

The Ideological and Artistic Value of Lewis Sinclair's Centuries

Babakulov Yunus Faizullaevich

University of Science and Technology in philological sciences doctor of philosophy, Uzbekistan

Annotation: This article explores the inner world of ordinary Americans, not only about the material problems that afflict many men and women, but also about the writer's ideological observations about the emotional suffering of people who have been injured by war, who have lost the meaning of life, who have been crushed by their marriage attempts, and the use of artistic image tools in their works, as well as the artistic value of the writer's work. Issues are focused on.

Key words: Realism, critical (critical) realism, political conflict, class struggle, idea, artistry, pictorial expression, spirit, consciousness.

"Main Street" (1920), and subsequent novels "Babbit" (1922), "Arrowsmith" (1925), "Elmer Gentry" (1927) were created in the years when critical (critical) realism developed in American literature. The First World War, the sharp political conflicts in a number of Western countries in the early 20s - all of this had a deep impact on the work of the best foreign writers.

In the post-World War I period in the United States, the class struggle was not as intense as in European countries. However, life itself testifies to the fact that the society is built on an unfair basis and it is inevitable that it will face a crisis, and it seems to be telling the writer about this. The American literature of the 1920s shattered the optimistic hopes that had become the dominant ideology in the country for many years. Even older, experienced writers of critical realism tried to see the contradictions of the current situation more acutely and deeply than before: Theodore Dreiser's "American Tragedy" and Epton Sinclair's "Jimmy Higgins" and "One Hundred Percent" also testified to this.

After the First World War, new forces came to American literature: talented representatives of a new generation, freed from the traditions of decorative convention, distinguished by their critical point of view, appeared on the scene. Sherwood Anderson in his "Winesburg, Ohio" became famous with a collection of stories; John Dos-Passos became famous thanks to the novels "Manhattan" and "The 42nd Parallel"; Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Will Rise" and "A Farewell to Arms!" published his novels; William Faulkner published his first anti-war novel, "The Soldier's Prize". Although Sinclair Lewis was a bit older than the generation of the 20s, his creative flowering time coincided with this period.

Before World War I, Theodore Dreiser and Epton Sinclair dealt a crushing blow to the ideology of "one hundred percent Americanization," demonstrating the depth of the gulf that separated the poor from the rich and ending the myth of "equal opportunity" that bourgeois democracy afforded to all citizens. Writers of the 20s went deeper. They revealed the truth not about the big cities and high-rise America, but about the suburbs and zabun, "one-story" America, showed the hardship and tragedy of the life of the remote villages. They explored the inner world of the ordinary American and told not only about the financial problems that afflict many men and women, but also about the emotional suffering of people who were injured by war, lost the meaning of life, and crushed by marriage attempts.

Sinclair Lewis, with his novels of the 1920s, participated in the renewal of American literature that was carried out by the post-war generation of writers. His novels served as a unique artistic guide to the "American way of life". Lewis showed the important features of the social reality of the United

States, which have not yet been covered in literature, and created artistic generalizations that are characteristic not only of his country, but also of other countries. Sinclair Lewis debunks the myths by portraying the new capitalist civilization in a magnificent and spectacular way. He also showed how the existing system has a negative impact on human personality and the intellectual life of society. Lewis's best novels exposed the spiritual underbelly of the modern bourgeoisie. In this sense, we have reason to talk about the international significance of Sinclair Lewis's satire.

Western European and American writers created many attractive figures of businessmen and entrepreneurs in the 19th and 20th centuries. The hero of Sinclair Lewis's novel "Babbitt" has a special place among them. He is not as angry as Dickens's Boudier, or as sweet as Dreiser's Cowperwood, or as ignorant as Henry Manning's Diederich Gessling. In general, Babbitt is not a cruel person, and it is difficult to say that he is devoid of human feelings. His biggest flaw is his stubbornness. We can call him a symbol of militant, celebrated mediocrity.

Western publicists and sociologists have spent a lot of effort to prove that bourgeois democracy creates ample opportunities for personal development, opens a free path to initiative, and promotes the growth of talents. Babbitt's image surpasses all correspondence of these publicists in terms of reliability. For so many years, he has been living in the minds of readers as a symbol of the owner-owner. Look, admire, a "free citizen", the owner of a large bank account, a successful businessman! His life is nothing more than a slave imitation. Even Babbitt's house is set up like his neighbors: his bedroom has "two flat, identical beds, between them - a bedside table with a standard night light, a glass of water on it, and a book with many color pictures for reading at night - it's hard to tell what kind of book it is, because no one has ever discovered him..." The typicality of the character here is based on his lack of education and simplicity. The hand of Sinclair Lewis came easily, and the name of Babbitt became known and famous not only in America, but also in the whole world.

What the author wrote about his hero may seem paradoxical: "I want him to appear not only as a type, but as a person, an individuum... He is a person like us, an ordinary American, who has achieved a lot at the age of 46, but is frying in his own fat. Babbitt is a person who wants to take more things out of life than cars and houses before it's too late... When I show his true face, I want to show that he has no extraordinary, special, different characteristics, but there is drama, passion, struggle.

Is there passion, struggle in Babbitt? Of course, his attempts to break out of the luxurious bourgeois life are very petty and funny. But Babbitt himself, drowning in the quagmire of business, opens his eyes from time to time: "I can't say that making money is a pleasure... What is all this for?" It is not about Babbitt himself, or even human nature, but about society, the environment that caused him to fall into this situation.

Despite his mediocrity and pettiness, Babbitt is not an automaton, or an anonymous, abstract person, but an ordinary living person. This method of description makes the author's accusation against the world of owners more relevant.

Babbitt, the novelist, finds a unique way to expand the scope of the environment in which he lives. Using film techniques in the novel, Sinclair Lewis creates a unique montage image: before the reader's eyes, short scene-film shots appear, and different social strata of the city of Zenit are shown in front of us.

"At this hour in Zenith, two scientists were sitting in the laboratory, working hard on their research papers on synthetic rubber research.

At the same time, in Zenit, four union leaders were discussing whether twelve thousand miners in the city and a hundred miles around the city should go on strike...

At the same time, the Pullmore tractor factory - a "city" made of steel and concrete - was working the night shift to fulfill an order for transporters for the Polish army...

A young man who could not find a job for half a year in the slums behind the railway opened the gas valve and poisoned himself and his wife.

It was at this time that Lloyd Mallem, a poet and bookshop owner, was finishing a poem describing how fun it was to live in feudal Florence and how boring life was in Zenit.

At the same time, George F. Babbitt turned heavily on his side and turned for the last time - this was a sign that insomnia had hit his soul, he decided to sleep hard and for a long time.

As we can see, Sinclair Lewis was not limited to expressing the "middle class" and its life, but was able to show how many tragedies, labors, conflicts, searches and ideas exist outside the world of "babbitts". This also strengthened the influence of the author's critical views.

The American public accepted "Babbitt" as the discovery of realism. The well-known critic G. Menken, who took an advanced position in the 1920s, concludes his analysis of the novel with the following general conclusion: "...This is not just humor, but a search for truth... I have not come across another novel that describes the true picture of real America. This is a high-class social document."

Sinclair Lewis was able to show more clearly and expressively than his predecessors that the spirit of standardization and equalization is characteristic of the bourgeois culture in his country. The provincial town of Gopher Prairie ("Main Street") resembles small towns in other states, as Babbitt recalls other middle-class owners; each of them has its own Main Street; a sense of peace and tranquility and boredom prevails, just like in others... Lewis's novels feature a number of anonymous characters. Their character and interests may be different, but they are used to thinking with the help of ready-made concepts or speaking with the help of ready-made forms, or rather, they are taught. The writer himself gradually turns into a person typical of the world of "babbitts" in the sarcastic, bitter author's review of the work. "American democracy," he says, "does not mean property equality at all, but demands a healthy uniformity in thought, dress, color, art, spirituality, and speech" ("Babbitt").

The business world takes a different approach to those who do not want to adhere to this "healthy uniformity". In his novels of the 1920s, Sinclair Lewis says almost nothing about the policing of the progressive elements, the judicial leadership. But it often tells stories of everyday crimes and impunity committed in the name of the "blessed" laws of proprietary morality. One of the characteristic features of his novels is the description of the pitfalls that befall a person who decides to show independence of thought, even if to a small extent. In one of Lewis's early novels, "Flight of the Falcon", one of the episodic characters, Professor Frazer, and his loyal students become victims of such persecution and humiliation. In other works, the young teacher Fern Mullins ("Main Street"), the innovative scientist Gottlieb ("Erosmith"), who did not find a "place" in the hearts of Winnemac University scientists, and the truthful priest Frank Shallard, who opposed the authoritative representatives of the church, are also persecuted by those around them.

The image of the religious leader Elmer Gentry is one of the most vivid satirical generalizations in the works of Sinclair Lewis. Where spirituality and people's psyche are closely related to commercial and monetary interests, such faceless, hypocritical, hypocritical "entrepreneurs" appear who make money by selling religion and faith, and even try to insert sensationalism and advertising into worship.

In the novels of Sinclair Lewis, careerists and bribe-takers use the traditional forms of the country's social (public) life for their own benefit. The proliferation of various clubs, groups, leagues, advocacy and charity campaigns not only encourages public initiative, but also creates a favorable environment for the activities of all kinds of fraudsters. Arrowsmith has one small but very attractive character in its own right: Dr. Almus Pickerbo. He makes a living as safely and confidently as Elmer Gentry used

religion in health care; he is engaged in sanitary bleaching works under the motto "The more health there is, the more it is." A person who has gained wealth through this medicine, who is a symbol of bacchanalism, will easily achieve great success in the political arena. When he is nominated for Congress, he will present his program of future activities in front of the voters. The author gives Pickerbo's eloquent intonation from his demagogic and hypocritical position in this way: "He is, of course, in favor of paying every worker a flat wage, but at the same time he fights like a lion for the interests of all industrialists, merchants and landowners - zamindars."

Gentry's sermons, Babbitt's club speeches, Pickerbaugh's sanitary-enlightenment slogans, Sinclair Lewis makes extensive use of the art of parody. He skillfully imitates the tasteless style of boulevard (street) newspapers, commercial advertisements, and the speech of political businessmen who scorn the highest concepts as black and white. He emphasizes that the speech of his compatriots has also been influenced by the commercial sphere (Pickerbaugh says very seriously about his profession - medicine: "Just think that we work in a field where nothing but honesty, humanity and solidarity can be traded!").

Lewis's book "The Man Who Knew Cooley" written in 1928 is also a unique work. This is a satirical monologue. Mr. Lowell Schmaltz, Babbitt's compatriot and friend, tells a story about himself. The essence of a bourgeois who is happy with his work, satisfied with his work, but at the bottom of his soul is known not only from the essence of his words, but also from the style of speech.

In the novels of the 1920s, Sinclair Lewis established himself as a witty and timely expositor, but he was unwilling to settle for just that role. A characteristic of Lewis, a writer, is the tenacious pursuit of positive values and positive heroes. This satirist, who was accused many times of condemning and distorting American life, loved his country with all his heart. He sincerely wanted to show the healthy, life-giving forces of the United States of America.

So what could the author of "Babbit" contrast with the bourgeois world? First of all, he sought to look for buds of positivity in the environment that was the subject of his realist criticism.

While working on Main Street, Lewis explained to the publisher his thoughts on the mockup for the supercover: he suggested that the image should be of a young woman "ready to fight" against the ignorant and angry townspeople. Lewis notes that "the book should not even look like a simple love story of a blue-collar girl, otherwise the novel will not interest the people it is supposed to attract." The writer wanted the central conflict and appearance of the Main Street character to be different from existing patterns.

Sinclair Lewis intended to find a very real person and show a deep-thinking, honest American. While working on "Babbit", he says: "My novel after "Babbit" will not be satirical, but rebellious in spirit, with only a heroic central character...". The meeting with Debs, the initial plans about the working class - all this did not lead to immediate creative results. The idea of a novel with a positive main character was realized in "Erosmith" in a completely different way. It is this very distance from the interests of this class that prevents Sinclair Lewis from presenting a reliable and honest portrayal of a man who showed courage and perseverance in the field of struggle for workers. But he was able to portray a person who demonstrated similar qualities in the field of science.

In Main Street and Arrowsmith, Lewis revealed a new side of American life. Developing a realistic critique of American bourgeois reality in Arrowsmith, he develops a theme of broad international significance. He was able to create one of the first and best novels about science and the fate of scientists in the 20th century.

In the last century, the rapid development of science and technology created a new type in literature - the image of a researcher, an inventor. The process of scientific research, the search for new truths turned out to be very interesting material for novelists. While following the activities of scientists,

realist-writers fight against not only the tyrannical forces of nature, but also social forces that are hostile to real science and enlightenment and intend to use scientific discoveries for their own selfish purposes.

Lewis's next novel, "Martin Arrowsmith" (Martin Arrowsmith, 1925, Pulitzer Prize), is a work that reveals the situation of science and its figures in the conditions of capitalist America. It is distinguished by having requirements that meet certain moods. However, this situation should be attributed to the fact that the well-known American scientist - Paul de Cruif (De Cruif) participated in the creation of the novel together with Lewis. Lewis met the writer and bacteriologist Paul de Kreyf (Crewey) at that time, who was extremely talented and knowledgeable. The participation of this person in the process of working on the work made it much richer in content and more interesting. Throughout the work, the work of the researcher-physician, his creative recovery, research and discoveries, achievements and defeats are interestingly and clearly described in the language of a person closely familiar with this field.

Sinclair Lewis continued to criticize bourgeois civilization in this book. He shows that the fate of science is in the hands of the dollar, in the hands of wealthy patrons who financially support the research of scientists and get huge profits from it. But the impact and originality of the novel is not in social satire, but in Martin Arrowsmith, a true, honest scientist who does not want to be subordinated to business.

In the 20s and 30s, the aspirations of the American creative intelligentsia for the working class increased during the period of economic hardship, labor protests, and large-scale strikes. For Sinclair Lewis, this was a period of particularly intense ideological ambivalence. The fact that he did not find the opportunity to get close to the most advanced people of America at this time and establish a relationship strengthened his feeling of isolation.

Thus, Sinclair Lewis' pamphlet about the striking weavers and the novel about the businessman Dodsworth coincided almost simultaneously.

According to the plot, "Dodsworth" is reminiscent of "Main Street". Both have family drama. However, in "Main Street" the disagreements in the family have a principled essence, and the conflict between Carol and her husband is that Carol is bored and tired of the life of a remote and backward town, and the writer looks at her at least partially with pity, but in "Dodsworth" this is not the case at all.

True, the heroine of the work, Fran, the wife of the owner of a car company, explains the quarrel between her and her husband by the fact that it is boring to live among people who are busy with business: "The drawback of our industrial system is that its ideals cannot satisfy the needs of a woman capable of intuition and feeling." However, as the plot of the work develops, Fran's "high feelings" are revealed, and it becomes clear that they are nothing more than the masculinity of a woman who knows nothing but pleasure and is indifferent to her family. By exposing his character who criticizes the "American industrial system", the writer tries to justify this system in a certain sense and restore it.

Businessman Sam Dodsworth is in many ways similar to Babbitt, and the writer reveals his qualities with warmth. He satisfies his desire for a relatively meaningful life by traveling through Europe. At the end of the work, with the "permission" of the author, he is ready to return to his temporarily abandoned business.

The writer's withdrawal from the ideological point of view, as it often happens, also harmed him in the artistic sense. It can be said that the novel "Dodsworth" has become too long, simple and even boring.

In the novel "Ann Vickers" (1933), Sinclair for the first time directly addresses the fate of the poor. He shows the disenfranchisement of the poor citizens of his country. The author argues that the prison

regime, based on gross abuse of the person, does not eliminate crime, but, on the contrary, paves the way for it. "Anne Vickers" contains many moving and powerful lines exposing the hypocrisy of bourgeois philanthropy, the bribery of officials, and the lies and fakery of the reactionary press.

Sinclair Lewis, in his opinion, intended to create a strong and honest human character who opposed the hostile world of the landlords. Ann Vickers, according to the author, is an American woman, a positive hero. He is smart and active, he has a strong sense of striving for justice and fighting for it.

The problem of the role of women in modern society is one of the topics that have been occupying Sinclair Lewis's life. He believes that a woman's place is not only in the kitchen and children's room, but they also have the right to engage in independent creative work and fight for their place in life. Carol interprets Kennicott's "defeat," his compromise with the world of "High Street," as his inability to fulfill his literary potential outside of his family. Leora Arrowsmith is portrayed by Sinclair Lewis not only as a beloved wife, but also as a reliable partner and assistant to her husband. In the novel "Ann Vickers", Sinclair Lewis was the first in the literature of his country to show a public figure - a woman.

In the central chapters of the novel, Anne Vickers' struggle against the violence and abuse of the prison administration is revealed with great skill and great drama. But this struggle, no matter how much endurance and strength Anne shows in it, is only directed against abuse. Acting as a reformer and a philanthropist (a person fighting for the common good), the hero of the novel does not at all undermine the foundations of the existing system.

CONCLUSION

American literary scholars studying the legacy of Sinclair Lewis usually proceed from the following scheme: after a long period of research and apprenticeship, the writer reached serious creative peaks in the 20s and created something new in American literature, then his work began to fade, and in his 30s and 40s All his works are of secondary level and are not significant from the point of view of literary studies. For example, M. Shorer's extensive research is based on this scheme. Lewis' works before "Main Street" are considered under the name "Rise", his works of the 20s are studied under the rubric "Success", and his books after 1930, when the writer was awarded the Nobel Prize, are collectively called "Depression".

This view of Lewis's way of writing, his work, does not tolerate any criticism.

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