



## **Babbitt**

*Sinclair Lewis (February 7, 1885 – January 10, 1951)*

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Read by:	Mike Vendetti	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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There are brand names and titles that enter the language because of their ability to define an entity or action completely: bandaid, kleenex, and google come to mind. The dictionary defines a “babbitt” as a “person and especially a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards”. The word comes from the title character in the controversial 1922 bestseller *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis that satirized the middle-class conformity and boosterism of American society in the years following the First World War. George Babbitt is a realtor in the fictional mid-sized industrial city of Zenith in the Midwestern state of Winnemac, next to Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. The 1930 Nobel Prize committee described

Babbitt as “the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle-class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of faith, and without hesitation he considers it God’s purpose that man should work, increase his income, and enjoy modern improvements.” The book does not have a plot in the conventional sense. Instead it is simply a chronological sequence of scenes that unfold over a two year period during which the solid citizen and Booster club member becomes disillusioned by unexpected events, attempts to find meaning in unconventional and rebellious behavior, but returns to the fold when he faces ostracism and his wife becomes ill. He gives in but never completely forgets the unrealized dreams.

**Harry Sinclair Lewis** (February 7, 1885 – January 10, 1951) was an American author known for his novels and short stories of middle class American life between the World Wars. He was the youngest of three boys born and raised in the town of Sauk Center, Minnesota. He attended Oberlin Academy and Yale University, where he became editor of the Yale Literary Magazine. Following graduation in 1908 he wrote for magazines and newspapers, developing a gift for producing shallow but popular stories, and started publishing novels in 1914. He struck gold in 1920 with *Main Street*, an exceptionally realistic novel about small town life that sold 180,000 copies in the first six months and over two million within a few years. He followed with *Babbitt* in 1922, the Pulitzer Prize winner *Arrowsmith* in 1925, *Elmer Gantry* in 1927, and *Dodsworth* in 1929. The strength of these works earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, the first American to receive the honor. He wrote eleven more novels, notably *It Can’t Happen Here* in 1935 about the election of a fascist President. His friend William Shirer summarized his career by noting that “compared to ... Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Faulkner ... Lewis lacked style. Yet his impact on modern American life ... was greater than all of the other four writers together.”