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### **Contrast between Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukoszaite in The Jungle by Upton Sinclair**

The author of the book 'The Jungle', Upton Sinclair was born in 1878 in Baltimore, Maryland. At fourteen he relocated to New York for his college education. While doing his degree at Columbia University, he was able to support himself by doing pulp fictional writing and working as a journalist. He was inspired into writing his sixth novel, The Jungle, in 1906 by his socialist affiliation. This came out as his first successful piece. The way Sinclair brings out the message in this book is admirable. The book is full of metaphors, starting from the title where Parkington is referred to a jungle from which there is no getaway. Those in the political and business owner class are predators while those in the working class are their prey. My focus was greatly drawn to Jurgis, the protagonist in the novel and his wife Ona because of their quite contrasting personalities and physical features, some which were admirable and others detestable. On the positive side, while Jurgis is portrayed as a big, strong and aggressive man, Ona comes out as a small, delicate and "one of God's gentlest creatures," (Sinclair 2) who can be viewed as a child. Negatively, Jurgis is ignorant, immature and hot-headed while Ona is intuitively intelligent, sensitive and understanding.

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At the start of the novel one of Jurgis' most striking features is his physique. Almost at his first mention Jurgis is defined as, "he with the mighty shoulders and the giant hands" together with "great black eyes with beetling brows" (Sinclair 2). Together with him being a gigantic man, he

also appears to have great strength. This is emphasized by, “Jurgis 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” (Sinclair 2). However he does not benefit much from his huge frame and great strength. Instead he gets himself into the conceit of youth, power and fitness, often laughing and expressing open joy at the tales of workmen who are wasted by the abattoirs. He moves from his remote home in Luthania to Packingtown but his strong and positive attitude towards life is not shaken by the seemingly hard and exploitative conditions of his new home. He remained confident that as a strong man, he was bound to win. Ona on the other end is brought to us a small and frail girl. She has a delicate build and she is very young. She actually comes out as an individual who is not fit for the rough and exploitative life of Packingtown. As the novel progresses, she is overwhelmed by the burden of the hostile environment, Pressed by the terrible circumstances of motherhood, falls victim of a rapist, harshly treated and judged by her beloved husband, and she finally dies painfully at childbirth.

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Jurgis comes from a peasant family that originates from Lithuania in Europe. Though they move to America, Jurgis’ mind remains stuck to the peasant lifestyle, and he remains ignorant of the business environment in America. Even with the terrible conditions at the butcheries he never complains or rebels. It is said that, “The “Union Stockyards” were never a pleasant place.” (Sinclair 229) Instead he enjoys the work even as his weaker colleagues are collapsing due to the murderous pace of work set by their supervisors. He does not understand that he is being slowly destroyed by this work that he seems to enjoy. He literally differs with and dislikes any of the workers who seem to bring new ideas and all those who support them. He is clearly a hot-headed and foolish man, who is blinded by his physical ability. This leads to his destruction. Although weak and vulnerable,

Ona is smart enough to find ways to survive. She uses her intuition intelligently enough to foresee that letting her hot-tempered husband of the exploitative ordeals she suffers at work will break their family instead of helping her. Even when she gets terribly hysterical and gets to a point of almost losing her mind, she remains sober and is evidently focused ahead than her husband.

Although Jurgis is all along seen to be strong both physically and in character, at a point in time he becomes weak. He is weighed down by the problems he faces to the extent of treating his wife and son unfairly. He develops a tendency of always scolding her when she cries. He turns into heavy indulgence in alcohol and abandons his family. Instead of educating his son, he turns into brutally assaulting him when the refuses to go out to work in the cold winter. When both his wife and son dies he sinks deep into desperation and his weakness of character is seen. He resorts into crime, begging and political trickery. Ona's love and care for both her husband does not shake despite the terrible circumstances they find themselves in. She prefers to keep her plight a secret for the sake of the well-being of her family because she knows her husband will not understand her. Instead of getting insensitive like her husband she remains sensitive amidst their challenges. Just like the author puts it, "the soul of Ona was not dead" (Sinclair 148). Her craving for love from her husband remains all through the novel but she has to learn how to live without it.

In conclusion, contrast between Jurgis Rudkus and his wife Ona Lukoszaite is evident throughout the novel *The Jungle*. Starting from the time of their introduction into the novel, they clearly contrast. Though they marry and live together as husband and wife, the clear differences between both their physical being and their personalities persist. The circumstances that they face as the novel progresses bring out the differences that exist between them more and more clearly. They at some points tend to have similarities in their way of thinking and responding to situations but their differences still emerges and become evident. Ona dies strong and with love and concern

for her son and her husband but Jurgis deteriorates more and more as she loses her wife and later his son.

### **Works Cited**

Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. New York: Courier Corporation, 2012. Web.