



# REALISM OF SINCLAIR LEWIS: SYNCRETIC FEATURES

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## Abstract

The study investigates Sinclair Lewis's characterization techniques from the point of view of the genre. The findings reveal that the writer created romantic heroes in his realistic novels ("Arrowsmith", "Godseeker") being influenced by Fenimore Cooper. Most of his antiheroes such as Babbit, Elmer Gantry, and Buzz Windrip are modeled after certain pathological personality disorders which proves that the writer carried a deep socio-psychological investigation in the depiction of the characters. This feature makes him closer to the naturalist authors who research human nature in detail. Though indifferent to modernism, Sinclair Lewis still incorporated some modernistic elements in his novels. The motif of metamorphosis in the novel "Kingsblood Royal" reflects the inner transformation of the hero. The syncretic nature of the Realism of Sinclair Lewis provides literary charm to his characters.

**Keywords:** syncretism, realism, character, hero, antihero, romanticism, naturalism

## Introduction

The aesthetic views and creative mastery of American writer Sinclair Lewis, who lived and worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were undoubtedly influenced by factors such as the era and environment. Notably, examining the writer's skill in character creation reveals that Sinclair Lewis's realism, particularly his mastery in crafting artistic images, is founded on syncretism. In other words, his realistic depictions vividly reflect the postulates of other movements, including romanticism, naturalism, and even modernism. The fact that the writer's career unfolded during the period between the two world wars, when naturalism, realism, and modernism developed in parallel in American literature, could not help but be reflected in the works of Sinclair Lewis.

## Methods And Theoretical Basis

Undoubtedly, S. Lewis is primarily a realist, a literally realistic writer who strives to depict life with photographic accuracy. His views coincide with the transition of American literature from classical to non-classical. This is probably why, on the one hand, S. Lewis's aesthetics were nourished by the stage of classical literature, which promoted the ideas of Aristotle-Hegel-

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Cant. Therefore, he was recognized as a conservative creator with his striving for rationality, normativity, harmony of form and content, seeing real life as the only object of art, and striving to depict the ideal. On the other hand, S. Lewis shares some views with modernists who rejected classicism. The article aims to reveal the syncretic features of Sinclair Lewis' characterization. The works of Sinclair Lewis, one of the major representatives of the American realistic novel, are widely studied in world literary studies. Also, S. Lewis's Character Creation Skills were the object of special studies in the works by A. Coleman, S. Conroy, S. Daniel, S. Grebstein, B. McKenna, M. Light, C. J. Town, D. Simpkins, S. P. Sherman, L. Richardson, S. Michels, J.M. Hutchison, M.M. Helleberg, D. Dooley, L. Coard, F. Carpenter, M. O. Mendelson, A. B. Gilenson, I. O. Mazirka, A. Kritsky, E. K. Iordanidi. Autobiographical sources by Mark Schorer [Schorer 1961], Vincent Sheean [Sheean, 1963] and Richard Lingeman [Lingeman, 2002] provide valuable information about Sinclair Lewis.

## Discussion

S. Lewis, although he often referred to the artistic images of Charles Dickens, and Herbert Wells, and took a model from them, exaggerated his aesthetic ideals in the form of romantic writers in the characterisation of the hero's psychology, and widely used uplifting-pathetic pathos in setting an artistic problem. His ideal heroes Arrowsmith, Gottlieb, Sandelius, Dormes Jessep, and Neil Kingsblad are deeply saturated with the ideas of humanism, altruism, and idealism of the creator. He embodies the image of a person who can rise above reality, one who remains undefeated in the conflict between individuals and society through their unwavering will and courage. It is precisely these characteristics that make S. Lewis's characters close to the artistic interpretation of man by romantics such as Fenimore Cooper. For both Cooper and S. Lewis, the image of a frontiersman served as a source of inspiration for the realization of their aesthetic ideals. Martin Erousmith is supposedly portrayed as Nat Bumpo's new counterpart, who appeared in the twentieth century, not in a wild jungle, but in the town of Winnemak, in a medical university. The character of Nat Bumpo is distinguished by his love for nature and his consideration of freedom, liberty, and personal independence as supreme values. This hero, who lives in the forest and knows the language of nature, is also considered a foster brother of Mohican Chingachgook. In the novel "Arrowsmith," individual freedom is of particular importance and is reflected in the image of Martin. There is a serious basis for interpreting the character of S. Lewis as one of the heroes of freedom in American literature. The transformation of liberty into a question of life and death in the line of Martin's personality brings him closer to a romantic character than a realistic one. After a long struggle, Martin gained a high reputation, a large fortune, and a leadership position. But Martin gave it all up and moved with Terry to a poor cabin on the edge of the woods to do his research. The intertextual connections between the characters of Martin Erousmith and Nathaniel Bumpo are not merely accidental, but the product of a creative dialogue connected to the conscious, purposeful artistic concept of the writer. Moreover, the theme of frontier and the image of Bumpo continue in the character of Aaron Gaad, the protagonist of "Godseeker". One of the last works of the writer "Godseeker" is a historical novel about the author's favorite topic - the frontier. Fenimore Cooper is remembered several times in the novel.

Sinclair Lewis also reminds representatives of the school of naturalism, in particular, in the characterization and the scientific study of antiheroes. He carefully examines and artistically embodies the mental world, motives, and thoughts of the antihero, like a sociologist. The writer was able to vividly express the inconsistencies and imperfections of human nature to such an

extent that it allows the researcher to compare the psyche of his antiheroes with the psychiatry of a particular personality disorder. It seems that the writer, relying on his life experience, modeled the characters of the antiheroes according to the psychotypes of specific pathological personalities. It should be noted that S. Lewis mainly uses such principles as naturalistic detailing and artistic research of the mental world of the anti-heroes. The writer, who began to research the nature of evil through anti-heroes, transferred his subtle observations and extraordinary accuracy to the characters of Elmer Gentry, Babbitt, Almus Pickerbo, and Bezz Windrip, who became immortal literary characters with their vitality and complexity. The article "Synthesis of Non-literary and Literary Typology in the Classification of Characters" [Akhmedova, 2023] is devoted to the new typology of literary characters. The correlation of the literary typology of the characters with some types of personality disorders developed in psychology is analyzed in the research. In particular, on the example of the works of Sinclair Lewis, the effectiveness of applying knowledge about the psycho-types belonging to the "Dark Triad" in the analysis of antiheroes in fiction is considered. In the course of the study, comparative-typological, psychological methods of analysis were used. As a result, the characters of Sinclair Lewis's novels "Arrowsmith", "Elmer Gantry" and "It Can't Happen Here" were analyzed according to the personality types of the "Dark Triad", such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. This approach turned out to be an effective means of creating and analyzing a literary character, in particular the image of an antihero. However, the protagonist characters Sinclair Lewis describes are completely different from the passive characters of contemporary writers Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser, whose characters are puppets in the hands of fate and their degradation is predetermined by their origins.

In the novel "Kingsblood Royal" Sinclair Lewis, who intends to show how racism burdens humanity, puts the hero of his story in an amusing and at the same time terrible situation. Perhaps Lewis' contemporary modernists also influenced such an artistic approach. After all, modernism puts the literary hero in an absurd situation and observes how human nature reacts. Like Kafka's Gregor Zamza, Neil undergoes a transformation, a metamorphosis. But not into a beetle. Into "an animal" since being a Negro meant this to Neil: *"It was to be an animal physically; it was to be an animal culturally, deaf to Beethoven and St. Augustine. It was to be an animal ethically, unable to keep from stealing and violence, from lying and treachery. It was literally and altogether to be an animal, somewhere between human beings and the ape"* [Lewis, 1947: p. 56]. Neil's family members have always been proud of their nobility, because "king blood" means "belonging to the king, from the royal blood", and this family believes that their ancestors are related to the kings. According to his father, one of his ancestors was born out of wedlock to an English king. Therefore, it is necessary to quickly confirm and prove that the Kingslood family is a descendant of kings. After investigating, Neil learns that one of his ancestors was actually a black man from Africa. So, according to the One-drop of rule, both Neil and his pink-cheeked queen Bidy are colored. The essence of the artistic meaning of this novel is that the sequence of events made the protagonist Neal Kingsblad feel with all his soul how absurd, inhuman, and tragic it is to divide the world into the whites and colored. The metamorphosis of the character gives the reader a deeper understanding of racial prejudice.

### **Conclusion**

Although Sinclair Lewis's artistic legacy is a profound example of realism, his literary characters reveal traces of other isms, which are naturally related to the context of the time. His

characters such as Arrowsmith, and Aeron Gaad show close intertextual relations with Natty Bamppo of Fenimore Cooper, father of American Romanticism. Thus features of romanticism, idealization of the characters, and reverence of nature in the image of the hero evidence the synthesis of romanticism and realism in the works of the novelist. Antiheroes of the novels by Lewis, like Babbit, Elmer Gantry, and Bezz Windrip are the result of a close study of the human psyche by the author who resembles naturalist writers by the depiction of sociological-psychological research of the characters. Though indifferent to modernism, Lewis was still influenced by some techniques of the modernists. The motif of metamorphosis in the novel "Kingsblood Royal" played an important role in the structure of the work. What makes Sinclair Lewis' characters longliving is provided by the syncretic nature of the Realism of Sinclair Lewis.

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