Chapter 4

SINCLAIR LEWIS: A LITERARY SOCIOLOGIST OF AMERICAN LIFE

4.1 INTRODUCTION:

One of the sharpest and the most detailed critic who wrote amazing literature out of what seemed to be the love of his country was Sinclair Lewis.\(^1\) Lewis was a prolific writer who published fourteen novels and a book of short stories over a span of nearly forty years. Later in his life, he wrote plays for both the theater and film, and he continued publishing books up until his death in 1951. Yet it seems that Sinclair Lewis will always be inextricably linked to a single decade, the 1920s. This ten-year period saw the publication of Lewis’s five greatest novels, beginning in 1920 with *Main Street* and ending in 1929 with *Dodsworth*. In between he wrote *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), and *Elmer Gantry* (1927).

In December 1930, Sinclair Lewis was bigger than any America knew and even bigger than he himself knew, or would ever know.\(^2\) It is the First World War which is the watershed event, one which so dramatically altered the cultural foundations, both in Europe and in American, that noting much of what occurred in that twenties in the areas of art, literature, and music—as well as the social, political, and economic climate of the period—was born in the trenches of World War I.

4.2 SINCLAIR LEWIS AND HIS LITERARY ADVENTURE:

In the years before the introduction of mass media and twenty-four hours news channels, most Americans were simply unaware of or not concerned with the events across the Atlantic. That is not to say that the war did not have any effect on American culture. Its effects, though more
indirect, were equally important. Almost by default, America emerged from the war as the world’s leading political and economic power. Europe’s countries were physically battered and her economies were in ruins. America, on the other hand, remained intact, her war-charged economy running on all cylinders which propelled it to become the most powerful nation in the world.

Lewis’s twenty two novels, so uneven in quality, do share in one likeness: they are a long march all directed toward a single die cover, the “realty” of American. This aim was Lewis’ inheritance as a novelist who was formed in the second decade of this century when the discovery of the “real” American, an American beyond the chauvinistic nonsense and the merely sentimental optimism that had formed the image of an earlier generation, because the aim of nearly every writer who took himself seriously. It was a period that, however briefly, put its trust in the democratic promise of American life. For Sinclair Lewis, American was always a promise and that was why he loved American but did not like it.\(^3\)

Generalized, it becomes an idealization of an older America, the America of the mid-nineteenth century, an America enormous and shapeless but overflowing, like a cornucopia, with the potentialities for and the constant expression of a wide, casually human freedom, the individual life lived in honest and perhaps eccentric effort. It was the ideal America of Thoreau, of Whitman, of the early Mark Twain, of the cracker barrel in the village store an of the village atheist, of the open road and the far horizon and the clear, uncluttered sweep of prairies.

Like Thoreau, Whitman, Twain, Lewis too could see the difference between the idealization and the actuality. It was Thoreau who wrote this indictment: “With respect to true culture and manhood, we are essentially
provincial still, not metropolitan—mere Jonathans. We are provincial, because we do not find at home our standards; because we are warped and narrowed by an exclusive devotion to trade and commerce and manufacture and agriculture and the like, which are but the means and not the ends”.

America was nervous, throughout the twenties there remained an agitated discomfort drifting beneath the surface prosperity of the decade. Finally past its extended adolescence, America was coming of age as a nation with a young adult’s mixture of confidence and apprehension. Sinclair Lewis focused on particular problems associated with American society in the twenties. Alienation, the disintegration of community, and his disappearance of the individual during a time in which the business of America certainly was business were dominant themes in their writing.

*Main Street* was published in 1920. With this novel, Sinclair Lewis emerged as major voice in American literature. It sold over one million copies, a huge amount for the time, and it placed Lewis in the position of “controversial writer,” a position to which he held fast throughout the twenties. Main Street allowed Lewis to deflate one of the most common of American myths, that of the sentimentalized small town. Besides, Lewis’s scathing literary tongue was most effective during the decade which began with the publication of *Main Street*, the twenties. While economic prosperity and political pride were rampant throughout the country, somebody, Lewis felt, needed to portray the ugly side of the new America society was losing much of the varied cultural flavor that made it unique.

Lewis’s folk are not alive in senses, mind, or spirit; they could scarcely be expected to have a social life. They carry on, of course, a group existence, for solitude is terrifying to them. Yet when they have gathered together, they have nothing to say to one another. They tell stories, they talk
about business, weather, housekeeping and automobiles, they gossip endlessly and often maliciously. Their curiosity as to each other’s doings, which is equaled only by their indifference to each other as persons, is not a friendly and welcoming curiosity. They do not really care to get acquainted with one another; they have and are capable of having, no true personal relation. Sometimes they seek distraction in noise and artificial gaiety. Constantly they simulate good-fellowship and parties a forced and humorless jocularity, raucous and mechanical. Their sociability is ghastly as any lifeless imitation of living thing must be ghastly. It is dance of galvanized dead. Lewis’s world is a social desert, and for the best of reasons, that it is a human desert. It is a social void because each of its members is personally a human emptiness.5

In 1922, Lewis’s Babbitt was published. With this novel, Lewis continued his mastery of realistic detail, the style he perfected in *Main Street*. Lewis’s novels always seem a little grimmer than he apparently intended it to be, and never as grim as when he envisions the rebels and aspiring spirits who front the resolute conformists. He never comes so close to giving a clinical description of psychic breakdown as when he shows his characters making their peace with the world.

Lewis is the historian of America’s catastrophic going to pieces of her middle class - with no remedy to offer for the decline that he records; and he has dramatized the process of disintegration, as well as his own dilemma, in the outlines of his novels, in the progress of his characters, and sometimes, and most painfully, in the lapses of taste and precision that periodically weaken the structure of his prose.

Lewis wrote his best books and achieved his fame in a decade that has, in the literary histories, seemed almost to exclude him. It is perhaps
more useful, then in evaluating his work and the ideas that inform it, to consider him as being influenced by the late nineteenth century spirit of Utopian idealism as revealed in Edward Bellamy’s immensely popular *Looking Backward* of 1888. Lewis parallels the social agenda of the Progressives in his attempt to give individual from, in the body of his works, to the great formlessness of early modern American life.

After a post-Civil War period of rapid growth and movement of population, of bewildering technological advancement, of the conversion of his native Midwest from an agricultural frontier to a city-dominated industrial empire, Lewis appears consciously to attempt to order the social and moral confusion that characterized the ascendant new America. Lewis and many of his characters project the hope that Americans could subsume the city and machine civilization into the traditional democratic framework without sacrificing pastoral values.

Lewis work reflects values that are largely frontier and pioneer inspired, with a heroic view of the past and an essentially hopeful and progressive conception of his future. Out of the awareness of the swift conversion of his own upper-Midwest country from agrarian frontier to machine civilization arises Lewis’s sense of the myriad possibilities for individual human lives.

While Sinclair Lewis accepted with part of his mind the vitality and urgency of the new America, he hesitated to commit himself and his characters fully to it. In the argument surrounding this ambivalence there is much of Lewis and of Babbitt—both the novel and the man. English-language dictionaries include an entry for *Babbitt* that reads something like the following: “A self-satisfied person who conforms readily to middle-class attitudes and ideals. Babbitt’s popular and critical success continued
through the decade, with the words “Babbitt” and “Babbitry” passing into the language, as we have seen as synonyms for middlebrow conformists and conformity. The novel was filmed twice by Hollywood, in 1924 and again in 1934, though neither production was to match the cinematic excellence of later films from Lewis books like *Dodswarth* and Lewis’s forthcoming novels were measured. Something of this opinion was obviously behind the decision of the Swedish Academy to name Lewis in 1930 as the first American writer to receive the Noble Prize. In choosing Lewis over Theodore Dreiser and other American writers, the Academy was most impressed by the typicality and representativeness of Lewis’s fictional creations, and by the artistic and affirmative qualities in Lewis’s work, as well as its more notorious satire critical realism. These qualities, the Academy believed had raised American literature to a place among the world’s literature. Babbitt was acknowledged as the apex of Lewis’s achievement. His novels of the 1930s and 194s were never to recapture the potency and energy of his best earlier work. A list of their titles Ann Vickers, Work of Art, The Prodigal Parents, Bethel Merriday, Gideon Planish, Cass Timerlane, Kingsblood Royal, the God seeker, World So Wide.

Major critical force in the 1930s as his increasingly reactionary, antigovernment politics and firebrand rhetoric ran counter to the sober economic realities of the Great Depression and the social reforms of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. T.K. Whipple, in his 1928 assessment of Lewis held:

While many of his (Lewis’s) contemporaries, who have succeeded in maintaining their integrity unimpaired, import to their readers an intense realization of the world they live in, the net result of Lewis’s
work in not truer apprehension or a deeper insight, but an increase in mutual dissatisfaction… Lewis is the most successful critic of American society because he is himself the best proof that his charges are just.  

This kind of immersion into the life of his projected books has led critic to term Lewis a kind of literary sociologist of American life. Underlying Babbitt’s conformity, however, is a restless sense of the emptiness of his life, which grows more pronounced and leads, as emptiness of his life, which attempts at escape - camping trips to the Maine wood, half- hearted efforts at romance, flirtations with leftist cause.

Babbitt is more than realistic, but its success as a novel is anchored in its depiction of real world of Floral Heights suburbia, of Ford automobiles, of dismal obligatory dinners, of relations’ conventions and of the cash nexus that holds them all together.

Sinclair Lewis has said of himself:
He has only one illusion: that he is not a journalist and ‘photographic realist’ but stylist chief concerns in writing are warmth and lucidity. No one else serves so well as he to illustrate the relation between literature and a practical world: in such a world he has himself lived all his life and such a world he portrays and holds up to ridicule and obloquy.

Sinclair Lewis was a novelist blessed with what Wright Mills called “the sociological imagination,” the capacity to see and be interested in the overriding dramatic quality of “the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world.” Lewis was often accused of being a kind of social scientist, although usually the similarity noted was in investigative and preparatory techniques and not in quality of mind. Mark
Schorer for example pointed out that “with Lewis, the subject, the social section always came first, systematic research, sometimes conducted by research assistants and carrying Lewis himself into ‘the field’ like any cultural anthropologist followed; the story came last, devised to carry home and usually limping under the burden of data.” Lewis too recognized the assumptions which underlay most of his work; he certainly was aware that his habits of mind and method of composition resembled the habits and practices of the social scientist. This view of the individual imbedded in a matrix of neighborhood, city and class which constitutes the basis of the sociological imagination.10

The major works Sinclair Lewis’s greatest decade may be shown to be the working out in dramatic form of these sociological insights. *Main Street* and *Babbitt* both show the sometimes painful process of adjustment. *Arrowsmith*, on the other hand, is concerned with a protagonist who cannot adjust, one who other hand, is concerned a protagonist who cannot adjust, one who becomes ever more alienated as his life unfolds. Finally, *Elmer Gantry* and *Dodsworth* concern men who are autonomous in two different ways.

The alienated or maladjusted man refuses to accept his culture, often withdraws from it, and tends to isolate himself within an impossible dream world. Isolation is a solution which cannot work, by virtue of the very lack of any meaningful interaction with an ongoing society. Sheldon Grebstein however, maintains that “what Lewis suggested by *Arrowsmith’s* withdrawal from civilization was simply a refusal by the individual to be bound by conventional social codes, mores, or patterns of behavior,” and he goes on to observe that this is an expression of Lewis’s fundamental optimism, for it proves that “happiness can be found America.”11
In the 1920 census it was revealed that for the first time the majority of Americans now lived in cities. The United States has become an urban nation. The succeeding decade saw the arrival of megalopolis and a phenomenal growth in suburban living brought about as a direct result of the impact of the motor car upon American life. A phase of historical development if not the myths associated with it had come to an end. In his Nobel Prize speech, Sinclair Lewis could criticize those writers who “chant that the America of a hundred and twenty million… that, in fine, America has gone through the revolutionary change from rustic colony to World Empire without having in the least altered the bucolic and Puritan simplicity of Uncle Sam.” But in his own fiction, which presented the national lineaments transformed, Lewis was unable to escape completely from the preveiling mood of cultural nostalgia.

For in response to increasing urbanization, a defensive ideology has come. It is ascribed to the natural state a value that was metaphorical or spiritual rather than economic. Inevitable, too, as a result of the high proportion of foreign-born Americans in the large cities, this pastoral impulse contained within it a strong element of ethnic nostalgia. It is a theme that appears but tangentially in Lewis’s writings, but in this respect, too, he reflects the spirit of his age. In making his vague affirmations in favor of nature, it is obvious that Lewis is participating in a general reaction against the complexities of life in an industrialized society.

Wealth of symbolizes honor and prestige in modern society; it is necessary for acceptance by our fellows. For status we need money, and without that status there can be no self-respect. Yet once we accumulate a certain sum, it is not enough. We are driven ever to increase what we own, to rise as far above the average as we can. Moreover, money brings power,
or the sense of power; and, since man’s striving for money also springs from
his sense of purposeful activity—what Veblen calls “the instinct of
workmanship”—we have come to see success as money and to measure
success by money. But the possession of money in not alone sufficient to
satisfy man; he must demonstrate his wealth, either by his own freedom
from labor and/or by the amount of goods and services he and his family
consume. Since money become the \textit{sum mum bonum} and the surest way in a
business society to success and power, the aim of business is to gain money;
all subordinated to profit, even if the profit is gained at the community’s
loss. Nor are profit and wages necessarily relisted to true value.\textsuperscript{12}

Brooks of 1920s argued that whatever logic of material necessary
might once have driven the puritan and the pioneer, industrial
commercialism had become “a habit” for the “well-fuelled and well-fed
modern businessmen, who his prosperity “loves the machine for itself.
Books Sought not to banish the machine but to reduce its affective power.
The businessman would cease to fetishize it only when he had “learned to
accept the machinery of life as premise.” Once the machine and its products
were normalized, their hold on the middle-class psyche released, Brooks
hoped that “the arts of life” might then also be embraced as “normal, natural
elements of civilized life.”

A “civilized life” signified the spiritual and cultural fulfillment of the
individual historian Casey Blake has clarified, however, that for these young
intellectuals,” the personal did not preclude, but was ideally predicated on,
the reciprocal rejuvenation of a democratic community. In the early postwar
period, the suburb emerged, albeit in tentative, exploratory fashion, as an
index of the failures of American civilization on both levels.\textsuperscript{13}
Because the machine process inculcates standardization exact quantitative knowledge, and a sense of material causality, it inevitably collides with and weakens tradition, traditional morality, and all conduct based on sentimental and metaphysical precepts. The elders disengaged themselves from such vital matters as death, which frightened them; sex, which brought them panic; and psychology, which mystified them. Having fallen into the comfortable routines of business, church, and family life, they recognized no change and failed to meet the age’s new needs and demands. Likewise, H. L. Mencken in the American Credo (written in collaboration with George Jean Nathan) offered an analysis of the American character which is perfectly applicable to Babbitt:

The thing which sets off the American from all other men, and gives a peculiar color not only to the pattern of his daily life but also to the play of his inner ideas, is what, for want of a more exact term, may be called social aspiration. That is to say, his dominant passion is a passion to lift himself by at least a step or two in the society that he is a part of—a passion to improve his position, to break down some shadowy barrier of caste, to achieve the countenance of what, all his talk of equality he recognizes and accepts his betters.14

In the war’s aftermath, the country entered a period of drastic social, technological, and economic transformation; in politics, on the other hand, conservatism dominated the American scene during the 1920s, often taking the form of reaction against new developments that were perceived as threatening. American culture went through other changes that disturbed moral traditionalists, especially in regard to courtship and sex. Women in particular showed the effects of this shift, not just in their daring new fashions (higher hemlines, higher heels, short hairstyles, and sleeveless,
open-throated evening gowns), but in the cigarettes they now enjoyed and the alcohol they now imbibed. Additionally, the women showed more daring in taking part in new dance styles that involved much more physical contact and as parents worried while sitting in the cars that more and younger people were driving.

This relaxation of the moral code which did not affect the younger generation alone sprang from other causes in addition to the unsupervised privacy offered by cars, the drinking habits altered by Prohibition, and the temptation sparked by immodest clothes. First, thanks to America’s participation in the war, over two million American soldiers had been sent to Europe, where many of them encountered a more tolerant attitude toward sex. Secondly, conventional American ideas on this topic were shaken by the popularization of Sigmund Freud’s psychological theories, which were interpreted (or misinterpreted) as an argument against sexual taboos. Finally, moral conservatives complained that the popular new motion pictures, with their passionate kissing scenes, were encouraging lewd behavior. While this last observation might make fears of a moral breakdown seem ridiculous from a more modern perspective, the change in moral standards could hardly be denied; even those who took part in it sometimes observed it with concern.

*Main Street*. Certain character types that were to be made famous by *Main Street*, the already appeared- the hypocritical bigot, the village Street, the aspiring idealist, and so on. And the basic pattern of Main Street was exactly the same pattern that has already been described: a young creature is caught in a stultifying environment, clashes with environment, flees from it, is forced to return, compromises.
Carol Kennicott, the heroine of *Main Street*, has no alternative to compromise. Her values, her yearning for a free and gracious life, had only the vaguest shape, and when she tried to put them into action in Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, she found only the most artificial and sentimental means. To some readers even then (When thousands of women were identifying themselves with her) she seemed like a rather foolish young women, and so today she must seem to every reader.15

The effectiveness of Mr. Lewis’s portrait of *Main Street* was due to the fact that he was not an alien in this environment which affects the social setting of the society and results to alienation since there were no social transactions. In *Main Street* and American had at last written of our life with something of the intellectual rigor and critical detachment that had seemed so cruel and unjustified when it had appeared in Dickens’s Notes or in Arnold’s *Civilization in the United States* Young people had grown up in this environment, suffocated, stultified, helpless, but unable to find any reason for their spiritual discomfort.

Becoming more confident of his purposes, Mr. Lewis broadened the caricature of Babbitt and became even more savage in his attacks upon the dominant American idols. Babbitt, the realtor, was a recognizable type; he was a man caught in a civilization he believes in too heartily, who had never done a single thing that corresponded to his inner go; a willing victim to the blather and buncombe of American business life, but nevertheless a victim.

*Arrowsmith* (1925) merely permitted the idealism that had always been present to prevail. The idealist is no longer a solitary figure, for. Besides Martin *Arrowsmith*, there are also Gottlieb, Sondelius, Terry Wickett, and others. These are the dedicated truth seekers, the pure scientists who will not compromise with commercial standards or yield to institutional
pressures. If, in the end, in order to maintain their own standards, they are forced to withdraw entirely from institutions, their standards are nevertheless victorious.

In Chicago he quite accidentally met a young medical research scientist recently associated with the Rockefeller Institute in New York, Paul de Kruif, and together the two discussed the possibility of a novel about the corruptions of the medical profession and of medical research. The other side of this idealism continued the same as before, and involved the same subjects for satire. A narrow provincialism, hypocrisy, complacency, and the “security” of organizational activity, pomposity, the commercial spirit, and the ideal of cash- all these were present again.\(^{16}\)

*Arrowsmith*, thorough consolidated that reputation and it quieted even his harshest critics. For here at last Lewis had found a specific and realizable object in which to locate his idealism and beside which he could pose his satire in some sort of balance. Martin *Arrowsmith*, pursuing in his laboratory what are presented as his lonely truths, was a new kind of hero, scientific idealism a new subject, and scientific individualism a new (and rather unscientific) perspective. Sinclair Lewis was once again in the vanguard.\(^{17}\)

*Arrowsmith*, The hero is a physician who becomes a bacteriologist. Before he finally takes refuge in the wilds of Vermont where he can pursue his researches undisturbed, he encounters all the difficulties which the United States puts in the way of a doctor and an investigator who would like to be honest; he struggles with the commercialism of the medical school, the quackery which thrives in the country, the politic and fraud of a Department of Public Health in a small city, the more refined commercialism of a metropolitan clinic, and the social and financial temptations of a great institute research. He is offered every possible inducement to prostitute
himself to an easy success-manifest, worldly success. Nor is he indifferent to the pressures which are brought to bear on him; on the contrary, being a scientist by instinct rather than by reasoned conviction, he wins out only in spite of himself. He would like to succeed, he has been contaminated by the success worship with which he is surrounded, but he is unable to cope with an ineluctable honesty and stubborn drive in himself. Throughout the novel we could examine the external forces of the American society who forces the individual for alienation and depression since the new ethics and values are of material world, money and selfishness, that alienation because of nothing just the impossibility of social transactions between the concerned character and the whole society. The variety in the thoughts, ideas and believes make the process of the understanding between them more than impossible. The intellectual life, however, is not the worst sufferer in the society Lewis deals with. The other humane activities fare no better and of them all probably none is so debased as religion.

In Arrowsmith the individual’s struggle with the demands of his culture is dramatized as the struggle between intensely individualistic dedication to scientific research and increasing tempting offers of worldly success. Martin Arrowsmith receives offers of success or potential success of a material sort often enough in his career. When he decides to leave Wheatsylvania, he is reminded by his father-in-law of the great sums he could soon be making, is offered a partnership in the village drugstore, and is tempted by certain political office. He fights his way on to the prestigious McGurk Institute in New York, but is soon disillusioned to find as much importance given there to appearances, income, and status as in Wheatsylvania. He has climbed to the pinnacle and has found it too corrupted by America’s materialistic standards. The alienated or maladjusted
man refuses to accept his culture, often withdraws from it, and tends to isolate himself within an impossible dream world. Isolation is a solution which cannot work, by virtue of the very lack of any meaningful interaction with an ongoing society.

Sheldon Grebstein, however, maintains that “what Lewis suggested by *Arrowsmith*’s withdrawal from civilization was simply a refusal by the individual to be bound by conventional social codes, mores, or patterns of behavior,” and he goes on to observe that this is an expression of Lewis’s fundamental optimism, for it proves that “happiness can be found in America. In this novel Lewis shows the conflict between the individual American and the demands of his culture becoming more serious, and the solution for the individual becoming more difficult, since the success requirements in the American society have become to lose your humanity and to become some other creature that results to alienations of those individual who could not adjust themselves in the society i.e. they could not have social transactions with the society around him/her.

In *Dodsworth*, Lewis refused the extremes and turned back to a reassertion of those very middle- class, middle-brow, and middle-western values that the decade of the twenties seemed to have destroyed forever, and that it had most emphatically forth seem to be the most old- fashioned of modern American novelists, would henceforth abide. Yet it was Lewis of Babbitt rather than Lewis of *Dodsworth* that led the Swedish Academy, at the end of 1930 to award him, the first American writer, the Nobel Prize in literature.

*Dodsworth*, Mr. Lewis achieved, I think, the top of his excellence as a novelist, although the theme is less. He returned, in a sense, to Main Street and Babbitt, with a new kindliness toward his central figure the business
man. Fran, *Dodsworth’s* wife is an odious counterpart of Carol Kennicott, with not a though in the world but her own narrow ego, her own conquests and satisfaction; and *Dodsworth* himself is Babbitt who has submitted to the prevailing standards without being enthralled by them. Not since Henry James had anyone so well portrayed the dilemmas of the untutored American in Europe, exposed to that irresponsible but quickening scene.

Are Mr. Lewis’s novels representatives of American life? Yes- if one is careful to qualify the meanings of these words. Mr. Lewis knows his own people of the very well; he writes as though at one period or another he had believed all their platitudes and participated in their worshipful mechanical routine. He has their intense practical sense and their wistfulness; the names of exotic places can stir him, and the chief defect of his style is the result of an effort to achieve glamour.¹⁹

Sinclair Lewis and out of his novels, was a real reflection to the American society and had examined the American society before and after the changes were taken over. The society had changed its skin to a new one which does not have any relationship to the former one, the individual was struggling to find him/herself, and the solution was being so difficult day by day. Mr. Sinclair Lewis’s satires have the value of Photography’, his best satirical effects are obtained simply by holding in sharp focus something that actually exists, and forgetting, for the moment, all that historically or spatially enters into the object to qualify it. The art of photography is that of creative selection; it brings nothing into existence, except what is developed by the momentary act of abstraction.²⁰

*Dodsworth* concerns little else in the way Lewis novels endlessly city themselves, as a tribute to his powers as a sociologist, Sam Dodsworth is “not a Babbitt”, he is a “craftsman” a “pioneer” in the development of
streamlined automotive design, and successful national manufacturer. When the business is sold to a larger corporation, his wife, Fran Dodsworth, moves them to Europe and real hotels, which Sam mournfully considers “the home of the homeless”. Sam deals with his own homelessness through a plan to house others. He contemplates designing “one of those astonishing suburbs which have appeared in American since 1910.”, garden suburbs like Roland Park and Shaker Heights, which I discussed in chapter 1. But Sam wants to return to “Pioneering”, which means the “tradition of …pushing to the westward …never resting, and opening a new home for a hundred million people.”

The negative effect of the new material way of life on Sam resulted into the impossibility of having a normal life and a normal social transactions with his own society and that wasn’t the issue of Sam as a character in Dodsworth only, but was the issue of a big part of the American society, and the question was either to peel your skin and put on the new Materialist one or else you have to face the alienation and depression. Immediately after Main Street, he plunged into his research in that section of American life where those qualities were most obvious and therefore most readily lampooned- the commercial world of the middle - class businessman in a medium sized city.

Like most generalizations, the depiction of the 1920s as a decade bent on self- indulgence and material pursuits is true enough, if applied selectively. In the popular culture of the twenties, as Frederick Lewis Allen points out in his influential history of the times, Only Yesterday (1931), there seemed to be sense of hysteria to much of the social life of the era. The end of the war with Germany on 11 November 1918, and the subsequent wish
for return to “normalcy” was thwarted by rush of rapid and undeniable change in American life.\textsuperscript{23}

The wide availability of radio and the growing popularity of Hollywood films were to influence the lives and attitudes of Americans strongly as television was to do thirty years later. For the first time, everybody could hear and see virtually everything. Sports, and particularly professional sports, became a major presence in public life.\textsuperscript{24}

The end of World War I seemed to signal a revolution in such mores. The beginning of the decade of the twenties saw the hemlines of women’s dresses daringly raised above the ankles. Growing numbers of aggressively unconventional young women- called flappers- defying the restrictions on them, wore revealing clothes, danced athletically, even frantically, to fast, sometime syncopated “ragged time” or “ragtime” music, or “Jazz,” and used make-up. Many of them smoked cigarettes, kissed more men than the one they were to marry, and drank hard liquor- even though the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the “prohibition amendment,” passed in 1919, had made liquor illegal. While Prohibition was repealed in 1933, its existence in the twenties, along with a booming trade in the outlawed manufacture, import, and sale of alcoholic beverages, served to mark the air of hypocrisy and evasion between official utterance and actual behavior that has come to characterize the decade. F. Scott Fitzgerald was to catch the spirit of rebellious youth and especially “fast” young women in his first novel.

Babbitt begins with the description of a modern city - a city “for giants.” The remainder of the novel provides an extended ironic commentary on this statement, as it demonstrates how Babbitt and the others of his kind who live in this city are pygmies, not glance at Babbitt is likewise focused
through Lewis’s ironic lens, for the only beauty and magic left in his life are the visitations of an elusive dream girl, reminiscent somewhat of Melville’s Yillah, who beckons to the hero for the narrative’s first one hundred pages, the irony deepens.

We are given closely detailed descriptions of Babbitt’s house, yard, bathroom; the routine of his morning shave; Mrs. Babbitt’s contours; his method of dressing, his eyeglasses, his tie, the contents of his pockets; his minor aches and pains and the state of his digestion; his opinions on dress suits and on his children. We are told of his pride in his automobile, his attitude toward his neighbor, his route to his office. We watch him as he dictates letters, prepares a sales campaign, and composes advertisements for cemetery plots. We follow him to lunch at the Zenith Athletic Club and listen to his badinage and his conversation. We see him, in short, in all the significant activates of his life, at home, at work, with his friends; and in the last five of the one hundred and two pages which have depicted twenty-four hours in the history of George F. Babbitt, Lewis recounts to us the sinful or meaningful or interesting things others are doing and saying in Zenith as Babbitt goes to sleep on his sleeping porch, gallant and intrepid at last in the pursuit of his dream girl. The total effect of this first section of the novel is, just as Lewis intended, overwhelming in its emphasis upon the smallness the pettiness, the triviality, and the lack of joy and freedom in the existence of a typical member of a money society. His house, conspicuous in its material comforts and illustrative of its owner’s success, is a shelter but not a home. His stolid wife and his children who insult one another and argue at the breakfast table about who will get the car are, if anything, even more trivial and shallow.
The point (Veblen’s) is that right and wrong the traditional morality, are now determined by what is expedient and profitable, by what brings in a financial return yet is not flagrant enough to disturb the system’s equilibrium. Where Babbitt might be troubled by moral qualms, the remnants of the old morality and religion, he can justify his practices under the name of good, smart business, which is what everyone is doing. Everywhere Babbitt is surrounded by pals who slap him on the back, call him by affectionate nicknames, and joke with him. His entrance at the Athletic Club brings a volley of greetings. He is elected vice-president of the Boosters Club. He is chosen to make a speech before the Zenith Real Estate Board. He attracts and praise by his speech- making during and elections campaign and by his participation in drive to raise Sunday school attendance at his church. But Babbitt’s conformity and forced geniality have their price because all the while there is only one person, Paul Riesling, to whom he can admit that he is somehow not fully satisfied, not really happy.²⁵

It is the novel Babbitt that established what would henceforth be Sinclair Lewis’ characteristic method of work, a method toward which he had been moving ever since his cattle boat notes taking days. To begin he chose a subject- not, as for most novelists, a character situation or a mere theme, but a social area that could be systematically studied and mastered. Ordinarily, this was a subclass within the middle class, a profession, or a particular problem of such a subclass. Then, armed with his notebooks, he mingled with the kind of people that his fiction would mainly concern, I Pullman cars and smokers in the lobbies of side- street hotels, in athletic clubs, in a thousand junky streets he watched and listened and then meticulously copied into his notebooks whole catalogues of expressions
drawn from the American lingo, elaborate lists of proper names, every kind of physical detail.

If in the land which Lewis depicts “life at its most passionate is but a low grade infection,” the explanation is not far to seek. This society from the beginning has been developed under the dominance of one motive: the self-advancement of its separate members. The men are ruled mainly by the desire to become richer; the women by the desire to rise socially, but the two are ultimately the same. Both, in order to get up in the world, have denied themselves all other interests and experiences. They have starved themselves, until in the midst of the utmost material profusion they are dying of inanition. They are famine-sufferers who alienate sympathy by their own pride in their misshapenness and by their fierce determination that everyone else shall be as deformed as themselves. But the spiritual malady which afflicts Zenith is most fully analyzed in the person of Babbitt himself. He feels vague longings which cannot be satisfied by the mechanical toys which are his “substitutes for joy and passion and wisdom,” His “symbols of truth and beauty.”26 He was conscious of life, and a little sad. With no Vergil Gunches before whom to set his face in resolute optimism, he beheld, and half admitted that he is held, his way of life as incredibly mechanical.

Save with Paul Riesling, mechanical friendship back slapping and jocular, never daring to essay the test of quietness…It was coming to him that perhaps all life as he knew it and vigorously practiced it was futile; that heaven as portrayed by the Reverent Dr. John Jenison Drew was neither very probable nor very interesting; that he hadn’t much pleasure out of making money; that it was of doubtful worth to rear children merely that they might rear children who would rear children. What was it all about? What did he want? Babbitt seeks relief in philandering and in drink, but finds hardly even
a momentary distraction. He attempts a timid excursion into liberal thought-
liberal for Zenith - but is frightened and cajoled back into orthodoxy. His
only real happiness he finds in a few days’ vacation with Paul Riesling in the
Maine woods.

The discontent which is common among the pillars of Zenith’s
civilization flares at times into open rebellion among the less compliant
members of the community. Paul Riesling, who should have been a violinist
and who instead went into the tar-roofing business, is in complete revolt and
is finally reduced to committing murder. Chump Frink, the syndicated poet,
gets drunk and lets out the secret of his thwarted aspirations. Gopher Prairie
likewise has many malcontents: Guy Pollock, the lawyer, the one civilized
man in the town, a victim to what he calls “the village virus”, Raymie
Wutherspoon, the shoe clerk, with his futile yearnings toward sweetness and
light; Erik Alborg, the tailor’s assistant, with a spark, but only a spark, of the
true fire. Not the least tragic, denying them possibility of healthy growth,
condemning them to ineffectuality if not to freakishness. The rebels are as
badly off as the conformists; for in a society in which the bread of life is
nowhere to be found, the few isolated seekers for it are in a hopeless
situation, foredoomed to being stunted and distorted both by lack of
nourishment and by the hostility of their environment.

In Babbitt, Lewis once again dramatized his familiar subject of the
person who longs for self-fulfillment but whose environment enslaves him
and prevents him from finding freedom. Compared to Carol Kennecott,
however, Babbitt is a much more frustrated individual, and the moderate
optimism Lewis reveals at the end of Main Street in no much in evidence at
the end of Babbitt. To Lewis, Babbitt is doomed: he is both the product and
the victim of a culture of conspicuous consumption and boosterism. He is a
forty-six year-old realtor who leads a standardized and utterly conventional life; he is aware of the spiritual emptiness of his existence and desires a more meaningful one but does not know how to achieve it. Lewis established the hollowness of Babbitt’s life on the first page of the novel: as the story opens, Babbitt is awaking from a dream about fairy six chapters, through a beckons to him. We then follow him, for the first six chapters, through a typical day in his life. In scene after scene, Lewis shows us that although Babbitt owns and expensive car, lives in an ultramodern house, belongs to the right club, attends an impressive church, and succeeds as a businessman and social climber, he is not satisfied. Yet he continues to act the way his acquaintances expect him to act. Babbitt’s complacency is shattered when his best friend Paul Riesling becomes so enraged at the pointlessness of his own existence that he has a nervous breakdown and attempts to murder his wife. Babbitt then rebels against his own life.27

Babbitt was a realistic picture of the American society 1920s, the Materialistic was the dominant print of every aspect of their life, and people were so concerned about machine and about comfortable life more than the real meaning of life. There were no values and ethics at those days, the main aim was to live up to the standard of life and to have all the devices (branding) that make them feel better. It was the best of nationally and 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”.28

The individual were totally mad of having the new devices and as Babbitt was so proud of being awakened by a brand and rich device. Lewis
and in a very realistic and smart was wanted to show us the materialistic of
the American society and how that society has made the possessing such a
“rich device” is so basic in life. The Babbitt’s house was five years old. It
was all as competent and glossy as this bedroom. It had the best of taste, the
best of inexpensive rugs, simple and laudable architecture with the latest
conveniences.29

One more time Lewis wanted to reflect the American society and that
society had made his chief aim in life to have perfect materials of flats,
devices and cars more than anything else and that was a result of the social
changes after the WW1, the society had lost a lot of its ethics and values and
that’s why there was a struggle inside the society and inside the core of the
society which is the family. Throughout the chapters of Lewis’s Babbitt we
are going to examine a various kind of struggle amongst Babbitt’s family
member as well as the other characters of the novel. That struggle was out of
a failure of social transactions amongst them.

The social transactions amongst Babbitt’s family members were
impossible since the way of thinking of each member is quite different than
the other as we are going to see that in the below quotation of the way of life
that both Babbitt’s daughter Verona as well as his son Ted wanted to have,
“I know what she wants! - all she wants is to marry a millionaire, and live in
Europe, and hold some preachers hand, and simultaneously at the same
time stay right here in Zenith and be some blooming kind of a socialist
agitator or boss charity- worker or some damn thing! Lord and Ted are just
as bad! He wants to go to college, and he doesn’t want to go to college.”30
What he had in fact written as a tour de force in which he simply document
the transformation of traditional American political and social customs into
their opposites.31
The traditional way of thinking of the American society had completely changed into a new way of thinking that does not have any relationship to the other one, those young people were so mad about money and superficialism of life. They had no interest to in education as we have seed with Ted, and were more concerned of being rich people, having a lavish life. The struggle between Babbitt and his family was out of not having social transactions; the different way of thinking as well as the lifestyle has made a huge gap between the two generations. When Verona and Ted were gone and Tainka upstairs, Babbitt groaned to his wife:

Nice family, I must say! Don’t pretend to be any baa- lamb, and maybe I’m a little cross- grained at breakfast sometimes, but the way they go on jab- jabbering, I simply can’t stand it. I swear, I feel like going off some place where I can get a little peace. I do think after a man’s spent his lifetime trying to give his kids a chance and decent education, it’s pretty discouraging to hear them all the time scrapping like a bunch of hyenas and never- and never- Curious here in the paper it says- Never silent for one mom.32

Babbitt was too helpless towards the way of thinking of his family, from the above conversation with his wife we could examine the kind of struggle that he had with his daughters as well as his son. The plan that he had already made for their future and all the sacrifices throughout his life went in vain in the face of materialistic way of thinking. Babbitt was too upset and he confessed that he can’t stand them anymore!! Babbitt was unhappy with his family that he has achieved everything in his life but still he could not find himself that feeling was out of being inside a family who has a quite point of view of life, quite different way of thinking and resulted to impossibility of social transactions. He observed:
I’ve pretty much done all the things I ought to; 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 specially, except smoking - and I’m practically cutting that out, by the way. And 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 that I’m entirely satisfied.\textsuperscript{33}

Babbitt reflects more fully on awakening that he detested the grind of the real-estate business, and disliked his family and disliked himself for disliking them.\textsuperscript{34} Babbitt was not happy and satisfied with all of his life, being with home was making him feel more depressed and more uncomforted. The social transactions and understanding the around society including the family is very essential to have a static and happy life, that’s why Babbitt and more than one time he said that he is not happy and can’t stand his family or life anymore. The house fails because it is so full of the goodies that form middle-class standards of tested, comfort and culture that uses the word home to evaluate their loss. The terms of his critique affiliate it with the values he claims to be repudiating.\textsuperscript{35}

Babbitt is simply subject to an unappeasable restlessness because “home” for him is always only a simulacrum of a thing he hasn’t got. Seeking a material success and standardization of the American society 1920s had made Babbitt as an individual away of the real meaning of life and away of the values. Babbitt had double struggle with himself and his entire society; he was searching of himself in a shattered family and in a hollow society. He cannot escape from places that remind him of what he has left behind and thus of what he has not yet found; he is perpetually in a position to realize that he has still to come home. What he had in fact written
as a tour de force in which he simply document the transformation of traditional American political and social customs into their opposites.\textsuperscript{36}

Babbitt is seen as no more than a single member of the society he lives in—a matter far more difficult to handle, obviously, than any mere character sketch. His every act is related to the phenomena of that society. It is not what he feels and aspires to that moves him primarily; it is what the folks about him will think of him. His politics is communal politics, mob politic, herd politics; his religion is a public rite wholly without subjective significance; his relations to his wife and his children are formalized and standardized.\textsuperscript{37}

The issue of Babbitt was not an individual issue, but was an entire society issue, that’s why Babbitt had to face it everywhere, with family at home, at work and at the social places. The standardization of the America 1920s had made the society main goal how to live up to it and creates social issues inside the society. The common thought and believes have become quite weird for the new generations, the stylish life and Superficialism were their concerns, they were too selfish and more concerned about money, such a society without any real value has to be a hollow and an empty one. This kind of immersion into the life of his projected books has led critic to term Lewis a kind of literary sociologist of American life.

Underlying Babbitt’s conformity, however, is a restless sense of the emptiness of his life, which grows more pronounced, and leads, as emptiness of his life, which attempts at escape - camping trips to the Maine wood, half-hearted efforts at romance, flirtations with leftist cause.\textsuperscript{38}

The reader of Babbitt who is alert to the traditions and practices of literary realism in the American social novel soon discovers that there is an important sense in which Lewis characteristically diverges from realism’s
standards. There are several significant departures from realism in the passage. The reader of Babbitt can experienced the reality of the American society 1920S, can go deep inside the American family and live with the individual during that decade, Babbitt as a character was not facing an individual issue, but he was a case study had been studied in a very realistic way by Lewis, to see the real kind of conversation amongst them and how the changes affected not only their life style but also their way of thinking, their ethics and believes. Babbitt is their archetype. He is no worse than most and no better; he is the average American of the ruling minority in this hundred and forty-sixth year of the Republic. He is America incarnate, exuberant and exquisite.

Babbitt is seen as no more than a single member of the society he lives in a matter far more difficult to handle, obviously, than any mere character sketch. His every act is related to the phenomena of that society. It is not what he feels and aspires to that moves him primarily; it is what the folks about him will think of him. His relations to his wife and his children are formalized and standardized. What he feels and thinks is what it is currently proper to feel and think. He has been rolled through the mill. He emerges the very model and pattern of a forward-looking, right-thinking Americano. They reveal something; they mean something. I know of no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of a high order.

Sinclair Lewis has depicted a very realistic picture of the American society by introducing the character Babbitt, Paul his close friend was for Babbitt the genuine human being who doesn’t follow the standardization of the American society 1920s, Babbitt could find himself with Paul more than anyone else even more than his own family because he could have a social
transactions with him, even though Paul was unhappy in his life because of his wife Zila and we could examine that more than one time though out the chapters of the novel *Babbitt*, “I ought to have been a fiddler, and I’m a peddler of tarooﬁng! And Zilla Oh, I don’t want to squeal, but you know! As well as I do about how inspiring a wife, she is.”

The issue of Paul with his wife was the same struggle of every individual in the American society, the issue of the social transactions. Zila could not understand Paul and Paul could not understand her as well and that results into a big issue between them which ends into the poisoning of Paul as we are going to see in the novel. Lewis is careful to emphasize that Paul is a misﬁt whose sensitivity, lack of business acumen and inability to endure his wife are incompatible with the standardized business world of Zenith. Indeed, the satirist seems eager to stress that Paul represents the genuine side of Babbitt that cannot conform to his outward life:

Love to look earnest and inform the world that it’s the duty of responsible business men to be strictly moral, as an example to the community; in fact you’re so earnest about morality, old Georgie, that I hate to think how essentially immoral you must be underneath. All right, our can’t talk about morals all you to, old thing but believe me, if it hadn’t been for you and an occasional evening playing the violin to Terrill O’ Farrell’s cello, and three of four darling girls that let me forget this beastly joke they call respectable life’ I’d have killed myself years ago.

All other relationships fade, however, in comparison to Babbitt’s one worthwhile relationship, with the one person around whom Babbitt feels truly and consistently happy. Paul Riesling is not only Babbitt’s best friend; he represents all that is genuine and valuable in Babbitt’s life, a fact that
Babbitt himself acknowledges after Paul is given a three-year prison sentence, later on Paul is going to shot his wife and got poisoned: “Babbitt returned to his office to realize that he faced a world which, without Paul, was meaningless.” With Paul “dead” to him, Babbitt loses the only person around whom he can express his real thoughts and be silent and calm, and he can no longer face his family or the business world. Babbitt is willing to perjure himself for Paul, ignoring the effect this would have on his career and social status. Paul’s imprisonment sparks a major mid-life rebellion in which Babbitt overturns nearly all of his beliefs and habits to escape his now “meaningless” existence.

The meaninglessness of the American society had been portrayed more than one time and though out the conversations of Babbitt family member which shows the hollowness of the American society impossibility of social transactions amongst them. In the below quote we are going to examine the different way of thinking between Babbitt from one side and his family from the other side and we are going to examine the failure social transactions amongst them, “Sort o’ thinking about buying a new car. Don’t believe we’ll get one till next year, but still, we might.”

Verona, the older daughter, cried “Oh, Dad, if you do, why you don’t get a sedan? That would be perfectly slick! A closed car is so much more comfy than an open one, “Well now, I don’t know about that. I kind of like an open car, you get more fresh air that way.” “Oh, shoot, that’s just because you never tried a sedan. Let’s get one It’s got a lot more class,” said Ted. “A closed car does keep the clothes nicer,” from Mrs. Babbitt; you don’t get your hair blown all to pieces, from Veron; “It’s a lot sportier,” from Ted; and from Tinka, the youngest, Oh, let’s have a sedan! Mary
Ellen’s father has got one. “Ted wound up, “Oh, everybody’s got closed car now, except us!”

Babbitt faced them: “I guess you got nothing very terrible to complain about! Anyway, I don’t keep a car just to enable you children to look like millionaires! And I like an open car, so you can put the top down on summer evenings and go out for a drive and get some good fresh air. Besides- A closed car costs more money,” “Aw, gee whiz, if the Doppelbraus a year’s afford a closed car, I guess we can!” prodded Ted. “Humph! Make eight thousand a year to his seven! But I don’t blow it all in and waste it and throw it around, the way he does! Don’t believe in this business of going and spending a whole lot of money to show off.”

Thorough out the above quote which is a conversation between Babbitt, his son Ted and his daughter Verona about selecting a new car to be bought. The conversation has depicted the various way of thinking amongst the three of them, while Babbitt was thinking of some open car to save some money, the son and daughter were thinking how to follow the standardization of the American society 1920s and buy a closed car!! The variety of the way of thinking and life style has created a big issue and that leads to a big gap in the way of thinking which results to the failure of social transactions among each other. They could not understand each other and they could not make each other understood, the society has become quite different and those who don’t follow the new way of thinking as well as the new life style, it has become a very difficult for them to accommodate themselves in the new society with the new ethics ideas and life style.

In the city of Zenith, in the barbarous twentieth century, a family’s motor indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family- indeed, more precisely,
considering the opinion of old country families upon newly created brewery barons and woolen-mill viscounts. There was no court to decide whether the second son of a Pierce Arrow limousine should go in to dinner before the first son of a Buick roadster, but of their respective social importance there was no doubt; and where Babbitt as a boy had aspired to the presidency, his son Ted aspired to a Packard twin-six and an established position in the motored gentry.  

Such a kind of life style and car type were very essential in those days in the American society, throughout the car type and life style someone can be classified, that’s why those people were so concerned about money and materialism. The superficial society has created its own standardizations which are to be followed by the society members. Babbitt was not happy with his entire life even though he could achieve all what he wants. Babbitt’s significance does not end with its realism and satire. The book’s unusual success also lies within the character of Babbitt himself, which reveals something more than can be conveyed through realistic. Babbitt, said Lewis, “is all of us Americans at forty-six, prosperous but worried-passionately-to seize something more than motor cars and a house before it’s too late…He would like for once the flare of romantic love, the satisfaction of having left a mark on the city, and let-up in his constant warring on competitors… I want to make Babbitt big in his real-ness, in his relation to all of us, not in the least exceptional, yet dramatic, passionate, struggling.”

The new generations were more concerned about money and materialism more than anything else, their chief aim was how to live up to the standard of the society, how to have money, cars, new devices and how to get high positions than each other by any way and by any means, they didn’t care about education and were interested in that, that what exactly
Babbitt faced with his son Ted, while Babbitt had planned some bright future for Ted, he has no interest at all in education and he was more concerned about cars and business, Ted, “I don’t see why they give us this old- fashioned junk by Milton and Shakespeare and Wordsworth and all these has- beens,” he protested.⁴⁶

For Ted the education was nothing more than waste of time for nothing, as we have mentioned earlier that Babbitt was planning to send him to a law school but he has no interest at all in education. We could examine the cross way of thinking between Babbitt and Ted and that’s why there was no social transactions between them. The education for the new generations was simply an old fashion and junk, out of belonging to a materialistic society the chief interest of those people was simply the money and nothing else and that’s why the education was of no value for them.

Babbitt’s discontent and restlessness are crucial but still barely acknowledged features of his archetypal figuration; indeed, as the novel unfolds, they almost replace standardization as the standard market of his middle classiness. In the Real Estate Board address, Babbitt publicly delights in all the material advantage of his class. He boasts that “it’s the fellow with four to ten thousand a year, say, and an automobile and a nice little family in a bungalow on the edge of town that make the wheels of progress go round!

Babbitt’s protest expresses an accurate sense of his advantages and the prerogatives of his social position, but they are now invoked as the conditions of his dissatisfaction. Babbitt is “discontented about nothing and everything because he has achieved everything that comes to be associated with the good life. The nature of his discontents differentiates him from the stereotype of the perpetually ungratified consumer, who could be soothed
only by further acquisitions, according to modern advertisers and their critics, as well as from Daniel Horowitz’s illuminating account of the deeply gratified consumer, for whom a higher standard of living also involved “the pursuit of ‘higher’ goals.”

Babbitt could not thorough out the chapter of the novel adjust himself to the people around him of his family as well as his society. The challenge of being middle class, for Lewis, is to enjoy the trap, not to escape it, to feel sorry for oneself as one struggles in and benefits from Babbitt’s inability to find his “real home” is the function of a productive rather than debilitating disequilibrium that demands the feeling, if not the fact, of dispossess.ion. The suburb highlights the contradictions of white middle-classiness in Babbitt; as the place where his material advantages are most palpable, it is almost automatically converted into the site of his oppression. And even if he really wanted to abandon it, there is no other place for the tired, homeless businessman to go.

Mr. Lewis’s chief effort is going after the scalps of the dragons. This he achieves with enormous success. I don’t believe anyone has his particular talent for describing the relentless glad handedness of the launchers at the Athletic Club of Zenith, nor the grotesque, silly emptiness and self-conceit of the Realtors’ delegations as they assemble at the railway station. Mr. Lewis does this sort of thing extraordinarily well, though one wonders why one so seldom laughs at these caricatures; until one notices that he himself is not so much laughing at these ridiculous people as trying with all his might to kick the life out of them. He enjoys mimicking them so hugely that he does it a great deal too much, and the people whose speech he mimics seem all to draw their talk from the same source. It is an inexhaustible source: page after page of the book is spread thick with the same composite of slang,
repetition, triviality and crude generalization. “In Zenith it was necessary for a Successful Man to belong to a country club as it was to wear a linen collar Babbitt’s was the Outing Golf and Country Club.”

The hollowness of the American society was in every aspect of life, superficiality was the goal of the society members, being a member in the country club was something very essential and important, as we have mentioned that the American society was so mad about the show up life and they had forgotten their real value of life and that’s why there was a depression and alienation inside the society itself and among the people themselves as Babbitt had during his life, he got a depression and alienation at home and outside as well and that’s why he was not happy and he could not feel home. The society has its own standard which a successful man has to follow blindly, that standard has nothing more than show up life and selfishness. The people were becoming more concerned about money as far as more alienated from each other and have no social transactions.

In the Sinclair Lewis novel, Babbitt, the main character is a man who lives his whole life under the presumption that the only way to be happy is to follow society. Daily, he walks the path of right-wing social law, believing that only wealth can bring him happiness. Babbitt eventually makes an effort to change his ways, but is too deep into the system to pull him from the lifeless abyss of proper society.

George F. Babbitt lives in a society that prohibits creativity at the cost of wealth, but grants only supposed happiness. Every block that has made up his life has been affected by the pressure of conformity. Success in relationships, family, social life, and business are all based on his ability to conform to Zenith’s preset standards of thought and action. Everything that Babbitt did was a reflection of what society told him to be.
At first *Babbitt* is portrayed as a person happy with conforming to the standards set for him by the rest of society. He is repeatedly found talking about modern technology, material possessions and social status as ways to measure the worth of an individual. The first of their occurrences comes early in the book when Babbitt boasts about his luxurious alarm clock. “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.”

All of Babbitt’s actions and thoughts are controlled by the standards of those around him. He does not act because it was what he is inspired to do; he acts for the acceptance of the rest of Zenith. Babbitt does everything expected of him by others because he hopes to improve his social status. By doing this, he moves quickly up the rungs on the ladder of success, feeling hollow happiness as he accomplishes the social goal of getting richer and richer.

Babbitt’s first attempt at rebellion is that he changes his political outlook and joins the political crusade of Seneca Doane. Next, Babbitt supports the telephone girls and linemen in a strike. Babbitt’s attempt at rebellion leaves his colleagues frowning upon him and talking behind his back. His next act to rebel against the system was to disregard his wedding ring and start an affair. He takes comfort in an old friend, Tanis Judique, a member of a wild group called “the bunch”. Babbitt tries to convince himself that he is happier living a life of non-conformity. However, because he chose methods of rebellion that were so radical to society, he became like a leper among his friends. Babbitt loses many friends because of his non-
conformist actions, and is cast out by the rest of conformist society. Even in his highly non-conformist ways, Babbitt still finds himself unhappy.

Sinclair Lewis, the author of *Babbitt*, devised several key literary elements to explain his full effect and purpose for writing his novel. Babbitt is a satirist look at not only one man, but an entire society as well. He exposes the hypocrisy and mechanization of American Society in the 1920’s. In the novel Lewis focuses on his main character Babbitt, the protagonist throughout much of the book, who is a businessman with lofty aims and a desire to climb the ladder of the social class. To fully achieve his opinions and beliefs, Lewis used the literary effects of irony and theme.

The novel begins in the 1920, a decade that had started in economic boom and avid consumerism, only to end in crash and depression. This was a parallel used by Lewis to illustrate the theme of the story. Lewis was trying to show that materialism and shallow attitudes of the middle class of America in the 1920’s. Lewis blatantly criticizes his own characters to get his point across. Here Lewis writes, “He hadn’t any satisfaction in the new water cooler! And it was the very best of water coolers, up to date, scientific, and right thinking. It had cost of great deal of money. This quote reflects Babbitt’s excitement about material items and how those items mirror his position in society. Babbitt’s morals and values were full of holes, which is what Lewis wanted to point out. He had chosen to satirize Babbitt as living in a fairytale world, oblivious to what was really going on around him.

Sinclair Lewis achieved the full effect in which he was aiming at. He showed the tragic downfall of a generation too consumed in their own egos to ever realize what was going on around them. The effect of Babbitt made the public realize what the American Middle Class was like in the 1920’s and how they eventually lost everything.
As we have earlier mentioned that Babbitt’s close friend was not happy with his wife out of not having a social transactions between each other since they have a quite different way of thinking, Paul has shot his wife and got sentence of three years imprisonment. Sinclair Lewis wanted to show us the effect of the new changes on the American society and how that made it so hollow from inside, the new materialistic society was simply hollow and without any values and ethics and that’s why Lewis has depicted and more than one time the dangerous of such issue on the society and the basic core of it which is the family.

Babbitt after losing his best friend was too lost and down, Babbitt started thinking of quitting his entire life and simply leaves everything and never come back. Paul was not simply a friend for Babbitt but he was a genuine human being for him, Babbitt could see what he wanted to be in reality, but Babbitt could not be so because of the standardization of the society. Babbitt didn’t want to live as a normal man and simply be like Paul even though deep inside himself he wanted to, but the standardizations of a successful man forced him to quite different than he wants.

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Babbitt_

might be read as the story of a man approaching old age- the male menopause - and having a last fling. Typically he becomes dissatisfied with his daily routine, his work his friends, his home and family. He almost inevitably seeks an illicit relationship which will restore the sense of life’s danger and adventure he had as a youth and reassures him that he is still sexually attractive. He rejects the values, and tries to return to the values and ideals of his youth.  

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In brief, Babbitt is seen as no more than a single member of the society he lives in—a matter far more difficult to handle, obviously, than any mere character sketch. His every act is related to the phenomena of that
society. It is not what he feels and aspires to that moves him primarily; it is what the folks about him will think of him. Babbitt’s relations to his wife and his children are formalized and standardized; even his debaucheries are the orthodox debaucheries of a sound business man. The salient thing about him, in truth, is his complete lack of originality—and that is precisely the salient mark of every American of his class. What he feels and thinks is what it is currently proper to feel and think.... We can even assure that there is no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of a high order.

Among the most tragic things which have happened to Babbitt is his loss of capacity for pleasure. He who seeks so ardently for recreation, for entertainment in culture which has never been more materially conducive to pleasure cannot really be entertained.

At the same time Lewis realized and attacked the power of things in American life, he admired the ingenuity of those things, the technology which made them, and the operation and power of the system which markets them. Utterly to damn Babbitt would have meant to damn America.

The Roaring Twenties were characterized by a unique fashion and style among American Youth. Clothing aided peers in identifying one another. Style marked the social status and was used to determine which groups and clubs a student belong to. Often, fashion and style followed current fads. Young men and women conformed to these fads and were commonly seen in the public domain. Young women did not dress as the previous generation. Youth challenged pervious cultural norms and impacted modern society. Young people turned to new leaders and values and sought unorthodox dress, recreations, and morals.
Statistics do show that both sexual promiscuity and the consumption of alcohol increased among the young during this decade. This revolution was greatly aided by the availability of the automobile, which allowed young people to get away from the prying eyes of parents. Margaret Sanger and others promoted the increased availability and usage of birth control during this period.\textsuperscript{50}

The traditional bastions of American morality lamented these developments, and especially criticized the new dances and college students’ proclivity for drinking and smoking. These critics, however, soon found themselves facing much larger opposition as the older generations began to adopt some of the socially liberated practices of their children. The emancipation of women during the post-war decade was very much a part of the great social change that America experienced. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote, many female leaders thought that women would come to have a pronounced role in American political life. Much to their disappointment, this did not occur in the 1920s. Women did not vote in a block “as women.” Yet, the overall position of women did increase in the decade. Divorces increased throughout the decade, showing that more women (and men) were leaving unhealthy married relationships. The number of women working during the decade also increased, although working women were usually single. Restrictions remained, however. Women seldom received the same pay for doing the same work as men, and women were almost never put into management positions. Most women still worked in clerical jobs, as teachers, or as nurses.

In the late 1910s during World War I attitudes were more tolerant towards working women as their husbands were off fighting to defend their country. However in the 1920s attitudes changed after the war ended. With
the return of male workers, women were expected to quit their jobs. Women attended college in the 1920s, albeit not in the large numbers characteristic of modern times. The society did not expect women to aspire to professions other than teachers and nurses. According to Cornell women’s historian Cynthia Grant Bowman, an education didn’t necessarily mean a job. As women graduated and began to apply for jobs they often encountered disappointment in finding out those employers -- who were mostly men -- did not take them seriously as applicants.

Homemaking was still a large part of life in the 1920s for women. Society expected women to clean, cook, and produce and raise children. According to Professor Lynn Dumenil the ads for home appliances targeted women specifically, and almost anytime advertisers produced radio commercials or print ads their aim was to let women know how their new products would make life as a housewife better.

All women did not simply submit to the social mores of the day and an underlying rebellion of the status quo was occurring. The 1920s saw significant change in the lives of working women. World War I had temporarily allowed women to enter into industries such as chemical, automobile, and iron and steel manufacturing, which were once deemed inappropriate work for women. Black women, who had been historically closed out of factory jobs, began to find a place in industry during World War I by accepting lower wages and replacing the lost immigrant labor and in heavy work. In the job market women flourished in the arts and entertainment fields. Zora Neale Hurston copyrighted her first play, “Meet the Mama,” in 1925. Two years later Dorothy Arzner directed her first film, Fashions for Women, and in 1929 Mildred Wirt signed a contract to write her first three Nancy Drew mysteries. The “flapper” movement challenged
the paradigm of the morally pure woman, who shunned alcohol and tobacco and remained refined.

A generational gap began to form between the “new” women of the 1920s and the previous generation. Prior to the 19th Amendment, feminists commonly thought that women could not pursue both a career and a family successfully, believing that one would inherently inhibit the development of the other. This mentality began to change in the 1920s as more women began to desire not only successful careers of their own but also families. The “new” woman was less invested in social service than the Progressive generations, and in tune with the capitalistic spirit of the era, she was eager to compete and to find personal fulfillment.51

The popular image of young women of the 1920s was the “flapper”, a young, pretty woman with bobbed hair and raised hemlines. She drank alcohol, she smoked, she thought for herself, and she took advantage of women’s new freedoms. However, the flapper lived more in the media than in reality. The flapper figured in movies, magazines, advertising, and novels, such as those of F. Scott Fitzgerald. The flappers were essentially, “liberated women”. George Mowry in his anthology The Twenties sums up the essence of the flapper as a woman who demands “the same social freedom for herself that men enjoyed”. He goes on to state how their existence shaped new industries in cosmetics and beauty, providing the “prop” for a new mass consumer society.52

Many advertisements of the 1920s portrayed women as sex objects; as a result, in the eyes of many Americans, women lost their respected position as moral leaders of the family. All of these things were frowned on in rural/small-town America and in pre–World War I urban America. According to Dumenil, society was still hostile towards women who worked
for personal fulfillment rather than dire need. Although they had gained the right to vote, the prevailing attitude was that women should settle back home and quietly care for their husbands and children.

Possibly the greatest satirist of his age, Lewis wrote novels that present a devastating picture of middle-class American life in the 1920’s. Although he ridiculed the values, lifestyles, and even the speech of his characters, there is often affection behind the irony. *The Job*, published in 1917, is considered one of the stepping stones towards Lewis’s success. It is considered as early declaration of the rights of women. The hero of the novel is actually a heroine: Una Golden, who desires to establish herself in a legitimate occupation while balancing the eventual need for marriage. The story takes place in the early 1900-1920”s and takes Una from a small Pennsylvania town to New York. Forced to work due to family poverty, Una shows a talent for the traditional male bastion of commercial real estate and, while valued by her company, she struggles to achieve the same status of her male coworkers. On a parallel track her quest for traditional romance and love is important but her unique role as a working woman, doing a man’s job, makes it tough to find an appropriate suitor.

The novel was published before Lewis achieved any significant fame and provides insights on working women as well as the unique nature of having a woman as the lead character. The novel ends, not with Una unsuccessfully attempting to “juggle” two lives, but with her rise to the top while, at the same time, having the man of her dreams and planning for a child.

Mrs. Golden was ambitious, romantic, read novels, wrote poetry, just as the then women, who didn’t have much to do. She was discontented in her marriage as her husband is not romantic. She visited clubs, aspired to
learn French without putting in any efforts, didn’t participate in suffrage movement as “she didn’t ‘think it was quite ladylike. She is the perfect exemplary of the then women. Ideal wife and mother; accepted what she was given, the living conditions, limited rights, no say in any decisions. “She was in appearance, the ideal wife and mother-sympathetic, forgiving, bright-lipped as a May morning. She never demanded; she merely suggested her desires, and, if they were refused, let her lips droop in a manner which only a brute could withstand.”

After the death of Una’s father, herself and her mother lead life like a typical widow mother and jobless daughter, who live and endure a tasteless, unambitious, passionless life just “because mother has never been trained to endure the long, long thoughts of solitude; because she sees nothing in herself, and within herself hears no diverting voice…” Like a typical citizen of 1920’s, Una wanted to earn and lead a lavish life. She decides to go to New York on the invitation of Mrs. Sessions, her acquaintance from Panama. “There would be no dusty winds in New York, but only mellow breezes over marble palaces of efficient business.” Like a typical woman of 1920’s, she wanted to have a smart, intelligent, rich husband. “No Henry Carsons, but slim, alert business men, young of eye and light of tongue.” She realizes that her mother had never got a chance to work hard for what she wanted. So she took up studies again and learned “the art of business” so as to fulfill her dreams.

The women of the 1920’s had got used to their weary, boring lives. They didn’t like to get out of their comfort zone, where they were exploited every day. When Una was looking for a place to live in after her mother’s death, she met many landladies. She pitied them all. “They were so patient, in face of her evident distaste. Even their suspiciousness was but the
growling of a beaten dog. They sighed and closed their doors on her without much attempt to persuade her to stay. Her heart ached with their lack of imagination. They had no more imagination than those landladies of the insect world, the spiders, with their unchanging, instinctive, ancestral types of webs.”

Mrs. Lawrence, her roommate, thinks there is no difference between man and woman. She says, “I know that a woman needs a man just the same as a man needs a woman.” She is an outrageous woman, unlike the contemporary women. She does what she likes. She herself gave her freedom as she knew she would be bound if she permits someone else to do that. She met men, partied with them, but controls them but at the same time, she lamented for real love.

Unlike the world outside, where people make discriminations on the basis of social status, gender, wealth, the “comradeship” of the women at the Home Club “was very sweet, quite real; the factional lines were not drawn according to salary or education or family, but according to gaiety or sobriety or propriety.” Since Una came here to live, she was confident, lively, happy, content, felt at home in the New York that she once despised. She got married to Mr. Shwirtz and became unhappy. She was scared and dreaded him and his ways of expressing love “She hadn’t realized a woman can die so many times and still live.” “And she wanted to spare this man.”

Just as the then men, who didn’t like their wives to go out to work and be an ideal wife and stay home, Schwirtz expected to her to give away all her “virginal book-learned notions” after marriage and said, “A man’s a man, and the sooner a female gets on to that fact and doesn’t nag, nag, nag him, and lets him go round being comfortable and natural, the kinder he’ll be to her. He wanted all the freedom he could, what he thought was his right, and
restrained Una from doing what she wanted to do. She thought of suicide, often... oftener she thought of a divorce. But she couldn’t do both. She didn’t commit suicide as she still had hope that everything will be ok and couldn’t divorce him because of social obligations. She couldn’t cast him out. She had married him. It was hard for women to walk out of marriages then. She even drifted away from her friends as Shwirtz didn’t like her to be with them. A lady in her neighborhood, Mrs. Wade, a solid, slangy, contented woman with a child, got away with her husband as he didn’t work or support her. On the other hand, there is Una who was stuck to a husband about whom she felt nauseated and who spent extravagantly without earning a penny.58

As Una couldn’t make herself happy, as she couldn’t do anything in life, as she couldn’t help herself out of her failed marriage, as she couldn’t help but be a “quitter”, she decided “to work out her first definite philosophy of existence.”: “Life is hard and astonishingly complicated... on one great reform will make it easy. Most of us who work-or want to work-will always have trouble or discontent. So we must learn to be calm, and train all our faculties, and make others happy.”59 Drawing on his office experiences and the perspectives of Grace Lewis and other career-woman friends, Lewis painted a depressing picture of the life of a contemporary female office hand.

The novel focuses a lot on the issues of exploited workers, particularly women workers. This time period the question really is work vs. marriage since it was deeply frowned upon for a woman to do both. It is difficult for working women to find a mate because there is a stigma attached to working, part of the reason that Una makes a bad decision to marry the wrong man, Shwirtz. Lewis vividly describes the dullness and hopelessness
surrounding typical “women’s work” in the early 1900’s. In the world of business, women had no particular importance other than a typist. She tried her hand at too many jobs but none could suit her or hold her. She knew she will do well only in corporation/business. She tried her best in Panama, but in vain. The people, especially the men, discouraged her. She did not want to marry Henry Carson or be stuck with being a teacher. “I won’t be genteel! I’ll work in the Hub or any place first!” Business was arriving; was being perceived differently. Just as women. They were preparing, like Una, to enter the stage of the world. “And now, in this fumbling school, she was beginning to feel the theory of efficiency, the ideal of Big Business.”

She convinces herself that none of the rich boys should be her ambition. And that she should concentrate on her “commercial future.” She always gave her job more importance than love, even though she yearned for it. When she was married to Shwirtz, she decided to leave him rather than her job. Even at end, she makes it clear to Babson that she won’t quit her job. Una got a job as a stenographer, in *Motor and Gas Gazette*, a weekly magazine. Here, she “first beheld the drama and romance of the office world.” She considered herself as an important link in the business chain. She took keen interest in her monotonous work. But “she was alone; once she transgressed they would crush her.” Saying that they wanted to “reduce the force”, Una got fired from the job. But the fact was that “no one in the Gazette office believed that a woman could bear responsibilities,” After she handled the whole office when Mr. Wilkins was ill, she became confident. “She was not afraid of the office world now; she had a part in the city and a home.” Una not only worked in the office but also took interest in it, in real estate. The stenographers were so occupied and “so busy that they change from dewey girls into tight-lipped spinsters before they discover life.” They
become grim and because of their struggle to keep their jobs, they remain unmarried. They are first discouraged to work and even when they manage to get a job, they extract their lives from them. The business world is “an unreasonable world, sacrificing bird-song and tranquil dusk and high golden noons to selling junk—yet it rules us. And life lives there.” She knew what she wanted was tough. That it was hard to change the mind-set of the people that women couldn’t work or do business in particularly. But she had decided to go on, to fight, to survive, it’s hard. Women aren’t trusted in business, and you can’t count without responsibility. All I can do is keep looking. It was easy for men to blame their mistakes on women working for them. Mr. Wilkins was very untidy and undisciplined regarding the maintenance of his office. But he too, like the people of his generation, blamed his mistakes on the stenographers of his office. These stenographers are all alike—you simply can’t get ‘them to learn systems.”

Even if men and women do the same job, they were not treated alike. Women are a lot more conscientious on jobs than men are—but that’s because we’re fools; you don’t catch the men staying till six-thirty because the boss has shystered and wants to catch up on his correspondence. But we—of course we don’t dare to make dates for dinner, lest we have to stay late. We don’t dare! According to Mrs. Lawrence, there was “no chance for women” in office. According to her, men hired them not because they thought they were intelligent or efficient but because they had to pay them less than their male counterparts.

Una saw old women working in offices cry because of what they went through in the past and even at present: “homelessness and uselessness.” At, present, when the machines were supposed to save worker’s work, “the girls worked just as hard and long and hopelessly after their introduction as
before… she could not imagine any future for these women in business except the accidents of marriage or death—or a revolution in the attitude toward them.” She would get strength by looking at the failed women, determined not to end up like them; gathered courage and promised herself to revolt and “face mysterious power of nature-human nature,” which was essentially the nature of men; and make place for herself.

Not only men at office considered women as useless at work and kept them at lower status in the office, even their fathers and husbands didn’t support them. Shwirtz: “You women that have been in business simply ain’t fit to be married. You think you’re too good to help a man.” Una gathered strength to say that “Maybe, the business women will bring out a new kind of marriage in which men will have to keep up respect and courtesy… I wonder how many millions of women in what are supposed to be happy homes are sick over being chamber-maids and mistresses till they get dulled and used to it.” She said that it is silly of men to discuss such things as of suffrage and think that it is not worth it; instead of simply accepting “those women are intelligent human beings” and that they have the right to give their verdict on anything they want. In the new office she met Babson, who had to work under her. He decides to quit the job because he couldn’t work under a “woman boss”. He wants to marry her but cannot work as her assistant. Una was progressing in business. She quit her job and joins Whit Line Hotels chain and do real business. She thought that being friendlier with the employees and associates, to have open conversations rather than confuse them could benefit both. She also tried to enhance the working conditions of women at workplace.

The moment Una reached New York, where she thought her life would change; she experienced a great depression, hollowness inside. The
lights and glitter of the city could be seen only from far distance, being
there, was dreadful. “For five minutes Una was terrified by the jam of the
people, the blind roar through tunneled darkness, the sense of being
powerlessly hurled forward in a mass of ungovernable steel” The social
transaction taking place her is negative in nature. “Jam of people”, “blind
roar”, would have given a suffocated feeling to new person, but Una “grew
proud to be a part of this black energy.” She was consuming it all and knew
that all those things were going to be hers one day. “Oh, I want all this-it’s
mine! Though she liked Sanford for his childishness, she wanted to associate
herself with Sam Weintraub as he charmed her with his stories. “She tried
consciously to become a real New Yorker herself.” She never felt a part of
the New York. “Not as priest or judge does youth seek honor to-day, but as a
man of offices… And our heroine is important not because she is
representative of some millions of women in business, and because, in a
vague but undiscovered way, she keeps on inquiring what women in
business can do to make human their existence of loveless routine.” She
entered a restaurant with “a sensation of freedom and novelty.” The
restaurant was with new elegant, sophisticated look. But the food she
ordered lasted the same as in ordinary restaurants; the people around were
the same “horde of lonely workers who make up half of New York;” same
vacant people. Una loved the countryside. She couldn’t identify with it.
Could connect to it rather than the city life where, even though crowded, no
one was there for each other. My America-so beautiful! Why do we turn you
into stiffy offices and ugly towns? She promises herself and her mother that
she would work hard and earn money for her. “I want to earn real money for
you.”
A letter from her acquaintance, Mrs. Albert Session, gave her the push she needed. She invited Una to New York and Una determined to go there and achieve her ambition of becoming a successful business woman. Una is shown as a cog in a machine dedicated to efficiency. She was never satisfied with what she had. She was never satisfied with her efforts to achieve something when “most of the girls in the school learned nothing but shorthand and typewriting, Una added English grammar, spelling, and letter-composition. According to Babson, Una was not satisfied with her work. She wanted to do more with the work she had. Una kept her eyes and ears always open. She was not only learning the business and its tactics from the dreary lectures, but also from her surroundings and her fellow students.

Una is a very intelligent, bright, unique, competent woman. She always got appreciated by those men who appreciate hard work and working women. Phil Benson, her neighbor in the rented house, thought Una was different than other women. That she dreamed “about higher things than just food and clothes.” Babson, seeing the fire in her, always encouraged her. She came appeared to Mr. Sidney, the owner of White Line Hotels, as a “high-class genuine lady all the time.” Una questions herself whether she was the one who beared the entire harsh world alone, how she could marry a “man who lives by begging”, how could she be so pathetic and helpless after the entire struggle she had. “She more and more often invited an ambition to go back to work, to be independent and busy, no matter how weary she might become. To die, if need be, in the struggle. Certainly that death would be better than being choked in muck.” Captain Lew Golden was typical of his age against modernism, change and experimentation. He was used to his present conditions, didn’t want to experiment with new government or never wanted to get out of his comfort zone.
She was angry that she even thought of marrying a man like Babson, who didn’t have a strong social position, who didn’t earn much. She liked him initially, but when she came to know how much he earns, she was furious to even think of marrying such “a weakling.” It reflects the mentality of the society, where people wanted to have money rather than relationships. She also threw away Phil just because of his social status was not up to her level. She couldn’t communicate herself to him. She was always restrained. Finally she realized she didn’t want him. Woman’s place is in the home, but really, you know, these women going to offices, vulgarizing all their fine womanliness, and this shrieking sisterhood going in for suffrage and Lord knows what… none of them clever enough to be tragic!

According to Shwirtz, a woman must get married because she can’t manage to live alone, she can’t manage a job. Nice, bright woman like you sticking in the office! Office is no place for a woman. Home’s the place for a woman.” When he couldn’t find a work of his caliber, Shwirtz shamelessly accepted Una to work. But when he got work, he asked her to leave her job and sit at home. Una Golden, “good little woman”: intelligent, romantic; could control her feelings and passions; “an untrained, ambitious, thoroughly commonplace, small-town girl. But she was a natural executive.” This shows her temperament for her job. “She wanted to learn, learn anything. But the Goldens were too respectable to permit her to have a job, and too poor to permit her to go to college.” So she gave up and “read books from the town library.” These readings made her disbelieve in Panama, Pennsylvania. “She was likely never to be anything more amazing than a mother and wife.” But Una “was fluid, indeterminate as a moving close.” She never wanted to come across as a child. Her business-like glasses gave her a look that she was aspiring to become. She was even conscious of how she came across
men. She believed in the “village ideal” and “that a woman’s business in life was to remain respectable and to secure a man, and consequent security”, till she lost her father. “She took charge of everything—money, house and bills.”

As a middle class girl, Una was expected to be a teacher which she never wanted to be if she didn’t have to earn for livelihood. She taught for two terms and was disinterested in “masses of other people’s children nor had any ideals of developing the new generation.” She wandered about the opportunities she could have outside Panama. Henry Carson, a widower of three children, wanted to marry Una. But Una “was waiting for the fairy prince.” But they were none in Panama so she gave up the thought. If I were only a boy, I could go to work in the hardware-store or on the railroad, or anywhere, and not lose responsibility. Oh, I hate being woman.

This suggests that men had freedom to do what they wanted, to choose any work of their choice, whereas women could not. Una wanted to do a hardcore job too rather than the household “women” work. She was a free independent woman now. But she yearned to be a mother and also thought of adopting a child. Rather than submit to her domestic fate as women of her time were expected to, she leaves Shwirtz, returns to the job world, and becomes a successful businesswoman with help and inspiration from a sympathetically portrayed Jewish boss, Mr. Sidney (unusual in novels of that date) and a successful female mentor (also uncommon at the time). If a woman tries to help herself and get rid of all the shackles that bind her, if they take a firm stand, they can do whatever they want in life. If they communicate their desires and be firm on achieving them, people, especially men, would take them seriously. She promises herself and her mother that she would work hard and earn money for her. “I want to earn real money for you.
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alone, how she could marry a “man who lives by begging”, how could she be so pathetic and helpless after all the struggle she had. She more and more often invited an ambition to go back to work, to be independent and busy, no matter how weary she might become. To die, if need be, in the struggle. Certainly that death would be better than being choked in muck. There was no transaction in her life, no communication at all. She was longing to have someone to talk to, to share her emotions, to share her thoughts. She missed her father.

Sometimes Una herself moved away from people, as if she did not need to have any relation and transaction with them. She moved away from Henry Carson because she aspired to have a handsome and rich husband. She even discarded her mother sometimes when she was in love with Babson. She distanced the Sessiones because they didn’t talk her language. Finally, when she had no one left to talk to, she even had to get rid of the bird who was the only near and dear to her. Una is too worried about the kind of dress to wear. The dress, as if, communicates who she is. Mrs. Golden always wanted to go back to Panama as she had no one to communicate with. She wanted to go back to her place where people knew her. Babson “wanted to express himself without trying to find out what his self was.” She is interested in Babson and without reminding herself that he is not rich, she wants him to tell her straight about his interest.

“Mrs. Golden had lost all her adaptability.” Once people are deprived of human contact, initially, they try to work it out, but later they surrender and get adapted to their loneliness and don’t like to part from it. Then, social transactions become a burden. After Mrs. Golden’s death, Una felt a huge void in her life. When she had had with her, she did not care too much to spend time with her, to talk to her, but now when she had gone, she longed
and cried to talk to her. She repents that she could not love her enough. These gentle, inconsequential city waifs, the Grays, the failure, the library-woman, meant no more to Una than the crowds who were near, yet so detached, in the streets.

Una and Mrs. Lawrence, her room-mate in her new home, found friends in each other. Both fulfilled each other’s need of companionship. Mrs. Elizabeth welcomed Una into her room and her life. Come in with me, kid. Give me an audience to talk to. “The presence of so many possible friends gave her self-confidence and self-expression. She went to bed happy that night, home among her own people, among the woman who, joined to make possible a life of work in a world still heavy-scented with the ideals of the harem.”

Urbanites get so much absorbed in their daily chores of making money, that they have no time to talk to their friends, spend time with their loved ones or even keep in touch with their friends. While there was no social transaction in Una’s life, there was this office transaction always going on around her “the whirr” sound of the “voices of different typewriters … the ‘zzzzz’ of typewriter-carriages … the roll of closing elevator doors, and the rumble of the ascending elevator. The long burr of an unanswered telephone… the enveloping clatter of typewriters and the city roar behind that.”

She took up a new job “And she was rewarded, for the whole job was made fascinating by human contact. She felt herself enthusiastic about most of the people she met at Traux and Fein’s; she was glad to talk with them, to work with them, to be taken seriously as a brain, a loyalty, a woman. Her routine was just like before, very tedious and boring “but now her whole point of view was changed. Instead of looking for the evils of the business
world, she was desirous of seeing in it all the blessings she could. She filled the silence of her life with her own thoughts. “She was a woman now, and trained to fill the blank spaces of the deserted office with her own colored thoughts.

Social transactions are very necessary in doing business. And Una realizes it. “I’ve been learning that it’s silly to be silent in business. When “she had ‘succeeded on her job’, she needed someone to share the good news.” She had no one to talk or convey her feelings to even though she had achieved what she wanted from life. The Job was an impressive performance. Ahead of its time, it has been rediscovered by contemporary feminist scholars. This book was very controversial during its time, pushing women’s rights, dealing with anti-Semitism, and this novel was daring enough to mention alcoholism, venereal disease, divorce, adoption by a single women, and women who drink and smoke. Throughout dealing with all this, the main heroine, Una, still remains a proper Victorian lady.

4.3 SUMMARY:

During the first third of the twentieth century, Lewis was consciously exploring the choices and pressures that women felt personally and socially and yes, this fictional exploration still has relevance emotionally and politically because the choices for and pressures on women have not been significantly modified. Una Golden, an ambitious young woman from a dull, small town who arrives in New York City to seek significant love and someone to love. After training at a secretarial school, Una takes a series of difficult and unrewarding jobs. She meets Walter Babson, the prince of her dreams. But Walter, too, is a seeker, and, equally restless, he wanders westward, as many of Lewis’s heroes must. Then in desperation Una allows herself to be persuaded that a salesman named Juilus Schwirtz can give her
the kindness and companionship she yearns for. Schwirtz’s vulgarities surface after the marriage and Una divorces him. After returning to work as a real estate agent, she met Walter and decided to marry him.

4.4 REFERENCES:

2 *Id.*, at 28.
3 *Id.*, at 39.
4 *Id.*, at 40.
7 *Id.*, at 11.
8 *Id.*, at 21-22.
10 *Id.*, at 71.
11 *Id.*, at 77.
13 *Infra* note 21 at 49.
14 *Supra* note 12 at 78.
16 *Id.*, at 18.
18 *Id.*, at 73.
19 *Supra* note 17 at 105.
20 *Id.*, at 106.
22 *Supra* note 17 at 11.
23 *Supra* note 6 at 3.
24 *Id.*, at 5.
25 *Id.*, at 80.
26 *Supra* note 19 at 75.
28 *Infra* note 32 at 4.
29 *Id.*, at 16.
30 *Id.*, at 13.
31 *Supra* note 17 at 34.
33 *Id.*, at 66.
34 *Supra* note 21 at 52, 53.
35 Id., at 56.
36 Supra note 17 at 34.
37 Id., at 22.
38 Supra note 6 at 32, 33.
40 p. 7.
41 Id., at 8.
42 Supra note 28 at 67.
43 Id., at 70.
44 Id., at 80, 81.
45 Supra note 6 at 18.
46 Supra note 28 at 82
47 Supra note 21 at 58.
48 Supra note 32 at 170.
49 Supra note 12 at 82.
50 “Sinclair”,
54 Id., at 9.
55 Id., at 138.
56 Id., at 184.
57 Id., at 247.
58 Id., at 261.
59 Id., at 25. See also, Supra note 55 at 58.
60 Id., at 41.
61 Id., at 173.
63 Id., at 317.
64 Id., at 145.
65 Ibid.