

SCIENTIFIC CAREER AND THE INDIVIDUAL STRUGGLE IN SINCLAIR LEWIS' *ARROWSMITH*

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Abstract:

This research paper is concerned with the traits of Sinclair Lewis's social vision shown in the novel of *Arrowsmith* and with the insight of scientific career and individual struggle against society that are expressed. Sinclair Lewis known for his satirical writings and the artistic way exploring conflict as the main theme in his works. In *Arrowsmith* Lewis repeatedly highlighted concept of medical practices and individual struggle against society. Also showing of American culture and behavior are detailed as this novel gives a view of American life and how its effect on the individual.

Keywords: scientific career, individual struggle, medical practices and view of American life.

Sinclair Lewis was an American writer, playwright and he was the first writer from the United States to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. The writing of Lewis's represented the American culture and society. His most represented work includes *The Main Street*, *Babbit*, *Elmer Gantry* and *Arrowsmith*. Lewis was most controversial writer during his period as because most of his works are satirical and he was very ambivalent about every aspects of life. During 1926 he even declined Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* but in 1930's Lewis reputation plummeted. Sheldon Grebstein commented:

“No writer has ever risen higher in our critical esteem and then dropped more precipitately”.

Indeed, *The Main Street* was most turning point in Lewis career which laid strong way for other four solid works - *Babbit*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Dodsworth* and *Arrowsmith*. In all these works Lewis repeatedly represented the American culture and conflict as the major theme. Also Lewis was a journalist so reader could find the essence of it in his works, the essence referred in his novels as arguments and refusal for adjustments.

Lewis portrayed many aspects of American life in *Arrowsmith*. The focus on this paper is to picture the struggle against American culture and the scientific career that developed by Lewis throughout the novel. In the novel *Arrowsmith*, Martin Arrowsmith is the hero who has been described in a way relates to struggle against the society, also Lewis brought up the new concept of medical practices and scientific researches in this novel. He depicted very clearly about medical profession as he had some understanding with medical career since his father, grandfather and brother were all doctors.

“*Arrowsmith* brought almost entirely new subject matter into American fiction, there had, of course, been novels about doctors” (Schorer414).

The hero, Martin attends the medical school at the University of Winnemac, he was doing research in bacteriology under the direction of Dr. Max Gottlieb. Except his medical research he was disappointed with the medical education. Martin had problems with the studies and some students ignorant. During his studies he was fascinated by Leora Tozer, an impotent and student nurse. After a short relationship between them, Leora forced by her family to return home to Wheatsylvania. This affected Martin and he suspended from the university for his drinking and after being impudent to a professor. Martin then settled for some time in Wheatsylvania and married to Leora then takes her off to a neighboring town.

Leora family forced Martin to return Wheatsylvania for the medical practice after finishing his studies. When Martin graduated, they both settled down in south Dakota. Even after Martin was not happy and not popular. He rarely attends church but left being a teetotaler. At certain point when Leora had a miscarriage and came to know they cannot have any more chance of it, this reason made them unhappier towards life in the small town. Martina and Leora then moves Nautilus, a city in the Midwest where Martin started working as a physician under Dr. Pickerbaugh. During the days in Nautilus he was not found true happiness in life and he felt Dr. Pickerbaugh stands too much on materialistic world.

The probable failure in personal life and business activities made Martin not to attain any happiness in life. But Throughout the story Martin has the down-to-earth quality unlike most doctors in the society. In Nautilus, Martin goes on falls with Orchid, who is Dr. Pickerbaugh eldest daughter. Orchid was caressing him but the affair is plainly not innocent as portrayed by Lewis.

“As definite as religious conversation or the coming of insane frenzy inwar; the change from shamed reluctance to be unfaithful to his wife” (P229).

Martin breaks up the extra marital relationship at one point. Once again Martin disappointed with his situation in Nautilus and then he moves to the Rouncefield Clinic in Chicago. His job was as a pathologist but he found the job was dull and materialistic. But He

tried to enjoy the pleasure of being in city with Leora. Martin continues to work for his research paper which made him to get an offer from Gottlieb, with the famous Mc Gurk Research Institute.

Martin found remarkable resources for his research at Mc Gurk. For his research he joins with Terry Wickett and with other officials of the organization. During the research he developed good friendship with Terry. He continues to work with anti-toxin research and devoted himself into the research. Martin continued his research for the new discovery but unfortunately a French researcher publishes same discovery at first. With al struggle he again started research in development of a bacillus of bubonic plague with the assistance of Dr.Sondelius. At this time, the plague breaks out on an Island of Caribbean.

Mc Gurk Research Institute sent Martin in company with Leora and Dr. Sondelius to test the medicine. There Martin conducted field experiment to use his new medicine. There he is to use the new medicine only half of those stricken with plague. He was attracted by the beautiful widow Joyce Lanyon who helped him in the fieldwork. Again Martin fails in life as in the fieldwork process Leora and Dr. Sondelius are contracted with the plague and dies there. In a grief and guilt, he left the experiment to be followed by another doctor. Later when the plague dies out Martin returns to New York as the savior of the Caribbean.

In the meantime, Martin falls in love with wealthy widowed Joyce Lanyon after a time they are married and for a while Martin kept away from the research, enjoyed the luxury life with Joyce. He then claims his research with Terry to the Vermont Woods. After sometime Joyce gave birth. With the birth of their son Joyce demands for Martin's time on social activities and some household events but he kept on work day and night at Woods. With all the bitter attacks from his wife, he chooses to join with Terry for a work on a commercial product.

Research become dominant in Martin's life but he was considered this as the religious feeling although not a conventionally accepted in the American culture. In the earlier chapter of *Arrowsmith* conventional spiritual behavior considered as the part of the life in American culture but Martin as the medical student was not a church goer. Even during his stay in Wheatsylvania with Leora, he was forced to attend church but he did occasionally.

“Board by the united Brethren minister's discourse on doctrine on the wickedness of movies, and the scandalous pay of pastors” (P12).

This explains Martin preferred to play poker and much involved with drinking even on the Fourth of July which was “the most absorbing event” (13) in American culture.

Martin had the same struggle even in Nautilus she had conflict with some of the churches. Later he attacked by all the “fashionable churches” and defended only by the catholic priest, whose attentions are poor ones. But Martin is not punished for neglecting the religious observance. Lewis also highlighted the concept of religion is replaced by scientist. Reader can find this essence while Martin Stays in Mc Gurk Institute with Dr. Max Gottlieb, who is sort of priest to him.

“The normal man, he does not care much what he does except that he should eat and sleep and make love. But the scientist is intensely religious...he is so religious that he will not accept quarter-truths because they are an insult to his faith” (P14).

The influence of the professor Dr. Max Gottlieb on Arrowsmith is mysterious. Gottlieb ruthless medical objectivity made Martin to perceive most of the materialism in the medical world. Advice from the professor with Hippocratic Oath:

“Knowledge is the greatest thing in the medical world but it is no good whatever unless you can sell it and to do this you must first impress your personality on the people who have the dollars. Whether a patient is new or an old friend, use must always use salesmanship on him” (P87).

Martin finds this as sort of materialism is confined to medical world. This shows Lewis hatred this kind of practices and that so evident in this novel. Lewis showed Martin Arrowsmith's medical profession in particular along with personal life and conflicts as the subject matter of this novel.

Lewis conception of portraying American culture is deep in this novel as he pictured the conflict of the individual American with all the demands of the society and the medical practices in particular. Following the career and dealing with the personal life in all aspects as becoming more difficult for the individual in the society.

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