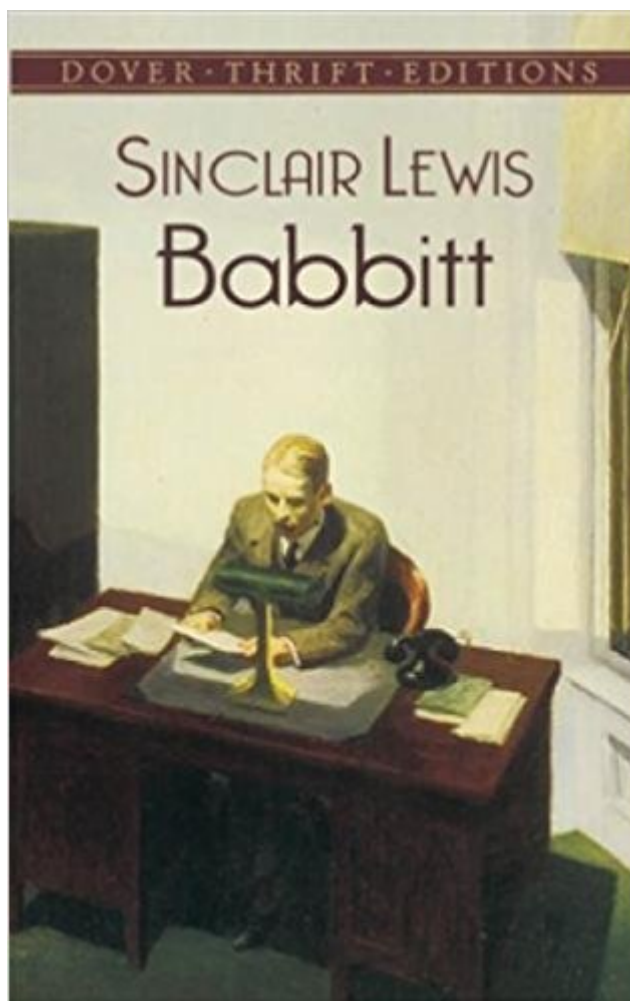


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Babbitt (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Prosperous and socially prominent, George Babbitt appears to have everything a man could wish: good health, a fine family, and a profitable business in a booming Midwestern city. But the middle-aged real estate agent is shaken from his self-satisfaction by a growing restlessness with the limitations of his life. When a personal crisis forces a reexamination of his values, Babbitt mounts a rebellion against social expectations – jeopardizing his reputation and business standing as well as his marriage. Widely considered Sinclair Lewis's greatest novel, this satire of the American social landscape created a sensation upon its 1922 publication. Babbitt's name became an instant and enduring synonym for middle-class complacency, and the strictures of his existence revealed the emptiness of the mainstream vision of success. His story reflects the nature of a conformist society, in which the pressures of maintaining propriety can ultimately cause individuals to lose their place in the world. Babbitt ranks among the important 20th-century works addressing the struggles of people caught in the machinery of modern life, and it remains ever-relevant as a cautionary tale against clinging to conventional values.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[It is] by its hardness, its efficiency, its compactness that Mr. Lewis' work excels." --Virginia Woolf
"Sinclair Lewis is one of the major prophets of our time." -- William Allen White, Pulitzer Prize winner
"Babbitt is an authentic modern American classic, a biting satire of middle-American values that retains much of its poignancy today." --Library Journal
"Mr. Lewis is a genius. . . an idealist, an

artist.” --London Observer”Sinclair Lewis is one of the major prophets of our time.” -- William Allen White, Pulitzer Prize winner ”Babbitt is an authentic modern American classic, a biting satire of middle-American values that retains much of its poignancy today.” --Library Journal”Mr. Lewis is a genius. . . an idealist, an artist.” --London Observer --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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I enjoyed Babbitt much more than I thought I would. It’s not easy at the start, as the reader gets thrown into a rah rah early 20th century American business environment in the fictional city of Zenith. There isn’t a whole lot of plot; it’s more a novel of characters, including, of course, George Babbitt. He initially appears to be a pumped-up, full of himself aspirant to the 1%. For a large portion of the book he says all the right things at various local community clubs and political events about squashing unions and rewarding the go-getters needed to get the country back on its feet after the first world war. He gets a reputation as an orator, and his real estate business prospers. But even as he becomes a leader in Zenith’s “boosterism”, underneath it all he yearns to slip away with the fairy child of his dreams: “He was somewhere among unknown people who laughed at him. He slipped away, ran down the paths of a midnight garden, and at the gate the fairy child was waiting. Her dear and tranquil hand caressed his cheek. He was gallant and wise and well-beloved; warm ivory were her arms; and beyond the perilous moors the brave sea glittered.” After a friend’s life takes a disastrous turn, Babbitt rebels and for a time searches for the fairy child among women of his acquaintance. He is reminded of his more liberal views when young, and begins to see his own rebellious son differently. The book was a huge success in its time, and in 1930 Lewis won the

Nobel Prize, the first American to do so. He writes really well, and more than once I thought this was what Updike was trying to do, with less success. *Babbitt* is a satire of crass American commercialism and superficial optimism, but the book also has a heart. "Babbitt" became a word in our lexicon defined as "'a person and especially a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards". To me, that definition is unfair, as Georgie Babbitt wasn't an unthinking conformist. He yearned for escape with the fairy child, but determinedly, with "pep", he tried to make the best of the hand he saw himself dealt. A four star read. (

Written in 1922, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* is remarkably timely. Its main character George Babbitt is a social climbing realtor in the fine town of Zenith. If you don't believe it's a fine town, just as old George. He spends the entire novel either patting himself on the back because he is one of the superior class of men in town, striving to be even better, or looking down on others less fortunate. George Babbitt thinks himself the rising star of Zenith society. But the problem is that he is only comfortably middle class. For all his wishing and hoping, his hanging in on rich parties, his reckless day spent in Chicago with a real English Lord, George is still just a semi-successful businessman. Now, back to why this is so timely. George Babbitt would fit right into the middle of today's Republican majority with his thumbing his nose at those not quite as successful as he, with his reverence for all things high society, and with his complete disdain for the common man. Lewis brilliantly paints a portrait of today's society, yet he was writing in the early 1920s. His use of racism, though most probably prevalent at that time, shows this disdain for the commoners that Babbitt and his compatriots have. But he doesn't stop with racism; he is disdainful of factory workers, stenographers, manicurists, and anyone else who is in a subservient position. Lewis uses a flowing, colloquial voice which fits his story perfectly: for all Babbitt's social climbing, he still poses as a common man. This is satire at its best, and good satire is relevant throughout the ages, for man's folly is ageless.

Sinclair Lewis has to be one of the "great" writers of all time. In *Babbitt* he describes an era using fictional characters to represent the times in which many changes were taking place in the social environment of our country. America was coming out of the rural age and into the age of technical development, and characters reflected the effects of these changes in Lewis' novel. Great reading, and an opportunity to reflect on an important stage in America's development.

No, this is not in the fast-paced style of Elmer Gantry. Instead it is the slow, plodding and revealing style that is reflective of most of Lewis's other works. Mr. Babbitt is the ultimate person of conformity. He has patterned his life after the 'Great American Dream' and, by doing so, finds himself as the ultimate Conservative, a staunch pillar of his community, a constant achiever and a people-pleaser at all costs. While attempting to live out this mundane, yet respected, life style Babbitt, like the restless human soul we all are, begins to challenge this lifestyle by living in the opposing manner of local mores in order to appease his unhappiness. While his needs and wants are more mindfully met in this arena he becomes highly disturbed that his public personae is becoming damaged by his supposed recklessness. After realizing that he cannot take the pleasures from both worlds at the same time he retreats back into the sanguine person he was. Destined to be unhappy by this move he, at novel's end, encourages his youngest son to go against the social mores that he tried to defeat and ultimately failed at.....

Sinclair Lewis does an outstanding job tracking a man's mid-life crisis and its effect on him and his family--probably 40 years before the phrase "mid-life crisis" was invented. Lewis is like Tolstoy in that his novel is a morality tale, in which the author has clear views of what makes, and breaks, human happiness. Even though I say it is predictable, it is well written and the plot is believable. He brings all of the major characters to life, and you understand their motivations, the reasons for their failings, and why they did or did not redeem themselves. Not the greatest novel ever written, just a good story with well developed characters and a great plot. It is definitely a worth read.

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