

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair is a dreary story that depicts the life of a working man in the early twentieth century. The book shows the horrid working conditions placed about the Chicago factory workers and the horrors of the standard of living. The book follows behind an immigrant from Russia who hopes to strike it rich in America. Sinclair consistently throws problems at the man who runs from one scenario to the next.

The title of the book comes from an old saying, "it's a jungle out there." meaning that the world is so complex and busy, it is hard to comprehend all that is taking place. That is exactly how the book is portrayed, as a jungle. So many things are going on like crime, politics, corruption, business, and families, that the main character has a hard time trying to adjust from his simple struggle to survive in Russia.

The novel takes place in Packingtown, a small area in Chicago during the early 1900's. Packingtown is made up of a few stores and two big meat processing plants. The whole area is based on the plants where most of the people are employed. Packingtown is not a pretty place. The air is filled with a black smoke that pours all day long from the big factories. The streets are not paved and the working conditions are terrible. The setting is a perfect place for a man to struggle from one problem to the next without ever finding the solace of comfort and relaxation. The time is important to the novel because it is before any laws on working conditions and food quality have been established. The novel takes place in several time sequences where Sinclair briefly stops to explain the new problem that the main character must overcome.

The main Characters on the novel are Jugus, the man of which the story follows, Ona, Jurgis's wife, Elzbieta, mother in law of Ona, and Marija, Ona's cousin. Jurgis is the main character of the novel and the only person who makes any change at all. Jurgis is a big man who starts work in one of the killing beds in a meat factory. Jurgis is a man who only wants the best for Ona and when faced with a problem uses the motto, "I will work harder." Ona is a "mere child" whose physical and emotional fragility allow little chance for survival. Elzbieta is a woman who endures tragedy after tragedy throughout the story. Marija is an orphan. She is a young woman of immense energy, powerful body, and commanding voice. Characterization in the story is illustrative. The reader does not know the characters in the story any better on at the end of the story as he did at the beginning. Once described, the character does not deepen or become more understandable. All of the characters in the story have a purpose, they all are there to have something happen to them. The range of characterization is small and all the

characters are similar in actions and words. Their dimensions are all the same and so is their level of believability. The working laborer is depicted and shares little differences from the intellectual upper-class man. Also, characterization is entirely external. The author always tells the actions of the character and tells what they are thinking. The process of thinking and moral choice are never shown.

Jurgis is faced with many problems throughout the story but none more apparent than that of poverty. The level of poverty in Packingtown is that of a lower standard than we are accustomed to. Jurgis has high hopes for him and his family when the story begins and he has his job at the killing beds. But an injury stops his plans of a good lifestyle short. After healing from the injury Jurgis finds out that he no longer has his old job and must search for a new one. Jurgis is unable to find a job and following the death of one of Elzbieta's crippled children Jurgis goes to work in the fertilizer plant, a place where no man chooses to go if he can help it. Then Jurgis finds out that Ona has committed adultery forced upon her by Conner, one of the foremen where they work. Jurgis confronts Conner and beats him badly and is sent to jail. Ona dies from an early labor and Jurgis stays drunk for several days and only brings himself back together by the pleas of Elzbieta who cries for the sake of Anatas, Jurgis's son. All through these problems Jurgis stay the same and changes little. The turning point in the novel and the only time that Jurgis changes at all is when he hears a socialist orator speak about all the good of socialism. From this point on Jurgis takes to socialism and tries to learn more about it. Jurgis joins up with other socialists and learns how socialism is the only answer to everyone's problems.

There is one thing that Sinclair refrains from and that is going right out and describing a character. He puts a picture of the character in the reader's mind's eye by how the character acts and by what he does. For instance Ona's frailty and hesitation to confront any resistance shows that she is small and timid. On the other hand Jurgis was hired for a job by just standing there and looking imposing. It was also said about Jurgis that "he could take up a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound quarter of beef and carry it into a car without a stagger, or even a thought". Dialogue is not used very effectively throughout the story. Instead of using dialogue to describe the characters, Sinclair simply explains what the characters do in the story instead of bringing the reader on to their level. I couldn't find any passages in the story that illustrates dialogue used effectively. One thing that Sinclair uses for effect in the story is repetition. The whole point of the story is to preach about socialism, so to create the correct frame of mind for the reader, Sinclair must show how bad the way of life at present time in the story is. So repetitively, Jurgis has one horrible thing after another happen to him. He loses jobs, becomes injured, has family members die, all

because of the way of life. This repetition helps Sinclair dramatize the ending of his story. This is a passage that I believe illustrates Sinclair's sense of style, "The whole long agony came back to him. Their sacrifices in the beginning, their three hundred dollars that they had scraped together, all they owned in the world, all that stood between them and starvation! And then their toil, month by month, to get the twelve dollars, and the interest as well, and now and then the taxes, and the other charges, and the repairs, and what not! Dede Antanas had died in the struggle to earn that money--he would have been alive and strong today if he had not had to work in Durham's dark cellars to earn his share. And Ona too, had given her health and strength to pay for it--she was wrecked and ruined because of it; and so was he."

This passage shows the repetitiveness that the characters had been through throughout the story. Everything that they ever work for, they lose many times over. Sinclair shows his characters no mercy, whenever it can't get worse, it does.

One obvious aspect of the story is the theme. It is clear to the reader the point that Sinclair is trying to get across to the reader. The theme is how socialism is the only way to lead a decent life.

Sinclair is trying to say that without socialism, we will be forced to live a life as Jurgis did. The basic way to describe socialism is a lighter form of communism. I don't agree with the author's ideas on government because it is now about eighty years after the story was written and we have gotten along just fine while other countries have relied on communism and collapsed. If I was living the life of Jurgis though, I would probably turn toward anything new and promising change. That is probably why the author thought that socialism would change the country for the better. I on the other hand am appreciative of the form of democracy we practice today.

The best thing about *The Jungle* is the atmosphere and the story line. I liked the vivid picture of the gloomy atmosphere that Sinclair painted in my mind. I also liked how the book kept my interest throughout the story. The ending of the story has several things left unsaid, but the actual story was good. I would not be that interested in reading another story by that author because chances are that it would be another book about socialism. There is also the fact that Sinclair does not form his characters all that well and they do not develop throughout the story. Sinclair can write a pretty convincing story, they're just not my type.

