

Children in American Capitalist System: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1904)

Abdolhosein Joodaki¹, Hadis Ashrafi²

1. Department of English Language and Literature, Lorestan University, Khorramabad, Iran
joodaki.a@lu.ac.ir / joodaki367@yahoo.com

2. Department of English Language and Literature, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran
Hadis_ashrafi72@yahoo.com

Abstract

The phenomenon of child labour is one of the most visible, rampant and complex problems of our society in contemporary times and it will continue to be more acute in future also till its total elimination all over the world. Early 20th century American labor and working-class history is a subfield of American social history that focuses attention on the complex lives of working people in a rapidly changing global political and economic system. The period between 1896 and 1945 saw a crucial transition in the labor and working-class history of the United States. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1904) is America's first proletarian novel that portrays the harsh conditions and exploited lives of immigrants in the United States in Chicago. Sinclair's primary purpose is describing the meat industry and its working conditions was to advance socialism in the United States. The primary aim of this paper is to propose a conceptual theoretical framework based on the reason of child labor in the Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and the investigation of slavery that was perfectly compatible with capitalism.

Keywords: Capitalist system, Children, Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1904), Child labor, America.

Introduction

James D Schmidt is associate professor of history at Northern Illinois University, in his monument book *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of child Labor* (2010) examined the relationship between labor law and the meanings of freedom during the age of emancipation. He teaches courses on the history of law, capitalism, childhood, and the United States in the long nineteenth century. He believed “centered on involuntary schooling and voluntary play, this lexicon imagined wage work for young people below a

statutorily regulated age as fundamentally illegitimate. Its traditions about youthful work have come down to us as child labor.” (3)

Child labour is a burning problem all over the world, both in developed and developing countries. Though several attempts were made and are being made to eradicate/mitigate child labour at national and international levels, yet, the magnitude has been increasing at an alarming rate, particularly in the third world countries. “As much as 90 percent of the child labour is concentrated in the undeveloped countries of the world” (Mandelievich 213). The proportion of child workers to total child population in different regions demonstrates a relatively “high percent in South Asia (5.4 percent), Africa (4.0 percent) and Latin America (2.6 percent)” (Kulshreshtha 4). When the global picture is seen, ILO estimated it at 248 million, which shows the gravity of problem. Among the countries, India possesses the highest child labour force in the world.

Participation of children in work is not a new concept particular to this age. It has existed in different forms in every society throughout the human history. Mendelievich has rightly observed: “To a greater or lesser extent, children in every type of human society have always taken part, and still do take part, in those economic activities which are necessary, if the group to which they belong is to survive” (39).

It has been pointed out in the Report of the Committee on Child Labour also that child labour is not a new phenomenon related to our age. It has existed in one form or another in all historical times. In Latin America Countries, child labour is widely concentrated in agriculture and plantations in the rural areas and domestic services, street trade and services in the small-scale industries, in the urban areas.

The industrial revolution destroyed the village and household industries. For their survival, not only the females but even the children of poor had to get inducted into economic activity. Factory owners and businessmen in general often appeared as the root of the child-labor evil. At times, capitalism or industrialism itself stood in for the captains of industry. The language of modern child labor according to Schmidt critically examine the view that childhood could be considered as a time of preparation for economic production to a stage of life. It centers on play and formal schooling, a form of socialization more fitted for the “consumer society” of advanced capitalist society. (xix)

By 19th century, it has become common for the children, to work in factories in abysmal working or conditions involving “a daily stint of some 14 hours and with almost no means of protection against the risk of accidents and dangers” (Costin 4). Poor children even as young as four, five or six years of age were set to work by selling them to farmers, by indenture to crafts men or by hard labour in almshouses. These almshouses had utilized the cheap labour of children who had to work for longer hours for lesser wages. Many died in their teens. The arrogant entrepreneurs, with the intention of making more money, “employed ‘slappers’ who held the young working children awake by whipping them when they fell asleep while working” (Christopher 6).

Schmidt seeks to remedy these problems by analyzing the history of child labors law and their employment condition over the decades before the Civil War. Law writers repeatedly took up that question of where young people belonged. (134) They believed, “young workers moved out of the statutory regimes of bound labor in households and into the market society of industrializing capitalism” (ibid).

After industrial violence, and youthful labor that occurred a century ago, as capitalism swept over the United States, it raised fundamental questions about the place of young people in industrial society. Initially, it appeared that “the market revolution would be no respecter of age, but by the turn of the twentieth century, a critical cross roads appeared” (Schmidt 256).

A similar state of child also prevailed in U.S.A, “where this problem was seriously debated in the Children’s Bureau Conference of Child Welfare Standards in 1919” (Komoloski 369) . However, alongside, certain efforts were made to eradicate/ mitigate child labour. While detailed presentation is made about the efforts made by our country and also internationally, through UN and its system of organizations, it has to be accepted that the year 1979 which was declared as an International Year of the Child by United Nations, marking its 20th Anniversary, is a landmark effort towards this end.

The daily cupidity of specific employers and the systemic hierarchies of industrial capitalism undermined the pains they took to protect the young. In this, United Nation’s Declaration of the rights of the child was brought out, in which the importance of the co-operation of the community of nations in common tasks of meeting the basic needs of children, i.e. “nutrition, health, education, material protection, family care, equal social

status and protection from racial and other forms of discrimination was stressed” (De Souza 66).

It can be said with no uncertainty that International year of the Child was a challenge to the conscience of mankind and to the community of nations to provide child rights and to meet the basic needs of children through national child development policies and implementation of wide range of programs and activities. It is a new hope for the future of children living in conditions of severe deprivation.

Discussion

The cultural meaning of childhood under capitalism could be answered in this part labeled as child labor. The following part of this paper moves on to describe in greater detail the academic literature on Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. It has revealed the emergence of several contrasting themes. The innovative and seminal work of *The Jungle* pioneered a new approach to examining the immigrant experience, working conditions, health and living situation, capitalism, corruption, social Darwinism and child labor.

The main theme of *The Jungle* is the evil of capitalism. Every event, especially in the first twenty-seven chapters of the book, is chosen deliberately to portray a particular failure of capitalism, which is, in Sinclair’s view, inhuman, destructive, unjust, brutal, and violent. The slow annihilation of Jurgis’s immigrant family at the hands of a cruel and prejudiced economic and social system demonstrates the effect of capitalism on the working class as a whole. As the immigrants, who initially possess an idealistic faith in the American Dream of hard work leading to material success, are slowly used up, tortured, and destroyed, the novel relentlessly illustrates that capitalism is to blame for their plight and emphasizes that the characters’ individual stories are the stories of millions of people. *The Jungle* is not a thematically nuanced or complicated novel: capitalism is simply portrayed as a total evil, from its greedy destruction of children to its cynical willingness to sell diseased meat to an unsuspecting public. Sinclair opts not to explore the psychology of capitalism; instead, he simply presents a long litany of the ugly effects of capitalism on the world.

In Sinclair's view, socialism is the cure for all of the problems that capitalism creates. When Jurgis discovers socialist politics in Chapter 28, it becomes clear that the novel's attack on capitalism is meant to persuade the reader of the desirability of the socialist alternative. When socialism is introduced, it is shown to be as good as capitalism is evil; whereas capitalism destroys the many for the benefit of the few, socialism works for the benefit of everyone. It is even speculated that a socialist state could fulfill Christian morality. Again, there is no nuance in the book's polemic: *The Jungle's* goal is to persuade the reader to adopt socialism. Every aspect of the novel's plot, characterization, and conflict is designed to discredit the capitalist political system and illustrate the ability of a socialist political system to restore humanity to the downtrodden, exploited, and abused working class.

Sinclair's novel is the story of a young couple who have recently immigrated to Chicago from Lithuania named Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukoszaite. The couple and several relatives have come to Chicago in search of a better life, but Packingtown, the center of Lithuanian immigration and of Chicago's meatpacking industry, is a hard, dangerous, and filthy place where it is difficult to find a job. Jurgis, who has great faith in the American Dream, vows that he will simply work harder to make more money.

Jurgis, who is young and energetic, quickly finds work, as do Marija Berczynskas, Ona's cousin, and Jonas, the brother of Ona's stepmother, Teta Elzbieta. The family signs an agreement to buy a house, but it turns out to be a swindle; the agreement is full of hidden costs, and the house is shoddy and poorly maintained. As the family's living expenses increase, even Ona and young Stanislovas, one of Teta Elzbieta's children, are forced to look for jobs. Jobs in Packingtown involve back-breaking labor, however, conducted in unsafe conditions with little regard for individual workers. Furthermore, the immigrant community is fraught with crime and corruption. Jurgis's father, Dede Antanas, finds a job only after agreeing to pay another man a third of his wages for helping him obtain the job. But the job is too difficult for the old man, and it quickly kills him.

Winter is the most dangerous season in Packingtown and even Jurgis, forced to work in an unheated slaughterhouse in which it is difficult to see, risks his life every day by simply going to work. Marija is courted by Tamoszius, a likable violinist, but the couple is never able to marry because they never have enough money to hold a wedding. Marija's factory closes down and she loses her job. Distressed about the terrible

conditions of his family members' lives, Jurgis joins a union and slowly begins to understand the web of political corruption and bribery that makes Packingtown run. Hoping to improve his lot, Jurgis begins trying to learn English. Marija regains her job, but she is fired when she complains about being cheated out of some of her pay. Ona is now pregnant, and her job has become increasingly difficult for her. Her supervisor, Miss Henderson, oversees a prostitution ring, and most of the other girls at the factory are made to be prostitutes. Ona gives birth to a healthy boy, whom she and Jurgis name Antanas after Jurgis's late father, but she is forced to return to work only seven days later. In Packingtown, any mishap can bring ruin upon a family. Jurgis sprains his ankle and is forced to spend nearly three months in bed, unable to work. Even though poor working conditions caused the accident, the factory simply cuts off Jurgis's pay while he recuperates. Unable to tolerate the misery, Jonas abandons the family, disappearing without a word. Kristoforas, the youngest son of Teta Elzbieta, dies of food poisoning. Jurgis at last recovers and returns to work, but the factory refuses to give him his job back. After a long, frustrating search for employment, Jurgis is forced to take a job at the fertilizer plant, the foulest place in all of Packingtown. He begins to numb himself with alcohol.

Ona is pregnant again. One night, she doesn't return home from work, and Jurgis discovers that Phil Connor, her boss, kept her after work and forced her to sleep with him. Jurgis attacks Connor and is arrested. After an unfair trial, Jurgis is sentenced to a month in prison; the family will again be forced to scrape by without his wages. In prison, Jurgis befriends a criminal named Jack Duane. When he is released, Jurgis discovers that his family has been evicted from its home and is living at the run-down boardinghouse in which they first stayed when they arrived in Chicago. When he enters the boardinghouse, he finds Ona screaming; she is prematurely in labor, and the effort of giving birth kills her and the child. In agony, Jurgis disappears on a drinking binge. At last, Teta Elzbieta convinces Jurgis to think of his son, and he again begins searching for a job. Through the philanthropy of a wealthy woman who takes an interest in the family, Jurgis finds a good job at a steel mill. He dedicates himself to Antanas and feels renewed hope in life. But his hopes are shattered when Antanas drowns in the mud-logged street. In despair, Jurgis abandons his surviving family members and wanders the countryside as a tramp.

In the winter, Jurgis returns to Chicago, where he finds a job digging freight tunnels. After injuring himself at work, he is forced to spend some time in the hospital. When he

is released, he has no money and cannot find work, so he becomes a beggar. One night, a wealthy young man named Freddie Jones gives him a one-hundred-dollar bill, but when Jurgis asks a bartender to change it for him, the man cheats him, giving him ninety-five cents back. Jurgis attacks the man and is again sent to jail. In prison, he meets Jack Duane again. When the two men are released, Jurgis becomes Duane's partner, and the two commit burglaries and muggings. Jurgis is eventually recruited to work for the corrupt political boss, Mike Scully. When a series of strikes hits Packingtown, Jurgis crosses the picket lines, undermining the efforts of the union but making a great deal of money as a scab.

One day, Jurgis sees Phil Connor again and attacks him. He is again sent to prison and, because Connor is a crony of Mike Scully, Jurgis's meager political connections do not help him. After being released, he is forced to live on charity. By this time, Jurgis has completely lost touch with his family. One day, however, he meets an old acquaintance who tells him how to find Marija. He learns that Marija has become a prostitute to help support Teta Elzbieta and the children. She is also addicted to morphine. Jurgis wants to see Teta Elzbieta again but not until he finds a good job.

One night, his spirit all but crushed by privation and misery, Jurgis wanders into a socialist political rally, in which an orator delivers a speech that fills Jurgis with inspiration. Jurgis joins the socialist party and embraces its ideal that the workers—not a few wealthy capitalists—should own factories and plants. Jurgis finds a job as a porter at a socialist-run hotel and is reunited with Teta Elzbieta. He attends a socialist rally in which the speaker sums up Jurgis's new beliefs: if more people convert to socialism, the speaker declares, then "Chicago will be ours!" (207)

Our purpose of this investigation was to assess the extent to which these characters are to be considered as labor workers. Those children in *The Jungle* who work as labors of capitalist system named; Una Lukoszaite, Juozapas Lukoszaite, Kotrina Lukoszaite, Stanislovas Lukoszaite, Antanas, Vilimas and Nikalojus, Kristoforas.

In *The Jungle*, little Stanislovas's reluctance to go to work on account of the dreadful winter—the boy almost froze to death in a previous experience—awakens Jurgis's ire. After Maheude's fashion, the Lithuanian imposes the dictates of the adult world upon the helpless boy.

All that day and night the family was half-crazed with fear that
Ona and the boy had lost their places; and in the morning they set

out earlier than ever, after the little fellow had been beaten with a stick by Jurgis. There could be no trifling in a case like this, it was a matter of Life and death. (119)

The harsh and miserable image of women and children especially little Stanislovas in the jungle was shown during summer and winter time in a black torture, terror and violence;

One bitter morning in February the little boy who worked at the lard machine with Stanislovas came about an hour late, and screaming with pain. They unwrapped him, and a man began vigorously rubbing his ears; and as they were frozen stiff, it took only two or three rubs to break them short off. As a result of this, little Stanislovas conceived a terror of the cold that was almost a mania. (47)

Their little fingers might be eaten by acid in the pickle rooms one by one, those who used knives and beef-boners lost their thumb, their hands went to pieces when acid had eaten all of them off, and a chance for blood poisoning suddenly happened, little Stanislovas screaming with pain. His fingers were all frosted, such a fearful kind of work;

Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, it was fated that he should stand upon a certain square foot of floor from seven in the morning until noon, and again from half-past twelve till half-past five, making never a motion and thinking never a thought, save for the setting of lard cans. In summer the stench of the warm lard would be nauseating, and in winter the cans would all but freeze to his naked little fingers in the unheated cellar. Half the year it would be dark as night when he went in to work, and dark as night again when he came out, and so he would never know what the sun looked like on weekdays. And for this, at the end of the week, he would carry home three dollars to his family, being his pay at the rate of five cents per hour just about his proper share of the total earnings of the million and three-quarters of children who are now engaged in earning their livings in the United States. (67)

In the same vein, Vilimas and Nikalojus, respectively eleven and ten years old, fail, after spending a whole day selling newspapers, to take their wages to their needy relatives. They are consequently severely punished and sent back to work the following morning (121). Such “direct impressions of life,” a part of what Henry James defined as Naturalism (Krause 3), were meant by Sinclair to emphasize the extent to which the burdening capitalist system induces parents to act out of panic. This was cause for much child abuse among the exploited masses. Fear of insufficiency, a cause of starvation and death among workers, almost always haunted them.

Sinclair found a loophole in his writing contracts and in his alleged fear of a second childbirth, which he believed would have been a disaster. Sinclair actually projects this feeling in his novel:

Ona was with child again now, and it was a dreadful thing to contemplate; even Jurgis, dumb and despairing as he was, could not bit understand that yet other agonies were on the way, and shudder at the thought of them. (139)

These forebodings are turned into reality as Ona dies of miscarriage in a dimly lit garret in spite of Madame Haupt’s attempt to rescue her. Madame Haupt is one materialist midwife sought after by Jurgis. Sinclair meant Ona’s death to lay bare the brutality of capitalism. This is so much the more so as Ona dies of work-related problems.

Kotrina performs the aforementioned tasks in an adult-like fashion: Little Kotrina was like most children of the poor, prematurely made old;

She had to take care of her little brother, who was a cripple, and also of the baby; she had to cook the meals and wash the dishes and clean house, and have supper ready when the workers came in the evening. (131)

In *The Jungle*, the elaboration of the theme of labor as burden is partly carried out by means of a melodramatic use of language. The meat-processing machinery of Packingtown, whenever depicted, is made to appear in a frightful guise that augurs no good for the proletariat. This method of portrayal employs the operational patterns of the means of production to give the reader a hint about what capitalism has in store in terms of treatment for its helpless subjects. As Jurgis and his family visit Brown’s killing beds,

for instance, the narrator makes an appealing reportage on the forces of material production in motion:

In these chutes the stream of animals was continuous; it was quite uncanny to watch them (the cattle), pressing on to their fate, all unsuspecting a very river of death. Our friends were not poetical, and the sight suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny; they thought only of the wonderful efficiency of it all. (33)

Along with the meat-processing maneuvers, the condition of the cattle serves as an analogy to the terrible reality awaiting the worker. To these repulsive images, Sinclair adds the even more depressing atmosphere of the stockyards as an indication of the “Kafkaesque nightmare,” terms used by Harris (71), that will ultimately assail Jurgis and his fellow Lithuanians. At their arrival in Packingtown, the immigrants are taken by a discomforting shudder as they stand in the midst of a chaotic milieu the main characteristics of which range from a sickening odor and a bewildering noise to an oppressive smoke. The latter feature is actually meant to exemplify the pervasive, domineering, and noxious power of capitalism. The narrator describes the instance in language replete with allegorical imagery:

It might have come from the center of the world, this smoke, where the fires of the ages still smolder. It was as if self-impelled, driving all before it, a perpetual explosion. It was inexhaustible; one stared waiting to see it stop, but still the great streams rolled out. They spread in vast clouds overhead, writhing, curling; then, uniting in one giant river, they streamed away down the sky, stretching a black pale as far as the eye could reach. (25)

Such smoldering fires remind us of Dante’s infernal world. As a matter of fact, the image given of Packingtown proves somewhat comparable to his *Inferno*.

The representation of the machinery of capitalism as cannibalistic was obviously first employed by the naturalist before it found its way in Sinclair’s novel. The socialist simply substituted meat for coal, the meat-packer for the collier. Even in his observation of Jurgis at work and his thorough detailing of the work process, one feels Zola’s presence.

In writing *The Jungle*, Sinclair was most interested in depicting the poor and dehumanizing working conditions that led to the strike of 1904. Meat-processing was only important to him when it could lend itself to the exposing of the baseness of industrial exploitation.

The Lithuanians' quest for the American Dream ironically leads to no social uplift, but rather dooms three generations of innocent beings to death and degeneracy. Jurgis is the first to experience the brutality of a system based on Darwinism. Naïve and yet highly confident in himself, the Lithuanian uses his strength without any sense of restraint and moderation. As a healthy and energetic worker, Jurgis wins his bosses' respect. Yet fate acts against Sinclair's hero. The risky working environment at Durham's is to be held accountable for Jurgis's downfall. Sinclair at this level gets into an account of the "speeding-up" strategy, one that gives no respite to the worker, before referring to the darkness and slipperiness of the killing beds. It is not also uncommon that a steer escapes time and again, and as Sinclair's narrator reports, a foreman would run in "blazing away" in the darkness to kill the strayed animal, while in the meantime killers, sharp knives in hand, would rush hither and thither in search of a hiding place. These were moments of great danger for the laborer in that his life was threatened by random gunshots, swaying knives, and by the risk of being gored to death. One episode underscores Jurgis's first ordeal when he sprains his ankle. The accident costs him his job, and this without any compensation whatsoever (114). Sinclair does not stack the deck in revealing a misfortune of this type. As a matter of fact, Barrett corroborates the writer's realistic approach as follows:

In one house alone, Swift and Company, 3,500 injuries were reported for the first six months of 1910, and this number included only those requiring a physician's care. According to the director of Armour's Welfare department, one of every two of the company's 22,381 workers were injured or became ill at work during 1917. The company's Chicago plant averaged twenty-three accidents per day. (98)

It is by means of a detailed and accurate description of labor that Sinclair reveals the factors accountable for the worker's victimization. A catalogue of the diseases most prevalent among the working classes is noted in *The Jungle*. Blood poisoning, for one, becomes a threat to every "beef trimmer." Marija, and her lover Tamozius Kuzleika, eventually suffer from its gangrenous effect. Rheumatism, in return, strikes the employees of the "chilling rooms." Old Dede Antanas, as I pointed out earlier, figures

among those stricken by this illness. In the pickling rooms of Packingtown, each worker bears an insignia that says much about the ravaging nature of materialist production. "Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten up by the acid, one by one," according to the narrator (97-8).

In the struggle for survival, the employee is also exposed to a "stifling heat" and to harrowing cold winters as well. The meatpackers' obsession with profit accounts for the absence of effective ventilation and heating systems. Whether at Durham's Pure Leaf Lard or at Brown's, the worker appears as an entrapped and helpless beast of burden. Sinclair depicts all its unbecoming aspects via Jurgis's experiences and his family's. The immigrants' involvement in industrial production turns their lives into a disconcerting and "dull round of daily existence," to use Paul P. Reuben's naturalistic terms (2-3).

Furthermore, the Lithuanians' sense of family unity is violently shaken by a pattern of labor that neither affords respite from harrowing want nor strengthens the feelings of love and self-commitment. Rather, it paves the way for individualism. That Jurgis should turn into an irresponsible hobo after his wife's and son's deaths speaks volumes for such a behavioral inclination. Jonas also chooses a similar course of action by deserting the family. Both most probably perceive this circle as an obstacle to their self-fulfillment and freedom. Jurgis, who, unlike the socialist, seeks refuge in a typically careless bohemian life. This instance figures among the rare moments in which Jurgis resorts to his free will. Overall, his reaction evolves as a logical response to a labor system that eradicates the human self just to promote the beast. Sinclair's close look at the working conditions and the recreation he made of the ways in which these do disservice to the individual and the family.

In his novel, Sinclair wrote about the terrible living conditions of immigrants in Chicago. However, he more famously exposed the meat packing industry for its lack of sanitation and health violations through *"The Jungle"*. Which ultimately led to the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.

The term "muckraker" was coined by Theodore Roosevelt for the reporters who did investigative journalism and wrote about all the "muck" or problems that society had that were not openly known to the public. Muckraking simply means exposing scandals before the public's eye by means of naturalistic and realistic devices. These journalists would come to expose the corruption and social issues, and would lead to the journalism

we see today. Some of the earliest muckrakers were Frank Norris, Lewis Hine, Ida Tarbell, and Upton Sinclair.

Lewis Hine was actually a photo journalist who was able to capture children working in sweatshops and doing hard labor. He brought to light child labor and showed the world the injustice of children as young as 5 and six working 12 hour long days in unsanitary conditions and doing some of the more dangerous jobs.

Upton Sinclair wrote about the terrible living conditions immigrants lived in Chicago in the early 20th century. More famously he wrote "*The Jungle*" which exposed the meat packing industry's lack of sanitation and health violations. This ended up leading to the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act, and through his work he showed the country and the world the true grime of those issues in our society and brought change through his work.

Through the work of all these men and women the ideas of journalism changed forever. Investigative journalism was created. The ground work created paved the way for journalists today to emerge themselves in what they want to write about and get the story from within. They not only started the trend but they also brought to light some of the ugliest issues in society and tried to bring about a positive change.

Muckraking began at the turn of the century when print was more popular than ever and since then they revolutionized what was printed and helped grow the popularity of magazines, journals, newspapers, and books. Modern journalism now continuously has stories on the inside of whatever issue is going on and at their time muckrakers were just starting out and exposing the truth. Without their work and change the magazines and journals we see today would not be the same.

Finally Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* led to the 'Meat Inspection Act' and the 'Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906', which eventually led to the 'Food and Drug Administration' (FDA).



Pic No. 1. Child Labor in The Meatpacking Industry of Chicago During 1900's

Conclusion

The groundbreaking genre that is naturalism has had a thorough impact on the careers of many American writers including, among others, Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and most particularly the greatest figure in muckraking literature, Upton Sinclair. In his quest for literary fame and excellence, Sinclair followed the steps of his talented contemporaries. They indeed ventured beyond the American boundaries to seek inspiration from the uppermost actor in the naturalist realm, viz., Emile Zola, the founding father of the theory that suited best their respective purposes. His influence pervades the novel that added to the richness and heterogeneity of American literature. It is notable through Sinclair's characterization, and thematic and narrative outlines.

Sinclair had talent enough to turn borrowed material into a heartrending picture of the horrific reality of Packingtown. Yet in striving for originality and practicality, Sinclair heavily emphasizes ideology through a typically partisan rhetoric. By thus expressing his preference for "spirit" in lieu of "form," Sinclair refused to accept that literature is art first, everything else being secondary to it. An artful work of fiction is only recognized as such when its author leaves it all to his characters to express whatever message the latter aims at propagating. In short, a balanced combination of the spirit and the form perfected by authorial absence is what make a book a great work of art.

Sinclair deliberately set himself apart from the American canon, thus blotting his chances to not only receive the Nobel Prize, but also to see his work widely taught in colleges and universities. Leftist scholars yet continue to appreciate Sinclair's literary output.

Capitalism is attacked for a variety of reasons, including machine-production, the modern division of labor, the depersonalization of individuals (Nietzsche), the growth of large towns and the break-up of small communities (Tönnies) and the inexorable growth of rational calculation (Weber).

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