novel, *Ann Vickers*, is another excellent example of how realistically he can show modern-day bourgeois society. Ann is rebelling against the ideals of Babbitt's world. The central part of the novel shows *Ann Vickers*, the social worker and reformer, at work. In the second part, he starts to lash out against established marriage and moral rules. The theme that runs throughout the novel is that men and women will always need each other. His novel is an attempt to make the everyday things of today seem more significant, as seen in Ann's assertion that she should always rebel against prisons, marriage, social norms, and established values. Sinclair Lewis was calling for a revolution, but it is unclear what he wanted to replace these old systems with, unless it was a vague form of utopia, like those popularized by Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells at the time. However, Sinclair Lewis has never attacked an array of social systems simultaneously in a single novel. In fact, his refusal to follow the rules about sex and marriage is very impressive. *Ann Vickers'* character flaw that stands out the most is that she changes from a generous seeker and idealistic rebel to a woman who is too focused on herself and not enough on sex. This change in Ann has made it easier for Sinclair Lewis to discuss the emptiness of customary marriages, but it's not very believable.

Sinclair Lewis wanted this novel to show what an independent woman looks like. But when he planned the novel, he made a huge mistake. He really did try to fit the themes of two novels into one. Ann, for instance, has been asked to play two different characters: a rebellious and unbending social reformer, and a woman who wants to be happy and is willing to break all social and moral rules to do so. Ann's marriage, which is the first part of the novel, shows that social change and individual happiness are at odds with each other.

In the novel *Ann Vickers*, some pages are smarter, but it's not in the same league as *Main Street* or *Arrowsmith*. He addressed social issues such as smugness in small towns and the progress in scientific study, which were essential and fundamental to a society. In *Ann Vickers*, he dealt with a vast number of fundamental social problems that were common in his time, like war, prisons, anti-abortion laws, and marriages between people who aren't compatible.

Main Street (1920), a novel of revolt, was Sinclair Lewis's first massive hit as a novelist in the 20th century. He also finished it off with *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), another novel about rebellion. He did write two more novels after this one. Compared to *Kingsblood Royal*, these two novels aren't essential. He shows how the freed woman in *Ann Vickers* rebels against strict social norms and a society that is falling apart. Additionally, in *Kingsblood Royal*, he illustrates how African Americans ultimately rise up against a social system that allows them to fight for rights in war but not for equality in peace.

Even though *Kingsblood Royal* isn't as good as Sinclair Lewis's best novels, the most important and attractive aspect is the idea that a black man shouldn't feel ashamed about his race or blood because it is royal blood, the blood of kings.

Howard Fast compared Sinclair Lewis, who was full of energy, to the young writers of the 1930s, like John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos, who had lost their strength and were unable to help themselves with their writing. It's hard to argue that the novel didn't have as much of an effect as *Main Street* since it sold more copies than that novel did.

Satire is the dominant note in *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Gideon Planish*. Sinclair Lewis goes on heaping satire, ridicule, and irony on the individuals and systems which he disapproves: On the other hand though there is as considerable measure of social analysis in *It Can't Happen Here*, as the title suggests, satire and irony are the predominant notes in this novel also to such an overwhelming degree that it, too, must be classed with great satires.

Sinclair Lewis produced four mostly satirical novels. Two of them are primarily about people, and the remaining two are mostly about society. The novels he has written offer a realistic and in-depth look at social groups and individuals, sometimes having a significant impact on society. Readers can sense the "weak humanity" put to the test in *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*. In *Gideon Planish*, Sinclair Lewis writes about a corrupt society; however, in *It Can't Happen Here*, he writes about a social order that is too proud of itself. Some characters and events in these novels are indeed exaggerated. Sinclair Lewis employs a consistent narrative structure in all of his satirical novels.

Despite his satirical novels, he never wrote any allegorical satires, such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, or satirical tales like George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The type of novel he writes is a social comedy. In this group is also "*It Can't Happen Here*," which is about a possible but fictional event. This is because it doesn't perfect its own into a faraway and vague future; it only deals with real-life instances in which the Fascist threat was very real.

Some readers have suggested that Sinclair Lewis used *Babbitt* to portray the typical American businessman as a philistine who prioritizes wealth over moral values. In fact, they say that businesses don't even have souls. *Babbitt* is interesting because he employed the well-known method of study and investigation to gather his facts and ensure his conclusions were accurate, in a manner similar to Zola.

In *Babbitt*, he employed a technique that was novel for his contemporary time to enhance the story's power. In the first hundred pages of the novel, he only deals with about one day in the hero's life. It goes into great depth on everything Babbitt does, from rising in the morning and waking up, to lying in bed. Readers pay the same amount of attention to his room, where he lives, his job, and the places he stops on the way home. By using this method, He shows how empty

Babbitt's goals are and how meaningless his surroundings are as the reader starts to be amazed by all of Babbitt's home's gadgets and comforts. Babbitt is a joke. But it's not really aimed at Babbitt. It's more the environment that makes him, holds them captive, and finally kills them. Sinclair Lewis describes Babbitt's bedroom and says, "Every second house in Floral Heights has a bedroom precisely like this." He is making fun of the system that leads to standardization.

It Can't Happen Here (1935), Sinclair Lewis's next novel in this genre, is also a novel of anger. He had a great sense of timing and an excellent idea of how people felt. The American scene had changed from religion to politics eight years after *Elmer Gantry*. More than religious issues, people were worried about the rise of fascism worldwide and the danger it posed at home. Like Father Coughlin of Detroit, who spoke out against fascism with excellent style, and the notorious Huey Long, whose manipulative speech gave him a lot of power over large groups of people, showed that fascism was becoming a massive threat in American life. Many radical liberals at the time, including Sinclair Lewis, were scared of the idea of a Fascist takeover.

This was the kind of charged environment where "*It Can't Happen Here*" showed up. The novel comes right after *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*, and in the way it criticizes what Sinclair Lewis hates, it could be seen as a reasonable follow-up to *Elmer Gantry*. *It Can't Happen Here* is a Bitter Satire like *Elmer Gantry* because of the mood, the subject, and the harsh tone.

Sinclair Lewis made a significant impact on the modern American novel as a realist and a critical realist. Unlike Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, he didn't have many close followers or start any schools. However, he did continue the trend of "Debunking." Another writer who looks a lot like him is John P. Marquand. On the other hand, there is a more critical realist. A lot of readers remember both Marquand and Sinclair Lewis for how well they wrote about modern society issues and traits.

Fellow writers have called Sinclair Lewis the "Dickens of America" because his political and social views were a strange mix of radicalism and orthodoxy. Like Charles Dickens, Sinclair Lewis was always very critical of American traits, but not of its structure. He was very aware of class distinction and hated snobbery. Then he shifts to satirizing the upper classes as aggressors and oppressors, and the popular classes as fighting back in self-defense. His novels represent the spirit of revolt against the existing order. In reality, it was the pinnacle of his life's work to portray how people lived in America in the present, and he was successful in doing so by utilizing satire and irony as the most powerful tools of protest. In his own field, he stands alone, leaving Anderson and other writers behind.

In Sinclair Lewis's life and autobiography, it is clear that he found in Europe a culture that instinctively met his needs for aesthetic sensibility, which was translated into many aspects of daily life a culture that had a real presence that America lacked. But his novels are not based on such a clear-cut opposite. As a necessary part of the moral issues they present, they also moderate the opposing view. He didn't think the American dream would come true because he thought people were inherently evil. Instead, he saw a new mythology of the infinite battle between illicit business and the honorable yet doomed efforts to preserve a tradition of civilized life. Sinclair Lewis's writing sharply addresses the fact that novels are not real and yet are successful. As Dr. Johnson said about limits in general, they are there not because we mistake them for facts, but to keep us honest. These are what his sharp novels do. However, the realities they discuss are selective; they provide a way to understand his time that is balanced and all-encompassing, which can't be achieved simply by gathering "facts" like traditional realists did, who were even more selective. In his writing, he doesn't use concrete or representational realism.

What is more important is the kind of realism that sees past the social trappings to the moral diversity in the part of American life he knew best. Because he admired the well-behaved nature of people in Europe in social situations, their art, and their public service, he was able to judge a society whose morals and intellectual energies were complex enough for a novelist to understand, but which primarily focused on law, business, and the exacting observance of fashionable behavior. His novels are European-inspired romances, similar to those of Moliere, set in American society. They are comparable to the novels written by American authors who came before him and were also influenced by European literature in various ways.

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