

Arrowsmith

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sinclair Lewis is a famous American short-story writer and playwright. He was the first among American writers to receive Nobel Prize in literature “ for his vigorous and graphic art of description and his ability to create, with wit and humor, new types of characters. ” His satirical method is largely based upon grotesque, on a revealing detail, overstatement, understatement, paradox and irony, the works of his pen are known for their insightful and critical views on American society and capitalist values, as well as their vivid characterizations of modern working women.

The excerpt under analysis is dedicated to the description of the college life of an American student Martin Arrowsmith. The fragment speaks volumes about a number of problems that used to exist in the contemporary US society, the society of the beginning of the 20th century.

In particular, the imperfection of the system of higher education, what the author vividly highlights by the use of irony in the description of the University Martin, the protagonist, studies at, expressly making it look like an advertisement, with all the impudence and vainglory typical of the educational establishments of renown (“ beside this prodigy, Oxford is a tiny theological school and Harward – a select college for gentlemen”).

Along with this, Sinclair Lewis emphasizes the role of fraternities in the life of common US college student, putting a considerable stress on the importance of belonging to them, and a consequent wish to really belong (“ and tempted by an invitation from Diagamma Pi, the chief medical fraternity”).

Throughout the excerpt, the author’s tone remains to be very sympathetic

and slightly humorous when it comes to something, having to do with Martin Arrowsmith.

The third-person narration by the omniscient author and the descriptive techniques used provide the reader with a clue to that. Martin Arrowsmith is a young, ambitious man, whose curiosity and stubbornness make him perfect for the realm of scientific research. He is a junior in college, situated in a non-existing state, having a non-existing name, which is thought-provoking in itself. The young man is preparing for Medical school, being, as the reader can judge, a very diligent and devoted student (“ The

University had become his world”). The protagonist appears to be a fairly handsome though thin young man, whom the girls all call “ romantic”, they even surmise he could have been the hero of amours one day. But, in fact, Martin is too subtilized and his image is drawn by Sinclair Lewis as a rather humorous, inconsistent and weird one (“ he seemed pale, in contrast to his black smooth hair, a respectable runner, a fair basket-ball center, a savage hockey-player”).

Looking at his surname, the reader presumes that it is to symbolize a straight and stubborn path, but again, by following his life and tracing the narrator’s tone, we are enabled to understand that Martin always stops halfway. The proof can be found just further on, in the description of Martin’s idol, Professor Edward Edwards (his name exemplifying the complete stagnation, degradation, viciousness of his being), whom he respects for his immense knowledge of the history of chemistry.

But the whole point is revealed immediately by the author's brilliant use of inversion ("Himself, Professor Edwards, never did researches") and a rather ironic polysyndeton ("He sat before fires and stroked his collie and chuckled in his beard") – a rather one-sided man, the kind of men Martin Arrowsmith himself belonged to. In fact, his surname and the title of the story "Arrowsmith" stands for a person who makes arrows, melds them out of difficult steel or iron, what cannot be said about Martin.

He can only be compared to an arrow, that exactly how straight and stubborn he is, demanding independence ("Martin had prized the independence of his solitary room"), but unable to become an arrowSMITH so far. Nonetheless, the fragment appears to be exceedingly optimistic, having the spirit of hope for the bright future in abundance, that contributes to its warm, humorous atmosphere in the ongoing scenes, and so do such devices as zeugma ("a lively boarding-house with a billiard table and low prices", "soap, alarm-clocks, fish") and oxymoron ("magnificently imbecile") and what not.

One cannot but distinguish the exceptional mastery of Sinclair Lewis not only in his grip of stylistic techniques, but also in his use of a foil to the protagonist – "Fatty" Pfaff, Martin's fraternity-mate, who looked like a distended hot-water bottle (nothing but simile is used by the author to a wondrous advantage here), and preserved a set of counter-character traits of Martin's, making his image, his portrayal extremely well-rounded and wholistic.

The excerpt provides the reader with some food for thought, the author strives to persuade us that nothing can prevent a truly gifted, diligent person from being a success in life, and accentuates the significance of being in the right place and company for studies. Martin Arrowsmith by the end of the extract was on halfway to having all that, to putting the outer world right, and can we say where we are by now? It is not that easy, is it?