

I. Critique of the Roaring Twenties

Capitalism is not an eternal, God-given socio-economic system, as it appears to most people. The same illusion always existed in every period. Men and women always find it hard to imagine that people can live and work and think and act differently to how they do at the given moment. Yet all history shows just how easy it is for men and women to change the way, in which they live, think, work and act. Indeed, human history is nothing more than the chronicling of such transformations. We marvel today at how humans like ourselves could ever have accepted cannibalism, slavery or serfdom. Yet our ancestors did so and would have found our own culture - the culture of capitalism - no less alien and incomprehensible.

No, capitalism is not eternal or fixed. In fact, it is less fixed than any other socio-economic system in history. Like any other living organism it changes, evolves and therefore passes through a number of more or less clearly discernible stages. It has long outlived its turbulent infancy and its confident and optimistic maturity likewise lies in the past. And the negative consequences of this will bear down hard on the shoulders of humanity. In this phase of capitalism, the periods of growth will not ameliorate the contradictions on a world scale, but only exacerbate them to the nth degree. And the downswings will threaten the world with the most terrible catastrophes.

America in the 1920s is dubbed the 'Roaring '20s.' Hollywood movies and television make it look like one big dance party with a few gangsters thrown in for dramatic purposes. Historians, journalists, and novelists are fascinated with the 1920s as the beginning of modern America, a decade that helps set the tone for the rest of the century. The roaring twenties are traditionally viewed as an era of great economic prosperity driven by the introduction of a wide array of new consumer goods. The

American economy subsequently boomed, transitioned from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy.

The boom of the 1920s is rip-roaring growth in the USA based on new technology, particularly the motor-car, new methods of production, a soaring stock exchange, and a general mood of wild optimism and a feeling that the good times would last forever. And indeed, as long as the carnival of money-making continued, it gripped the minds of all classes - from the strategists of capital and the politicians down to the man and woman in the street. But once the boom collapses, this process turns into its opposite. Kevin Phillips sums up the roaring twenties and says that they all indicate that the nation's attitude toward business is changing:

In the Roaring Twenties, wealth momentum surged, the rich pulled away from everyone else and financial and technological innovation built a boom. Then it went partially or largely bust in the securities markets. Digging out was never easy. The deep-rooted nature of "financialization" in the United States that developed in the 1920's and 30's put America in a turning point. (19)

The view of the previous decade presented in the thirties by most historians was far less subtle and complete. Instead of a New Era, liberation, or a slow scientific adaptation, the twenties became a deplorable interlude of reaction. This view stated sometimes with qualifications and sometimes very baldly, has continued to dominate academic historical writing from the thirties almost until the present.

The social and societal upheaval known as the roaring twenties begins in North America and spreads to Europe in the aftermath of World War I. The spirit of the Roaring Twenties was marked by a general feeling of discontinuity associated with modernity, a break with traditions. Everything seemed to be feasible through

modern technology. New technologies, especially automobiles, movies and radio proliferated 'modernity' to a large part of the population. Formal decorative frills were shed in favor of practicality, in architecture as well as in daily life. At the same time, amusement, fun and lightness were cultivated in jazz and dancing, in defiance of the horrors of World War I, which remained present in people's minds. The period is also often called "The Jazz Age." *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is often described as the epitome of the "Jazz Age" in American literature. The progress of human resources in Corporate America is a story of advances and setbacks, triumph and despair, celebration and frustration. Describing the time just before the roaring twenties, Shari Caudron and Jennifer J. Laabs notice that:

The year was around 1915, a year after the outbreak of World War I. Disgruntled workers were fed up with shabby working conditions, paltry paychecks and shop foremen who hired, fired and paid workers based on criteria no more substantial than how they felt when they got out of bed that morning. Promising to relieve their misery, unions stepped in, workers went on strike and nervous executives finally got the message that better employment practices were needed. (32)

In the debates that took place within the Communist International in the early 1920s the question of the economic cycle was discussed in some depth. The ultra-lefts put forward the argument that there was going to be a final crisis of capitalism. They maintained that capitalism would just collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. Lenin and Trotsky, on the contrary, pointed out that there is no such thing as the final crisis of capitalism, in the sense of an automatic collapse of the system. Left to itself, the capitalist system will always find a way out - although at the most frightful cost to the working class and human civilization. Unless and until

capitalism is overthrown by the working class then there is always some way out of even the deepest crisis. Thus, the fate of society is not decided mechanically by the blind play of economic forces, but by the class struggle, in which the elements of organization, consciousness and leadership play just as decisive a role as in war between the nations.

To comment on the 1920's today, the period is over and major changes have taken place. Calm study of this decade is not easy. Successive writers have found it necessary either to condemn or to praise the decade, though what they have seen in it to condemn or praise has differed. The twenties were, indeed, golden, but only for a privileged segment of the American population. Historians disagree on the degree of prosperity in the 1920s, the role of advertising, and the nature of the "popular culture" of the decade. With the depression, the twenties shot into the past with extraordinary suddenness. The conflicting pictures of the decade, rosy and deep black, changed sharply, though none disappeared. Of them all, it was the New Era point of view, the interpretation of the decade as the birth of a new and humane capitalism that understandably suffered most. Commenting about the crash of the economy of the 1920's, Mary Mueller writes:

Black Tuesday explains how the decade's economic boom and unregulated markets created the speculative bubble that burst when the stock market crashed in 1929. It concludes that growing investor panic and inadequate government response to the crash contributed to the Great Depression, leaving society with an enduring fascination with the day that ended so many dreams. (35)

During the 1920s it seemed as if prosperity would go on forever; even after the stock market crash in the fall of 1929, optimistic predictions continued to come from

high places. But the depression deepened, millions of investors lost their life savings, business houses closed their doors, factories shut down, banks failed, and millions of unemployed walked the streets in a hopeless search for work. As the people rallied from the initial shock and began seeking explanations, they noted unhealthy trends that had gone unobserved beneath the prosperous facade of the 1920s. The Great Depression demarcates the conceptualization of the Roaring Twenties from the 1930s. The hopefulness in the wake of World War I that had initiated the Roaring Twenties gave way to the debilitating economic hardship of the later era. Paul Jonson partly blames The Great Depression for the rise in poverty in America as:

Poverty in the U.S. flourished in this country during the 19th century. After World War 1, 10 million Americans were considered poor, and this number grew bigger during the Great Depression. During World War 2, U.S. economy strengthened but poverty still persisted in some areas of the country. In 1964, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared unconditional war on poverty which persisted until President Richard M. Nixon's administration. (65)

Perhaps the dominant current version was that proclaimed by the businessmen, the picture of the period usually conveyed by the phrase New Era itself. Out of the postwar upheaval was emerging, in this view, a new civilization. Its origin was technology, its efficient causes high wages and diffusion of ownership, its leadership enlightened private management. It was buttressed by academic argument and attested by foreign observers. To its believers, it was not a picture of conservatism but of innovation.

The greatest boom was in consumer goods, e.g. cars, refrigerators, radios, cookers, telephones etc. Ordinary people were encouraged through advertising to buy

these goods and many could now afford what had been luxuries before the war. One reason was that they earned slightly higher wages because of the boom. Another reason was that the growth of hire purchase meant that people could spread the cost over months and even years. But the main reason was that goods had become cheaper. This was because of mass production methods used to produce many consumer goods. Assembly lines were built in factories and each worker concentrated on one small job only. The most famous example of this method was Henry Ford's factory which was fully automated. Lewis was very confident of *Babbitt* that makes James M Hutchisson say:

By the summer of 1922, Sinclair Lewis had established himself as a professional novelist and had ample reason to believe that he was poised on the brink of a brilliant literary career. He had already secured a foothold in American literature by writing *Main Street*, which became both a best seller. Awaiting the fall publication of his next novel, *Babbitt*, which Lewis prophetically told his publisher Alfred Harcourt, would soon have America talking of Babbitry. (47)

Sociologists of the period, seem exultant over the apparent defeat of religious obscurantism, were as optimistic as the businessmen and the historians, though for different reasons. Their New Era lay in the future rather than the present, its motivating force was not technology alone but the guiding social intelligence. This picture of the decade as a transitional age emerges most clearly from the sociological periodicals of the early twenties, where one finds at least four important assumptions.

First, the scientific study of society was just coming into its own. Second, social scientists were now able to abandon sentiment, impressionism, and introspection and seek accurate information, especially quantitative information.

Third, this new knowledge should be, and increasingly would be, the guide for practical statesmanship, replacing custom and tradition. Fourth, Utopia was consequently just around the corner. To condense is always unfair, and it would be incorrect to assume that all social scientists in the twenties saw their role or their period this simply. Yet it is easy enough to find all these beliefs stated very positively in textbooks and even learned articles, with both the behaviorist dogmatism and the authoritarian implications full-blown part of the confidence of these prophets rested on real and important achievement by social scientists in the period, but those who had actually contributed the most new knowledge were sometimes less dogmatic than their colleagues.

The typical economic thought of the twenties, while it avoided Utopian extremes, shared with the other social sciences an unlimited confidence in the present possibilities of fact-finding and saw in the collection and use of statistics much of the promise and meaning of the era. The third contemporary interpretation of the period, that offered by its literary intellectuals, differed sharply from the other two completely repudiating the optimism of the businessmen, it agreed with the social scientists only in its occasional praise of the liberated intelligence. For the most part, the writers and artists of the twenties saw their age as one of decline. The fact remains, that American civilization in the twenties presented to many of its most sensitive and some of its gifted members only an ugly and hostile face.

In the book *The Defining Moment: The Great Depression and the American Economy in the Twentieth Century* the editors Michael D. Bordo, Claudia Goldin, and Eugene N. White point out that:

The interwar period was marked by a sharp increase in exchange controls, the interwar gold-exchange standard was a house of cards that

needed exchange-control props because postwar price levels remained too high for the prewar gold parities that central banks attempted to restore. It was not the classical gold standard that collapsed in the Great Depression, but a system of discretionary cooperation among central banks trying to maintain a jury-rigged quasi gold standard.

(474)

Sometimes, despite their basic differences, the Marxist writers agreed in part in the thirties with the progressive historians. Often, however, the literary Marxists made a different combination. Starting in the twenties as rebels in the name of art, they had found their esthetic distaste for capitalism confirmed by prophecies of its inevitable doom. The resultant mixture of individualist rebellion and socialist revolution was unstable and short-lived, but in the thirties powerful. Marxists, and neo-classicists all found the twenties deplorable, yet in writers from all these camps, and in others who wrote in the thirties, a note of nostalgia often broke through the sermon. Frivolous, antisocial, and decadent as the literature of the twenties seemed, it had to be conceded the somewhat contradictory qualities of freshness and excitement. And, in the thirties, extended beyond the previous decade's literature to its manners and customs. Helen Johnson talks about how after the roaring twenties, there was a gloom in the American economy and its relations to others:

The Great Depression left international relations in the 1930s influenced by economics to an extraordinary extent. As states battled to repair their damaged economies, problems such as war debts, reparations and trade relations became not only increasingly important, but also ensured they crossed traditional boundaries between political and economic policy making. (13)

American culture in the eyes of critics at home and abroad was both materialistic and puritanical. Symbolizing the Puritanism of the period was the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. In 1920, the manufacture, sale, import and export of alcohol was prohibited by the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in an attempt to alleviate various social problems. This came to be known as "Prohibition". America's continued desire for alcohol under prohibition led to the rise of organized crime, smuggling and gangster associations all over the America. Prohibition was intended to eliminate the saloon and the drunkard from America. Instead, it created thousands of illicit drinking places and opened a profitable criminal career to bootleggers. Widely violated, prohibition was morally hypocritical and, to many Americans, comparable to the widespread political corruption of the Harding era.

In general, however, literary opinion seems to have gone beyond both nostalgia and reproof into a more mature and solidly based apt predication of the achievements of this era now so safely in the past. To many, the apparent sterility of the present literary scene furnishes a depressing contrast. Whatever else they rejected, writers of the twenties took their writing seriously, and publishers made it possible for them to do so. One achievement of the twenties which has received only a little specific comment is nevertheless widely recognized today. The period of alienation and exile gave rise, curiously enough, to a thorough, rich, and continuing inquiry into the whole American past. The sources of this inward turn are as complicated as the decade itself. With the literature and historical research of the twenties, its economic achievement, once overvalued and then rated too low, turned the corner into a rising market. In the years of the Marshall Plan, when American capitalism was called on to shoulder an immense burden, it was hard to think of it as a failure and a mistake. The

twenties were a period in which common values and common beliefs were replaced by separate and conflicting loyalties. Louis Kronenberger says:

During the 1920's author Sinclair Lewis was surely our most significant writer of fiction; today he is the author of *The Prodigal Parents*. Whether he wrote this unfortunate book because he was naive or because he was canny, one is not prepared to decide; but it should as much restore him to favor with a class of people he once disconcerted as *Reflections on the French Revolution*, resorted British statesman and writer Edmund Burke. These classes of people are commonly called *Babbitts*. (101)

Relentless criticism became the dominant note in American literature. H. L. Mencken, a journalist and critic, who was unsparing in denouncing sham and venality in American life, became immensely popular. Perhaps no serious novelist had a wider audience than Sinclair Lewis, whose satire on American middleclass life in such novels as *Main Street* and *Babbitt* became landmarks in the national consciousness. It is ironic that these criticisms of America by Americans were made when the nation was experiencing a high point of general well-being. Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* has been a center of much attention by many critics since its publication. Terry Teachout writes about the social portraiture of middle-class America and says:

The trouble with *Babbitt*, of course, is not that it isn't accurate, but that it is obvious to the point of painfulness. To read *Babbitt* eight decades after its publication is to be struck *by* how much of its social portraiture has retained its point, but Lewis could never stop himself from over egging the pudding, piling detail upon detail until you finally lose all patience with him. And though he had a near-infallible ear for the

rhythms of American speech, he was incapable of writing well enough to clearly differentiate his own voice from those of his characters, a grievous error in a novelist who sought above all things to portray the sheer crassness of middle-class America. (23)

Lewis's novels are perhaps the last important American novels that are primarily concerned with social class. He does not talk about subjective lives like Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Faulkner but he had a stridently comic gift of mimicry that many a more polished American writer does not have at all. And he also had a vision of a hot and dusty hell: the American hinterland. A close friend of Lewis, and also a critic, Mark Schorar makes his judgment as:

In any strict literary sense, he was not a great writer, but without his writing one can not imagine modern American Literature. No more, without his writing, could Americans today imagine themselves. His epitaph should be: he did us good. (80)

Lewis's novel *Babbitt* (1922) is a merciless portrait of Midwestern businessmen. George F. Babbitt, Forty-six years old, yearns for freedom but in his world art and culture are in the service of business. To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor-car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. The office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion ashore. His brief period of rebellion starts when his closest friend kills his wife and is sent to prison. All his attempts to live a more "bohemian" life fails and he returns to the fold of his clan of good fellows. In *Babbitt* there are moments when the people of whom he writes, with such amazing attention to the outer details of lives, begin to think and feel a little, and with the coming of life into his people a kind of nervous, hurried beauty and life flits, like a lantern carried by a night watchman past the window of a

factory as one stands waiting and watching in a grim street on a night of December.

Joseph Wood Krutch comments about the sensational element in *Babbitt* as:

Lewis loved notoriety almost as much as he loved fame, and he sought one almost as ardently as the other. What looked like both came to him rather early—he was thirty-five years old in 1920 when his book *Main Street* was published and he had not outlived his reputation when he died at sixty-six. Two years after "Main Street" came the equally sensational *Babbitt*.

The novel of the 1920s uniquely captures the relentless culture of American business. For the centre of his cutting satire of American business he created the bustling, shallow, and myopic George F. Babbitt, the epitome of middle-class mediocrity. Babbitt basks in his pedestrian success and the popularity it has brought him. He demands high moral standards from those around him while flirting with women, and he yearns for meaning in his hollow life.

Babbitt (1922) satirized the American commercial culture and boosterism.

When Sinclair Lewis wrote *Babbitt*, he succeeded in creating a caricature of success typifying the mind-set of the twenties. Babbitt is a character without a real soul. He gleans his opinions from newspapers or from business peers. Lewis attempts to indict these “standard” symbols of American prosperity – popularity, hidden pleasures, money, shiny cars, and self-obsession – by citing the weaknesses of both radical and conservative viewpoints. *Babbitt* depicts dilemmas and embarrassments that middle-aged office workers and professionals of the 21st century identify with. By the 1920s, the United States was already concluding the process described by historians as “Making America corporate.” Thus, despite the

many intervening changes in technology, *Babbitt's* world remains the non-fictional world. Peter B. High interprets the character of George F. Babbitt. He writes, "*Babbitt* is the story of a perfect conformist; a man who tries to act the same way everybody else does" (221).

Though written well before the great depression, the new deal, World War II, and the post war boom, Lewis's comic novel is surprisingly readable and remains popular. One reason for the book's continuing accessibility may be Lewis's success in capturing the emotions, challenges, and concerns of the modern white-collar worker. American middle class society is depicted as hollow and empty. Individuality is discouraged. In fact, the struggle to keep up with the traditions and expectations of society can cause the individual to completely lose his place in the world. Sinclair Lewis' novel is one of the most important works of the twentieth century to deal with the struggle of man caught in the machine of urban life. Babbitt accepts this conformity in the end, but his story is presented as a warning to all of the dangers associated with clinging too deeply to convention. Erik Axel Karlfeldt, portraying the protagonist George F. Babbitt as a happy middle-class businessman argues:

As a matter of fact, Babbitt probably approaches the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle-class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of fate, and without hesitation, he considers it God's purpose that man should work, increase his income and enjoy modern improvements. He feels that he obeys these commandments and therefore lives in complete harmony with himself and society. (83)

Babbitt is more than an embodiment of what is wrong with America. He is a vivid and lifelike character searching for meaning in a life dominated by conformity

and loneliness. Babbitt tries to rebel in every way he knows until a conservative organization threatens his business because of his new liberal ideas, at which point he falls back into the lifestyle of what Lewis called a “Standardized Citizen.” In a society that, today, retains many of the basic values that Lewis attacks, Babbitt’s struggle continues to engage readers and expose some of the deepest and most longstanding infirmities of American culture. Critic Gore Vidal talks about Lewis as a satirist and says:

Lewis was established as a serious if not particularly brilliant novelist after his first five books, and although he had been born with all the gifts that a satirist needs to set up shop he was, by temperament, a romantic. *Main Street* was not considered a satire until the critics began calling him a satirist, but it is possible that *Babbitt* became true satire. (15)

Babbitt depicts dilemmas and embarrassments that middle-aged office workers and professionals of the 21st century identify with. By the 1920s, the United States was already concluding the process described by historians as “Making America corporate.” George F. Babbitt seems to be a complacent American businessman in appearance. In reality, his individuality has been sucked out of him by Rotary Clubs, business ideals and general conformity. This proposal study tends to argue how Lewis satirizes the American bourgeois society through his protagonist.

All of *Babbitt*’s thoughts are controlled by society. The struggle to keep up with the traditions and exceptions of society can cause the individual to completely lose his place at work. The story is presented as a warning to all of the dangers associated with clinging too deeply to convention. Babbitt’s struggle continues to

engage readers and expose some of the deepest and most longstanding infirmities of American culture.

II. Marxism and Socio-Cultural Worldviews

From Marxist point of view, art is originated in the society and it must have some social significance. Marxist philosophy itself insists that literature closely corresponds to reality. It is explicitly stated that literature belongs to the superstructure as politics, religion and philosophy which are based on socio-economic base. Lukacs stresses that, there must be some formal correspondence between literary work and “dialectical totality.” According to the Marxist point of view, art is originated in the society and it must have some social significance. However, this reproduction of reality can’t be always indifferent. It also carries the artist’s attitude towards it.

Lukacs who tried to present art from Marxist realistic perspective is rather severe in his treatment. All characters, whether good or bad, should be “portrayed as living many sided human beings and not as poster like caricature” (Lukacs 330). The only measurement of the successful artist is his touch to reality. Whatever the language, style, uses of images, construction of plot is, if it does not copy the life faithfully, Lukacs does not allow it to be entitled a work of art. The totality of such picture depends upon the variety of the characters depicted in a work.

Art and Literature in Marxist Perspective

Marxism is a highly complex subject, and Marxist literary criticism is no less so. Towards the middle of the 19th century, Karl Marx, in association with Frederic Engels, invented radical economic, social and political theories. Views of Marx and Engels on art and literature have been drawn up differently by various scholars and interpreted and developed in divergent ways. Marx writes in *The Communist Manifesto*, “The communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as

a whole” (49).

His theories clearly disprove the bourgeois, economic, social and political system establishing the philosophy of proletariat the lowest stratum of the society. They initiate the movement of the proletariat, against those who possess abounding amount of wealth without much labor. The emancipatory movement initiated by Marxism aims at abolishing the concentration of wealth in the hands of tiny minority by seizing political and legal power from the hands of bourgeois class. Thus, Marxism is a political theory that advocates class struggle of the proletariat against the ruling class until the political power is seized and socialist emancipatory society is established.

Marxism brought significant change in bourgeois ideology. It challenged the old view point of philosophy itself. His theories that aim at intensifying the inevitable process of change brought considerable change in the concept of art and literature as well. Marxism treats literature as expression of socio-economic life and judges it on the basis of how far it has fulfilled this function. Its struggle stresses literature should be useful to life. Although Marxism is primarily a theory of social, economic, political and revolutionary activities, it treats art and literature with special care. Majority of these theoreticians believe that literature has social as well as political implications and it must be committed to the cause of people. It should be used for advancement of society.

In order to capture reality, successfully, an author needs to have deep intellectual power and penetrating vision of the historical forces of the period. Outward, superficial depiction of the thing like that of naturalism and modernism which bracket off all the inner causes can never lead to reality. Marxist literary criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produced it;

and it needs to be aware of its own historical outside it. For Marx, the external reality is prior to ideas in the mind, and that the material world is reflected in the mind of man and translated into forms of thought. In his seminal book entitled, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Louis Althusser remarks Marx's notion of ideology as:

An imaginary assemblage, a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'Days' residues from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence [...] represents the imaginary relationship of individual to their real conditions of existence. (153)

Marxist criticism, in its diverse forms, grounds, its theory of economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his fellow thinker Fredrich Engels (1820-1895) on three main points. The first is the material production of the society that largely determines the evolving history of humanity, of the social relations of its institutions, and of its ways of thinking or its overall economic organization. Second, are establishing in each era a dominant and subordinate class that engage in a struggle for economic, political and social advantages. The third claim is that human consciousness is constituted by an ideology, the beliefs, values and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive and by recourse to which they explain what they take to be reality.

An ideology is the product of the position and interest of the particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology, embodies and serves to legitimize and perpetuate the interest of the dominant economic and social class of the time. Pierre Macherey, a French Marxist theoretician, rejects literature to be reflection of outside reality.

In his essay, *Literature as an Ideological Form* written jointly with E. Balibar, writes:

Literature is not fiction, a fictive knowledge of the real, because it cannot define itself simply as figuration, an appearance of reality by complex process, literature is the production of certain reality, not intended [...], an autonomous reality, but a material reality, and of certain social effect. (66)

Although Marx and Engels have not left any systematic works entirely centered on art and literature, however, they have raised some basic questions about them to their discussion about 'base' and 'superstructure'. So, "the interpretation of the relevance of Marx's theory to literature is a matter of dispute not merely between Marxists and non-Marxists (sociologist literature critics, philosophers) but has been and is still the subject of bitter controversy between those claiming to be Marxists." (Slaughter 21). Therefore we find contrary views and literature among the Marxist critics and theorists themselves. Lukacs treats literature as the reflection of outside reality. Adorno sees it as the negative knowledge of the actual world, talks about revolutionizing the whole sphere of art and literature and puts all efforts on bringing newness in theatrical production. Even so they all agree on the point that "literature can be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality" (Forgacs 167). Raymond Williams, a dominant British Marxist positively responds to the late 20th century developments in art and literature. He insists that 20th century novels whether it is of Woolf or any other authors still hold to reality. In his work *The Long Revolution* William writes:

No human experience is entirely subjective or objective. It is both because we can't see things as they are apart from any reactions; it is

inseparable process so it is wrong to relate science to object or psychical reality and art to subject or emotion [...] the conscience is part of the reality and reality is the part of consciousness, in the whole process of our living organization. (23)

The distinction between Marxist and not Marxist sociological realistic criticism is not so sharp. Till nineteenth century all criticism was sociological; therefore Marxist criticism is often said to have organized from quite earlier. Of course, it is closely associated to biographical, sociological and historical criticism. The fundamental difference between them is that the Marxist criticism examines how far a literary work embodies ability in altering human existence and lead it in the path of progress, prosperity and emancipation whereas others give emphasis on interpretive function and examine whether a work is successful in interpreting life and world appropriately. For this type of criticism interoperation is the primary function of art and literature.

But Marxism, a living body of thought, aims at revolutionizing the whole-economic life establishing new political system led by proletariat. Orthodox Marxist theory of literature strongly insists that a work of literature should reflect the class relation and be committed to the cause of working class people. A writer's success or failure should be judged on the basis of his works which exhibits his insight of the socio-economic situation of the epoch. It demands the author's to produce reality objectively with special attention to class divisions especially the exploitation of the lower class by upper.

Marxism treats literature as expression of socio-economic life and judges it on the basis of how far it has fulfilled this function. It strongly stresses that literature should be useful to life. Although Marxism is primarily a theory of social, economic,

political and revolutionary activities, it treats art and literature with special care.

Disproving the early concept of them Marxist theoreticians has developed their own theories which are known as Marxist theories of art and literature. Majorities of these theoreticians believe that literature has social as well as political implications and it must be committed to the cause of people. It should be used for advancement of society. Raymond Williams insists art like other communication is social activity and it can't be set apart from reality. it is obviously a part of our social organization. As he writes:

It is totally wrong to assume that political institution and conventions are of a different and separate order from artistic institutions and conventions. Politics and art together with science, religions, family life and the other categories we speak of as absolutes, belong in a whole world of active and interacting relationships which is our common associative life. (39)

Although Marxist theory of literature developed out of Marx's and Engel's general remarks concerning culture, art and literature in relation to their discussion about social, economic and political questions, as a literary theory it appeared for the first time in the last decade of nineteenth century and produced ample impact on the study of art and literature during the decades of 1920-40.

Reflection of reality is the key idea of his theory of art. Art for him is socio-historical phenomenon. But the reality in literary works and the reality in the actual world need not have one to one correspondence. Artistic representation is not photographic as the artist is not a machine. A photographic machine present everything in differently as it can't react, whereas, an artist is a sensitive creature, he feels and reacts. So a picture presented in a literary works like novels, dramas, poems

etc. ultimately passes through the active and sensitive mind of the author. The previous experience and his own liking and disliking influence his interpretation of the world. For Lukacs, the world is chaos from where an artist picks up the required materials. During this process of selection he may give priority to one aspect of reality neglecting the others. Similarly, the objective external reality is mingled with the artists' feelings and emotions which are purely subjective. In the process of creating work of art, the objective reality which lies in the chaotic state is given form and arranged in sequence. David Forgacs in his essay *Marxist Literary Theories* observes thus, "To be reflected in literature reality has to pass through the creative form giving work of the writer. The result, in the case of correctly formed work, will be that the form of the literary work reflects the form of the real world" (171).

Thus, for Lukacs, literary creation is a process of putting selected matters together. This process of selection and combination imposes bound to the chaos of objective reality. Forgacs says, in Lukacs' view form is "the aesthetic shape given to content, a shape manifested through technical features such as time and the interrelationship of characters and situation in work" (171).

Lukacs denounces the romantic concept of art that separates it from social realities and its utility. For romanticists art has no more scope and aim than expressing the purest feelings of the creator. For example, Percy Shelley, a poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds. For Wordsworth, the creation of poetry is nothing more than "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, emotion recollected, in tranquility" (qtd. in Daiches 887). Hence romantic poetry is less about mankind, more about nature.

Lukacs doesn't only reject romanticism; he criticizes naturalism that attempts to reproduce photographic picture of life. For him, naturalism which appears to be

more realistic in its depiction of life is unmediated. In his view Naturalist writers, are alienated from comprehensive social problems. They possess superficial vision of life and dismiss the inner and constant antagonism between the classes. They are unable to apprehend the basic and historical truth. So they are, in Lukacs' term, "elemental." He remarks that, "the naturalist manner of portrayal inestimably blunts both popular movements and popular attitudes; it deprives one of the historical objectivity and other of consciousness" (212).

Class Society: Accumulators and Exploited

In earlier ages, we see society arranged into complicated class structures. In medieval times there were feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices and serfs. Modern bourgeois society sprouted from the ruins of feudal society. Marxist perspective shows how the modern bourgeoisie is the product of several revolutions in the mode of production and of exchange. The development of the bourgeoisie began in the earliest towns, and gained momentum with the age of exploration. Feudal guilds couldn't provide for increasing markets, and the manufacturing middle class took its place. In this regard Marx and Engels say:

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end. (57)

However, markets kept growing and demand kept increasing, and manufacture couldn't keep up. This led to the industrial revolution. Manufacture was replaced by the modern bourgeois. With these developments, the bourgeoisie have become powerful, and have pushed medieval classes into the background. The development of

the bourgeoisie as a class was accompanied by a series of political developments. With the development of modern industry and the world-market, the bourgeoisie had gained exclusive political sway. The state serves solely the bourgeoisie's interests.

In the past, industrial classes required the conservation of old mode of production in order to survive. The bourgeoisie are unique in that they cannot continue to exist without revolutionizing the instruments of production. This implies revolutionizing the relations of production, and with it, all of the relations in society. Thus, the unique uncertainties and disturbances of the modern age have forced man to face his real condition in life, and his true relations with others.

Marx says that modern bourgeois society is in the process of turning on itself. Modern productive forces are revolting against the modern conditions of production. Commercial crises, due, ironically, to over-production, are threatening the existence of bourgeois society, and these crises represent this tension. Yet in attempting to remedy these crises, the bourgeoisie simply cause new and more extensive crises to emerge, and diminish their ability to prevent future ones. Thus, the weapons by which the bourgeoisie overcame feudalism are now being turned on the bourgeoisie themselves.

They cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated

before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all which is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober sense his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.

This class, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves.

In one word, it creates a world after its own image. They have subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

The bourgeoisie class keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralized the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralization. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier, and one customs tariff.

During its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents, cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?

The proletariat originated in the industrial revolution which took place in England during the second half of the 18th century and which has repeated itself since then in all the civilized countries of the world. This industrial revolution took place with the invention of steam engine, various spinning machines, the power loom and a great number of other mechanical instruments. These machines were expensive and could only be installed by persons who had plenty of capital. Machinery could produce cheaper and better commodities than the craftsmen. Thus, these machines handed over industry entirely to the big capitalists and rendered the little property the workers possessed entirely worthless. Soon the capitalists got all in their hand and nothing remained for the workers.

The Communist Manifesto is a direct appeal to all workers. It defends the communist position that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. According to Karl Marx, modern industry had established the world market. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed. Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character. He becomes an appendage to the

machine and the state arose as a means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed classes. To this Lenin adds:

Clearly in order to abolish class completely it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the landlords and capitalists, not enough to abolish their rights of ownership; it is necessary also to abolish all private ownership of the mean of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. (Great Beginnings 13)

The lower middle class, comprising of the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie to save from extinction their existence. They are therefore not revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend their future interests. The “dangerous class”, the social scum is swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution.

The society where we live is divided into the classes of oppressor and oppressed. But the society was not divided into classes in the primordial times when people lived in small kinship groups and were still at the lowest stage of development in a condition approximating to savagery and epoch from which modern civilized human society is separated by several thousands of years. They used to work together for their common necessities and there was no sign of oppression and exploitation at all. In many instances, women were superior to men in those times.

Class-exploitation does not end until the classless society is formed and it cannot be possible to eliminate the classes completely only by overthrowing the exploiters, the landlords, capitalists and their rights of ownership but it is also necessary to abolish all forms of violence of man as well as the whole system of

private ownership of the means of production. The theory of materialist dialectics holds the view that development arises from the contradictions inside a thing. This internal contradiction exists in every single thing hence its motion and development. The class struggle is the internal contradiction of society which pushes its development forward.

III. Bourgeois Satire in *Babbitt*

Babbitt is a satire of the prosperous and conservative business class of 1920s America. Published in New York in 1922, Lewis' novel follows two years of realtor George F. Babbitt's life, during which Babbitt goes from a lifestyle of complete conformity with the business world, to a period of rebellion including heavy drinking and adultery. Throughout this journey, Lewis skillfully highlights the lack of culture in medium sized American cities during the Prohibition Era, the hypocrisy and corruption of pro-business organizations, and the emptiness in typical businessmen's lives. George F. Babbitt, a 46- year-old real estate broker, enjoys all the modern conveniences available to a prosperous middle-class businessman, yet he is dissatisfied with his life. When the novel opens, Babbitt has begun to regularly indulge in fantasies about a fairy girl who makes him feel like a gallant youth.

The word Babbitt, and its subsequent meaning, come from the 1922 novel by Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*. The word Babbitt means a self satisfied person who conforms readily to conventional middle class ideas and ideals, especially of business and material success. It is a novel which shows a cross section of American middle class life through the eyes of the materialist, George F. Babbitt. What must be explored in Lewis's work is, why was Babbitt created the way he was, and why has he become such a paradigm of American middleclass life?

The Phony World of Zenith

Lewis satirizes the middle-class Zenith community as hopelessly complacent, unable to think for itself, materialistic, concerned only with appearance and social status, uncultured in terms of art, hypocritical in its support of ethics, and religious only insofar as it helps the citizens' social standing. Lewis portrays the Zenith middle-class community as treating everything like a business, motivated only by the desire

for superficial things. He further portrays the middle class as unable to escape its hollow way of life, even though many individual members of middle-class society find themselves dissatisfied and bored with life. The Athletic Club that was the pride of the businessmen of Zenith was a building lacking a soul.

The Athletic Club building is nine stories high, yellow brick with glassy roof-garden above and portico of huge limestone columns below. The lobby, with its thick pillars of porous Caen stone, its pointed vaulting, and a brown glazed-tile floor like well-baked bread – crust, is a combination of cathedral- crypt and rathskellar. The members rush in to the lobby as through they were shopping and hadn't much time for it. (48)

Babbitt opens with a view of Zenith, the imaginary Midwestern city that is the novel's setting. The name of the city itself, Zenith, is significant. Zenith means the highest point, the greatest achievement, surely a proud name for a city to have. And Zenith is proud. It isn't like older cities whose buildings are citadels devoted to war or cathedrals devoted to religion. Zenith's shining towers are devoted to business, devoted to the new. Zenith also has economic power. Its telegraph wires connect it to Peking and Paris. The goods it manufactures are sold in the Middle East and in Africa. Babbitt isn't just a portrait of a single man, but of an entire community.

Modern, successful Zenith seems a city fit for giants. Zenith from a distance may look like a city made for giants, but Babbitt is anything but a giant. He's pink, plump-faced, well-off- not because he's creative but because he knows how to sell houses to people for more than they can pay. Relationships, family, social life, and business are all based on his ability to conform to Zenith's preset standards of thought and action. Zenith and by extension, all of America, calls itself a democratic and

egalitarian society, where everyone from washerwoman to bank president is equal. But in fact the divisions between classes are almost impossible to cross, and Babbitt and his family and friends are always conscious of their social status, always anxious to improve it. The rise of Zenith city is described as:

They had labored, these solid citizens. Twenty years before, the hill on which Floral Heights was spread, with its bright roofs and immaculate turf and amazing comfort, had bright roofs and immaculate turf and amazing comfort, had been a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and been a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and maples. Along the precise streets were still a few wooded vacant lots, and the fragment of an old orchard. (26)

Babbitt is set in the modern Midwestern city of Zenith. Babbitt is a middle-aged successful real estate broker in Zenith. He is a typical member of Zenith's hypocritical, ignorant, unthinking, conformist middle class. However, he is vaguely dissatisfied with the monotonous and conventional middle-class lifestyle. George Babbitt is an ordinary businessman living and working in Zenith, an ordinary American town. Zenith's gleaming, modern landscape of skyscrapers, factories, and automobiles seems like a paradise of post-World War I prosperity. Babbitt's neighborhood, Floral Heights, contains neat rows of pleasant, comfortable homes, replete with all the modern conveniences.

Babbitt is a happy citizen of such a city. It is called Zenith, but probably it cannot be found on the map under that name. The city is a hundred times larger and therefore, a hundred times richer in one hundred per cent Americanism and one hundred times as satisfied with itself and the enchantment of its optimism and progressive spirit as embodied by George F. Babbitt. Babbitt even wants his son to

take more traditional liberal arts courses, not because he thinks education has any real value in itself, but because it's a status symbol necessary to business success in Zenith. Lewis finds both attitudes narrow-minded, materialistic.

However, Zenith and its citizens are characterized by a depressing sameness and a vicious competition for social status and wealth. Babbitt is moral and enterprising, and a believer in business as the new scientific approach to modern life. Being proud of being a citizen of Zenith, Babbitt says:

I tell you, Zenith and her sister-cities are producing a new type of civilization. There are many resemblances between Zenith and these other burgs, and I'm darn glad of it! The extraordinary, growing, and sane standardization of stores, offices, streets, hotels, clothes, and newspapers throughout the United States shows how strong and enduring a type is ours. (155)

Babbitt is a satire on the conformity, hypocrisy, and ignorance endemic to the American middle class. The houses of Zenith's middle class look the same as middle-class houses all over the country, and the same modern conveniences furnish all of those identical houses. Perhaps most damning, Lewis portrays Zenith's middle-class citizens as similarly standard, completely circumscribed by their comfortable, homogenized world. Through the experiences of Babbitt, the novel's title character who rebels against the middle-class community of which he is a part, *Babbitt* seeks to expose the hypocrisy and emptiness underlying middle-class life.

As Lewis presents his characters, we discover that the prosperity and growth of Zenith are inversely proportional to the intellectual bankruptcy and spiritual stagnation of its inhabitants. Lewis' characters think in terms of production and consumption, judge people on the grounds of their purchasing power parity, and seek

happiness in the earning and spending of money. Zenith is an English word meaning highest point or pinnacle. When Babbitt is in his office in Zenith, or among acquaintances at the Zenith Athletic Club, he believes he ranks with the most eminent men of his society. To reinforce his status, he acquires the latest home appliances and gadgetry, cultivates relationships with the most influential politicians, joins the right organizations, proudly wears his Boosters' button, and becomes active in church affairs. All of Babbitt's choices were big like that of his native Zenith as:

Then the business unloading, and high doorways of marble and polished granite. It was big—and Babbitt respected bigness in anything; in mountains, jewels, muscles, wealth, or words. He was, for a spring-enchanted moment, the lyric and almost unselfish lover of Zenith. He thought of the outlying factory suburbs; of the Chalosa River with its strangely eroded banks: or the orchard dappled Tonawanda Hills to the North, and all the fat dairy land and big darns and comfortable herds.

(29)

This creed of prosperity permits every aspect of Zenith's society. It is evident not only in political and economic beliefs but in moral and religious attitudes as well. Even more sinister is business. In one maneuver, Babbitt plots with a speculator to force a struggling grocer to buy the store elemental to Babbitt's conscience that he honestly feels nothing but delight and pride when the deal is completed. His only regret is that the speculator carries off nine thousand dollars while Babbitt receives a mere four hundred and fifty dollar commission. "Makes me sick to think of Lyte carrying off most of the profit when I did all the work, the old skinflint!" (44). At the same time, Babbitt with no inkling of his hypocrisy discourses on his virtue to his

friend Paul Riesling, touting his own integrity while denigrating the morality of his competitors.

Everything about Zenith was modern. A few old buildings, ramshackle witnesses of the city's nineteenth century origins, were embarrassing, discordant notes amid the harmony of newness produced by shining skyscrapers, factories, and railroads. One by one, the old buildings were surrounded and bulldozed. Lewis begins the novel by giving an apt description of Zenith city:

The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings. The city was full of such grotesqueries, but the clean towers were thrusting them from the business center and on the farther hills were shining new houses, homes they seemed- for laughter and tranquility. (5)

Babbitt is fond of his town Zenith, connoting Zenith to be that of the highest point within astronomical terms. There lays a belief within Babbitt that to be among the sky-scraped iron skyline gives a sense of accomplishment within himself and his fellow boosters. The thrust of all energies in the city was toward the growth of Zenith's most booming businesses, which was real estate.

The houses of Zenith's middle class look the same as middle class houses all over the country, and the same modern conveniences furnish all of those identical houses. The value placed on money also determines Zenith's aesthetic standards. There is no frivolity about the city's architecture. The most important structures are the strictly functional business buildings. Other structures, such as the Athletic Club where the businessmen go to "relax" and discuss weighty matters of finance are

gaudy, unabashed copies of past styles. The Reeves Building where Babbitt had his office is one of the achievements of modern architectural designs and it is described as:

The Reeves Building was as fireproof as a rock and as efficient as a typewriter; fourteen stories of yellow pressed brick, with clean, upright, unornamented lines. It was filled with the offices of lawyers, doctors, agents for machinery, for emery wheels, for wire fencing, for mining-stock. Their gold signs shone on the windows. The entrance was too modern to be flamboyant with pillars; it was quiet, shrewd, and neat. Along the Third Street side were a Western Union Telegraph Office, the Blue Delft candy shop, Shotwell's stationery Shop, and the Babbitt-Thompson realty company. (30)

The Club's motley conglomeration includes everything from Roman to Gothic to Chinese. The culmination of literary talent in Zenith is the work of Chum Frink, whose daily newspaper lyrics are indistinguishable from his Zeeco car ads. He comes to Babbitt's dinner party fresh from having written lyrics in praise of drinking water instead of poison booze. With bootleg cocktail in hand, Babbitt identifies the American genius as the fellow who can run a successful business:

In my opinion, what the country needs, first and foremost, is a good, sound, business-like conduct of its affairs. What we need is-a business administration! What the country needs-just at this present juncture-is neither a college president nor a lot of monkeying with foreign affairs, but a good-sound-economical-business-administration, that will give us a chance to have something like a decent turnover. (26)

The Lavish descriptions of buildings in the novel provide effective backgrounds for devastating portraits of Babbitt and his friends at work and play. The Zenith Athletic Club is the largest social club in the city. It occupies an impressive nine-story building with a vaulted lobby resembling a cathedral crypt. Despite the club's name, its activities are not particularly athletic, although the club sponsors youth teams, and a few members use the gymnasium than they try to reduce their weight. The major function of the building is to provide a lunch-time meeting place for businessmen who cannot qualify for the snobbish Union Club. In their own territory, Babbitt and his buddies joke ponderously with each other, entertain out-of-town visitors, and remain alert for profitable business opportunities. Describing the Zenith Athletic Club, Lewis writes:

The Zenith athletic club is not athletic and it isn't exactly a club, but it is Zenith in perfection it has an active and smoke-misted billiard room, it is represented by baseball and football teams, and in the pool and the gymnasium a tenth of the members sporadically try to reduce. But most of its three thousand members use it as a café in which to lunch, play cards, tell stories meet customers, and entertain out-of-town uncles at dinner. (48)

The middle class Zenith community is hopelessly complacent, unable to think for itself. Babbitt and other Zenithites use wealth as a form of escapism, a way to deal with or escape their troubles. They are materialistically concerned only with appearance and social status, uncultured in terms of art, hypocritical in their support of ethics, and religious only insofar as it helps the citizens' social standing. Lewis portrays the middle class community as treating everything like a business, motivated only by the desire for superficial things. He further portrays the middle class as unable

to escape its hollow and phony way of life even though many individual members of middle class society find themselves dissatisfied and bored with life. The extreme reaction of the privileged to hollowness is hollowness.

Babbitt along with other Zenithites are too concerned with earning a lot of money, owning property while lacking humanist desires to help the poor. Narcissistic and greedy, the Zenithites only care to inflate their wallets and their egos. Very little value, if any is given to the lower class, and social programs are viewed with contempt by the middle class. Business is fully embraced, while philanthropy and the welfare of others are rejected. For example, when Verona explains to her father that she would like to work for charities and do meaningful work, her father quickly dismisses those ideas as absurd and communist like:

Now you look here! The first thing you got to understand is that all this uplift and flip flop and settlement work and recreation is nothing in God's world but the entering wedge for socialism. The sooner a man learns he isn't going to be coddled, and he needn't expect a lot of free grub and, uh, all these free classes and flip flop and doodads for his kids unless he earns 'em, why, the sooner he'll get on the job and produce-produce-produce! (17).

Despite their great attempts to escape their inconsequential lives, the citizens of Zenith and Babbitt can only find a fleeting and shallow sense of contentment and escape from their daily lives.

When Babbitt buys the car cigarette lighter, he feels special since he can afford it and this gives him a shallow sense of self worth. But soon afterward he is thinking about buying a car, meaning his want of material things to fill his spiritual

void is a constant and demanding cycle. About thoughts on religion, Babbitt would say:

My religion is to serve my fellow men, to honor my bother as myself, and to do my bit to make life happier for one and all. I'm a member of the Presbyterian Church, and naturally, I accept its doctrines. There's no use discussing and arguing about religion: it just stirs up bad feeling. (173)

They are misleadingly led to believe that acquiring material things help them escape their problems. To maintain his morale he has to buy more things, whether he needs them or not. Their materialistic possessions quite apart from need or practicality, sustains them and Babbitt. Although Babbitt and other characters present a mask to the world, they are inwardly lacking joy in their life, and are unhappy despite how they appear in public.

After a dinner party when everything seems to have gone well, Myra cries softly to herself. In a speech Babbitt gives he reads a piece his friend Chum Frink wrote for the newspaper, and it details how when you're filling down the best remedy for the illness is to indulge yourself in things of material value.

Babbitt holds his friend's poem close to the heart, because he uses material wealth to cope with problems. In the 1920s, after the traumatic after effect of World War I, many people searched for a way to make their lives meaningful after having lived through such a difficult time, and many turned to material things because they believed it would bring them happiness.

This belief is widely accepted by Babbitt, and other Zenithites. Fortunately Babbitt realizes that the only way to find true happiness is not to conform, but to do what makes one happy. Babbitt thought if he informed and accepted the widely

accepted believes of his friends, then he would live a content and successful life.

Content on seeing his office neat and tidy, Babbitt:

Normally he admired the office, with a pleased surprise that he should have created this sure lovely thing; normally he was stimulated by the clean newness of it and the air of bustle; but to day it seemed flat –the tiled floor, like a bathroom, the ocher –colored metal ceiling, the faded maps bathroom, the ocher- colored metal ceiling, the faded maps on the hard plaster walls, the chairs of varnished pale oak, the desks and filing cabinets of steel painted in olive drab. It was a vault, a steel chapel where loafing and laughter were raw sin. (31)

The city's churches glorify the values of their parishioners. Babbitt's own Presbyterian Church meets in a magnificent Gothic-style brick building, housing a large auditorium with indirect lighting from ornate electric globes. Its minister, who is famous for publishing an article on *The Dollars and Sense Value of Christianity*, boasts that he has made the church a true community center with its nursery, gymnasium, and library. Lewis interjects that "it contained everything but a bar" (165).

The great cultural triumph of Babbitt's life is his reorganization of the church's Sunday school on businesslike lines, complete with a marketing program that greatly increases attendance. His church which was, "the most oaken and velvety" (171), led to useful business opportunities. Zenith's unchurched citizens are offered the tent revival services of evangelist Mike Monday, celebrated as the world's greatest salesman of salvation, who has converted over two hundred thousand souls at an average cost of less than ten dollars a head. Religion was commercialized at the church which Babbitt went to. His church was a true community center as:

It contained everything but a bar. It had a nursery a Thursday evening supper with a short bright missionary lecture after ward, a gymnasium, a fortnightly motion-picture show, a library to technical books for young workmen-though, unfortunately, no younger workman ever entered the church except to wash the windows or repair the furnace- and a sewing- circle which made short little pants for the children of the poor while Mrs. Drew read aloud from earnest novels. (171)

Yet despite their various professions, men like Mike Monday, the popular preacher, Jake Offut, the politician, Vergil Gunch, the industrialist are identical in their values. They are united in their complacent pride in their own success and in their scorn for those who have not 'made it'. With his pretentious name and his terrible writings, T. Cholmondeley Frink represents the sad state of the arts in Zenith, where ad campaigns are discussed as if they were great literature, while genuine literature goes ignored. A man is measured by his income and his possessions in the materialistic city like Zenith. Thus, Babbitt's car is far more than his means of transportation and his acquisition of gimmicks like the nickel-plated cigar cutter more than mere whim. Both car and cigar cutter are affirmations of competence and virility.

The more Babbitt and his peers strive to distinguish themselves through ownership, however, the more alike they seem. The men of Zenith, since they are saturated day after day with the demands of the business life and its values, are even more alike than the women, who are not as immersed in the rat race as their husbands. With the industrial revolution, the bourgeois class advanced not only financially but also with full political power as epitomized by Babbitt.

The means of production and property were successfully centralized by them like the wealthy citizens of Zenith. Money becomes the object of primary importance

and all social relations become hollow and were instinctively reduced to money relations as seen in *Babbitt*. Describing another realtor like Babbitt, Lewis writes:

Conrad Lyte was Conrad Lyte was a real-estate speculator. He was a nervous speculator. Before he gambled he consulted bankers, lawyers, architects, contracting builders, and all of their clerks and stenographers who were willing to be cornered and give him advice. He was a bold entrepreneur, and he desired nothing more than complete safety in his investments, freedom from attention to details, and the thirty or forty percent profit which, according to all authorities, a pioneer deserves for his risks and foresight. He was a stubby man with a cap-like mass of short gray curls and clothes which, no matter how well cut, seemed shaggy. Below his eyes were semicircular hollows, as though silver dollars had been pressed against when and had left an imprint (42)

Lewis gives a panoramic view of Zenith with all its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, it's modern and economically vital as its helping pull America into the prosperous twentieth century. On the other hand, it has deep class divisions. The gap between the wealthy Lucile Mc Kelvey and the out-of-work man who kills himself is enormous. Zenith has religion, but it's the loud, empty religion of Mike Monday. It has democracy, but it's a democracy manipulated by Jake Offutt. It is, as Seneca Doane says, "a place of cutthroat competition and standardization of thought" (121). In short, it's fascinating, powerful, and deeply flawed.

Materialist George Babbitt

Sinclair Lewis published *Babbitt* in 1922 and he was successful in creating an archetypal figure that has since remained in America's cultural consciousness.

American society, especially in the middle classes, is depicted as hollow and empty. Individuality is discouraged. In fact, the struggle to keep up with the traditions and expectations of society can cause the individual to completely lose his place in the world. Sinclair Lewis' novel is one of the most important works of the 20th century to deal with the struggle of man caught in the turbulence of urban life. *Babbitt* is a novel centered on the hypocrisy of the prosperous and conservative business class of 1920s America.

Sinclair Lewis portrays George Babbitt as a rebellious, middle aged, middle-class conservative. Babbitt who is financially prosperous is unhappy with life and seeks freedom from the oppression that his daily duties of husband and businessman have bestowed upon him. Early twentieth century America burgeoned with a middle-class distinct in the ideology that wealth and social status were the keys to success. One must conform to a strict moral code, and for Babbitt and his colleagues that code is to help protect the stature of their middle-class life. Lewis describes his protagonist in this manner:

He was not fat but he was exceedingly well fed; his cheeks were pads, and the unroughened hand which lay helpless upon the khaki-colored blanket was slightly puffy. He seemed prosperous, extremely married and unromantic; and altogether unromantic appeared this sleeping-porch, which looked on one sizable elm, two respectable grass-plots, a cement drive-way and a corrugated iron garage. (6)

Sinclair Lewis succeeds in making a lively presentation of the commonplace through the protagonist and his circle of friends. He convincingly portrays the vulgarity and vile gregariousness of the American businessman and makes it amusing. Babbitt represents the business class with its high ambitions. All of Babbitt's thoughts

are controlled by the bourgeois society. He is seen as a symbolic character who symbolizes the modern bourgeois of an industrialized country like America. Along with Babbitt, there are others who are materialists and hypocrites like him. Henry T. Thompson is Babbitt's father-in-law and business partner. He is just as eager as Babbitt to take advantage of shady business opportunities in Zenith's real estate market. Myra Babbitt is George Babbitt's dull but devoted wife. She is also dissatisfied with the monotonous, conventional middle-class Zenith lifestyle.

Paul Riesling was Babbitt's college mate and is his closest friend. When he was young, he wanted to become a professional violinist, but like Babbitt, he becomes mired in the conventional lifestyle of the middle-class businessman. He is harshly critical of the monotonous, hypocritical character of Zenith's middle class. Zilla Riesling is Paul Riesling's wife. She is bored and embittered with their monotonous, conventional, middle-class lifestyle. She vents her frustration by constantly nagging her husband. She is described as:

Zilla was an active, strident, full-blown, high bosomed blonde. When she condescended to be good-humored she was nervously amusing. Her comments on people were saltily satiric and penetrative of accepted hypocrisies. She danced wildly, and alled on the world to be merry, but in the midst of it she would turn indignant. She was always becoming indignant. Life was a plot against her, and she exposed it furiously. (112)

Sir Gerald Doak is an aristocratic British businessman. He is a guest of Charles Mckelvey when he stays in Zenith. When Babbitt encounters him in Chicago, they become friendly with one another, and Babbitt learns that he is frustrated with the mistaken assumptions that Americans make about him because he is an aristocrat.

Reverend John Jennison Drew is the minister at Babbitt's church. He appoints Babbitt to the committee to increase Sunday school attendance. He mixes politics and religion because he preaches against the labor rights movement in Zenith. The women in Zenith city are a marginalized lot, who had nothing to do:

They had but two, one, or no children; and despite the myth that the Great War had made work respectable, their husbands objected to their "wasting time and getting a lot of crank ideas" in unpaid social work, and still more to their causing a humor, by earning money, that they were not adequately supported. They worked perhaps two hours a day, and the rest of the time they ate chocolates, went to the motion-pictures, went window – shopping, went in gossiping towns and threes to card-parties. (104)

Babbitt is always looking for the weaknesses of his friends. This comes from his need to be the best of his bunch. Babbitt actually evaluates people by tabulating their possessions. When Babbitt is able to mix with the upper class it becomes his obsession, and as here tells the stories of his excursions, his relationships with the rich become more profound. For example, when Sir Gerald Doake of Manchester was in Zenith he scarcely noticed Babbitt's existence. On a lonely business trip to Chicago, however Doake opted to break the monotony, and he got drunk with Babbitt, one could call it a one nightstand.

To Babbitt, however a life long friendship had begun. Babbitt pictured himself, by chance, bumping into McElvey, his college pal who had moved up in the world. Babbitt fantasized of telling McElvey. "I had a fair time in Chicago, ran around with Sir Gerald Doake a lot. Jerry's an old friend of mine, the wife and I are thinking of running over to England to stay with Jerry in his castle, next year" (248). Babbitt

lived for such encounters where he could show up his friends, especially prosperous ones like Mcelvey.

The novel presents a portrait of George Follansbee Babbitt, a middle-aged realtor, booster, and joiner in Zenith, the Zip City. Economically, he is seen as a member of the bourgeois class in the novel. He is unimaginative, self-important, and hopelessly middle class. Babbitt as a person more than happy to conform to the standards set for him by the rest of society.

Babbitt goes about his normal routine praising modern technology, material possessions and social status as ways to measure the worth of an individual. He is vaguely dissatisfied and tries to alter the pattern of his life by flirting with liberalism and by entering a liaison with an attractive widow, only to find that his dread of ostracism is greater than his desire for escape. Introducing Babbitt, Lewis says:

There was nothing of the giant in the aspect of the man who was beginning to awaken in a Dutch Colonial house in the residential district of Zenith known as Floral heights. His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forth-six years old now, in April, 1920, and he made nothing in particular neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay. (6)

Babbitt's chief characteristics are shouting, backslapping, and self conscious masculinity. Babbitt feels that he must engage in such childish maneuvers so that everyone is assured of his pep, punch, vision, red-blooded Americanism. Babbitt's main goal is power, anyway he can get to it. He does not want to be the average middle class man. He wants to be like the bank president William Washington Eathorne. He wants to be, "deliciously, rigorously, coldly powerful" (218). His house

is everything a house in the middle class Floral Heights should be:

The bedroom a modest and pleasant color scheme, after one of the best standard designs of the decorator who did the interiors for most of the speculative builders' houses in Zenith. There was a dressing table of solid silver and a standard bedside book with colored illustrations, what particular book it was cannot be ascertained, since no one had ever opened it. The Mattresses were triumphant modern mattresses which had cost a great deal of money. It was a masterpiece among bedrooms, right out of the Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium Incomes. (16)

George F. Babbitt is the prosperous real-estate dealer in Zenith, a typical American city. He is the standardized product of modern American civilization, a member of the Booster' Club, hypnotized by all the slogans of success, enthralled by material possessions, envious of those who have more, patronizing towards those who have less, yet dimly aware that his life is unsatisfactory. His high moment comes when, after delivering a speech at a real estate convention, he is asked to take part in a political campaign against Seneca Doane, a liberal lawyer who is running for mayor. As a result of his campaign efforts, Babbitt is elected Vice-President of the Boosters. In an address at the Boosters' club Babbitt admits that:

It is at once the duty and the privilege of the realtor to know everything about his own city and its environs. Where a surgeon is a specialist on every vein and mysterious cell of the human body, and the engineer upon electricity in all its phases or every bolt of some great bridge majestically arching o'er a mighty flood, the realtor must know his city, inch by inch, and all its faults and virtues. (39)

For Babbitt, business represents the sole purpose of living. At his middle class level, business not only thrives but it is the chief cultural characteristic. Babbitt sees his life as the new wave of America. To Babbitt the middle class businessman is taking over the country. He sees himself as something of a romantic hero. “The romantic hero was no longer the knight, the wandering poet, the cowpuncher, the aviator, nor the brave young district attorney, but rather the great sales manager” (143).

As another day begins in Zenith, a sleeping George Babbitt fought to ignore the morning sounds, the milk truck, the furnace-man, a dog barking, so that he could cling to the dream he was having. He had the same dream often. The necessities of the extravagances were the mis-valued objects like the alarm clock, cord tires, front lawns.

All these were rich devices which are all symbols of the American dream. Daily life for Babbitt is to find the very best and can be read within his own family values as well with his business. The children fighting over who gets the car, all of this for the sake of appearance is what become apart of the Babbitt household. Myra Babbitt is shown as the faithful, ever loving wife that will do whatever it takes to make George happy.

Babbitt was set in post World War I era, and for many the new inventions and gadgets that were emerging into the markets were to help improve daily life. A sense of accomplishment was noted when one could afford a new, sleek alarm for his bed side-table.

For Babbitt, a new cigar lighter mounted on top of his dash compliments as well a boasts self-worth. Babbitt delves into conspicuous consumption that has engulfed the entire middle-class lifestyle. These inventions were a must for the social

elite as if a trophy for those who could afford such new luxuries. Babbitt's alarm clock is described as:

He escaped from reality till the alarm-clock rang, at seven twenty. It was the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial. Babbitt was proud of being awakened by such a rich device. Socially it was almost as creditable as buying expensive cord tires. (7)

But, gradually as the day beckoned George pulls himself from bed, baths, shaves, dresses, and then hurries downstairs for breakfast. As usual, Babbitt was a grumpy breakfast partner; a foul mood was expected of a respectable businessman. When he went down to breakfast, he was as grumpy as usual. It was expected of him. He read the dull real estate page of the newspaper to his patient wife, Myra.

Then he commented on the weather, grumbled at his son and daughter, gulped his breakfast, and started for his office. When he grumbled at his nearly adult children, Verona and Ted, and argued with Myra, his wife, no one in the house appreciated all he did for them. "He sulkily admitted now that there was no more escape, but he lay and detested the grind of the real-estate business, and disliked his family, and disliked himself for disliking them" (7). Apart from his love for money, Paul was perhaps the only person Babbitt had ever loved. Myra his wife, had long since become a habit, and the children were too full of new ideas to be close to their father.

He was fonder of Paul Riesling than of any one on earth except himself and his daughter Tinka. They had been class mates, roommates, in the state university, but always he thought of Paul Riesling, with his dark

slimness, his precisely parted hair, his nose glasses, his hesitant speech, his moodiness, his love of music, as a younger brother, to be petted and protected. (37)

Babbitt always gulped down his food, "laid unmoving lips against (Myra's) unblushing cheek," (17) and left for work. Driving toward his office in down town Zenith, he admired the "bigness" of the city. In fact, " Babbitt respected bigness in anything: in mountains, jewels, muscles, wealth, or word" (25). Babbitt drives from Floral Heights toward downtown Zenith, stopping for gas and grandly telling the mechanic that what the country needs "first last and all the time is a good, sound, business administration" (43).

At the Reeves Building where the Babbitt – Thompson Reality Company had its offices, he wrote an advertisement designed to entice buyers to purchase the company's cemetery plots. Then he phoned his old school friend Paul Reisling and made arrangements for lunch. Babbitt always ate in the Zenith Athletic Club. He normally sat with "the roughnecks," an intimate group of big businessmen.

George Babbitt has a superficially perfect life as a happy husband, loving father, successful real estate broker, and leading citizen of Zenith. Yet he, like almost everyone he knows, is a hypocrite. He firmly believes in obeying all laws but longed for an affair. He obtains an illegal loan to make an unethical investment but fires an employee for being dishonest. George F. Babbitt is a man without an identity. His "individuality" has been imposed on him by a world of other things:

Just as he was an Elk, a Booster, and a member of the chamber of commerce, just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief and the Senators who controlled the Republican party decided in little smoky rooms in Washington what he

should think about disarmament, tariff, and Germany, so did the large national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. (30)

Babbitt probably approaches the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of faith, and without hesitation he considers it God's purpose that man should work, increase his income, and enjoy modern improvements. Babbitt believes wealth will bring him joy and social acceptance.

He feels that he obeys these commandments and therefore lives in complete harmony with himself and society. His profession real estate is the highest in existence, and his house near the city, with its trees and lawn, is standard, inside and out. The make of his car corresponds to his position, and in it he whizzes through the streets, proud as a young hero amidst the perils of the traffic. Babbitt is proud of his materialistic possessions as:

To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. The office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion ashore. Among the tremendous crises of each day none was more dramatic than starting the engine. (23)

Babbitt enjoyed excellent health, is well-fed, alert and good natured. His daily lunches at the club are feasts of instructive business conversation and stimulating anecdotes, he is sociable and wining. Babbitt is furthermore a man with the gift of speech. He has learned all the national slogans and whirls them about with his flowing tongue in his popular talks before clubs and mass meetings.

George F. Babbitt is proud of his house in Floral Heights. It is one of the most respectable residential districts in Zenith. Its architecture is standardized, its interior decorations were standardized and its atmosphere was standardized. Therein lay its appeal for Babbitt. He always bustled about in a tile and chromium bathroom during his morning ritual of getting ready for another day. His bathroom is a marvel that is filled with all that money can buy:

Though the house was not large it had, like all houses on floral heights, an altogether royal bathroom of porcelain Floral Heights, an altogether royal bathroom of porcelain and glazed tile and metal sleek as silver. The towel-rack was a rod of clear glass set in nickel. The tub was long enough fro a Prussian Guard, and above the set bowl was a sensational exhibit of tooth-brush holder, shaving-brush holder, soap-dish, sponge-dish, and medicine-cabinet, so glittering and so ingenious that they resembled an electrical instrument-board. But the Babbitt whose god was Modern Appliances was not pleased. (8)

Babbitt is a man who does everything based on how it will look to others. He desperately wants his son, Theodore Roosevelt Babbitt, to attend a real university, even though he himself confesses to have learned nothing useful at college. Babbitt wants his son to go to college for all the wrong reasons. He wants to be given the prestige of having a son in a fine State institution. He will do anything for his son, as long as he is given proper credit. Babbitt lends much of his time and energy to the Sunday school at the Church.

Babbitt is a real estate broker who knows how to handle business with zip and élan. Having closed a deal whereby he forces a poor businessman to buy a piece of property at twice its value, he pocketed part of the money and paid the rest to the man

who had suggested the enterprise. Proud of his acumen, he picks up the telephone and calls his best friend, Paul Riesling, to ask him to lunch:

Lyte had made something over nine thousand dollars, Babbitt had made a four-hundred-and-fifty dollar commission. Purdy had, by the sensitive mechanism of modern finance, been provided with a business-building, and soon the happy inhabitants of Linton would have meat lavished upon them at prices only a little higher than those down-town. (44)

The contradictions in Babbitt can be seen in his behavior. Babbitt is virtuous the way society said he should be. He advocates, though he does not practice, the prohibition of alcohol. He praises, though he does not obey the laws against motor speeding. He pays his debts, contributes to the church, the Red Cross, and the YMCA. He follows the custom of his clan and cheats only as it is sanctified by precedent. Along these same lines Babbitt is not unreasonably honest. In one section he gives a rambling speech on the virtues of honesty, throwing out cliché after cliché. Yet in the next breath he swindles a poor shopkeeper out of thousands of dollars.

Once in Zenith, Babbitt is asked to make a speech at a convention of real estate men, which is to be held in Monarch, a nearby city. He writes a speech contending that real estate men should be considered professionals and called realtors. At the meeting, he declaims loudly that real estate is a great profession, that Zenith is God's own country.

The best little spot on earth, and to prove his statements, he quotes countless statistics on waterways, textile production, and lumber manufacture. Babbitt's speech shows him at his very worst, loud, smug, and intolerant. He brags about schools but knows only ventilation systems, not teaching. He brags about art museums but knows

only their buildings, not the art they contain. His idea of a park is a driveway "adorned with grass, shrubs and statuary" (155). The speech is such a success that Babbitt instantly wins recognition as an orator. An extract from his speech says:

With all modesty, I want to stand up here as a representative business man and gently whisper, "Here's our kind of folks! Here's the specification of the standardized American citizens! Here's the new generation of Americans: fellows with hair on their chests and smiles in their eyes and adding-machines in their offices. We're not doing any boasting, but we like ourselves first-rate, and if you don't like us, look out-better gets under cover before the cyclone hits town!" (154)

His self-satisfaction is shattered when his own real friend, Paul Riesling, shoots his nagging wife and is sent to prison. For the first time, Babbitt begins to doubt the values of American middle class life. He has a love affair with a client, Mrs. Judique, and becomes involved with her somewhat bohemian friends.

He publicly questions some of the tenets of boosterism but refuses to join the Good Citizens' League. But the pressure of public opinion becomes too much for him. When his wife is taken ill, his brief revolt collapses, and he returns to the standardized world of the Boosters' Club. Once Babbitt had reprimanded Zilla and told her that:

I've had enough of all this damn nonsense! I've known you for twenty-five years, Zil, and I never knew you to miss a chance to take your disappointments out on Paul. You're not wicked. You're worse. You're a fool. And let me tell you that Paul is the finest boy God ever made. Every decent person is sick and tired of your taking advantage of being a woman and springing every mean innuendo you can think

of. Who the hell are you that a person like Paul should have to ask your permission to go with me? You act like. (114)

Babbitt is depicted as an average middle-aged American, living the good life in the bustling commercial city of Zenith, Ohio. Equipped with a house, car, two children, modern conveniences, modern gadgets, and a healthy bank account, Babbitt finds that the meaning of life has somehow eluded him.

All American's like Babbitt feel that they are chasing the, some what elusive, American dream. Lewis wanted to exploit the fine line between the American dream and reality. That the streets are paved with gold is not the question. The dispute is over the definition of gold. Babbitt thinks that he has achieved the American dream. This is why he is so bewildered at his discontentment with his life. Babbitt feels that he's done everything he ought to do, as he bemoans to his friend:

I supported my family, and got a good house and a six cylinder car, and built up a nice little business, and I haven't any vices especially except smoking. I belong to the church, and play enough golf to keep in trim, and I only associate with good decent fellows. And yet even so I don't know if I am entirely satisfied. (81)

Babbitt has lived according to his dreams inspiration, but they are dreams which leave the dreamer restless and betrayed. Babbitt wishes to be different from everyone else. In trying to be different, he falls into the trap of consumerism. He prides himself on having the latest gadgets and a fine house filled with fine things. In the aftermath of a tragic even involving his best friend, Babbitt is left with feeling of doubt in the things he has trusted for many years. He begins to ask himself, what is life all about? What does he want?

Lewis wanted to capture the hypocrisy of society where society is to blame for the inconsistencies. Lewis wanted to use satire by self exposure. Lewis was trying to capture the sad realities of life and wanted to trap his immolation into painting his own portrait of reality. *Babbitt* has become the epic of boom years, and it remains today as the major documentation, in literature, of American business culture. It seems as if Lewis succeeded in his goal, he had made the world aware of its monumental problems. *Babbitt* became the greatest international success in publishing history. It seems as if Lewis got exactly what he wanted. His book was widely read and people accepted its trenchant remarks as truths. Narrating Babbitt's character, Lewis writes:

Babbitt did not often squabble with his employees. He liked to like the people about him; he was dismayed when they did not like him. It was only when they attacked the sacred purse that he was frightened into fury, but then, being a man given to oratory and height principles, he enjoyed the sound of his own vocabulary and the warmth of his own virtue. (62)

Along with the tensions Babbitt feels the need to make large sums of money. He also feels the tensions of social climbing. Babbitt along with his other metropolitan middle class friends would like to enter the social class of the rich. Babbitt also feels marital tensions as he desires many other women, yet he could never cheat on Myra.

This prospective loss of respectability is the sole reason for his continued fidelity to his wife. This is a perfect example of how Babbitt's morals work. He does not decide for himself whether things are right, or wrong, rather he acts based on what society expects from him.

Babbitt and his cronies believe they are pillars of the community who promote high moral and ethical standards. In reality, they are pragmatic, narrow-minded citizens who play politics, deceive business clients, oppress the working class, womanize, and stifle views that dissent from their own. The following passage centers on this theme:

But Babbitt was virtuous. He advocated, though he did not practice, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised, though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; he paid his debts; he contributed to the church, the Red Cross, and the Y. M. C. A.; he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only as it was sanctified by precedent; and he never descended to trickery—though, as he explained to Paul Riesling: Course I don't mean to say that every ad I write is literally true or that I always believe everything I say when I give some buyer a good strong selling-spiel. You see—you see it's like this: In the first place, maybe the owner of the property exaggerated when he put it into my hands, and it certainly isn't my place to go proving my principal a liar! (41)

Babbitt has never done anything to make him, rather than society, happy. He is prosperous but worried wanting passionately to seize something more than motor cars and a house before it is too late. Babbitt can not foster a true disposition because he does not know what individuality is.

He dreams always of a fairy child, a life with a little whirl of romance and peril. The fairy child is never described however, because he does not know what this whirl of romance, and peril mean. The fairy child is not necessarily a woman, although Babbitt originally assumes that it is.

Babbitt has chiefly been understood as a satire of the prosperous, conservative business class of which Babbitt is a prominent member and a perfect example. At a point in the political and social climate where, Lewis felt, private enterprise and the economic interests of the business and ruling classes were valued above cultural endeavors or basic ethics, the novel struck an important critical tone. Lewis's satire of the smugness, hypocrisy, and Puritanism of American small-town life served as a needed contrast to the sentimental literary traditions that had enshrined so much of provincial America.

The creation of Babbitt, whose name has become synonymous with bourgeois mediocrity, is Lewis's greatest accomplishment. Therefore, we can say convincingly say that Babbitt, is a satire on the bourgeois middle class lifestyle and attitude. One of the most important themes in Babbitt is the way American society, though supposedly free and democratic, tells its citizens what they should think. It's able to do that, in large part, because citizens like Babbitt are too lazy to think for themselves.

IV. Conclusion

One of the best known American social commentators in history and the first American novelist to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, Sinclair Lewis was born in small town in Minnesota. This upbringing would greatly affect his writing and he wrote often about life in small towns and the characters that filled them. For *Babbitt*, though, Lewis chose to stray from his normal formula to work on a complex character set in a large city.

Babbitt is a satire on the conformity, hypocrisy, and ignorance endemic to the American middle class. The creation of George F. Babbitt, whose name has become synonymous with bourgeois mediocrity, an intellectually empty, emotionally immature man of dubious morals who nevertheless remains a lovable comic's trip figure, is Lewis's greatest accomplishment. *Babbitt* is an authentic modern American classic, a biting satire of middle- American values that retains much of its poignancy today. George F. Babbitt, Lewis's outwardly successful but inwardly an unhappy real estate salesman, still seems very much real.

In *Babbitt*, Lewis undertook a more representative theme of the character of the typical businessman, the "go-getter" with his materialistic standards. Babbitt is hypnotized by his own slogans of success yet gnawingly aware that his life is somehow empty. Babbitt's tragicomic revolt is short-lived, but it symbolizes the failure of American middle-class life to bring any real satisfaction to these people who are materially so successful and comfortable.

Babbitt has chiefly been understood as a satire of the prosperous, conservative business class of which Babbitt is a prominent member and a perfect example. At a point in the political and social climate where, Lewis felt, private enterprise and the

economic interests of the business and ruling classes were valued above cultural endeavors or basic ethics, the novel struck an important critical tone.

Sinclair Lewis has often been referred to as a writer in revolt because his novels are satiric. They expose the hypocrisy and mechanization of American society. If in *Main Street*, he deals with the flaws of American rural community, in *Babbitt*, he focuses his attention on the conservative but hypocritical business community. *Babbitt*, the protagonist of the latter novel, is a typical businessman with lofty aims and a desire to climb the ladder of social success.

When Lewis started writing novels, America had established itself as a super power people were glorifying the New World and emulating it as their model. The American people, therefore, considered themselves to be a superior race. At such a time, Lewis novels were a timely reminder that the "super" nation had its underbelly. He exposed the follies of American society courageously. His fans admired his frankness, but his critics condemned his cynicism.

Mercilessly revealing and minutely detailed as the portrait of Zenith is, however, *Babbitt* would not be the excellent novel it is if Lewis had stopped at that. In addition to being an exposure of shallowness, the novel is the chronicle of one man's feeble and half-conscious attempt to break out of a meaningless and sterile existence. George Babbitt's complacency is occasionally punctured by disturbing questions. He worried that might his wife be right that he bullied Zilla only to strut and show off his strength and virtue? Are his friend's really interesting people? Does he really love his wife and enjoy his career? These nagging questions and the pressures in his life finally build sufficient tension to push Babbitt to the unprecedented step to taking a week's vacation in Maine without his wife and children. The trip relieves his tension and dissolves the questions, and he returns to another year in Zenith with renewed

vigor and enthusiasm for boosters, baseball, dinner parties, and real estate. He never seems to change. He only loves money.

Lewis cleverly used George's story to explore and satirize the USA of the 1920s and its uncertain value system. Babbitt has an affair with a widow who subscribes to a moral twenties values, frequents parties with her wild friends, and drinks heavily enough to affect his business. Lewis discloses the ways in which society enforces its demands for conformity in matters ranging from dress to opinions. His attack on modern business ethics is merciless but accurate. Babbitt succeeds both as a sociological document and as a brilliant comic novel.

By the end of the novel, Babbitt has "returned to the fold," joining the Good Citizen's League and redoubling his zeal on behalf of Zenith Booster activities. Even though Babbitt lacks the strength to break out of his mold, Lewis does not imply that he is unchanged by his experience. The Babbitt at the close of the novel has grown in awareness, even if he has proven himself incapable of essentially changing life.

Although *Babbitt* outraged certain sectors of the business community, the novel became an international success. Europeans loved it even more than *Main Street*. They enjoyed seeing the United States portrayed as they believed it was, materialistic, vulgar, standardized, and hopelessly without culture. They even enjoyed the language. It is interesting to note that even while the novel was being angrily attacked, a number of Midwestern cities acclaimed to have been the model for Zenith. Without offering any cure, simply by diagnosing and photographically reproducing symptoms of a national phenomenon, Lewis promoted self-awareness among his many readers.

Babbitt represents America's disclosure to the world that it crass, materialistic, complacent and chauvinistic. Lewis wanted to tell America the truth. He had the guts

to tell America to which stupid, and finally devastating, social damnation, they were drifting to. Lewis wanted to use the subliminal to its full extent. Lewis knew that by creating a humorous, realistic character, like Babbitt, people would subconsciously identify themselves with Babbitt. As a result people would hopefully change so as to avoid Babbitt's frustrating fate. This was Lewis's goal.

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