

## SLOVENE CRITICS ON SINCLAIR LEWIS'S NOVELS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the reception of Sinclair Lewis's novels by Slovene critics. Initially, the article focuses on the life and work of Sinclair Lewis, giving special emphasis to social influences that made the author a representative figure in the literary and social world. Thus his works are nowadays to be understood primarily as fiction, but on the other hand also as sociological documents of a social and political situation of the period between the two world wars. Generally, the effect they produce is one of a critical discussion of the nation of the United States. When speaking of the social relevance that Lewis's novels have, it is obvious that his works are the portrayals of Americans and their deficiencies. At the time of their publication Lewis's novels received unfavourable criticism on account of his overly open pro-European attitude and Slovene critics of the period before World War II emphasise this in much detail. It was precisely this anti-American propaganda in the novels themselves and sincerity on the part of the novelist that won the European critics as well as the readers when it came to appreciating his works. However, Lewis's view of the Americans, as presented throughout his works, only enhanced his literary credibility as a modern writer. That is why the articles by Slovene critics that appeared after the Second World War, and even more significantly after Lewis's death, almost minutely reflect a more favourable attitude to Sinclair Lewis, which was also the case with foreign literary criticism of the post-war period. Critics still discuss the qualities and flaws of Lewis's novels, but being more lenient they no longer profess that the novels lack in artistic value. They remain, however, primarily relevant as social documents of the pre- and post-war era, which fully presented the American middle-class mentality in America and elsewhere. For this reason, the Nobel Prize for Literature awarded to Sinclair Lewis in 1930 seems duly justified. It signifies appreciation and respect that the American and European readers as well as critics used to have and still have for Sinclair Lewis. Therefore, it is no surprise that his novels are being translated in several foreign languages even in modern times.

**Key words:** Lewis's novels, literary criticism, social realism, portrayal of American society, middle-class mentality

Sinclair Lewis is a largely analysed figure who (during his lifetime) managed to focus his works on the events of his own life, which is why we can assume that the majority of his best acclaimed novels reflect the author's own identity, pervasively a result of his social commitment and his own personal beliefs. It was precisely his radical views that made him *persona non grata* in the social and literary

sphere. Social environment is, however, a major influence over an individual, but it is the spiritual strength of each individual that shows whether a person is going to submit entirely to the norms of society or take on a more active role within his / her environment.

Lewis achieved the biggest acclaim from his readers and critics when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. He was the first in the line of American authors to be awarded this honourable prize. Lewis's reputation of a social realist was mostly due to his most fruitful years from 1920 to 1930, which was the time that saw the publication of his major novels – *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Elmer Gantry* (1927) and *Dodsworth* (1929). His popularity, however, was noted outside the United States as well, which was proved with numerous translations of Lewis's novels into many European languages. As Hutchisson (1996: 204) states, by 1930 eleven out of thirteen novels were translated into Russian, German and Polish, seven into Hungarian, Danish, Norwegian and Czech, six into French, four into Dutch, two into Spanish and one (*Babbitt*) into Italian and Hebrew. Lewis's satirical and at times even controversial novels offered the Europeans a new perception of Americans, while Americans tended to perceive themselves quite differently as well (*ibid.* 209). Lewis, thus, successfully outlined the virtues and flaws of the American society – its unique American-ness of the Midwest. Opposed to this he presented the benefits and drawbacks of the European mentality, mainly shown through different behavioural patterns of the immigrant society.

Social relevance of Lewis's novels is justified by different layers of symbolism in the given social milieu. An individual symbolically embedded in his environment is a pervasively naturalistic feature. Lewis himself admitted that he had followed the steps of Balzac, Zola and Dickens, but his naturalism was less severe than theirs had been and much more lenient. As stated before, the Nobel Prize awarded to Sinclair Lewis brought him proper acclaim, but at the same time it also signified the beginning of the end of his collaboration with the publishing house Harcourt, Brace and Co. and his chief editor Alfred Harcourt. Lewis reproached Harcourt for not taking commercial advantage of his Nobel Prize. Unfortunately, one reason for his breaking ties with Harcourt lay also in the fact that a third of the profit from the sold novels abroad went to the publisher directly, while Lewis had yet to pay ten percent of his earnings to foreign agents in England and elsewhere for the promotion of his novels abroad. Yet, it is commonly believed that Lewis's relation with Harcourt was the most productive one, since he never later repeated his success with any of his other publishers.

Many of the hundreds of letters that Lewis wrote to Harcourt during this ten-year period were Lewis's way of asking Harcourt to confirm that he was on the right track, that his next novel would be even better than the previous one; Harcourt did this faithfully and cheerfully. Lewis might not have been as productive as he was without Harcourt's constant encouragement. And he never received the kind of personal attention from the publishers of his later novels that he had from Alfred Harcourt. Although several of Lewis's later works (published first with Doubleday, Doran and then with Random House) were best-sellers, the period of Lewis's greatest success was exactly coequal with his association with Harcourt. (Hutchisson 1996: 207-208)

As for his literary role Sinclair Lewis, he was first and foremost a realist, but a different kind from Zola, Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens and Mark Twain. He was a symbolic realist who observed the inner reality of his characters within the boundaries of their society, which was a recognisable feature of the great Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Ibsen and Proust. In this respect Lewis could also be described as belonging to the school of psychological realism. The individual, however, mainly developed as a product of his / her environment, which is why psychological realism came to be recognised as social realism after World War II. What a social realist did was take an individual and mould him / her within the society (s)he belonged to. Psychologically the writer focused on the individual, while socially he analysed the impact of society on the individual. Modern realists thus differed significantly from the classical realists of the nineteenth century. They relied on the social premises of socialism and even communism, but emphasised the psychological and social influence of the environment on the individual within his / her society.

There is much to be said about the reception of Lewis's work and its popularity among the Slovene critics and readers. Mirko Jurak in his commentary to the Slovene translation of *Main Street* (*Glavna cesta*, 1998) by Janko Moder, describes *Glavna cesta* as a novel of provincial intolerance (601). With this work, according to Jurak, Lewis attempted to destroy the illusion that small towns and villages were places of rural idyll. As Jurak claims, »je želel Lewis razbliniti iluzijo, ki je dolgo vladala, namreč, da je majhno ameriško mesto sinonim za paradiz, v katerem se vsakdo počuti svobodnega in si vsi prebivalci prizadevajo za skupno dobro« (601-602) [Lewis aimed to blow the illusion that a small American town was, as generally believed, inherently a paradise, within which everyone felt free and attempted to reach the common idea of being true and good to oneself and others]. Lewis deliberately exposed the social ills, applied them to the American environment and singled out the individual. As Jurak says, Lewis trusted the individual, but not the social system (594), which is applaudable, but slightly paradoxical, since it is true, that each social system essentially depends on the willingness and strength of each individual. *Main Street* thus personifies the small-town mentality as well as that of the American nation itself. Furthermore, Jurak ascertains that Lewis more often than not faced intolerance on the part of the critics, since he openly attacked middle-class superiority, provincial submission, conformism in principles and hypocrisy in the institution of the Church. According to Jurak these are all the problems and dilemmas of the Americans trying to surpass the limitations of the society and become truly awakened (Jurak 2001: 43). Due to Lewis's honesty in his radical liberal beliefs the nickname *Red* was attached to him during his university years and remained his red badge of courage for the rest of his life. His socio-political views, however, influenced Lewis to become one of the advocates of the periodical called *Die Sammlung*, founded by Klaus Mann, André Gide, Aldous Huxley and Heinrich Mann. Soon after the publication of the magazine, Lewis received a telegram from his previously liberal German publisher, beseeching him to break the ties with the Mann family or else he would stop publishing his novels in Germany. Lewis responded by saying that he thought his works in Germany were popular on account of their literary value alone and thus refused to see how his political views interfered with his art. More about the publication of this magazine and Lewis's support of it can be read in *Modra ptica* (1934/1935: 47).

The year when the first critical appraisals and reviews began to be published in Slovenia was 1930, which was also the year of the Nobel Prize awarded to Lewis. Lewis's first novel to be translated into Slovene was *Arrowsmith* (1933). Two years earlier the novel had been translated into Serbo-Croatian, which was like Slovene one of the main languages of Yugoslavia. The literary review was at that time written by Mirko Javornik and published by *Modra ptica*. For the Slovene readers there are two articles even more important. Lojze Golobič in his article entitled "Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith" published in *Slovenec* (6/9/1933) describes Lewis's novel as extremely powerful and humanly deep, particularly due to Lewis's fight against the doctors – money hunters (4). He firmly attacked doctors who persisted in their jobs purely for the sake of money and reputation. Another critic who speaks about *Arrowsmith* is Filip Kalan. His essay entitled "Amerika in Lewisov dr. Arrowsmith" [America and Lewis's Dr. Arrowsmith] emphasises that doctors apt to succeed are those who can associate themselves with little people. A doctor's sensitivity to the suffering of others is at least as vital as his medical knowledge. Finally, there is an article by Josip Vidmar "Refleksije – O velikem tekstu" [Reflections – On the Big Text], published in *Sodobnost* 1938 (61-63), in which Vidmar compares Lewis's *Arrowsmith* with Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg* [The Magical Mountain]. Both novels take place within the medical environment, the difference being that *Arrowsmith* analyses the personality of a doctor dedicated to the bacteriological research focused on getting the vaccine for a plague, while Mann's novel speaks about the patient suffering from tuberculosis.

There are two articles written by Victor F. Calverton and translated by Griša Koritnik that appeared in *Ljubljanski zvon* in 1932. The first article entitled "Emancipacija ameriškega slovstva" [The Emancipation of the American Literature] focuses on the status Sinclair Lewis has achieved. Calverton described Lewis as the most truly American of all American writers. His works are permeated by one hundred percent genuine Americans like Babbitt and typically American cities like Zenith. Even the style is purely American (299). And it was this pervasively American approach that rendered Lewis his Nobel Prize. The other article by Calverton, also translated by Griša Koritnik, entitled "Ameriški fenomen" [The American Phenomenon] clarifies what it is that makes Babbitt the most persuasive character in Lewis's fiction. Namely, Lewis himself could be designated as a true Babbitt in his own ideas (347). It is precisely this credibility that was critical when it came to how the Europeans saw and perceived the Americans. Vilko Ivanuš in *Svoboda* (1932) relates Babbitt to Don Quixote and labels him Don Quixote of the modern era. The novel is an imaginative portrayal of the American bourgeois society, or as Mirko Javornik puts it, the novel is "spreten in značilen prerez in železno jedro amerikanstva in njegove kulture, katere nosilec in najvažnejši predstavlj[aj]ec je malo buržujstvo v statičnosti in povprečnosti svojih stremljenj, potreb, zahtev, idealov o življenju in o vsem" (Javornik 1932: 78) [a creative and typical portrayal as well as a core text about the American culture, whose major representative is *petit bourgeoisie* with its average static desires, needs, demands and ideals about life and such]. There is one other translation by Griša Koritnik published in 1932 in *Ljubljanski zvon*. The article entitled "Sinclair Lewis" written by Ludwig Lewisohn reproaches the readers for not staying loyal to the author of *Main Street* after he was awarded the Nobel Prize. According to Lewisohn, it was precisely due to the American criticism of America itself that Europe

established its own sense of superiority. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Americans considered Lewis's Nobel Prize as a false representation of their own national character. Many American critics found the reason for the award confusing, since as Silvester Škerl in his article "Sinclair Lewis dobil Nobelovo nagrado" [Sinclair Lewis has received the Nobel Prize] (*Slovenec*, 7/11/1930: 6) states the reason for it being awarded to Lewis lies less in the artistic value of Lewis's novels than in their social relevance.

In his Nobel speech Lewis described his homeland as a country of immense contrasts. He said that America was definitely the land of skyscrapers and fast cars, but most certainly not a country for an artist to establish himself on any level (*Slovenski narod* 1930: 4). On Lewis's fiftieth birthday there was an article published by *Jutro* (1935, issue 34), in which Lewis was denoted as one of the sharpest and most successful critics of the American public and private life (5). *Književnost* (1933) published a report about Lewis's novel *Ann Vickers* translated into Serbo-Croatian by Stana Oblak in 1933. It is labelled as a novel about a middle-class intellectual struggling for the freedom of women (187). The novel is outlined as Lewis's most courageous one and it is the translation by Stana Oblak that is believed to be superb as well.

After World War II there were more articles published in Slovene journals about the novels of Sinclair Lewis. Critical appraisals that appear after the Second World War are published in *Mladinska revija*, *Novi svet*, *Vprašanja naših dni*, *Beseda*, *Knjiga*, *Knjižna polica*, *Socialistična misel*, *Naši razgledi*, *Ljudska pravica*, *Delavska enotnost*, *Nova obzorja*, *Slovenski poročevalec*, *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, *Primorski dnevnik*, *Večer* and *Vestnik mariborskega okrožja*.

In his review of *Kingsblood Royal* published in *Beseda* (1951/1952) Vasja Ocvirk displays the American society as rigidly black and white. He considers blacks to be the good people who are suppressed, while the whites are recognised as solely evil and blood-seeking. Lewis managed to show a typical example of black America regardless of where an individual lived (466). France Filipič wrote an article entitled "Podoba rasne diskriminacije" [The Portrayal of Racial Discrimination] for *Vestnik mariborskega okrožja*, in which he describes Neil Kingsblood's struggle as a fight to be humanely acknowledged. His is more than just a fight against racial distinction, his is also a fight against violence and fascism. On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1952 there is another article entitled "Lewisov roman Kraljevski Kingsblood" [Lewis's Novel *Kingsblood Royal*] published in *Naši razgledi*. The author, Dušan Pirjevec, speaks about the prejudice regarding the inferiority of the black population, as firmly engraved in the mind of an average American, thus visibly reflecting traditional American mentality. The novel is written in a satirical tone, sometimes bordering on grotesque, while the tragic elements are being lost. *Kingsblood Royal* is mentioned also by Janez Gradišnik in his article in *Novi svet* (1951). Gradišnik believes this novel to be the last one still worth the reputation of Lewis's former major ones. He also thinks that with this novel Lewis has made an important contribution towards the equality of people of all colours and races. Moreover, the author's portrayal of racial conflicts seems at times even more dire than in reality.

However, there is another socially relevant novel – *It Can't Happen Here*. Branko Rudolf in his article "Ob smrti Sinclairja Lewisa" [On the Death of Sinclair Lewis] published on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1951 in *Ljudska pravica* states that if the Americans were to transform certain kinds of administration, they would easily get fascism instead of

solid democracy. As the title of the novel itself suggests, the systems of democracy and fascism are not that far apart. *Mladinska revija* (1950/1951) published another article entitled "Ob smrti Sinclairja Lewisa" [On the Death of Sinclair Lewis], in which Vasja Ocvirk remembers Lewis and his major works. He describes *Main Street* as a caricature of a small country town (439). Main Street, according to Ocvirk, designates American provincialism; he even denotes small-town mentality as being reflective of 'Main Street'. Similarly, 'babbitt' has come to represent an entrepreneur, a small businessman, "ki ga plehko buržoazno življenje neprestano krivi in končno izkrivi" (440) [constantly corrupted by the bourgeois ways of life]. Lewis, according to Ocvirk, was a true humanist who truly knew his characters, since he lived as one of them. That is why he was frequently intolerant of their flaws, but never unjust. There is an essay entitled "Ameriška literatura in Sinclair Lewis" [The American Literature and Sinclair Lewis], which was published in 1951 in *Novi svet*. Its author, Bogomil Fatur, states that Lewis in *Main Street* presents Carol Kennicott in a similar way to Gustav Flaubert's presentation of his protagonist in *Madame Bovary*. Her role of a doctor's wife seems to function only on the outside, while within herself Carol fights for spiritual autonomy. There is, however, a contrast between the two novels as to the method of description. Lewis made use of precise report-like realism, which is useful when it comes to giving a minute description. His character portrayals are realistic photographs of people in a small town. Flaubert, on the other hand, provided emotionally realised portraits of the main protagonists, which give his work better credibility (660). In *Babbitt* the main character, George Babbitt, is a representative of bourgeois ideas since he himself represents a model for an average middle-class hero (657). Herbert Grün believes that Babbitt is all the more convincing since he himself survives the process of standardization. Moreover, Zenith is at least as real as Proust's Combray. Both towns are said to be imaginary milieus, yet they both appear very realistic. Dušan Željeznov, however, in his article "Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt" published on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1953 in *Slovenski poročevalec*, claims that Babbitt's tragic self is mostly due to his child-like behaviour, his lack of maturity. Despite his several attempts to rise above the mediocrity of his everyday life, he basically remains immature.

The most artistically accomplished novel by Sinclair Lewis is *Arrowsmith*. It is stylistically best developed and structurally supported by De Kruif's contributions. There are certain autobiographical elements in the novel that should not be overlooked. James M. Hutchisson speaks of them in his article entitled "Sinclair Lewis, Paul De Kruif, and the Composition of Arrowsmith" (1992). He mentions how De Kruif, who helped Lewis with bacteriological and medical terms, met his wife Rhea Barbarin during his internship in the hospital, which poses a similarity as to how Martin met Leora for the first time. De Kruif's contribution to the making of the novel is thus equivalent to Lewis's. Lewis deliberately separates Martin from the society, at the same time, however, making it possible for him to reach and fully realise his ambitions, which is more than any other major protagonist of Lewis's other novels manages to accomplish (Hutchisson 1996: 123). As Fatur (1951) believes, Lewis managed to produce a remarkable intellectual epic (659). Fatur's conclusive statement thus remains that Lewis very precisely dissects the small-town bourgeoisie, which seems to be disintegrating and dying.

In *Naši razgledi* in 1952 (issue 1) there is a short report entitled "Sinclair Lewis: Iskalec boga" [Sinclair Lewis: The Godseeker] which relates to Lewis's novel of the

same name. As in *Kingsblood Royal* the central idea here is once again a fight for independence, although it now takes place within an Indian community. In *Naši razgledi* (1952) there is a literary review of *Elmer Gantry* by Ivan Skušek. He speaks of the novel as a vital account of the corruption within the institution of the Church. At the same time it appears to be a call for a better social system in which the humanity would be immune to social disintegration, even towards the fanaticism in religion within the American church (23). *Beseda* 1951/1952 offers a report by Vasja Ocvirk entitled "Pogled na ameriško zgubljeno generacijo" [The View of the American Lost Generation] (78-82). The common ground for the young radical writers, widely known as the Lost Generation, is general dissatisfaction with their homeland, its social and political ideas. These writers lived abroad for a certain period of time, but they generally returned to their country sooner or later. The older group of writers, represented by Theodore Dreiser, Henry Louis Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, expressed their dissatisfaction and tried applying it to the entire American society per se. As for the Nobel Prize, Ocvirk fully justifies it being given to Lewis himself, since Europe at that time recognised the influential role that the United States had internationally.

Finally, the importance of friendship between Sinclair Lewis and Louis Adamic should be emphasised. At one of the literary meetings Adamic was introduced to Sinclair Lewis. Lewis knew Adamic's work and congratulated him on his novel *Dynamite* (1931), which had recently been published. On this occasion Lewis invited Adamic to help him collect the documentary material for the proletarian novel he was going to write. Adamic was later invited by Lewis to spend a weekend at his cottage in Vermont. Adamic accepted the invitation gladly and visited Lewis in Vermont. During his stay in Vermont, Adamic wrote to his wife Stella and said: "Perhaps more than anyone else, he personifies, encloses, contains America, many of her virtues, her dynamic qualities, her spontaneity, and many of her faults" (Adamic 1938: 100). Adamic and Lewis carried on correspondence between 24<sup>th</sup> September and 4<sup>th</sup> October 1931. In one of his letters Lewis let Adamic know he had changed his mind and had decided to write the novel in America rather than in Vienna, as it was originally planned. Later, however, Adamic learned from a mutual friend, Ben Stolberg, that Lewis had once again changed his mind and decided not to write the novel at all. His friendship with Lewis is minutely described in Adamic's work *My America* (1938). In this work Adamic asks himself what made Lewis give up his idea of producing the great proletarian novel he had been considering for the past two years. Adamic suggests that the red liberal issue might have been the reason for Lewis's decision. Another cause for it might have been the fact that as a Nobel Prize author he was not willing to lose his readers even over an issue he felt so strongly about. It remains questionable if Lewis's second wife Dorothy Thompson might have had something to do with her husband's decision to start working on a feminist novel *Ann Vickers* instead. Furthermore, in *My America* Adamic makes a comparison between Lewis's novel *Arrowsmith* and the novel *Weeds* by Edith Sumner Kelley. He sees the similarity between the two protagonists, Kelley's Judy and Lewis's Leora (*ibid.* 96). Adamic personally met Miss Kelley and she told him that she was an old friend of Lewis's and thus served as a model for his portrayal of Leora. All in all, in his critical study Adamic writes about his own views regarding Lewis's novels. He believes *Main Street* and *Babbitt* to be fully reflective of the social situation in the United States,

while he is not particularly fond of *Ann Vickers* and even less of *It Can't Happen Here*, which he sees as only a vague reflection of his true beliefs. Despite his utmost respect for Lewis, Adamic feels himself to be more liberally engaged than Lewis, although Lewis's radical views were visibly expressed, also in Mencken's literary periodical *The American Mercury*. On a literary scale, however, Adamic believes Lewis to be at least as crucial as Oton Župančič and Ivan Cankar were for Slovene literature, even though the two countries can hardly be compared, either geographically or ideologically.

More about the correspondence between Lewis and Adamic can be read in *Izbrana pisma Louisa Adamiča* (1981, translated by Jerneja Petrič), where one also comes across the fact that Lewis supported Adamic when he applied for the Guggenheim's scholarship, which he received and used for a visit of his native Yugoslavia (Slovenia). When Lewis visited Austria in 1932, he contacted Adamic about visiting Yugoslavia, but the meeting between the two of them never took place. In his letter to Lewis on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1932 Adamic regretted not meeting Lewis as they had planned. In the same letter he also asked Lewis about the scheduled time of publishing *Ann Vickers*. Adamic said that one Slovene publisher showed a keen interest in the English edition of the book since he intended to publish its Slovene translation the next year. In the scope of social criticism Adamic's article entitled "Križa ameriškega individualizma" [The Crisis of American Individualism] and published in *Ljubljanski zvon* (1932) must not be overlooked. He openly attacks individualism deriving from the capitalist democracy that enabled only the minority of people to climb up the social ladder and succeed economically. This kind of success is in Lewis's novels achieved only in the character of genuinely *good* Martin Arrowsmith and in the figure of pervasively *evil* Elmer Gantry. Further on, Adamic claims that both Lewis and Dreiser were expecting individualism to be replaced by collectivism. However, Adamic only briefly mentions the economic and political reasons that led to the general national apathy. Still, he does mention Lewis, yet entirely ignores Steinbeck and Hemingway. His presentation of social literary criticism is thus less than complete. However, his study presents some scientists and publicists as well, including Ludwig Lewisohn and his literary study on Sinclair Lewis. Lewisohn primarily focuses on Lewis's sudden fall in popularity. From the European point of view an American author is as appreciated as his works reflect the anti-American stance. That is why, as Jerneja Petrič points out, it was generally believed in the United States that Lewis's Nobel Prize for Literature reflected a certain kind of anachronism and that there were authors such as Mark Twain and Henry James who had deserved the award much more.

There is much to be said about the literary value of Lewis's works. Sinclair Lewis is a realist, but his realism is not the classical realism of the nineteenth century, but psychological and social realism of the modern era. Many critics believe Lewis's protagonists to be too one-dimensional. However, it is precisely the psychological limitations that make them even more human. In contrast to classical realists, such as Balzac and Zola, Lewis's realism is often rigid and limited. No one can claim, though, that he pays no attention to different layers of reality, but his protagonists, with the exception of Elmer Gantry and Martin Arrowsmith, show no sign of being fully emotionally realised. Thus Lewis's novels seem to have become realistic photographs, though not fully realised portraits of individuals per se. Many critics therefore value Lewis's works primarily



for their social input, but much less so for their artistic value, which they nevertheless possess. It is also true that there has been a change in the domain of critical appraisals. Former critical antipathy has lately been replaced by true enthusiasm. At the time of the publication of his novels Lewis's literary position used to be unfavourable. Americans believed that he was openly pro-European, whereas it was for the very same reason that European readers found his narratives genuinely sincere. It is precisely this authenticity that finally won Lewis the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930.

The Slovene translations, however, have shown that the social dilemmas in Lewis's novels seem to have surpassed the boundaries of the exclusive American milieu and have become universal issues. The reason for immense critical interest in Lewis's novels lies primarily in the European political situation at the time, which seems to have influenced the American mentality as well. Lewis warns about the fascist mentality in the American society, potentially caused by the dichotomy between sheer liberalism on the one hand and utmost conservatism on the other. It is precisely due to the radical ideas discussed in his novels that Lewis's works reflect the proletarian consciousness, which entered the American mentality in the 1920s and 1930s. The struggle for working-class uniformity was not that distinctive at that time in Slovenia, but it became a growing issue a few decades later (in the mid-fifties), particularly as a result of the post-war apathy, which led to the growth of communism and socialism. Thus it is more than reasonable why Lewis's socially engaged novels keep to be translated, published as well as critically discussed in different languages even in modern times.

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so se pogosto omejili na en sam, včasih tudi manj pomemben vir, niso pa podrobneje vzporejali motivov, tematskih ter figurativno-jezikovnih sorodnosti med angleškimi in slovenskimi deli. Med kritiki, ki so tem značilnostim doslej posvetili nekoliko več pozornosti, so zlasti Jakob Kelemina, Alfonz Gspan, Anton Slodnjak, France Koblar, Joža Mahnič, Dušan Moravec, Janko Kos in Irena Avsenik Nabergoj. To seveda ne pomeni, da so bile deležne knjižne izdaje in uprizoritve obravnavanih slovenskih dram le skromnih kritiških odmevov, temveč zlasti dejstvo, da je bil Shakespearov neposredni oziroma mestoma tudi posredni vpliv le redko konkretno in podrobneje predstavljen. To pomanjkljivost skuša nadoknadi pričujoča razprava. Obenem želim v študiji tudi dokazati, da so bili navedeni in tudi nekateri drugi, manj pomembni slovenski dramatik, v obravnavanem obdobju že sorazmerno dobro seznanjeni s Shakespearovimi deli in še zlasti, da so njegove drame vplivale nanje v večji meri kot pa je bilo to doslej znano.

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#### SLOVENSKI KRITIKI O ROMANIH SINCLAIRJA LEWISA

Namen članka je predstaviti recepcijo Lewisovih del pri slovenskih kritikih. Članek se osredotoča na življenje in delo Sinclairja Lewisa, poseben poudarek pa daje družbenim vplivom, ki so Lewisova dela zaznamovali tako po literarni kot po družbeni plati. Njegova dela zato danes prištevamo k leposlovju, prav tako pa jih razumemo kot socialne dokumente o družbenopolitični situaciji na ameriških tleh v medvojnem obdobju. V splošnem torej delujejo kot kritiške razprave o deželi onkraj Atlantika, ki nujno potrebuje socialno preobrazbo v širšem družbenem prostoru.

V času nastanka in objave Lewisovi romani niso deležni ustreznega priznanja, saj avtor preveč odkrito kritizira svoje rojake in jih opozarja na njihove slabosti, pri čemer je velikokrat precej neizprosni. Prav tako pa so neizprosni tudi kritiki. Tako tuji kot tudi domači kritiki v obdobju med prvo in drugo svetovno vojno so pogosto nestrpni in skoraj nekoliko agresivni. Verjamejo, da njegovim delom manjka umetniške vrednosti. Takšnih očitkov v kritikah poznejšega obdobja ne zasledimo več. Članki in eseji tujih, predvsem pa domačih avtorjev so mnogo bolj prizanesljivi in objektivni. Lewisu priznavajo literarno pomembnost, pa tudi družbeno angažiranost, zaradi česar se njegova dela še vedno prevajajo v različne svetovne jezike in ostajajo kritiško zanimiva tudi stoletje po svojem nastanku.