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APPENDIX I

Biography of Sinclair Lewis



Harry Sinclair Lewis was born in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, on February 7, 1885, the third son of Edwin J. Lewis and Emma Kermott Lewis. His father, grandfather, and older brother were all small-town doctors. Lewis was a lonely, awkward boy who liked to read. He began writing while in high school, and some of his articles appeared in Sauk Centre newspapers. After high school Lewis left Minnesota to study at Yale University in Connecticut, interrupting his education in 1907 to work briefly at Helicon Hall, a New Jersey socialist colony (a group of people living and working together as equals for the benefit of all) set up by the writer Upton Sinclair (1878–1968). After his graduation in 1908, Lewis spent several years doing newspaper and editorial work in various parts of the United States. His first four novels were all unsuccessful.

In 1920 Lewis achieved instant worldwide recognition with the publication of *Main Street*, the story of a gifted young girl married to a dull, considerably older village doctor who tries to bring culture and imagination to empty, small-town life. Next Lewis focused on the American businessman in *Babbitt* (1922), perhaps his major work. Lewis purposely wrote in a fantastic

style, ignoring formal plot development or structure. The creation of George F. Babbitt, an intellectually empty, immature man of weak morals who nevertheless remains a lovable comic figure, is Lewis's greatest accomplishment. One critic remarked, "If Babbitt could write, he would write like Sinclair Lewis."

Lewis's next popular novel, *Arrowsmith* (1925), returned to the form of *Main Street* to portray a young doctor's battle to maintain his dignity in a petty, dishonest world. Despite its often simplistic look at science as a means of saving one's soul, *Arrowsmith* was offered the Pulitzer Prize. Lewis, however, immediately refused the honor because the terms of the award required that it be given not for a work of value, but for a work that presents "the wholesome atmosphere of American Life."

Elmer Gantry (1927), an extreme assault on religious hypocrisy (the false expression of the appearance of goodness), seems more concerned with the main character's morals than with the failings of organized religion. *Dodsworth* (1929), a sympathetic description of a wealthy, retired manufacturer seeking happiness in Europe, is more successful. Here Lewis makes little effort to hide his liking of, and even admiration for, the values described earlier in *Babbitt*. In 1930 Sinclair Lewis became the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, but this honor brought him little personal happiness.

Lewis produced a great deal of writing in the following years, but none of these works were as successful as his earlier efforts. *Ann Vickers* (1933) traces the career of an unstable woman who starts as a social worker and ends as the

mistress of a politician; *Cass Timberlane* (1945) deals with an unhappy marriage between a middle-aged judge and his loving wife; *Kingsblood Royal* (1947) takes on the subject of racial prejudice; and *The God-Seeker* (1949) tells the story of a New England missionary's attempts to convert the Native American Indians of Minnesota in the 1840s.

Lewis spent his last years traveling throughout Europe, unable to find publishers for his work and aware that his impact on American literature was far less than his early admirers had led him to believe. Lewis was overshadowed by other American writers, including Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) and William Faulkner (1897–1962), who had yet to appear when Lewis first attracted attention. Later critics also felt that the Nobel Prize Lewis had won in 1930 should have gone to the stronger novelist Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) instead.

Married and divorced twice, in Lewis's last years he retreated almost completely from other people. Increasingly self-conscious about his physical decline, he refused to be seen even by his few friends. He died on January 10, 1951, of a heart attack in a small-town clinic just outside of Rome, Italy. Although Lewis is not considered to have been a great writer, his place in the history of American literature is secure.

Source: <https://www.notablebiographies.com/Ki-Lo/LewisSinclair.html#ixzz6bwNkQcDv>

APPENDIX II

Synopsis of *Babbitt*

Babbitt is set in the modern Midwestern city of Zenith. George F. Babbitt, a 46-year-old real estate broker, enjoys all the modern conveniences available to a prosperous middle-class businessman, yet he is dissatisfied with his life. When the novel opens, Babbitt has begun to regularly indulge in fantasies about a fairy girl who makes him feel like a gallant youth. Babbitt's family consists of his three children, Verona, Ted, and Tinka, and his dowdy, devoted wife, Myra.

Babbitt's closest friend Paul Riesling is even more dissatisfied with his life. He is also more vocal about it. Although he dreamed of becoming a professional violinist in his youth, Riesling became mired in the life of the average middle-class businessman of his generation. His wife, Zilla, is equally unsatisfied with the monotonous, conventional routine of Zenith, but she vents her frustrations by constantly nagging Paul. Riesling has often spoken of divorcing his wife, but, like Babbitt's frequent declarations that he is going to quit smoking, he never follows through. Riesling and Babbitt try to ameliorate their dissatisfaction by taking a vacation in Maine together, but their enjoyment at their newfound freedom is short-lived. They eventually have to return to their lives as middle-aged married men. Both men experience a growing impulse to rebel against social conventions. When Babbitt discovers that Riesling is having an affair, he preaches the value of maintaining one's good social standing in the community. Riesling retorts that his life is miserable, so he doesn't feel guilty for seeking a little

comfort in the arms of another woman. Soon thereafter, Riesling and Zilla have another argument; Riesling snaps, shoots his wife, and subsequently receives a sentence of three years in the state penitentiary.

Babbitt is devastated by the loss of Riesling's steadying presence in his life. His own desire for rebellion comes to the surface when he realizes that he wants his fairy girl in the flesh. When the attractive widow, Tanis Judique, enters his life, Babbitt thinks he has found his fairy girl and begins an affair. At the same time, Babbitt becomes more critical of the conservative opinions of his friends. When the threat of a general strike hangs over Zenith, Babbitt ventures to support some of the claims of the strikers, shocking and alienating his social set. While Myra is away nursing her sick sister, Babbitt stays out late, drinking and partying with Tanis' bohemian friends.

Babbitt's friends do not fail to take notice of his rebellion. They attempt to coax him back into their inner circle, but Babbitt remains defiant. Upon her return to Zenith, Myra becomes suspicious of Babbitt's activities. When he finally admits to her that he is having an affair, he convinces her that it is her fault. However, Babbitt becomes disillusioned with Tanis when he realizes that in many ways, her life is just as conventional as his. Meanwhile, Babbitt's friends try to bully him into returning to his old ways. When Babbitt refuses to conform, they shun him, and his business begins to suffer.

When Myra falls seriously ill with appendicitis, Babbitt realizes that it is too late to become a rebel. He once again becomes a devoted husband and deeply regrets the pain he has caused his wife. Babbitt's friends offer their support during the crisis. Babbitt gratefully accepts the chance to resume his old life and quickly regains his respectable social status.

Meanwhile, when Ted shocks everyone by eloping with Eunice Littlefield, Babbitt takes him aside to speak with him privately. Although he wants Ted to go to college, Babbitt accepts that Ted himself wants to drop out and work as a mechanic. Babbitt explains to his son that he never did anything he wanted to do with his life. Therefore, he urges Ted to resist the heavy pressure to conform to the expectations of others. Babbitt acknowledges that it is too late for him to rebel, but Ted still has a chance to achieve happiness on his own terms.

Source : <https://sparknotes.com/lit/babbitt/summary/>