

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Background of the Study

Literature is the expression of human life in writing which reveals so many aspects of life, covering human thoughts, values, and problems. It may talk about a real life situation which is combined with the imaginary one. It may also deal with human experiences of life. Literature is the vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they thought, and felt about these aspects of it.

According to M.H. Abrams, literature can be defined as a form of expression, a process whereby strong and irrepressible feelings are forced out. In other words literature is the manifestation of a certain thought and feeling in writing.

Literature has a social function, since it expresses life. Life in large meaning is a social reality. It is possible to say that literature can explain a kind of relationship between the work of art and the society in which it was produced. The author might be a member of a society. He is impressed by the important social issues that take part in his time. Some of those social issues might involve him and some of them might disappoint him.

In this case, the author might be a part of them who experienced by himself those issues and problems in the society. Those experiences encouraged him to create a literary work in a kind of critical form.

As the form of expression and the kind of critical one, literature has also a personal function for the author himself. The author is the most important factor in creating a literary work as the form of expression. The author can express his ideas, his thoughts, and his feelings freely through his work, that is literature. Through literature, he can talk anything he wants, he can tell every kinds of story, even he can cry and also scream for whatever that makes him react and protest because of his disappointment. If he does not want to be harsh in his expression, through literature he can also criticize and satirize life and society.

The writer has chosen a novel as his subject of the study, since it is one of the medium to express that certain thought and feeling of the author. In A Handbook to Literature it says that a novel is "a fictional prose narrative in which the representation of character occurs either in a static condition or in the process of development as a result of events or action." (1986:35) Because of its length and its detail, novel is the best form of literature to describe the author's thoughts and ideas, and the best one to express the author's feelings. Novel is greatly concerned with characters, conflicts, -

and settings. Novel is also the best form of literature to display realism, social setting and time, because the author often describes and then satirizes the real social condition of a certain society. By reading and understanding the long and detailed novel, it will be clear for us to know and then learn the condition of the society that the author wants to reveal and criticize, since the novel will present the vivid description of certain social setting and its problems.

The writer merely focuses his attention on American novels in the early twenties and takes one of them as his object of analysis, due to the fact that American novelists in the twenties had serious interest in social issues of their time. They mainly concerned with many aspects of society as the background for their characters in their novels. At that time life of American small town had already entered the period which had been marked with the displacement of farm labor by machinery and with the migration of its young people to big cities. They had been attracted by the brighter jobs and greater personal freedom.

Sinclair Lewis (1885 - 1951) was one of the greatest American novelists in the twentieth century. Moreover, Lewis was one of the most important American writers of the first half of the twentieth century. He was one of the leading members of an American school of writing which, during and after World War I, had opposed

a romantic and complacent conception of American life with one that was realistic and even bitter. Among other writers of this school were Floyd Dell, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson. This group crystallized America's own revolt against the spiritual barrenness and narrow intellectual outlook in many aspects of its life.

We know exactly that Sinclair Lewis' reputation was international. In 1930 he received the Nobel Prize for literature. He was the first American ever to receive the honor. Most of his novels are talking about the American life. From 1920 to 1930 Sinclair Lewis was, beginning with Main Street, a writer who compelled the attention of both his own country and the whole world in general.

According to Mark Schorer in his Introduction to Lewis at Zenith, Lewis' earlier novels are considered as

These stories, more often than not, perpetuated an old and favorite notion in American fiction about life in the small town; here was America at its kindest, its friendliest, its best.

(Mark Schorer's Introduction
to Lewis, Sinclair, Lewis at
Zenith, 1925, vii)

When Main Street was published in 1920 the world especially America was quite surprised because of the theme of the 'new' image of America which is offered -

by Lewis in this novel. Lewis brilliantly describes the self - satisfied and typical society, and the details of the smell, dirt, and ugliness of American small town.

Sinclair Lewis won the Pulitzer Prize for Arrow-smith, which was published in 1925, and in 1930 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for Babbitt, which was published in 1922. His Main Street, however, is Lewis' most successful and famous novel. He reached a high level in 1920 with the appearance of Main Street, since his earlier novels are undistinguished and not succeeded. Lewis does attacks and satirizes the true nature of the American small town and its people, because the image - which he offers in Main Street is the new, but real image of today's American small towns. That's why besides - the publication of Lewis' Main Street had been followed by many critics and dissatisfactions toward it, it also arose some recommendations and admirations. The strength of the satire which was created by Sinclair Lewis in - this novel is in the proportion to the universal reality of the description of the American small town life. These are the peculiarity and the special quality of Main Street which had made this novel the masterpiece of Sinclair Lewis.

This thesis is dealing with Lewis' Main Street, a novel which has become the product of the creative process and the form of expression in which the author can express his ideas freely. This kind of expression is in

the satirical form. The satire which is created by Lewis is about the life of American small town. Lewis can see the ugliness and all of the bad sides which are found in the prairie town, a small mid - west town during the second decade of the twentieth century. This special satire reflects the true nature of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, - the author's own birthtown. The specific reason to reveal the aspect of satire in Lewis' Main Street in this thesis is based on the fact that Lewis, as the native of Sauk Centre, wrote and emphasized the bad sides of the town in this satirical novel. It seems Lewis hated this town, but actually he loved it because he had requested that his ashes were returned to Sauk Centre after his death in Rome, Italy.

The story of Main Street mostly tells about the struggle of its main character, Carol Kennicott, against the stuffiness and lack of beauty life in Gopher Prairie - the small town in Minnesota. It is the story of the young rebellious woman, who reacts and rebels against the ugliness and self - satisfied society of the town, and towards the way how the people of the small town treat her as the outsider in the town.

As a fiction and a literary work, Main Street is quite a unique and special novel. This novel has some autobiographical elements of Sinclair Lewis as the author, which are somehow dominant and also determine its plot. It is about the reality. It is about the true des-

cription of a small town condition, Gopher Prairie, which is the reflection of the social condition in Sauk Centre, the birthplace and hometown of Sinclair Lewis. Most of the details of the town had been seen and known well by the author himself. The character of Carol Kennicott is like Lewis himself in some ways. Carol's combat with the bad condition of society in Gopher Prairie to express her disappointment is actually the expression of Lewis' disappointment towards what the people of his own hometown had treated him. Main Street, however, is not merely the autobiographical novel of Sinclair Lewis. Some autobiographical elements of the author in this novel had been beautifully combined with many of Lewis' ideas and imagineries in order to creat the great story.

I.2. Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the statement of the problem of this thesis are

1. What aspects in Main Street show Sinclair Lewis' satire to the life of an American small town and its society ?

2. Which autobiographical elements of Sinclair Lewis are reflected in Main Street ?

3. Which autobiographical elements of the author are dominant and determine in creating this satirical novel ?

I.3. Objective of the Study

1. To express that the novel Main Street has some aspects which clearly show the way how Sinclair Lewis satirizes the life of American small town, especially in the twenties, and how he satirizes its society.

2. To express that there are some autobiographical elements of the author which are reflected and quite dominant in determining the aspect of satire in the novel.

I.4. Significance of the Study

After analyzing the social life in Gopher Prairie as the representation of the social life of the American small towns in general, we can get better understanding of the American life in a small town and understand the American society and its characteristics. Main Street, as a product of creative process and a form of expression, is a satirical novel. By analyzing this specific novel we can understand how the author expresses his thoughts and ideas in his satirical novel. We also can understand how the personal life and the experiences of Sinclair Lewis, as the author, influenced and determined in creating Main Street. The result of the analysis is expected to be an input for any other studies of novels as literary works. More further, this study can be meaningful and useful for the English Departement stu

dents who have attention to the interpretation of Sinclair Lewis' literary works.

I.5. Scope and Limitation

This thesis is emphasizing on the analysis of the satire and the social criticism which is written by Sinclair Lewis in the social setting, character especially the main one, and the conflicts of Main Street.

The study is also dealing with the autobiographical elements of Sinclair Lewis which are reflected in the novel Main Street. There is a clear limitation about the fact that the character of Carol Kennicott and Main Street are really the product of creative process of the author, although there are some autobiographical elements of Sinclair Lewis in this novel.

I.6. Theoretical Background

The expressive theory has been applied in dealing with the analysis of Sinclair Lewis' Main Street, which is regarded as the product of the creative process and as the form of expression. As one of literary works, this novel can be considered as a medium in which the author can express his thoughts, ideas, and feeling freely. Through his literary work, the author can talk, react, criticize, and satirize about life and about anything which has been disappointed him.

This thesis concerns with the social setting and the social condition of Gopher Prairie as the representation of today's American small town in general, and with the life of its society. In this novel Sinclair Lewis satirizes the bad sides, the cruel, and the ugliness of the American small town and satirizes the way how the small town people treat Carol Kennicott, the main character and the outsider of the town. So, it will be appropriate if the sociological approach is applied in the thesis as well.

Regarding literary work as the product of the creative process, the author is the main and important factor. The author is the subject matter in analyzing novel as the form of expression. To observe the author's ideas, it is certainly to consider the author's details of his background of life as a principal concern. Incidentally in the novel Main Street there are some autobiographical elements of Sinclair Lewis which are reflected in it. Therefore, the biographical approach is used to explore them.

I.7. Method of the Study

To support his thesis, the writer applies the library research by collecting the data and the sources from the reference books, or some printed materials dealing with Sinclair Lewis and his works, especially the novel Main Street and the critics about it. The writer al-

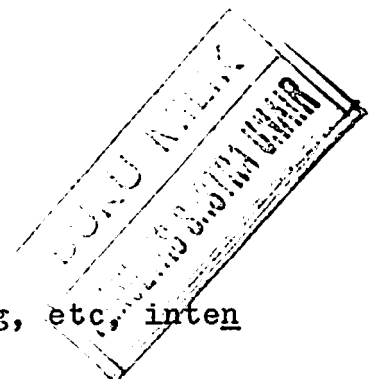
so found out some informations from other books which - deal with theory and approaches which are used in the - research. Since the thesis concerns with the society of American small town in the early of the twentieth century, the writer tried to get some references and books about the society of American small town especially in - the twenties. The writer did the same thing for some references about the author of this novel and his works , since the thesis also concerns with the biography of Sinclair Lewis.

Being engaged with the analysis of the novel, the writer has used the Content Analysis Method. This is the kind of method which is based on the content of the literary work. The writer primarily observes on the social setting and Carol's character as the main character, who has some conflicts with her new society and whose life - has some similarities with the author's life. The writer notices that the novel Main Street has social aspects - as the representation of the social reality which is described by the author and together with all of the aspects which the writer of the thesis observed are unified just to form the great story as the satire towards the American small town life.

I.8. Definition of Key Terms

- Satire

is a work of literature, theatre, speaking, etc, inten



ded to show the bad and false, the foolishness or evil of some establishment or practice. The satire emphasizes the bad sides and the ugliness of something

- Society

as used in literature means human beings generally or less often, an organized group of persons living as members of a community. Society may also be considered as classes of people grouped according to worldly status.

- Small Town

In its broadest meaning the word Small Town denotes - simply a small collection of houses without regard to the form of its political organization.

The small town itself is the small physical shell of a close community, consisting of durable buildings and permanent ways in which, at least since the neolithic period, men have sought military protection, religious and political association, economic opportunity and cultural stimulus.

- Autobiography

is a form of nonfictional literature, the subject of which recounts his or her own life history. In general the form is considered to include Biography, in which - the subject is the life of an individual. But autobiography may recount the experiences, however scandalous, of travellers, lovers, more or less for their own sake.

I.9. Organization of the Paper

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter is the Introduction which is subdivided into: Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Objective of the Study, Significance of the Study, Scope and Limitation, Theoretical Background, Method of the Study, Definition of Key Terms, and Organization of the Paper.

The second chapter is the Theoretical Framework which consists of the Expressive Theory, the Sociological Approach, and the Biographical Approach. It is completed with other related studies about the work that support the writer's thesis.

The third chapter is The Life of Sinclair Lewis and His Works. It consists of the sketch of the author's life which is completed with the general discussion about his works.

The Fourth chapter is the Analysis which deals with the interpretation and the further explanation of findings.

The fifth chapter or the last chapter of this thesis is the Conclusion.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK