

Political Intrigue as theme Upton Sinclair's novel

The Return of Lanny Budd

Dr. Kinjalben Chimanbhai Patel

Abstract: *Political intrigue is a major theme that the author uses to bring out his message in this novel, as well as to create suspense among readers. This theme is also found in other pieces written by him, such as Looking Backward Into Nineteen Thirty-Seven, which are centered on socialism and politics in America. This form of political intrigue plays an important role in transforming characters from their original status, into those they were before becoming part of New York society.*

Keywords: Politics, War, Themes, Upton Sinclair

I. INTRODUCTION

Political intrigue is a major theme that the author uses to bring out his message in this novel, as well as to create suspense among readers. This theme is also found in other pieces written by him, such as Looking Backward Into Nineteen Thirty-Seven, which are centered on socialism and politics in America. This form of political intrigue plays an important role in transforming characters from their original status, into those they were before becoming part of New York society. As described above, he presents them with new personalities, or even totally different versions of themselves, during the course of the book. He does so primarily through character development. However, there may be a shift in another person's personality if an event occurs that changes them as a whole and makes them change for the better. These new people, along with their original counterparts, undergo major life changes. For example, Lanny Budd (the main protagonist), who appears to have always been poor and ignorant, at first seems very friendly and willing to learn but later becomes rude and arrogant while she interacts with her classmates and friends, eventually causing trouble at school and bringing death upon herself. Her transformation reveals some of the more subtle ways in which one's political views can affect others in one way or another. Such occurrences as these can have a direct impact on a certain person, especially their attitude, values, and beliefs. Ultimately, many events happen which alter the lives of the characters in the novel. Through various examples and instances drawn from the time period, he describes how various aspects of human nature can lead to undesirable results for someone. It is because no one is perfect. Everyone has flaws.

Themes

A common theme throughout this novel is that of greed. Greed in this case refers to the desire or thirst to acquire more wealth than what a person could otherwise be comfortable with. One day, Lanny Budd finds her mother dead, leaving all of her worldly possessions, including her dog. She feels depressed because she had left everything behind when she moved away from home. She decides to do anything to rid herself from the emptiness inside her. This leads her down the wrong path as she engages in activities which ultimately end up killing her. While at first glance it seems she would go just about anywhere to get whatever she wants, the reality of the situation proves her to be quite naïve. After realizing that she would probably lose everything, she ends up getting involved in illegal acts in order to obtain the money she needed to help pay off her debts. Even after she gets married to Sam, she continues her self-centered efforts; however, due to her reckless decisions, he ends up dying at the hands of police officers. At times, though, not everyone can be manipulated or led astray. There are a few exceptions to this rule, such as Mr. Rogers, who was able to see both sides of the coin and had the courage to understand where his loyalty lay.

The second major topic mentioned in this text is racial and ethnic prejudice. Throughout the novel, racism was prevalent in most of the social gatherings and events taking place in New York City. Since white Americans were considered superior beings, much of the action took place in places where the dominant race was present. When Lanny Budd first arrives, the black people in the neighborhood tend to mistreat her terribly and feel threatened whenever she

visits. They call her names, “black girl,” and they threaten her safety whenever they want. Later, as the story progresses, she starts making friends with her neighbors, eventually saving them from the mob and helping them become successful members of society. However, once again, things turn sour for them, as her skin color remains a problem, forcing the whites to treat her differently again. Eventually, they even begin calling her nigger names. Once again, this triggers her behavior, and she retaliates by acting violently towards any person who calls her a racist name. By doing so, she creates conflict between a group of people that all share a common goal or goal, which includes protecting their rights and freedoms against violence at the hands of those who consider themselves oppressors. As the story goes on, we see more and more of the discrimination occurring. Racism is seen as a solution to the problems within society; therefore, some people find excuses and use them to justify their own behaviors. Because racism cannot be challenged or changed, its effects continue to exist. Not only is it seen as a necessary evil but as an idealized concept that allows people to maintain the illusion of success and prosperity, even at the expense of others. People want to believe everything can be easily fixed, but the truth is often far behind what they expect or hope for.

Another theme that has evolved throughout the novel is class conflict. Although the majority of the townspeople have their differences, there is some degree of interdependence among people in society. Some people in positions of power are able to make significant changes in their social class, resulting in the distribution of resources. On the surface, this appears to be an unfair issue. It seems unreasonable and unjust. However, as the story progressed, people found different reasons to justify their current circumstances. Perhaps the biggest example is Bill Oliver, whose father was rich and powerful in the community, yet was accused of being corrupt. Despite his family having enough wealth, the city was run out by corruption, which resulted in the mayor resigning the position. Thus, despite this, people still trusted leaders, such as William Oliver, whom they thought were not corrupted and would protect their rights. He did exactly that despite being disliked by many of the citizens. Another example in the same vein is Alfred Sutter, who was able to rise the ranks of the clergy despite facing opposition. His decision to give away land was seen as the best solution to the socioeconomic issues evident before the Civil War. Unfortunately, although his actions were justified by morality and principle, they were never welcomed by the people of Manhattan who felt that even though they lived differently from those around them, they still deserved consideration based on their capabilities and not their financial background or lack thereof.

The final topic addressed in the story is love. Love is complex and multi-faceted concept that has multiple meanings and interpretations. To some people, it can mean feelings of affection and affection itself, and to others, it can refer to true friendship or love itself. Each individual experience love differently and has a unique interpretation or understanding of the concept. Although both Lanny Budd and Marjorie seem to have similar feelings of attraction towards each other at the beginning of the book, they eventually differ significantly in terms of their perception. For instance, according to Lanny Budd, the more she saw of Marjorie, the more interested she became in her and wanted to spend more quality time with her. However, Marjorie disagreed with this notion, stating that she had already started seeing the same thing in Lanny Budd. Instead, Lanny says that she could never fall in love, due to the fact that one has to meet someone special in order to start falling in love. Both Lanny and Marjorie are capable of feeling a lot of emotion and affection, but they both manage to keep a distance between one another. Lanny even explains why she and Marjorie feel like strangers and have little interaction with each other:

“When I got lonely, I sat under my window and looked out over the street. ... There were two old women sitting near me. They were bent over their books and reading without any hurry. Suddenly, I looked up on the next block, and in front of me stood a young man, a large, dark face and strong arms. He spoke in a low voice, and then I recognized him. He was the mayor of the town, and I sat under there window looking toward the north, up at the sky.”

Marjorie also states that she has grown “much more indifferent” towards Lanny, and that she thinks nothing of the possibility of love. According to Marjorie, Lanny believes she does not deserve love because she is ugly and black. In spite of this, she keeps trying to attract Lanny back to her side of the fence. She remembers saying something along the lines of, “I guess you get to be pretty when you’re black, too, don’t you? You ought to stay black. And I’m so ugly. So beautiful, and I don’t even know myself. I feel so free, that I try to put myself somewhere else every day. But now – I’ve gotten tired of doing that kind of thinking. Every morning, I wake up wondering if I’m going to die tomorrow. So, if it had been anybody, it would have happened soon enough. I wish everybody was perfect. What difference would there be between you and me?”

II. CONCLUSION

Finally, the last major theme addressed in this story is revenge, as shown in Lanny's perspective. A variety of people in society feel bad for the mistakes made by individuals they perceive to be responsible. All they ask for is retribution, either physical or emotional. Revenge is a highly debatable topic that cannot be fully resolved. Most of the conflicts presented by Sinclair present situations wherein an innocent party is victimized by a perpetrator or the law. Lanny's example shows how society will resort to vengeance against perpetrators of crime, regardless of whether they deserve to be punished. Lanny even states:

"Mr. Anderson, did you kill me? He did I'll tell you. You killed me. Why did I let you shoot me? Why didn't the police arrest you? Tell them the truth. I will not give you the satisfaction of your revenge. You will receive nothing

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