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## **Social Contradictions in the Roaring Twenties as Reflected by Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt: A Marxist Reading**

**Thesis**



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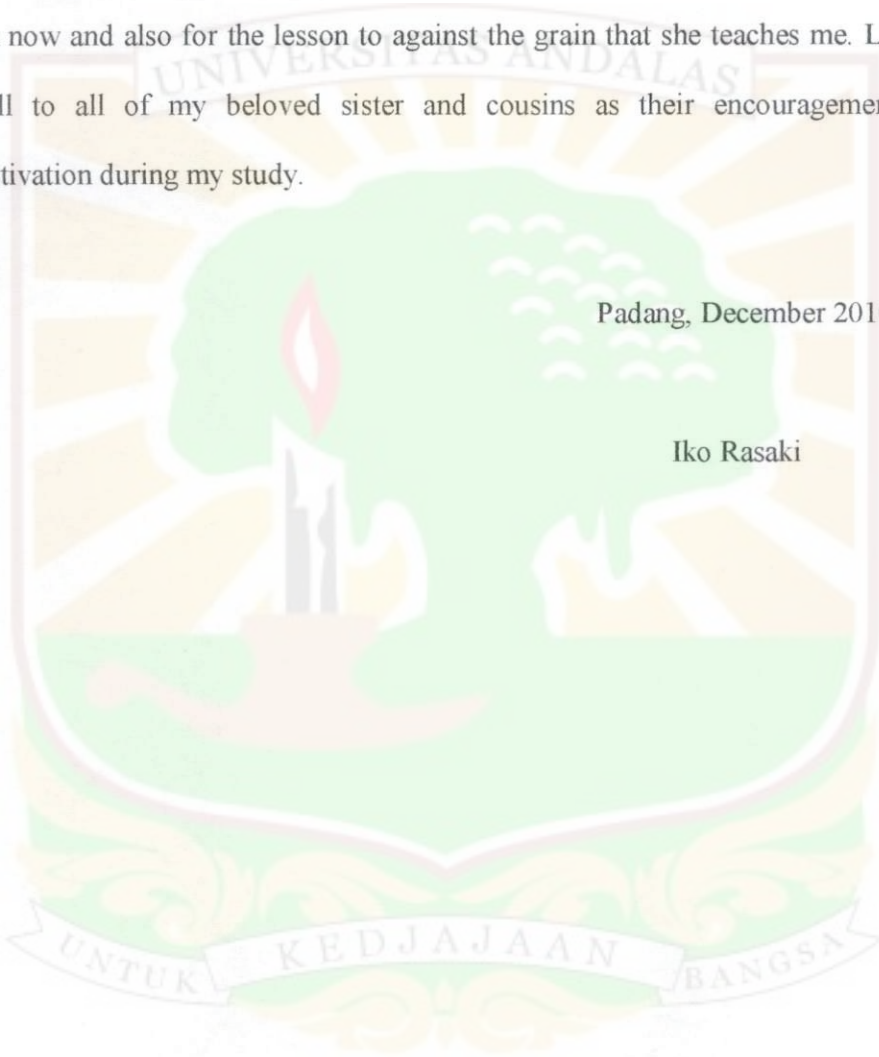
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## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini merupakan pembacaan Marxist terhadap novel berjudul *Babbitt* karangan penulis Amerika pertama yang menerima penghargaan nobel sastra, Sinclair Lewis. Melalui asumsi bahwa karya sastra adalah refleksi dari zamannya dan sekaligus juga dapat berbalik mengkritik zamannya, penulis menjelaskan bahwa novel ini adalah refleksi dari tipikalitas dan kontradiksi sosial pada zamannya dan disisi lain juga merupakan kritik terhadap zamannya.

Melalui metode penelitian kualitatif, penulis mengaplikasikan pembacaan Marxist yang dikembangkan oleh Karl Marx dan para pengikutnya dalam ranah sastra seperti Georg Lukacs, dan Terry Eagleton dalam menganalisa data primer. Melalui pembacaan Marxist, penulis dapat memperlihatkan bahwa novel ini merefleksikan kontradiksi sosial pada *Roaring Twenties* di Amerika. Penulis menggunakan kerangka kritik sastra Marxist dalam menghubungkan kondisi material di Amerika pada awal abad 20 seperti hasil dari revolusi industri pertama dan kedua, awal perkembangan korporasi di Amerika, keterlibatan Amerika dalam perang dunia pertama, pertumbuhan korporasi raksasa yang mendasarkan diri pada produksi massal, dan aparatus ideologis yang merayakan nilai dominan pada masa itu dengan kontradiksi sosial yang direfleksikan oleh teks.

Setelah menganalisa novel ini dari perspektif kritik sastra Marxist, penulis menemukan bahwa George F. Babbitt dan beberapa karakter dalam novel ini adalah refleksi dari masyarakat Amerika awal abad 20 yang hidupnya ter-reifikasi – suatu kondisi dimana komoditas mengontrol hidup manusia dan segala hal yang seharusnya bukan komoditas dianggap sebagai komoditas. penulis juga menemukan bahwa karakter George F. Babbitt dan Paul Riesling dalam novel ini merupakan refleksi dari masyarakat Amerika awal abad 20 yang teralienasi di bawah kekuasaan kapitalisme. Lebih jauh lagi, reifikasi dan alienasi tersebut juga direfleksikan oleh unsur formal – sudut pandang dan alur – dari novel ini. Sebagai penutup, penulis juga menemukan bahwa melalui karakter Ted Babbitt dan Tinka Babbitt, Sinclair Lewis berhasil menyisipkan *tone* optimis untuk melawan reifikasi dan alienasi yang direfleksikan oleh novel ini.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. The Background of the Research

Sinclair Lewis is a name that is inevitably to say is inseparable from the America's history of literature, not merely because he writes highly acclaimed novels such as: Our Mr. Wrenn, Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, and Kingsblood Royal, but also because he invents and contributes a word mean "unthinking conformist" to American vocabulary through Babbitt (Milch 2, Shaw 44). Even so, these facts are still far from adequate to represent in words the contributions of Lewis – whose name associated with the age of Roaring Twenties – to the realm of literature. Lewis' work have been interpreted, analyzed, and explained by number of critics in his country as well as overseas. The rumbles of his works fly overseas and countries, and have made acquaintances with those who are interested in literature, especially American literature.

Any of those who are mentioned last must be familiar with Lewis' style in capturing the way of 1920s Americans live their life in the post WWI, even some books such as: The 20<sup>th</sup> century and Beyond, McDougall Little: American History and an Encyclopedia about America's literature classify him as one of important figure in history of America's literature.

There is interesting fact I catch from Lewis, who is the first American writer who was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1930 (Milch 2, Streissguth 139). Lewis deems literary work should reflect its times and becomes a mirror of its society (139). What he professes is depicted by his work such as Main Street



which portrays the narrow minded American in post world war I and Babbitt that talks about a typical suburban businessman in 1920s who seeks happiness in things possession but remains restless.

In short, Lewis' Babbitt is a novel which takes its chronological setting in 1920's America or the time which is well known as *the roaring twenties*. Taking its chronological setting in the era of economic booming, this novel talk about a middle-class realtor named Babbitt. In fact, Babbitt never envision being a realtor. His dream is to pursue a career as lawyer who stands for the have-not. But the prosperous living possessed by businessman and economic booming makes Babbitt changes his mind. Moreover Babbitt is a novel which tells about middle-class American who buys books and the brand new lighter just because every person belongs to middle-class does that, and it also a novel which tells about Babbitt's restlessness among consumer goods around him.

I keen on discuss, analyze, and explain Babbitt which was published in 1922 since I have found that no students of English Department of Faculty of Letters in Andalas University analyze this salient novel. Furthermore I decide to discuss, analyze, and explain this important novel by bringing its extrinsic consideration and context because I strongly believe that literary work is tied to its social and historical roots. So, there is no way to discuss, analyze, and explain a work unless apprehend critically its conjuncture with the social and historical background that shapes it.

In this respect, I will analyze this novel critically from the perspective of Marxist literary criticism since in the light of my insight Marxist literary criticism

is the most appropriate “knife” to discuss, analyze, and examine the conjuncture between a work with its social and historical roots. Besides that, I also strongly believe that Marxist literary criticism – which in the words of Fredric Jameson is called “absolute horizon” – will be able to reveal the negative side of class-based society (e.g. alienation, reification, and commodification) that dehumanized human being who lamentably perceived it as natural thing.

I also lies my foundation on choosing Marxist literary criticism in the fact that this novel is written in the roaring twenties when America experienced the economic booming, beside that this novel also tells about a man who turns down his dream to be a lawyer just to pursue a prosperous career that he actually do not really like. In addition, this novel able to show how certain mode of production makes things able to take over human life. Furthermore, I expect this thesis will show how aesthetic form of a literary work – which is in this case, is novel – can be a weapon to criticize society from where it rises.

Furthermore, I also expect that by analyzing this novel from the perspective of Marxist literary criticism, I can figure out the conjuncture between the content of this novel and its formal element, and hence reverse the critics – some critics like El Doctorow and Mark Schorer state that Babbitt have awful formal elements (Doctorow 451, Schorer 320) – that condemn the formal element of this novel.

Inevitably to say, talking about choosing literary criticism to explain a work is talking about which side one is going to chose. It is because I strongly believe the history of modern literary theory as Terry Eagleton argues in his book

Literary Theory: an Introduction is a part of history of political and ideological values of our time. Just like Feminist or Post Colonial criticism for instance, one who applies Feminist criticism undoubtedly want to speak in the name of woman and oppose patriarchal society as well as one who applies Post Colonial criticism who undoubtedly wants to speak in the name of the subaltern and the colonized and hence aim to reveal the wicked face of colonization.

I – who belong to great majority whose option in living their life is limited and torn to shreds because wealth remains concentrated in the hand of minority – decide that I am going to apply criticism worthy to discuss in accordance of the marginalized liberation. And that criticism, as I strongly believe is Marxist criticism. It is because Marxist criticism, as remarked by Terry Eagleton, is not merely a technique to interpret Paradise Lost or Middlemarch, Marxist criticism is a part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies – the ideas, values, and feeling – by which men experience their societies at various time... and such understanding contributes to our liberation (Eagleton xii-xiii). In this light, instead of interpret or study history of a work, one who is keen on applying Marxist criticism have to understand and reveal the relations between a work with the ideological world it inhabit profoundly. In other words, Marxist literary criticism demands a revolutionary understanding of history and social process of which it is part (3).

In accordance to the theory I opt, and relating it to the story of Lewis' Babbitt, it is important to propose and conduct a research entitled: “Social Contradiction in The Roaring Twenties as Reflected by Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt: A Marxist Reading.”

## 1.2. The Identification of the Problem

As I state previously, every text is tied to its social and historical roots which are in Marxist sense cannot be separated from the issue of base and superstructure which is one of the basic tenets in Marxism as well as Marxist literary theory. There is, needless to say, an insight inherited in Marxist criticism history that base and superstructure constitute asymmetric relationship. Regard this as departure points, it can be remarked that literature, as a part of superstructure is not merely the passive reflection of the economic base. It has a degree of autonomy and not tied, as Trotsky once argued to any simple one to one correspondence to mode production (Eagleton 13).

In the light of this, I would argue that Lewis' Babbitt as a part of superstructure is not a passive reflection of its base structure and hence can criticize the base. By bring the extrinsic consideration, context, and relating it critically to the content and form of the novel, I would apply Marxist literary theory to show the social contradictions that reflects by the content as well as the form of the novel.

## 1.3. The Scope of the Research

In conducting this research, I would cling to some points to limit my analysis of this novel: the first point is the historical circumstances when the novel is written. Historical circumstances in this case is historical circumstances in the sense of Marxist terminology which is defined as the political, social, and ideological atmosphere generated by material conditions in particular time (Tyson 54). The Second point is the content of the novel as the asymmetric reflection of

the historical circumstances when the novel is written. To be more specific, I focus on the issues of social contradiction which is in the light of this are: reification, commodification, and the shallowness of one dimensional man under capitalism as reflect by the content of this novel. The third point is the form of the novel. In the light of this I concentrate on the plot and point of view of the novel.

#### **1.4. The Objective of the Research**

The aims of my research are to show how the content of this novel reflect the historical circumstance at the time it is written and thus become a critic of it, then I want to show how the form of this novel reflect the social contradiction of the time it is written, and I also want to show how the point of view of this novel able to push the critique more profoundly.

#### **1.5. The Review of the Previous Studies**

In conducting the analysis, some previous studies are being used as the comparison for this thesis. During the research, I found Lewis' *Babbitt* has been discussed by Marcel Hartwig entitled "The Organization Man Still Matters: Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*" (<http://www-copas.uni-r.de>). Within his essay, Marcel Hartwig discusses the characterization of George F. Babbitt, the main character of this novel who according to him is a sketch of average American businessman in 1920s who is trapped within his routines but have desire to rebel against that mechanism, however, the condition around him makes Babbitt return to his routines. As the argument goes, Hartwig states that Lewis sketches the portrait of Babbitt by introducing Babbitt's everyday life and the way Babbitt live it. In

addition, Hartwig also attaches some statements of critics who have delivered their comments toward this novel.

The second previous study I opt for the comparison is Imam Basuki's "The Darker of American Success as Reflected in Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt" which is published in Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra. In his writing, Imam analyzes Lewis' Babbitt from the perspective of sociology of literature and moral criticism. He argues that Babbitt reflects the moral decadence in the 1920's America. Furthermore Imam jotted down that one of the moral decadence reflected by the novel is the greedy of American businessman who (8), as Imam's argument goes easily do something immoral such as; corruption, collusion, nepotism, and other crimes. Moreover, Imam also states that Babbitt also show the moral decadence of middle-class American in the term of drinking alcohol and having love affairs with women (9).

Another previous studies that I opt to discuss within this thesis is taken from the realm of the literary theory going to be applied in the main analysis; Marxist literary criticism. The studies is taken from Peter Barry's Beginning Theory in which he criticizes Shakespeare's Twelfth Night from the perspective of Marxist literary criticism and argues that this play reflects the contradiction of society in feudal age. The analysis advances that in social life of that age, the only class have the morality of indulgence are the privileged social class. It is also point out that the members of the ruling class find their identities through excessive indulgence appetite (Barry 169). Peter Barry then concludes that his analysis show the commodification of human relationship at that age in the

character of Maria who use Malvio as the object of deceive humiliation to reach her goal.

Notwithstanding the previous studies I jotted down above possess similarity in the light of work analyzed and the concept of theory; I have different analysis with that of those researchers'. Within this research I apply Marxist literary criticism in the sense of reflection theory. Furthermore I focus my attention to following social contradiction: *reification*, and *alienation*. In addition I also pay attention to the form of this novel.

## **1.6. Theoretical Framework**

### **1.6.1 The Brief Sketch of Marxism**

Marxist criticism has long periods of history; it is in fact, as Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson argue, a literary criticism with the longest histories (Selden and Widdowson 70). The beginning of Marxist criticism can be traced back to Karl Marx himself. Karl Marx, even though a revolutionist philosopher never conceives himself as philistines, has a very close acquaintance to literature and concern much about literary work. And needless to say, first journalism written by Marx argued for freedom of artistic expression. In other words, literatures, as argued by Terry Eagleton are the very air Marx breathed and it can be argued that Karl Marx is the very first Marxist literary critic (Eagleton 2).

Before I continue further to the realm of Marxist literary criticism, a brief sketch about Marxism is saliently needed. Marxism, as declares by Listiyono Santoso in *Epistemologi Kiri* is one of the most important events within the history of philosophy between the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century (Santoso 37). Franz

Magnis-Suseno even argues that the face of 20<sup>th</sup> century would be totally different without Marxism (Magnis-Suseno xi), and last but not least Peter Singer in his Marx: A Very Short Introduction states that Marxism has profoundly affected philosophy, literature, and the study of arts (Singer 3). Those arguments illustrate in words the importance of the thought firstly outlined by the philosopher who bears Moor as his nickname.

Marxism has its root dialectic, a term derived from ancient Greek. Generally, Dialectic is a process of reconcile hostile ideas or opinion to find the truth. In the light of this, Hegel, a philosopher whose ideas adopted by Marx argues that every opinion contains weakness, thus another opinion would come up to deny what former opinion perceives (Woodfin and Zarate 23). The process of rejection or negation (to borrow Hegelian term) would continue until the hostility reconcile by the emergent of the third opinion which would omit the weaknesses from both of the two former opinion, to add some more to consider, the process of negation will restart the whole process as the third opinion emerged. In Hegelian term, the process is divided into three terms: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Furthermore, according to Woodfin and Zarate; Marx and Engels perceive that the process of dialectic much better than traditional logic, it is because dialectic instead of being a rigid process is a dynamic process, and hence appropriate to explain how things change (28). Furthermore, as the argument goes, Marx and Engels perceive dialectic is worthy to explain the process of social changing in the term of its relation one another. Instead of adopting Hegel's ideas for granted, Marx criticized him by arguing that instead of constructing by ideas, reality is constructing by material condition, as Marx famously point out in the



foreword of his Toward a Critique of Political Economy: “mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 284).

The reversal of Hegel’s notion about history makes Marx’s idea about history eminently known as Historical Materialism which perceives historical change as a result of the actions of humans being within the material world. This conception of history jotted down by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology:

In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process (Marx and Engels 258).

In the light of Marx’s materialist conception of history, it is worth to consider two things. The first one is class antagonism. By class antagonism, the Marxist does not mean history as a harmonious narrative which is crafted by great human figure like kings or queens, vice versa the Marxists perceive history as the conflict of classes as Marx and Engels accentuate in their highly acclaimed Communist Manifesto: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels 3). In this light the class struggle has to be

apprehended not in the sense that the oppositional classes morally wicked, but in the sense that they possess conflict of interest within mode of production.

The next thing is the famous architectural metaphor of base and superstructure, as Marx once argues that hand mill generate feudal landlord and steam mill generate society with industrial capitalist (Singer 48). A more detail argument Marx writes in his A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. (Marx 284).

Those premises show that Marx divided society into two elements; base or the economic structure and superstructure which are included philosophy, art, form of government, the media and other things that belong to the realm of culture in its broad sense. In short, it can be explained that everything belong to the realm of superstructure conditioned by the economic base.

From the brief sketch of Marxism jotted down previously, we can conceive Marxist theory in at least two ways. First, Marxist theory is a revolutionary critique of class-based society especially capitalism. In this light I

would remark Marx as a philosopher who concern with the need for social change in the light of what he perceives as the injustice and oppression generated by hierarchic economic relation. Second, Marxist theory is a good weapon to analyze values and viewpoints created by class-based society especially capitalism which is its impact can be seen in realms such as literature and other cultural products (Hitchcock 14-15).

### **1.6.2 The Marxist Literary Criticism**

During the long tradition of Marxist literary criticism, critics have been arguing about the relationship between base and superstructure. A group of Marxist critics known as “vulgar Marxist” argue that literary work as a part of superstructure is merely passive reflection of the economic base. In this light, vulgar Marxist solely perceive the literary work in the term of direct cause-effect relationship between base and superstructure, and all the writers conditioned by their social class. This kind of view leads the vulgar Marxist critics to the simplistic assessment of literature as explicitly or implicitly propaganda either contributing to preserve the status quo or to the imperative social change.

Notwithstanding, more recent Marxist literary critics have seen in literature a more complex reflection of society, in this light literary works is not solely a static mirror, rather literary works possess a force to the social dialectic of history, in others words it also reflects the oppositional forces that counter the base from where it rise.

The argument can be traced back to Frederick Engels’ letter to Joseph Bloch where Engels jotted down that elements of superstructure constantly react

back upon economic base (Eagleton 9). As the argument goes, Engels wants to insist that art can be an active element in criticize the base.

Back to the realm of literary criticism, Georg Lukacs – a Hungarian Marxist critic who is regarded as one of the most important Marxist literary critic in twentieth century (Saptawasana and Cahyadi 27) – is one of the critics who refine the formulation coined by the Vulgar Marxists (Clark 207). In other words it can be argued that he anticipates some of the Soviet doctrines.

The characteristic of Lukacs' theory is the usage of term *reflection*. Lukacs argues that a fictional work often succeed to oppose the economic base by reflect life in the greatest concreteness and clarity and with all its motivating contradiction (Abrams 149). By motivating contradiction, Lukacs as a Marxist undoubtedly points out the negative sides of human life within hierarchical and oppressive economic system named capitalism such as alienation, reification, commodification, and so on.

By reflecting life with all its motivating contradiction, Lukacs remarks that *typical* characters of that epoch will be presented (Abrams 149, Eagleton 26). These typical characters, as Lukacs continues, will manifest and incarnate the determinant forces of their epoch, and hence able to show *typical* contradictions within their epoch.

In the light of this research, I will pay attention to *alienation*, and *reification* to show the social contradiction reflects by this novel. Alienation is a state where human being lose the control over their lives, it can also argued that alienation is a state where human being have a sense of living in the world that

alien, hostile and lead to the conditions in which human being experience their lives as meaningless, unsatisfying, and worthless (Walker and Gray 9). In short alienation is a state in which human experience dehumanization.

Reification which is one of the crucial concepts of George Lukacs thought can be defined generally as condition where something discrete from its original context, and placed to another context. To be more exhaustive, reification refers to a condition where human creations become independent of their creators and human beings become subject to their own creations; human beings are governed by the system of commodity production that they have created. Furthermore, it can also be perceived as a condition where human qualities, relations, actions, and even human being themselves are transformed in the course of capitalist production into things. In short, reification can be remarked as thingification (Roberts 39, Walker and Grey 254-256). Thingification leads to Commodification which is deemed by Marx as one of the worse "sins" of capitalism. As the argument goes, commodification is a condition by which all things in society (even people) regarded as commodities that have exchange value. It also refers to refers to something that normally not regarded as commodity that has inherent economic value become assigned to something that has economic value.

Besides paying attention to the content of a literary work, Marxist literary criticism also seeks for the conjuncture between other elements of literary work such as its form with the base or material condition when the work was written (Eagleton 14). It is because Marxist literary criticism conceives that social reality of the literary work will always be part of it. In fact Georg Lukacs argues that form is the truly social element in literary work (19). Furthermore, Terry Eagleton

– a prominent Marxist literary critic – argues that “for Marxism the changes in a society’s material ‘content’ determine the ‘form’ of its superstructure” (21). Relating Eagleton’s argument to the realm of literary work, it can be argued that society’s material ‘content’ determine the form of literary work.

Furthermore, recent Marxist literary critics believe that literary form always evolves in accordance with the evolving of modes of production (24). But one thing needs to be noted from this argument; the evolution does not omit the older form, the traces of the older form remain survive within the new ones.

### **1.7. Methods of the Research**

In undertaking this research, I use library research methods that aim to collect the primary data as well as secondary data. The primary data are taken from Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt whilst the secondary data are taken from books, and article from the internet. Most of the secondary data are utilized as the “knife” to analyze the primary data, and some more are utilized to bolster this research.

In analyzing the primary data, I use qualitative analysis that focuses on meaning, perspective, and understanding. Qualitative analysis also put an emphasis on process, inductive analysis, and also grounded theory. This research is begun by reading and apprehending the primary data which is in the light of this is Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt. Then the secondary data are utilized to bolster the application of Marxist literary criticism. In presenting the analysis, I use descriptive method which is emphasizing the usage of quotation from the data.

## CHAPTER II

### PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS' BABBITT

In the case of attaining the full enjoyment of fiction; an analysis that base itself on specific principals of literary theories is saliently needed. In order to drive the theories or approaches that are applied to the sharp analysis, thus an analysis must lay itself on a profound understanding of the text that is analyzed – which is in this light is Sinclair Lewis' novel called Babbitt.

As a subgenre subsumes under fiction which emerged in England during the eighteen century, novel – like another fiction – cannot unencumbered from the elements deals with the following inquiries; what happens? Who acts? Who sees what? Where and when do the events take place? And what is the main idea of it? To be speaking within the realm of literary terms, those inquiries can be remarked as; plot, characters, point of view, setting, and theme – these elements is well known as element of fiction. Furthermore, through those elements someone will be able to attain a profound understanding toward a text. In this light, I will employ those elements within this chapter to Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt in order to provide myself a deep understanding and thus enable me to write a sharp analysis.

#### 2.1. Plot

In a metaphor of rabbit and carrot, plot is like the carrot that pulls the rabbit – which in this case, is the reader of a novel – through. This is simply because the reader is curious of what happen next and where the story leads to. Needless to say, plot reveals events in temporal as well as in their causal relationship to the reader. To remark in an academic way, plot is “the logical

interaction of the various thematic elements of a text which lead to a change of the original situation as presented at the outside of the narrative” (Klarer 15).

In order to be able to recognize plot, the structure of plot is saliently needed. An ideal traditional plot consists of these following things: exposition, complication, climax, and resolution. Exposition deals with certain amount of introductory information. In other words, one could remark that exposition as William Kenney states within his How to Analyze Fiction is an introduction of any story (15). Complication is an event that occurs to disturb the exposition. Moreover, complication also aims at produces suspense that leads to climax (Klarer 15). In this light complication hold an important role in preparing the advent of one part of plot by which suspense attains its peak, or in other words when plot reach the climax. The climax then is followed by resolution of the complication which is also brings an end to a text.

Furthermore, the importance of flashback and foreshadowing cannot be neglected from the discussion of plot since flashback which deals with any information concerning the past and foreshadowing that is deals with any information concerning the future can be important elements that mould a narrative.

Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt is introduced by the description of a morning ambiance in a fictional city somewhere in 1920s America called Zenith (Lewis 12). From the description of morning ambiance, the narrative moves to the depiction of Zenith; Zenith is typically modern city where good roads and railroad



exist, and where office buildings, skyscrapers, and new houses ‘thrusting’ slum area ‘from the business center’ (12).

The depiction of Zenith leads to a Dutch Colonial house in a residential district known as Floral Heights, the house of this novel’s main character, George F. Babbitt. George F. Babbitt is a little bit fat forty six years old man with a pink large head and thin hair whose job is realtor (13-14). Within this opening, George F. Babbitt is dreaming during his sleep:

‘Yet Babbitt was again dreaming of the fairy child, a dream more romantic than scarlet pagodas by a silver sea... For years the fairy child had come to him. Where others saw but Georgie Babbitt, she discerned gallant youth. She waited for him, in the darkness beyond mysterious groves. When at last he could slip away from the crowded house he darted to her. His wife, his clamoring friends, sought to follow, but he escaped’ (14).

But, the morning alarm of ‘the rumble and bang of milk truck’, ‘irritating rattle of someone cranking a Ford’, and the ringing of ‘alarm clock’ disturb George F. Babbitt dream, and he wakes up reluctantly realizing he has to go back to his ruts.

As the exposition flows, it is narrated that George F. Babbitt has a wife named Myra (20), and three children Theodore Roosevelt Babbitt whose nickname is Ted, Verona Babbitt whose nickname is Rone, and Katherine Babbitt whose nickname is Tinka.

Based on the criteria of exposition, I see Sinclair Lewis has built a good exposition to introduce his Babbitt, since the exposition of this novel contains certain amount of information about George F. Babbitt – which is needless to say the main character of this novel. Moreover, Lewis also infixes an element of instability – element which shows the capability of development within a narrative (Kenney 15) – in his Babbitt's exposition.

In this light, I remark George F. Babbitt's dream is a subtle element of instability within this exposition. I claim so since it is told that the dream had come for years to Babbitt. At this point there is no clue why that dream keeps on coming to Babbitt, yet it is told that Babbitt slips away from the crowded house and escape from his wife, and his friends who sought to follow him. Compared to the depiction of his house – Dutch Colonial house – which is I assume a comfortable house, I suspect there is something that makes Babbitt undergo his dream. In other words, I questioned why Babbitt tries to slip away from crowded house, his wife, and his friends. Thus, I come to a conclusion that this dream will constitute threats from which the narrative of this novel flows.

The exposition of Babbitt continues as the omniscient narrator narrates Babbitt's metamorphosis from middle aged man whose face is 'babyish in slumber' to businessman of Zenith whose nervousness soothed from his face as he stares to the towers at Zenith which are look like temples in his eyes (30). The narrative of this novel then flows as George F. Babbitt's attitude in living his life being narrated; he is a philistine and a standardized man as well, since he buys books merely because "every second house in Floral Heights" do so (32).

The depiction of Babbitt's attitude in living his life move to the way he runs his business as a realtor. Babbitt, as narrated by the narrator is never consider the aesthetic aspect such as architecture of the house he sells, the solely thing he consider is the money he earns from his activity in trading the house (72). Babbitt is also a realtor, who will do anything to maximize the profit he gains, for he develops a glen less and oriole less residential called Glen Oriole (76). Moreover, he usually boasting of the complete sewage system of Glen Oriole, but as narrated by the third person omniscient narrator, Glen Oriole possesses a bad sewage system.

The initial conflict of this novel comes when Babbitt as narrated by an omniscient narrator tells himself at a cocktail party held at his house that he is bore with his life (192), he cannot fully enjoy the party since his mind flies to one of his friend's offer to have a vacation in the woods. Secretly, he tells himself; "I'd like to get away from everything." (193).

The restlessness can be muffled as Babbitt and Paul Riesling – a friend who offer Babbitt to go to a vacation – take the trip to their vacation. During the trip, Babbitt can get away for a while from his ruts; he meets some new friends on board, have some conversations – although their conversation still shows how they see everything quantitatively – and share some jokes with them (221).

As Babbitt and Paul Riesling attain their destination, both of them immediately spend their days in the nature. When both of them sit at the edge of a wharf, Babbitt admits that he like to sit there since there is no sound of typewriter and no finickiness of his staff there. When he realizes this, he ask Paul, and Paul

feels exactly what Babbitt feels (230-231). At this point, Babbitt and Paul recall their days in the college years; Paul remembers that he wanted to learn fiddle in Germany while Babbitt recollects that he wanted to be a lawyer. At the end of his vacation, Babbitt feels that he interested in life.

Return from the vacation, Babbitt zealously back to Zenith. He remembers that he wanted to be a lawyer because his appeal is public speaking, and he wanted to use his skill in public speaking to help the have-not. As narrated by the omniscient narrator, In Zenith, Babbitt promptly employs his skill in public speaking, but not to help the have-not. He employs it to firm up his position within his class (394).

The important event that provides suspense occurs when Paul Riesling arrested for shooting his wife (396). The event shakes George F. Babbitt up since Paul Riesling is the only friend that makes him feel a bit as human. As narrated by the omniscient narrator, George F. Babbitt feels his life is meaningless without Paul (404).

Once again Babbitt feels the restlessness within himself; he starts to question what he really wants in his hollow life (409). Moreover, he starts to think to rebel and break through the conformity where he is in. In this light, he recollects Maine – place where he and Paul escape from their ruts. But as he attains Maine, he finds that people in Maine whom he expects far for conformity is dreaming about conformity (449). The disappointed Babbitt decides to go back to Zenith, yet he refuses to give up his rebellion.

The climax comes nearer as Babbitt walks through the train that will take him back to Zenith. He tries to see face that he knows among the crowd, yet he find nothing but Seneca Doane (451). Seneca Doane is a friend of George F. Babbitt back to his college years – years when Babbitt wants to be a lawyer who stand in the side of the have-not, resist against arrogance of the rich, and do that for nothing. Quite reverse to Babbitt attitude, Seneca Doane was a reactionary college student. At that time his goals was to be rich, buy paintings and live at ritzy residential district (453). Now Seneca Doane is a lawyer who stands in the side of labor, and in this light he would like to thanks Babbitt who has inspired him and other friends.

Babbitt is startled, proud and shy for lend his ears to Seneca Doane's explanation, he also finds out that the socialists like Seneca Doane and his friend are far from the notorious depiction that circulates among his friends (453, 455). Suddenly Babbitt feels that he has discover the key to solve his restlessness, and with the newly found gusto reminiscent from his past Babbitt decides to rebel.

As Babbitt decides to rebel, the conflict is getting sharper. He has to face the decency among his friends and his surrounding; Babbitt has to face a world where no room for a dissenter is appropriated. The first experience for Babbitt to challenge the decency happened at the Athletic Club when Babbitt challenges his friends' opinion about Seneca Doane – a socialist who look notorious within their perspective (461).

Shortly after Babbitt challenge his friends' opinion about Seneca Doane, a strike occurs in Zenith. The strike paralyzes economic matters in Zenith so that

Reverend Dr. John J. Drew – minister of Chatham Road Presbyterian church which Babbitt attends – feels that he needs to deliver a sermon about that. In the name of religion, the sermon champions the competitive economic system (468). Babbitt who already finds the key to solve his restlessness inflamed for hears the sermon. He damns the sermon and makes his friends at Athletic Club who sits beside him – Chum Fink – glancing at him doubtfully.

After the events at the church, Babbitt sees a march of strikers. Firsts he hates them since most of the strikers are not members of his class, it makes him feel insecure. But among the strikers he sees Seneca Doane and Professor Brockbank, head of the history department in the State University (470). For a moment Babbitt feels confuse, he question his hatred toward the strikers, and at last he comes to a conclusion – although he still a little bit confuse – that the strikers have right to march just like another elements of society.

After sees the march of strikers, Babbitt has his lunch in the Athletic Club, during his lunch he hears his friends – Captain Clarence Drum and Vergil Grunch – talk about the strike. Captain Clarence Drum boasts that the strikers have throwing-bombs; Babbitt bothered by Captain Clarence Drum nonsense and says: “oh rats Clarence, they look just about like you and me, and I certainly didn’t notice any bombs.” (472). As Babbitt leaves Athletic Club; his friends discuss his dissenting opinion.

Beside reactionary friends who glance doubtfully at his dissenting opinion, Babbitt also faces a reactionary wife who worries about his newly found attitude (475). Babbitt suddenly feels that he needs a friend whom he can share his

dissenting idea. Beside that he also needs someone who not represents his ruts and decency world.

Babbitt feels that he finds it within Tanis Judique, a woman whom he can share his dissenting opinion (486). But as the relationship getting further, Babbitt realizes that it is not what he is looking for. At the same time Babbitt friends who oppose Seneca Doane and the strike form “Good Citizen” league to counter the strike that spread all over the town and they asking for Babbitt stance (554). Babbitt declines the invitation although he fears the outcome of his repudiating.

Shortly after his repudiating, Babbitt starts to lose his friends (556, 558). Moreover, Babbitt’s firm also begins to lose customers and employees (561). But the worst of all is Street Traction Company – Babbitt’s partner in real-estate business – gives the new real-estate business to Babbitt’s rival, Sanders, Torrey, and Wing Company. In short, what Babbitt fears has come into reality, no room for a dissident within his world and now he is being expelled just because he takes a stance in the side by which he believes in.

Babbitt, as narrated by an unnamed narrator begins to think to “flee back to the security of conformity,” he wonders if there was “a decent and creditable way to return (563), but at this time he still hesitate to decide what he should do. He longing for someone whom he can share ideas with, but no dissenting opinion is accepted in the world of decency save Ted Babbitt and his girlfriend Eunice Littlefield.

The way to return to security of conformity which is also denotes the climax of this novel comes when Myra Babbitt – George F. Babbitt’ wife – nursed

in the hospital. The members of Good Citizen League drop in to see Myra, and once again Babbitt stance being questioned (579). Here Babbitt is facing a dilemma; to stay true to himself by keep dissenting or estrange himself within conformity. Yet, Babbitt as narrated by the unnamed narrator:

“Almost tearful with joy at being coaxed instead of bullied, at being permitted to stop fighting, at being able to desert without injuring his opinion of himself, cease utterly to be domestic revolutionist. He patted Grunch’s shoulder, and next day he became a member of the Good Citizen League (579).”

The resolution of Lewis’ Babbitt is the return of Babbitt to the embrace of conformity, to the world where he cannot and has no boldness to take a stance in the side in which he used believes in, to the world where he do not know whether he have accomplished anything except just get along, but still the restlessness ignites faintly within as he says to himself; “I’m going to run things and figure out things to suit myself – when I retire (591).

Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt is ended with Ted Babbitt’s rebellion. Ted secretly marries his girlfriend Eunice Littlefield and announces it happily to his family at the dawn. Shortly after the announcement, Ted Babbitt is surrounded by the Babbitt’s and the Littlefield in an inquisition (593). All of them save Babbitt blame Ted. After a few moment of hollers, Babbitt finally talks; “Ted, come into the dining-room, and we’ll talk this over.” (594).

At the dining-room, Babbitt asks what Ted’s plan after the marriage, and he also – like the rest of members of Babbitt’s and Littlefield’s – expect Ted to get



a college degree – as narrated in the beginning of the novel, the citizen of Zenith believe that a college degree equals to better social status. But Ted has another surprise; he gives up college for his dream, to be a mechanic (596). For the way he chooses, Ted poised with a low salary in factory job. For listens to Ted's statement, Babbitt says:

“I’ve never done a single thing I’ve wanted in my whole life! I don’t now’s I’ve accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I’ve made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundreds rods. Well, maybe you’ll carry things on further. I don’t know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell ‘em to go to the devil! I’ll back you. Take your factory job, if you want to. Don’t be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Not of yourself, the I’ve been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours!” (596).

Babbitt sees within Ted's rebellion thing that he wants to do but he cannot do since he has no boldness to do so; Ted does things that he really want to do, and dare to take a stance to defend what he really believes. And for that George F. Babbitt wants to defend Ted.

Beyond the sequence of exposition, complication, climax, and resolution that I have explained above, Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt possesses an unusual structure of plot; some chapters and subchapter of Babbitt seems like fragmented loosely-connected chapter and subchapter interpolated together. In some parts, the subchapter of the novel jump to another subchapter that loosely connected with

the preceding one. It can be remarked that some parts of Babbitt are montage of events by which Babbitt takes part within. In this light, I expect to analyze the structure of plot further in the fourth chapter of my thesis.

## 2.2. Characters

Characters, as jotted down by Abrams in his A Glossary of Literary Terms are the persons represented in a narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it – the dialogue and from what they do – the action (32-33).

Below, I will jot down the characters of Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt that related to analysis of my thesis.

### George F. Babbitt

As the central character within this novel, George F Babbitt is depicted as middle-aged realtor who appreciates everything based on its price (14, 16). In most of the narrative of this novel, George F. Babbitt is narrated as a philistine whose perspective cannot go beyond profit and consumable things, in one conversation with his wife and son, he states:

“I’ll tell you why you have to study Shakespeare and those. It’s because they’re required for college entrance, and that’s all there is to it! Personally, I don’t see myself why they stuck ‘em into an up-to-date high school system like we have in this state. Be a good deal better if you took

business English, and learned how to write an ad, or letters that would pull (121).

Moreover, George F. Babbitt is also a conformist whose life is spent just to get along, as he admits at the end of this novel; "I've never done a single thing I've wanted in my whole life! I don't now's I've accomplished anything except just get along (596). As the direct upshot of his attitude, George F. Babbitt finds himself belongs to Athletic Club, a club of the have who see the workers union aims to take comfortable life away from them (453, 472), notwithstanding he had a converse view when he was young.

At one point of his life, George F. Babbitt senses that there is something wrong with his life and aims to change his attitude by dissent to his friends view, but as his friends, employees, and costumers leave him; he flounders his decision and flee back to the embrace of conformity at the end of this novel.

### **Myra Babbitt**

Myra Babbitt is George F. Babbitt's wife. Just like his husband, Myra Babbitt is also a philistine whose dressing-table is positioned next to a bedside book that she never ascertain (31), the only reason why it is positioned there is just because every home in her neighborhood do so.

Myra is also a conformist whose world view bound to the dominant view of society where she lives. This attitude makes her cannot understand his husband discontent when George F. Babbitt share his opinion one night with her. She even scares peoples would think her husband a socialist which notorious within dominant view of society (475).

### **Theodore “Ted” Roosevelt Babbitt**

Ted is George F. Babbitt’s son. He is a good athlete but poor in his study (337). When he was in senior high school, his concerned is cars and making money (36, 125). But beyond that, he shows his passion in mechanic and wants to be a good mechanic one day (462).

Notwithstanding his father always expect him to enter the State University and get a B.A for the sake of their family’s social status (121, 136), Ted – at the end of the novel – burst at the steam and be what he dreams, and for the path he chooses Ted is willing to take a low salary job in a factory. Ted’s rebellion at the end of novel makes him contrast to his father; he has boldness to do the most important thing in life that George F. Babbitt has no nerve to do and that’s why George F. Babbitt “get a kind of sneaking pleasure” for see Ted rebellion and bolsters him.

### **Paul Riesling**

Paul Riesling is a close friend of George F. Babbitt since they attended the same college and had been the classmates and roommates (69). At his middle age, Paul is an unhappy man who takes care of his father business. But back to their college years, Paul Riesling is a lively young man whose dream is go to Europe to learn Violin and become a great violinist (140).

For years of taking care of his father business, Paul Riesling is discontent with the way of businessmen run their business, during lunch in one afternoon at Athletic Club he tells George Babbitt; “My business... is principally keeping my

competitors from distributing roofing. Same with you. All we do is cut each other's throat and make the public pay for it." (103). Then he continues;

"Take all these fellows we know, the kind right here in the club now, that seem to be perfectly content with their home-life and their businesses... I bet if you could cut into their heads you'd find that one-third of 'em are sure-enough satisfied with their wives and kids and friends and their offices; and one-third feel kind of restless but won't admit it; and one-third are miserable and know it. They hate the whole peppy, boosting, go-ahead game, and they're bored by their wives and think their families are fools--at least when they come to forty or forty-five they're bored--and they hate business, and they'd go--Why do you suppose there's so many 'mysterious' suicides?" (103-104).

He then proposes a plan to escape for a while from their ruts, and George F. Babbitt accepts it happily. One day after their vacation, Paul Riesling shoots his wife and being arrested. The absent of Paul leads George F. Babbitt to cognizance that there is something wrong with his life.

### **Seneca Doane**

Seneca Doane is a notorious attorney in Zenith due to his political view (74). Just like Paul Riesling, he also attended the same college with George F. Babbitt. Back to the college years, Seneca Doane always oppose George Babbitt idea about fight the rich for the poor; he always says to George F. Babbitt that one day he going to be the rich himself and live in luxurious residential district (453).

But the George F. Babbitt's view enlightened young Seneca Doane and that's make him alter his view. When both of them involved within a conversation in a train that will take them to Zenith, Seneca Doane admit that George F. Babbitt had inspired him and that's making George F. Babbitt feels that he finally finds the key to solve his restlessness.

#### **Reverend Dr. John Jennison Drew**

Reverend Drew is a minister of Chatam Road Presbyterian Church. When strikes occur in Zenith, Reverend Drew uses religion as a justification of the competitive and unjust economic system (468). He even condemns those who want to bring despotism to its end as despots.

#### **Zenith Athletic Club's Members**

Zenith Athletic Club is a club which its members are prosperous businessmen of Zenith – including George F. Babbitt and Paul Riesling. Some of Zenith Athletic Club's members are: Vergil Gunch the coal dealer, Sidney Filkenstein the ladies'-ready-to-wear buyer, Professor Joseph K. Pumphrey the owner of the Riteway Business College and instructor in public speaking, business English, scenario writing, and commercial law (89-90).

The members of Zenith Athletic Club share the same opinion about social and political ideas. In the realm of social ideas, all of them are price-tag worshiper (91-92) and take for granted the ideas that life is about competition (468). While in the realm of political ideas, all of them believe that someone who fight for the poor workers like Seneca Doane ought to be hanged (461) and socialists is a

bunch of hoodlum who wants to “take the bread and butter away” from their family (472).

### **Tinka Babbitt**

Tinka is the youngest member of Babbitt’s, she is a ten years little old girl (21). She is the only family member who aware that Myra Babbitt is alive and she also the only Family member who read the expensive fairy tales illustrated by an English artist and plays piano.

### **Zilla Riesling**

Zilla Riesling is a wife of Paul Riesling. She is the embodiment of individualism and always relates herself to the world through commodities (99). She is also a woman who likes to attend the party of the-have and like humiliate poor people.

### **Joe Paradise**

Joe Paradise is an Indian guide in Maine woods – place where George F. Babbitt and Paul Riesling spend their escape vacation. Although Joe is a guide in Maine woods, but he does not really know the woods, all he knows is money from those who needs his guidance. Moreover, Joe is also dreaming about conform life just like what George F. Babbitt has in Zenith (449).

## **2.3. Setting**

Setting, as Mario Klarer jotted down in his An Introduction to Literary Studies is “the location, historical period, and social surrounding in which the

action of a text develops (24). In this light, most of Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt takes place in Zenith, a fictitious city somewhere in 1920s United States of America (13).

Zenith, as depicted by omniscient narrator at the beginning of the novel and as suggested by its name, is a city that shows the highest achievement of men of its time. It is a city where "sturdy, delicate and beautiful towers of office building aspired above the morning mist" (12). From this point I assume that Babbitt's physical setting is intended to reflect every big city in America at its time.

#### 2.4. Point of View

Point of view in the sense of literary term refers to "narrative perspective" (Klarer 20). In other words it is simply how a narrative is told. According to Klarer, the narrative perspectives of fiction can be structured to the following pattern: omniscient point of view, first person point of view, and figural narrative situation.

Omniscient point of view narrates a narrative through external narrator who refers to the acting figures in the third person (20). Omniscient narrator narrated texts from all knowing, god like perspective and has the ability to explore what a character have in mind. In the first person point of view, the narrative is narrates by a character within the story – it could be major or minor character. While in figural narrative situation; "the narrator moves into the background, suggesting that the plot is revealed solely through the actions of the characters in the text." (22).



In the respect of previous explanation, Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt employs omniscient point of view. The following citation shows that quite clear: "His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forty six years old now, in April, 1920." (Lewis 14). Since the third person narrator is divided into third person limited and third person omniscient, this following citation will corroborate my assertion that this novel employs the third person omniscient narrator:

"When Babbitt had graduated from the State University, twenty-four years ago, he had intended to be a lawyer. He had been a ponderous debater in college; he felt that he was an orator; he saw himself becoming governor of the state. While he read law he worked as a real-estate salesman. He saved money, lived in a boarding-house, supped on poached egg on hash. The lively Paul Riesling (who was certainly going off to Europe to study violin, next month or next year) was his refuge till Paul was bespelled by Zilla Colbeck, who laughed and danced and drew men after her plump and gaily wagging finger." (140).

The previous citation evidently shows that the narrator can sneak into the past time when George F. Babbitt was just graduated from the State University. Likewise, the narrator exactly knows what George F. Babbitt was dreaming on and moreover the narrator also knows exactly the information related to other characters within the novel.

## 2.5. Theme

Theme which was initially named *topos* in the ancient Greek tradition is "the meaning the story releases." (Kenney 91). In addition, William Kenney also

remarks that theme is the necessary implication of the story, and what an author is able to make of the total experience.

Tracking the life of George F. Babbitt – the main character of this novel- and his friend Paul Riesling it can be asserted that the main theme of this novel is the tragedy of human being under the sovereignty of capitalism. As evident in this assertion; since he knows his passion is public speaking, the young George F. Babbitt was intended to be a lawyer who will defend and fight in the side of the poor for nothing but he then gives up his dream to pursue a career as a prosperous realtor and marry Myra Thompson. At one point in his life, George F. Babbitt realizes that there is something wrong with his life and decide to rebel against decency. But shortly after he starts his rebel his friends, employees, costumers, and partner leaves him, he flounders his rebellion and flees back to the embrace of conformity and become alienated once again.

The same thing happens to Paul Riesling. The lively young Paul Riesling was intending to pursue his dream to be a violinist, but young Paul was fall in love to Zilla Colbeck and ends up as roof distributor. In his middle age, Paul Riesling is a bored, unhappy, and restless man.

Considering George F. Babbitt's remorse when he just flee back to conformity, his "kind of sneaking pleasure" when he sees Ted burst at the seams and has nerve to break with conformity in order to be what his dream, and his endorsement to Ted's rebellion, I also assert that "burst at the seam and be what you dream" is also the theme of this novel.

## CHAPTER III

### SUPPORTING ANALYSIS: MATERIAL CONDITIONS THAT DETERMINE CONFORMITY IN ROARING TWENTIES

Within the perspective of Marxist literary criticism – which is one of its most basic tenets, is the relationship of base and superstructure – literary works cannot be isolated from its historical roots. In this light Marxist literary criticism asserts that different epoch of history will produce literary works with different characteristics.

In this respect, there is no other way to discuss, examine, analyze, and criticize a literary works except apprehend its historical roots. Since this thesis will employ Marxists literary criticism, the sketch of historical roots from where the novel rises is saliently needed. And as I expect this chapter will discuss the intended historical background.

#### **3.1. Historical Condition that Leads to the Roaring Twenties**

The Roaring Twenties is an era that happened in America right after the First World War until the late 1920s. This era is denoted with prosperity that spread across the America and the changing of lifestyle among the American. Subchapters below will discuss about historical and material conditions that lead to that era as well as the era itself.

##### **3.1.1. The First and the Second America's Industrial Revolutions**

Predates to 1800s, America was not yet a manufacturing country in the sense of big industrial manufacture. At that time, manufacturing remains at the

household or handicraft stage of development. As illustrated by Tindall and Shi in their America: a Narrative History; pre-industrial revolution America is a stage of development “in which a merchant would distribute raw materials (say, leather patterns for shoes) to be worked up at home, collected, and sold.” (432).

Slowly, America began to undergo a transition from handmade manufacturing country to a factory manufacturing country. But before discussing America industrial revolution further, it is essential to touch the Great Britain industrial revolution, unless the discussion would look like an incomplete jigsaw. Long before America enter a transitional phase to industrial revolution, the Great Britain had gotten long head in the industrial production. The pillar of industrial revolution that led the Britain to the industrial production were the invention of steam engine in 1705 which is improved by James Watt in 1765, and some other inventions that mechanized the production of textiles (Lekachman and Van Loon 37).

Determined by the residue of mercantilism economic system by which its logic is the “death-game-alike” competition between nations, the Great Britain cautiously kept its worthwhile secret. Back in that time, the Great Britain forbidding the export of machines or even publication of descriptions of them, even restricting the emigration of informed mechanics (Tindall and Shi 432).

The secret was leak in 1789 when Samuel Slater whose idea is plan of a water-powered spinning machine arrived in America from Britain. Shortly, he got a contract from enterprising merchant manufacturer in Rhode Island to build a mill in Pawtucket. In 1790, the mill he built becomes a satisfactory cotton yarn.

Shortly after mill in Pawtucket was built, textile industries begin to grow although the growing is slow and stumble.

The speed of the first industrial revolution began to shift into higher gear as Thomas Jefferson embargo stimulated domestic production in 1807. Besides that, war of 1812 forces America to restricted imports. The upshots of these events encouraged the merchant capitalists of New England to transfer their resources to manufacturing. Thus by 1815, textile mills numbered in the hundreds (433).

The beginning phase of capitalism in America which was starts with the first industrial revolution in that country still hide its horror face behind the veil of community values, the evident of my argument is the Lowell System being employed at that time. Lowell System – named after Francis Cabot Lowell, one of the founders of Boston Manufacturing Company and this system – was a system by which its aim is building factory in which the processes of spinning and weaving by power machinery were brought together under one roof, with every process mechanized but avoid the corruption of the social substance (433-434). To actualize that aims, mills was being located in the countryside with the establishment of the program of paternal supervision for the workers. In this respect, the workers within the Lowell System was provided with nice boarding houses, lectures halls, libraries, prepared meals, moral disciplines, and a variety of educational and cultural opportunities. These policies had great impacts on the workers social life; they found time and energy to form study groups, publish literary magazines, and attend lectures.

Beyond that aim, the beginning phase of capitalism in America still embedded in the very logic of the capitalism; profit and efficiency. The Lowell factories was tend to hired women rather than men since women were willing to receive lower wage and have dexterity in operating machines. Thus, the very logic of capitalism then ruined the aim of Lowell System as the level of competition is equal with the mushrooming growth of the factories by which in 1840s numbered thirty two. Shortly, the blissful rural town became a bustling, grimy, and bleak industrial city.

The mushrooming growth of factories forced the businessmen to stress efficiency and profit margins over community values in order to be able to survive in a fierce competition. At the same time, immigrants from all across Europe arrived on America's shores desperate for jobs provide abundant of labor for the mushrooming factories in America (Nash 143). The abundance of labor provided opportunities to businessmen and foremen to cut cost of production in order to aggrandize the profit margins. Moreover, the necessities of efficiency within competition between factories also forced businessmen and foremen to run their factories – workers and machines – at faster pace. Shortly, the relations between owners and workers become deteriorated, and strikes emerging to protest the deteriorating conditions.

Furthermore, capitalism which was starting with the first America industrial revolution begins to show its internal contradiction; commodification. This internal contradiction occurs as “water powered textile grows rapidly by 1820s” (Tindall and Shi 436). Water, which was used to be societal resource transformed into private commodity as entrepreneurs perceive the exchange value

embedded within the water. Soon, they acquired the water rights by purchasing land contiguous to rivers and rented the flowing water to textile mills.

A much more powerful America industrial revolution took place after the civil war (Zeman 72). This second industrial revolution was determined by some factors; the growth of capitalism in America was threatened by the civil war that exploded in 1861. This war was generate nationwide shortage of labor and material condition that forces the businessmen to develop more efficient labor-saving machinery in order to defend their position within their class. As expected, new inventions and innovations that improved machinery and another equipments in the process of production gives a new support to the process of production and even spurring great advances in productivity. The increase of productivity determined business and industries to expand numerous states, and open up opportunities for businessmen to create larger business enterprises.

As business and industries expanded numerous states, new inventions that will play important part in business and industries expansions were discovered: telephone and telegraph system. Such as another progress within civilization along history, this new invention shortly embraced by the ruling class to shore up their position within mode of production and created an interconnected national communication which was its directs upshot is "facilitation of national and even international market for American goods and services" (Tindall and Shi 746).

Larger business enterprises which were mushrooming in America in this period create unavoidably competition within the markets. This material condition determines businessmen applying systemic application of scientific research to

process of production in order to aggrandize the profit margins and survive within the competition. In the ends of 1800s Andrew Carnegie – a businessman that subsequently become an urban legend – applied Bessemer converter and open-hearth steelmaking method, which converted iron ore into steel with much less labor than was previously required. Carnegie's mill also combined all stages of steel production. As the result, the price of steel rails dropped from \$107 per ton in 1870 to \$32 per ton in 1890 (Nash 204). The decreasing price of steel was exhilarates railroad business and shortly, America was able to establish an interconnected national transportation that shore up market for American goods and services.

Another example of business owner who applying systemic application of scientific research to process of production in order to aggrandize the profit margins and survives within the competition was John D. Rockefeller. In 1889, his Standard Oil found a new way in refining oil which is influences the oil price at that time and at the same time made Standard Oil became the largest refiner. Rockefeller decided that the best way to survive within the competition is by wipe his competitors out of business; He made deals with railroads to carry his oil at a lower rate than his competitors' oil. He also built and purchased his own pipelines to carry oil (Dalek et al 739). One of Rockefeller most famous way to wipe his competitors out of business was Standard Oil Trust, a trust was a legal body created to hold stock in many companies, often in the same industry. Trust enabled Rockefeller to employ centralized control over his business, monopolize market and control the oil price. His moves make him famous as robber baron – a



business leader who uses dishonest methods to grow rich – within history of America.

Other inventions that give great influence to America's industrial revolution were electric power, sewing machine, and machine for packaging (737). Electric power created dramatic advance in the power and efficiency of industrial machinery. Sewing machine enabled factories to produce ready-made clothes. Instead of being fitted to each buyer, clothes come in standard sizes and popular styles. Increasingly, people bought clothes instead of making their own. And machine for packaging give an advance of efficiency in packaging American goods.

Rapid growth of businesses and industries, and interconnected national and even international market for American goods and services created a material condition for the contrived of modern corporation – a business owned by shareholders, investors who buy part of the company through shares of stock – in America. In the sake of their interest, Corporations, as jotted down by Hira Jhmatani (4) always promotes hyper growth and whatever it takes to keep the hyper growth, homogenization, corporate deregulations, and market values.

By the turn of the century, the rise of Modern Corporation played an important role within the economic realm of America. In 1901, Mammoth Corporations appeared. The United States Steel Corporation bought together 158 companies with a capitalization of \$1.4 billion or three times the amount spent annually by the federal government (Reeves 4). Other big corporation such as General Electric, Westinghouse, American Sugar, Swift and Company, Goodyear,

American Tobacco, Eastman Kodak, International Harvester, and Singer started to gain authority within the market.

The rapid growth of industrialization leads America to urbanization (Dalek et al 745, Reeves 5). Beside European, most of the migrants were rural dwellers who seek for jobs, social, cultural, and intellectual stimulations of urban areas. The turn of the century denoted the birth of the new urban middle class. This new urban middle class consisted of salaried professionals, technicians, government employees, sales people, and clerical workers. As jotted down by Thomas Reeves, these peoples had great faith in the future and envisioned unlimited prosperity and economic independence for those committed to virtuous living and hard works (6).

Beside urbanization, industrialization that had been created interconnected national market also changed the way peoples spend their money. Big department stores that mushrooming in that time tries to convince peoples, that shopping is a great pleasure to enjoy. As evident; by the beginning of twentieth century the amount of money spent on advertising increases a thousand percent if compared to the end of ninetieth century (Nash 207).

As jotted down by Louis Althusser in his highly acclaimed Ideology and Ideological States Apparatuses; capitalist regime will ensure the submission of peoples to the ideology of the ruling class (154). One way to ensure the submission is through ideological state apparatuses (ISA) such as religious ISA, family ISA, communication ISA, and cultural ISA. By the turn of the century in America those ISA manifest in Herbert Spencer's sold out book which celebrated

social Darwinism. William Graham Sumner and John Fiske that celebrated moral attributes such as industriousness, temperance, and frugality produces prosperity and power and their remark that it is against the “laws of nature” and the health of the nation for the state to come to the rescue of those who are losers in the struggles of life. Countless lectures and sermons and a vast literature of schoolbooks, self-help handbooks and magazines, Protestant tracts, and inexpensive rags-to riches novels had taught millions to believe that success come more or less automatically to those who exhibit honesty, frugality, sobriety, industry, perseverance, punctuality, initiative, loyalty, obedience, and similar virtues. Even a highly influential clergyman named Henry Ward Beecher declared that “no man in this land suffers from poverty unless it is more than his fault – unless it is his sin” (Reeves 9). Moreover, from rag to riches urban legend such as Carnegie story spread wide within society at that time.

### **3.1.2. The First World War**

The rapid growth of economic realm in America was heavily influenced by the First World War which was started in 1914. This war is started with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian on June 28, 1914 in the city of Sarajevo. The assassination triggered Austria’s declaration of war on Serbia. Shortly, one by one nation in Europe joined the war and the First World War began. Notwithstanding this single action started the First World War, the conflict had some other underlying causes: competition for colonies in Africa and Asia, nationalism, and alliances by which one attack on one nation force its allies to come to its aid.

When the war begins, all of American wanted to keep their country out of conflict, yet the industrial and financial strength of America led to an inevitably involvement within the war. Exports to the Allies dramatically increased, from almost \$825 million annually in 1914 to more than \$3.2 billion by 1916. Munitions sales alone amounted to \$1.7 billion between January 1916 and March 1917 (Reeves 62). In short, all segments of economy in America enjoyed the upshot of the war; burgeoning prosperity.

By 1915, Woodrow Wilson – President of America at that time – permitted the Wall Street bankers to make some loans to the allies. During next year and a half, the run shorted of funds Great Britain borrowed more than a billion dollars, France borrowed 300 million dollars, and Russia 50 million dollars (62). Beyond on its impartiality rhetoric, America was playing an important role for the Allies and the government seemed reluctant to alter this advantageous relationship.

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked congress for a declaration of war to the Central Powers due to the German's U-boats attack to American ships. Notwithstanding the reason behind America's path to war was because Americans had had enough with German's U-boats' attack to their ships, this move had underlying cause: America was needed to save the Allies from the defeat since Wall Street financiers had loaned money to the Allies, beside that America also enjoyed highly profitable economic ties with the Allies (Dallek et al 828-829, Reeves 66, and Whitfield 22).

The first American troops consist of 14,000 soldiers arrived in France in June 1917. The arriving of America's troops boosts the morale of the weary Allies. American and British warships escorted merchant and troop ships across the Atlantic in convoys, this tactic protect the Allies from the U-boats menace. On May 28, 1918, American soldiers attacked the town of Cantigny, which was occupied by the Germans. The soldiers were succeeded to force Germans to retreat from the town. The turning point of the war comes in the summer 1918 when 85,000 American soldiers helped the Allies halt the German advance and force the German back (Dallek et al 840).

By early September, the Germans lost all the territory in the western front. Although they still control vast area across Europe, the German knew that the Allies would win the war with the assistance of America. On November 11, 1918, the German agreed to armistice and all fighting ceased. From this short sketch of the First World War, it is clear that America's intervention comes just in time to turn the tide, and the Allies are saved from the defeat.

### **3.2. The Roaring Twenties**

By late 1918 much of European civilization had been destroyed meanwhile business in America continued to grow. In fact, American corporations gained new market since European civilization had been badly shaken (Whitfield 22). Notwithstanding business in America continued to grow, it also had to face postwar turmoil.

The most notable postwar turmoil was the strike of labors in the beginning of 1919. As the First World War ceased, workers expect a postwar wage increase,

but did not get one since “returning veterans flooded the labor market” (Streissguth 3). The repudiating triggered strikes to demand better wages. History jotted down that 3,600 strikes involved more than four million workers (Reeves 81). The most noteworthy strike occurred in Seattle, Washington, and Boston. More than 55,000 workers in Seattle and Washington paralyzed the city in a peaceful strike (Dallek et al 848). Meanwhile in Boston the police joined the strike and badly frightened the middle class.

Notwithstanding the strike succeeded in gain national attention, the strike did not endure long. The strike could be muffled with the discourse of “Red Scare” created by business owner and government which was spread the fear of communist makes up the strike to take over America and the world (Chomsky 14, Nash 340). Thus, the victory of business owner over the worker contributed to the restoration of sanity in America. Beside the victory of business owner with the assistance of Red Scare, the beginning of Roaring Twenties also embellished with the ratification of intoxicating liquors prohibition which is supported by business owner since they perceive it would increase labor productivity (Whitfield 26).

The Roaring Twenties began to shift into higher gear as a senator from Ohio named Warren G. Harding ran his presidential campaign. In fact, Harding had a bleak political record, but that did not matter to the businessmen and party leaders who guided his career since his slogan “back to normalcy” was what voters wanted to hear (Reeves 94-95). No wonder he elected president in 1920 election.

Shortly after elected president, Harding – who supported less government over business – chose pro business cabinet. Under Harding's leadership, government reduced taxes for the wealthy in order to stimulate the realm of business. And along with this policy, the government was well known with the slogan: "We want less government in business and more business in government." (95). In the sake of its new spirit, the government under Harding's leadership helped businessmen in numerous ways, gave massive gifts and loans to the shipping industry, promoted industrial efficiency, and assisted corporations with their labor problems. In short, under Harding's leadership *laissez-faire* economics – theory that business, if free of government regulation, will act in ways that benefit the nation – was in style.

Harding's policies and splendid economic position that America gained after The First World War – emerged as a creditor nation and became the only major power in industries – triggered the economy grew rapidly. Following a period of postwar economic and social unrest, America expanded its productive capacity. Moreover, the corporate revolution that had begun in the late 1800s attained its culmination point in the Roaring Twenties. American business became big businesses as thousand firms went out of business or are absorbed into large corporations (Nash 356).

The emphasis on standardization, division of labor and mass production which was applied during the First World War had evidenced as an effective concept. Thus, as bigger corporations which were required efficiency emerge following a period of splendid economic position America gained in the postwar, businessmen hastily applied these concepts to nearly every industries.

Before discussing the upshots of newly-applied concepts industries during the prosperous postwar period in America, I would like to give some examples of how those concepts work. In the twenties, Henry Ford applied those concepts in industrial complex at River Rouge, southeast of Detroit (Reeves 84). He sought to improve efficiency and increase output by using an assembly line in which materials move along a conveyor belt while labors stay in one place. Thus, the labors just added parts or did specific jobs as the belt moved past them. Moreover, this process also enabled Ford to lower the cost of production. Another notable example was The Maytag Company. By the twenties, Maytag Company manufactured 52,000 washing machines and made them the world's largest manufacturer of washers (84).

Shortly, the markets of America were flooded with cheaper consumer products. Yet, flooding of cheaper consumer products is useless unless consumers who willing to buy the commodities are available. Thus ideological state apparatuses that will ensure the masses to buy the commodities are needed. By the twenties, gigantic advertising industry sprouted, determined to persuade, cajole, and intimidate the public into buying more and more of everything. As evident, the nation's advertising bill doubled during the twenties (85). Reeves continue his depiction of that era by arguing that:

Installment buying becomes an integral part of sales promotion. People are urged to abandon old taboos about debt and purchase on time payments the hundreds of labor-saving devices and luxuries now pouring from the factories. They flock to the new chain stores, such as A&P, Rexall, and Woolworth, to load up on the wristwatches, mouthwashes, cigarettes, and



rayon stockings advertisers convince them are essential to the “good life.” (85).

Furthermore, movies became a very effective ideological state apparatuses as well. Movie became very effective apparatus that ensured the masses to consume the consumer products since it celebrating the “glamour life” of that time (Dallek 864). In short, it can be illustrated that ideological states apparatuses such as newspapers, radio stations, magazines, and billboards are bombarded the masses with two messages: buy and consume!

Taking departure point from Marx’s “the dominant ideas of an epoch is the idea of ruling class”, and from Louis Althusser’s “capitalist regime will ensure the submission of peoples to the ideology of the ruling class”, it is not surprising if every leading university in America during the twenties scrambles over each other established its own business school aimed to fulfill the demand of the economic realm rapid growth (Nash 357). It is also not astonishing if clergymen routinely linked capitalism with Christianity (Reeves 84). And it is also not startling if Edward Earl Purinton published an article in April 16, 1921 that idolizing big business and saying that successful business leaders were naturally suited to be powerful religious leaders. Following Edward Earl Purinton’s article, Bruce Barton also published his best-seller The Man Nobody Knows where he wrote “Jesus picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world.” (Nash 353-354, Reeves 84).

Thus, America in the roaring twenties became a prosperous nation by which time-clock efficiency, mass production, and mass consumption moved the

## CHAPTER IV

### **SOCIAL CONTRADICTION IN THE ROARING TWENTIES AS REFLECTED BY SINCLAIR LEWIS' BABBITT: A MARXIST READING**

From Marxist literary criticism's perspective, every cultural artifact, including literary work is bound to its base or mode of production from where it rises. In this respect, literary work – which is in this case, is Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt – possess an ability to evince the typicality and motivating contradiction of its epoch; within its content and within its form as well.

By relating the second and third chapter, I remark that Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt is a vivid reflection of America following the post-war period of prosperity – which is well known as Roaring Twenties. In this respect, I insist that through Babbitt, Sinclair Lewis is able to show the typicality and the motivating contradiction inherent within that era. Moreover, there is fascinating fact that I recognize from this highly acclaimed novel, the typicality and motivating contradiction is not just presented by the content of this novel, yet also by its form as well.

To be more exhaustive, I will discuss the typicality and motivating contradictions of that era by using two specific perspectives which were already jotted down in the first chapter of my thesis: *reification* and *alienation*.

#### 4.1. The Reification in the Roaring Twenties as Reflected and Criticized by Babbitt

Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt starts with the ambiance of morning in Zenith, a fictional city somewhere in 1920s United States of America. Within this scene, an omniscient narrator narrates how the day started in Zenith while exploring through the city.

“The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings.”... Below the bridge curved a railroad, a maze of green and crimson lights. The New York Flyer boomed past, and twenty lines of polished steel leaped into the glare... sheets of glass and hollow tile, glittering shops where five thousand men worked beneath one roof... The whistles rolled out in greeting a chorus cheerful as the April dawn (Lewis 12-13).

Written and set during the prosperous Roaring Twenties where capitalism is getting dramatically stronger than before and under its regime, things – commodities and objects – dominate and oppress human existence, I perceive this depiction of an ambiance of morning in Zenith is particularly interesting. Here Babbitt reflects grotesque pictures of morning under capitalist regime where things are dominating people's life. Furthermore, the absence of sunrise – within this scene the light of sun rise is substituted with the glare of polished steel and glittering shops – in this scene symbolize of how commodities and objects reign

to dominate in an era when human life is being force into the corner. Thus, I argue that this opening is a good foreshadowing to evince that this novel will tell about human being whose life is dominated by commodities and objects.

#### **4.1.1. Human Creations Become Independent and Control Human as Reflected and Criticized by Babbitt**

As I have already discussed previously in the first chapter of my thesis that one way to apprehend reification is to refer it to a state where human creations become independent of their creators and human beings become subject to their own creations and are governed by the system of commodity production that they created. Hence, within this sub-chapter I will evince how this novel reflected the reification in this sense and at the same time criticize it.

Before I present my analysis, it is important to note that reification is condemned by many Marxist intellectuals – from Georg Lukacs, Max Horkheimer, to Erich Fromm – as the problems of contemporary society which is needless to say is society under capitalist regimes. Furthermore, reification can be seen as the upshot of mode of production by which its logic is focused on things – commodities and objects. As my analysis goes, I would argue that the reification within this sense is embodied in the character of George F. Babbitt, the main character of this novel.

After the symbol of reified society open the novel, the omniscient narrator introduces George F. Babbitt who having his dream and awakened as the alarm clock rings (15). Although George F. Babbitt sulkily ceases his dream, yet he feels proud of being awakened by luxurious and expensive commodities.

I recognize two mechanisms of reification within this scene. Firstly, within the proud feeling George F. Babbitt feels as being awakened by that luxurious alarm clock. Before I go further, it is essential to note that George F. Babbitt feels proud since he feels luxurious alarm clock have an impact on his social status (16). In other words, that luxurious alarm clock defines to which class George F. Babbitt belongs to in the antagonism between the two classes. Thus, I would argue that the existence of George F. Babbitt – from his point of view that provided by the omniscient narrator – is defined by nothing but commodities which embodied within this luxurious alarm clock provided by capitalism.

Secondly, as my previous argument stated that George F. Babbitt existence within his class is governed by commodities, this scene – the word “expensive” – also implies that George F. Babbitt perceive his world not only as world of interrelated commodities, but also a world by which of the medium of commodities, money is governing.

As the narration of the novel flows, it can be seen that George F. Babbitt reified life is not confined in his house. Shortly after he leaves his house, George F. Babbitt enters the ill reified world of the Roaring Twenties. In his way to the Zenith Athletic Club – Zenith Athletic Club as explained by the omniscient narrator has no connection with sport as its name suggested, yet it is an exclusive club for urban middle class to have their lunch (88) – George F. Babbitt drops by in a small news-and-miscellany shops to buy a electric cigar-lighter. At glance, there is nothing wrong with this scene, but as the omniscient narrator informs that George F. Babbitt had promised himself to quit smoking, this scene becomes suspicious. As he attains the Zenith Athletic Clubs, the reason behind why he

bought that electric cigar lighter is become plain. He bought it because the cigar lighter signified “luxurious”, thus become sign of his social status within the community of his club.

Considering one of basic tenets of Marxist literary criticism which is states that literary works is able to reflect the typicality of the era when that literary work is written, thus I argue that George F. Babbitt’s deed is a reflection of the typicality of society in a reified era when the rapid growth of capitalism generates mass production that cajole and intimidate masses in every possible ways to buy and consume the commodities that bombarded them. Furthermore, this scene reflects how within class based society and mode of production that based itself on mass production and hence creates logic that focused on things, commodities that have been injected with particular value turn over to control human.

The most notable scene that reflects how human creation becomes independent, escapes human control, and seems to have its own life occurs in the scene when George F. Babbitt attending the State Association of Real Estate Boards convention where an auction takes place (259). At the end of this auction; “A clerical-looking man rose to clamor” and states “Money talks” as the bid from Sparta is being accepted. At glance sentence “Money talks” seems as usual sentence by which figurative language being applied. Yet if this sentence is being related to this scene exhaustively, it is distinctly clear that the decision being decided at the end of that auction is because the money simply “talks” to govern the peoples in the State Association of Real Estate Boards convention to opt that decision; they do no considerate other things but money to opt that decision. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno state “All reification is forgetting” (Jay

4), this scene reflects how within mode of production that generates desire toward commodities and its medium – money – like the Roaring Twenties, peoples are forgetting that money is a product of human interaction that ought to be controlled by them. Yet, in the Roaring Twenties, money seems to escape human control and turn over to govern human since as this scene evinced, the only parameter to opt the decision in the State Association of Real Estate Boards convention is money. Similarly, Ted Babbitt also governed by the money when he wants to take the courses which are advertised in the newspapers (122-125). As evident, I would recall that Ted's passion is to be a mechanic, yet none of the courses which are advertised in the newspaper that he wants to take connected to his passion. He just want to take it since the courses promise that the skill they over is able to make big amount of money.

Furthermore, the ending of this novel – when George F. Babbitt talks personally with his son – emphasize that he has been lived his life in a reified world: "I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along" (Lewis 596). This sentence implies that market forces which is in fact is a product of human interaction has been governed George F. Babbitt's life so that instead of control his own life, George F. Babbitt has been controlled by that force and loss his control over his.

Based on assumption that a particular point of view being employed have great influence on the literary work, I would argue that the third person omniscient narrator that posses a god like perspective being applied in this novel

is appropriate to criticize the reified life in the Roaring Twenties that reflected by this novel.

As evident, I will take a scene when George F. Babbitt finished dressing in that morning. Before he has his breakfast, George F. Babbitt is standing by the window of his room to see the center of Zenith three miles away from his resident (Lewis 29). While staring to the center of the city, George F. Babbitt “could see the top of the Second National Tower, an Indiana limestone building of thirty-five stories.” Which “Its shining walls rose against April sky to a simple cornice like a streak of white fire.” In this tower, George F. Babbitt feels integrity, and strength of a tall soldier. As he stares, George F. Babbitt feels

“Nervousness was soothed from his face, his slack chin lifted in reverence. All he articulated was “That’s one lovely sight!” but he was inspired by the rhythm of the city; his love of it renewed. He beheld the tower as a temple-spire of the religion of business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men; and as he clumped down to breakfast he whistled the ballad “Oh, by gee, by gosh, by jingo” as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble.” (30).

Within this scene, the omniscient narrator plays an important role in giving access to what George F. Babbitt’s feeling as he beholds the Second National Tower. Here, the omniscient narrator evince how George F. Babbitt whose morning begins with nervousness as his escaping dream threatened by alarm clock feels that the Second National Tower posses a particular power that able to sooth nervousness from his face and gives him inspiration. Moreover, the omniscient



narrator also provides information of how George F. Babbitt exalts that cold concrete.

Furthermore, with the assistance of omniscient narrator whose his god like perspective enable me to access George F. Babbitt's feeling, I would argue that this scene reflects how within mode of productions that its logic is focused on things, commodities and objects – symbolize by the tall “Second National Tower” – which is in fact is the creation of human being and therefore obliged to be controlled by its creator escape from its original context and placed to another context and inverted to control human being since within its new contexts those commodities and objects posses a new power that “enable” them to dominate humans being. In other words, I would argue that the scene where George F. Babbitt feels integrity, strength of a tall soldier, and soothing of nervousness from his face is a portrait of ill society of the Roaring Twenties that controlled by things – commodities and objects – in the reified world.

The important role of omniscient narrator in the sense of criticize the reified life of the Roaring Twenties within this novel does not cease in his ability to provide information that enables me to see more profoundly to George F. Babbitt, but also in his cynical tone when depicts the Babbitt's; “But the Babbitt whose god was Modern Appliances was not pleased” (18). By the word “god”, the omniscient narrator intends to insist cynically that the Babbitt's live their life within a world that is ruled by the commodities.

Another most notable cynical tone of the omniscient narrator takes place when George F. Babbitt meets his customer in his office; “The customer joined

him in the worship of machinery, and they came buoyantly up to the tenement and began that examination of plastic slate roof, kalamein doors, and seven-eighths-inch blind-nailed flooring” (109). In this respect, phrase “worship machinery” the omniscient narrator cynically depicts the irony of the mode of production by which its logic focused in commodities and object; the creators – human being – subjected by their creations which is in this scene is represent by machinery.

Taking departure point from one of Marxist literary criticism tenets which states that literary work as a part of superstructure possesses an ability to reflect contradiction and typicality of era when that literary works being written and considering the cynical tone used by the omniscient narrator within this novel, I argue that through this narrator, Sinclair Lewis whose nickname is “Red” is intend to criticize the Roaring Twenties by which its mass production and massive advertisement that cajole and intimidate the masses to buy and consume bombards the masses with commodities. Or in other words, through the cynical and satirical tone employed in his Babbitt Sinclair Lewis is intend to criticize society whose logic focused on commodities and objects.

Beside the reflection of society whose life ruled by commodities and cynical tone possessed by the omniscient narrator that intended to criticize that society, Sinclair Lewis also interject a positive tone which is I interpret as his faith that the human being can resist the reified life through Tinka, the youngest family member of the Babbitt’s. In this respect, Sinclair Lewis contrasting another member of Babbitt’s who worship the commodities with Tinka within this scene:

On the table was a runner of gold-threaded Chinese fabric, four magazines, a silver box containing cigarette-crumbs, and three "gift-books"--large, expensive editions of fairy-tales illustrated by English artists and as yet unread by any Babbitt save Tinka (143-144).

I perceive the imagery of little kid – Tinka is a ten year old little girl – that employed by Sinclair Lewis to contrasting the other members of Babbitt's who depicted as slaves of commodities is wittingly interesting. In this light, I interpret little kid is not yet poisoned by ideology that force them to subdue to the imperial of commodities while on the other hand, the adults are subject of interpelation of ideology that transform them into worshippers of commodities. Furthermore, this scene also implies that Sinclair Lewis believes that submission to commodities is a product of mode of production that its logic focused on commodities, thus the submission can be resisted if human being is freed from that mode of production, just like the little girl named Tinka in this novel.

#### **4.1.2. "Thingification" as Reflected and Criticized by Babbitt**

Beside generates submission to commodities, mode of production that its logic focused on commodities and profit also transform human relations, actions, human being, and what previously not considered as thing – commodities and object – into things that on most occasions valued based on curve within statistic table of exchange value. Written on the era of economic and mass production booming called the Roaring Twenties, I would argue that Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt unavoidably reflects the reified life which needless to say is the typicality of such

era. Thus, in the following explanation I will discuss how Babbitt reflects that typicality and at the same time negate it.

Reification within this sense is embodied within some characters of this novel, in this respect I would like to begin my analysis with George F. Babbitt, the main character of this novel. As the vivid reflection of conformist urban middle class of the Roaring Twenties, George F. Babbitt unavoidably cling in the typicality of its era by which in this light is considered everything within the limited horizon of things – commodities and objects – or worse; in the term of the medium of things, money.

As I already jotted down in the third chapter of my thesis, following a period of splendid economic position America gained in the post World War I, mammoth corporations that stressed mass production, profit and efficiency mushrooming. This period also denotes that America industrial revolution which was began by 1800s attained its culmination point.

Taking departure point from Marx argument that “The mode of production of material life conditions the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life”, I would argue that the horizon of George F. Babbitt – as the representation of urban middle class of the Roaring Twenties – is conditions by the logic of its era.

In this light, I would take a scene when the omniscient narrator tells about George F. Babbitt faith concerning his job: “He serenely believed that the one purpose of the real-estate business was to make money for George F. Babbitt” (72). By the usage of sentence “the one purpose”, it can be seen that instead

perceive his job as a mean to actualize his self as *homo faber*, George F. Babbitt merely elucidates his job in the term of medium of commodities, which is needless to say; money. In other words, it can be stated that since George F. Babbitt solely relates his self with his job within commodities term, George F. Babbitt whose horizon conditions by the mode of production of his era has transform what not supposed to be perceived as commodities into commodities.

As the narration of this novel flows, the reified life of urban middle class that reflected through the character of George F. Babbitt is increasingly seen. In a conversation with Paul Riesling as they wait for the lunch they ordered, George F. Babbitt says: "I've pretty much done all the things I ought to; supported my family, and got a good house and a six-cylinder car" (97). This conversation evinces how under the imperial of mode of production that draws human focus into commodities and objects, George F. Babbitt relationship with his family already petrified into "good houses" and "six cylinder car". His relationship with his family metamorphosed into nothing but merely commodities. In this respect, George F. Babbitt perceives purchasing "good houses" and "six cylinder car" as a sign of his caring to his family rather than what it actually is. Indeed, George F. Babbitt caring to his family is confined within world of commodities. The satirical and cynical sentence narrates by the narrator in first paragraph of the eighteenth chapter of this novel would be a good evident: "THOUGH he saw them twice daily, though he knew and amply discussed every detail of their expenditures, yet for weeks together Babbitt was no more conscious of his children than of the buttons on his coat-sleeves" (337). Moreover, George F. Babbitt also perceives religion as commodities when he talks to Kenneth Escott:

"Well, now Kenneth, I don't think you ought to talk that way about the doctor. A preacher has to watch his interests, hasn't he? You remember that in the Bible about--about being diligent in the Lord's business, or something?" (333).

Refers back to what I jotted down previously on the beginning of this chapter, reification in the sense of "thingification" will lead to commodification, the specific condition of "thingification" by which exchange value – an amount of money for which a commodities can be bought or sold – is entangled. This condition is again, embodied within the character of George F. Babbitt.

However, as the novel illustrates, George F. Babbitt goes to a barbershop where forty barbers and nine manicure girls worked desperately to have his nails manicured. One of the manicurists in this barbershop named Ida Putiak attracts his attention (433). George F. Babbitt feels that Ida would be a good escapade to escape from his mechanized relationship with his wife. George F. Babbitt asks Ida to have a date with him and Ida accepts it in order to get a good meal in a Biddlemeier's Inn. Besides that, George F. Babbitt also boasts of his social status and power to Ida in order to cajole her to accept his invitation. This scene shows that the Ida Putiak acceptance is an exchange of Ida beauty for money – good meals – and social status that George F. Babbitt imparted to her. In other words, George F. Babbitt perceives Ida Putiak solely as a commodity which is can be purchased. Similarly, George F. Babbitt also uses his money to buy the Mayor's doorman when he wants to visit Paul Riesling in jail (397).

Beside entangle exchange value, commodification also involve sign exchange value by which human is estimated in the terms of its social status and exclude other consideration. However, as the novel illustrates, George F. Babbitt and his wife, Myra Babbitt intends to invite the Mckelvey's to dinner in their house (294). George F. Babbitt invites the Mckelvey's since "McKelvey was being placidly merry now with the great, the manufacturers and bankers, the land-owners and lawyers and surgeons who had chauffeurs and went to Europe" (292). In this respect, George F. Babbitt perceives the Mckelvey's posses sign exchange value in the term of their power and social status which is in the turn will benefit the Babbitt's in the sense of their social status. As evident, George F. Babbitt hoped that the Doppelbraus would see the McKelveys' limousine, and their uniformed chauffeur, waiting in front (297).

Ironically, the Mckelvey's perceive the Babbitt's who theoretically belong to the lower class as valueless commodity as satirically illustrates by the narrator "the McKelveys not only accepted but, after changing the date once or twice, actually came (295). Indeed, they show their reluctance by coming late and going home early. As the narration of this novel flows, I notice that Sinclair Lewis intends to emphasize this ironic and hence makes it fun by illustrates similar scene. Yet, in this scene the Overbrook's is placed in the position of the Babbitt's and the Babbitt's is placed in the Mckelvey's position (303-307). In addition, I would like to states that the dinner scene between Mckelvey's and the Babbitt's, and between the Babbitt's and the Overbrook's reflects the relationship between human being under the sovereignty of capitalism by which defines within the term

of commodities. In other words, a human being wants to develop relationship with other human being only if that relationship gives her/him “profit”.

Just like George F. Babbitt, the other characters of this novel are cannot escape from the logic of mode of production of their era. The absolute domination of this “horror” seems leave very little space to allow human being to escape from its logic.

As the novel illustrates, other character that live under sovereignty of commodification is Vergil Gunch – president of Boosters and Zenith largest coal dealer. In an occasion he states zealously “The thing to do then, as a live bunch of go-getters, is to CAPITALIZE CULTURE; to go right out and grab it” (393). His statement evince that he perceives culture solely in the term of medium of commodities, which is needless to say is money. Furthermore, this novel also illustrates even a best-known Protestant pontiff in America named Mike Monday cannot escape from the logic of commodification as the narrator depicts him as the world's greatest salesman of salvation (154).

Reification undercuts the sense of totality in society, which is in the words of Fredric Jameson; it fragments our perception of the whole world in which we live (Jameson in Roberts 41). Thus, those who live under sovereignty of mode of production that generates reification can merely see discrete objects. In this respect, I would argue that once again the third person omniscient narrator that narrates this novel is a central figure to corroborate my argument that this novel is a critique toward capitalism or particularly in the Era of the Roaring Twenties



since the way this omniscient narrator describes George F. Babbitt in the following paragraph truly depicts a human being whose life is reified:

“Though he did know the market-price, inch by inch, of certain districts of Zenith, he did not know whether the police force was too large or too small, or whether it was in alliance with gambling and prostitution. He knew the means of fire-proofing buildings and the relation of insurance-rates to fire-proofing, but he did not know how many firemen there were in the city, how they were trained and paid, or how complete their apparatus. He sang eloquently the advantages of proximity of school-buildings to rentable homes, but he did not know--he did not know that it was worthwhile to know--whether the city schoolrooms were properly heated, lighted, ventilated, furnished” (74-75).

Furthermore, the satirical tone possessed by this omniscient narrator when the narrator describing George F. Babbitt shoes; “His shoes were black laced boots, good boots, honest boots, standard boots, extraordinarily uninteresting boots” (24) is interesting if it is being relates to the discussion within this subchapter. I interpret that within this sentence; the narrator actually intends to describe George F. Babbitt. Yet, since in a reified world human being is merely things – objects and commodities – among ocean of things, thus the narrator simply describe George F. Babbitt with one of commodities that makes up his existence. In addition, I recognize that George F. Babbitt’s remark toward his son at the end of this novel corroborate my argument: “I’ve never done a single thing I’ve wanted to in my whole life! I don’t know 's I’ve accomplished anything except just get along” (Lewis 596). That sentence implies that under mode of production

that draws human's attention to things, George F. Babbitt has been transformed into thing since just like things – commodities and objects – George F. Babbitt have no control over himself.

As my analysis goes, I also recognize positive tone that this reified world can be challenged once again through Tinka, the youngest member of the Babbitt's. I recognize this positive tone when the narrator describes Myra Babbitt as follow: "She was a good woman, a kind woman, a diligent woman, but no one, save perhaps Tinka her ten-year-old, was at all interested in her or entirely aware that she was alive" (21). Here Tinka is presented as the negation of reified world where everything including human being is considered solely as things by describing that she is the only human being in the Babbitt's house who aware that Myra Babbitt is not a commodity or an object. And following my argument in the previous chapter concerning Tinka, here I also argue that the imagery of little kid in Tinka corroborate the positive tone, since the little child is simply not yet poisoned by the dominant ideology of her or his era.

#### **4.1.3. Fragmentary Narrative Perspective as the Reflection of Reified Society**

Besides paying attention to the content of a literary work, Marxist literary criticism – as stated by Terry Eagleton in his highly acclaimed Marxism and Literary Criticism – also seeks for the conjuncture between other elements of literary work such as its form with the base or material condition when the work was written

In this respect, this novel shows an event I recognized interesting related to the discussion of this subchapter. That event occurs when scene that illustrates

George F. Babbitt is preparing to go to bed interwoven with disconnected scene that illustrates

“Horace Updike was making love to Lucile McKelvey in her mauve drawing-room on Royal Ridge... a cocaine-runner and a prostitute were drinking cocktails in Healey Hanson's saloon on Front Street... two men sat in a laboratory. For thirty-seven hours now they had been working on a report of their investigations of synthetic rubber... a conference of four union officials as to whether the twelve thousand coal-miners within a hundred miles of the city should strike... a G. A. R. veteran was dying... factory of the Pullmore Tractor Company of Zenith was running on night shift to fill an order of tractors for the Polish army... Mike Monday who was finishes a meeting... Seneca Doane, the radical lawyer, and Dr. Kurt Yavitch, the histologist (whose report on the destruction of epithelial cells under radium had made the name of Zenith known in Munich, Prague, and Rome), were talking in Doane's library about standardization in Zenith... a young man who for six months had sought work turned on the gas and killed himself and his wife In the slum beyond the railroad tracks ... Lloyd Mallam, the poet, owner of the Hafiz Book Shop, was finishing a rondeau to show how diverting was life amid the feuds of medieval Florence, but how dull it was in so obvious a place as Zenith.” (152-160).

Within this scene it can be evinced that simultaneous scene occurs in different location – from drawing room on Royal Ridge to the slum beyond the railroad tracks – within one city, Zenith. These interwoven yet disconnected events give impression as if the narrator possesses facet eyes that can see many

irrelevant events. Based on my point of view, this fragmentary framework can be interpreted in two ways:

First, it can be interpreted that Sinclair Lewis wants those who read his Babbitt witness the hypocrisy, exploitation, resistance, and other social contradiction of the Roaring Twenties that he reflected through fictional city of Zenith.

Before I explain my second interpretation, I would like to recall the material conditions that become the background of my analysis. The Roaring Twenties is denoted with the rapid growth of economic real that triggers the mushrooming of mammoth corporations. The mushrooming corporations that base its existence on mass productions unavoidably generate fierce competition which is stressed efficiency in order to aggrandize profit margins. The direct upshot of these material conditions is the sharpened of work divisions. Thus, the totality of process of production is shredded into many divisions. These material conditions generate human being that has become what Georg Lukacs call isolated atoms (Lukacs in Suseno 120). Furthermore, this reified world makes human becomes blind to the fact that the live in a total network of relationship with other peoples. Taking this as departure point, I would argue that this fragmentary narrative perspective can be interpreted as the expression of experience of live in a reified world. Furthermore, if this related to the topics of discussion within this subchapter, it is also can be stated that this fragmentary narrative perspective reflects the content of this novel.

## **4.2. The Alienation as Reflected and Negated by Babbitt**

Alienation, as I have stated previously in earlier chapter is a state where human being lose the control over their lives, hence that condition lead to a sense of living in the world that alien, and conditions in which human being experience their lives as meaningless, unsatisfying, and worthless.

Alienation seems to be central point within this novel. I come to this conclusion since this novel is opened by the alienated George F. Babbitt who project his unresolved alienation to a dream that keep on hunting him, the conflict is triggered by the desire to subvert alienation, the climax is denotes with the dilemma faced by George F. Babbitt whether keep on rebel and freed from alienation or return to the embrace of conformity and becomes alienated once again, and the resolution of this novel is denotes by the tragedy of returning George F. Babbitt to the embrace of alienation which is contrasted by Sinclair Lewis with Ted Babbitt who succeed to freed himself from alienation by refused his father's expectation and actualize his passion and natural ability..

### **4.2.1. The Tragedy of Alienated Man in the Roaring Twenties as Reflected by the Character of Paul Riesling**

Within this subchapter, I want to emphasize on one specific definition of this term, alienated from species life. In this respect, alienated from species life can be interpreted as a condition by which

“The very possibility of manifesting the capacities which characterize a person as a human being is blocked by the role most of them assume

within the process of production in order to meet their needs. For work serves solely as “a means for their existence.” (Rockmore 63).

Furthermore, within this type of alienation, human being is alienated from chance to actualize themselves since they do not objectify themselves according to their passion and their natural ability. In short, it can be stated that within this type of alienation, human being is estranged from himself.

This type of alienation is embodied within two characters of this novel; Paul Riesling and George F. Babbitt. In this respect, I would like to begin my analysis with Paul Riesling first. Paul Riesling is a close friend of George F. Babbitt since they attended the same college and had been classmates and roommates (69).

Paul Riesling, as I jotted down within the earlier chapter is an unhappy man in his middle age, yet comparing to his college years, he is as narrates by the narrator is a lively young man (140). Taking this as the departure point, I argue that from the perspective of Marxism, the best way to find out what makes Paul discontent is by examining his material existence that illustrate by this novel.

However, as the novel illustrates the lively young Paul Riesling was a violinist and always expected to learn it more profoundly in Europe (140, 233). Yet, Paul Riesling ends up as businessman who take care his father business (70). By relating Paul’s job with his expectation when he was young, I would state that his restlessness is the result of the contradiction between his job and his expectation.

I come to this conclusion since from the perspective of Marxism, human being actualize themselves and become real human being through work. In this respect, the only way for them to become human being and to see themselves is by actualize their passion and natural ability. Thus in Paul's case, he could becomes a human being merely if he becomes a violinist and go to Europe to learn it more profoundly. Thus, by become a businessman, Paul Rieslings enters a world that completely alien to him, he never gets assurance of himself. In other words, he appears to be a stranger for him. In addition, the fierce competition that he faced amongst businessmen has totally demolishes his essence as a human since as he says to George F. Babbitt in one occasion "my business... is principally keeping my competitors from distributing roofing" (103). This sentence implied that Paul Riesling has effectively becomes machine in the mechanical mode of production, his work no longer know the essence of human being by which principally based on freedom and universality.

For live in world that alien and hostile to him, it is not startling that one day Paul Riesling proposes a plan to escape for a while from that alien world to George F. Babbitt. During their escapade in Maine, Paul Riesling turn becomes a man that appreciate life more as what he says when George F. Babbitt asks him about what he feels: "Oh, it's darn good, Georgie. There's something sort of eternal about it." (231).

Tragically, returns from vacation Paul Riesling once again turn become an unhappy businessman as once again he back to world that alien to him. This is can be seen distinctly when Paul Riesling becomes the only person who seen glum, alone, and silent in a party that attended by the businessmen of Zenith (290-291).

One day, Paul Riesling who already cannot stand his alienation symbolically resist by shooting Zilla, his wife who in this light is a representation of his alien world (396).

As my analysis goes, I would like also add that in fact, there is no detail information provided regarding Paul who gives up his passion to be a good violinist except his father business and the presence of Zilla. Thus, I would cling to a basic tenet in Marxist literary criticism that a literary work possesses an ability to reflect the typicality of its era to analyze why Paul Riesling give up his dream.

Paul Riesling is a portrait of urban middle class of the America Roaring Twenties. In this light, Paul Riesling represents the urban middle class in the Roaring Twenties America which logic of its mode of production draw their focused into commodities and the medium of commodities. Within mode of production that clings to such logic, everything that cannot be defined within its term will be marginalized. Moreover, the presence of ideological apparatuses that cajole, intimidate and ensured peoples to submit to the dominant ideologies leave no room for people like lively young Paul. Thus Paul Riesling as a portrait of the Roaring Twenties urban middle class represents those who become the subject of interpelation of the dominant ideologies.

Furthermore, the presence of Zilla also influences the submission of Paul Riesling to the dominant ideologies and gives his dream up, not in the sense that she is in fact a woman, yet because she also subject of the interpelation of dominant ideologies. I draw this conclusion from what Paul says to George F.



Babbitt when they are talking about Zilla in Maine; “I figure out all sorts of plans to keep her amused.” (234). Taking departure point from Marx famous passage in Toward a Critique of Political Economy: “mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness”, I would argue that the best way to amuse Zilla who grows in the Roaring Twenties is by amuse her in the logic of mode of production at that time. Thus, there is no room for violinist whose economic position is not as splendid as businessman like Young Paul Riesling.

#### **4.2.2. The Tragedy of Alienated Man in the Roaring Twenties as Reflected by the Character of George F. Babbitt and Negated the Character of Ted Babbitt.**

Similar to his close friend Paul Riesling, George F. Babbitt is also an alienated businessman. Yet, what makes them different is Paul Riesling clearly feels that his life is meaningless, unsatisfying, and worthless; while George F. Babbitt do not really recognize that, at least until Paul ask him to have escapade in Maine woods.

In fact, the young George F. Babbitt wants to pursue a career as a lawyer since he is a good orator (140). Furthermore, the young George F. Babbitt keeps on saying to his friends in college that as a lawyer, he wants to take the cases of the poor for nothing (452). Before I continue I would like to states that young George F. Babbitt is a classic example of man that is not alienated. He wants to become a lawyer since he wants to make his passion become an objective reality,

by become a lawyer; he wants to develop and express his essential human characteristics. In other words, George F. Babbitt becomes a human and ensures that he is a human only by actualize himself as a lawyer. Furthermore, his willing to take the cases for nothing denotes that de-alienation work is pleasurable.

Similar to Paul Riesling, George F. Babbitt ends up become a businessman, a realtor. He enters the world that alien and hostile to him, he never develops and expresses his essential human characteristic as he states in the end of the novel: "I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods." (596). In other words, he becomes stranger to him and regrets it in the end of the novel.

Although in the beginning of the novel George F. Babbitt shows that he is a delighted successful businessman of Zenith. Yet within his unconscious he feels conversely different. As illustrates by the narrator, for years George F. Babbitt experienced the similar dreams:

For years the fairy child had come to him. Where others saw but Georgie Babbitt, she discerned gallant youth. She waited for him, in the darkness beyond mysterious groves. When at last he could slip away from the crowded house he darted to her. His wife, his clamoring friends, sought to follow, but he escaped (14).

Instantly he was in the magic dream. 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 (160).

These dreams show that George F. Babbitt is represses something deep within his unconscious. As my analysis goes, I interpret that this dream represents George F. Babbitt's desire to escape from world that alien to him, it represent his desire to escape from meaningless, unsatisfying, and worthless life he live in.

In this respect, I would like to states that just like Paul Riesling, there is no detail information provided within this novel regarding why George F. Babbitt gives his dream up, yet I would cling to a tenet in tradition of Marxist literary criticism that a literary work possesses an ability to reflect typicality of its era to analyze why George F. Babbitt gives his dream up.

As I states previously in the third chapter of my thesis; the turn of the century denoted the birth of the new urban middle class in America, this new urban class whom direct upshot urbanization and burgeoning prosperity of capitalism have great faith in the dominant ideology of that time. Moreover, the ideological apparatuses that cajole, intimidate and ensured peoples to submit to the dominant ideologies are flooded America at that time also played important role in ensuring this new emerging urban middle class submission to the dominant ideologies. Regarding the fact within this novel that George F. Babbitt feels ashamed to be mocked by Myra Thompson – his wife to be – as a country boy from Catawba (140), at this point I would argue that George F. Babbitt is the embodied typicality of this new emerging urban middle class.

Just like what happened to Paul Riesling, the presence of Myra Thompson also influences the submission of Paul Riesling to the dominant ideologies and gives his dream up, not in the sense that she is in fact a woman, yet because she

also subject of the interpellation of dominant ideologies. Myra, as I already discussed in the second chapter of my thesis is a girl that relate herself to the world through commodities, thus there is no room for lawyer who willing to takes cases of poor people for nothing for Myra. Hence there is no other way for George F. Babbitt beside gives his dream up and enter the world that totally alien to him to amuse Myra.

For living his life in world that alien to him, and unconsciously desires to escape from his meaningless, unsatisfying, and worthless life, George F. Babbitt happily accepts Paul's offer to have escapade in Maine woods. During his escapade with Paul, George F. Babbitt says to Paul "I'd just like to sit here--the rest of my life--and whittle--and sit. And never hear a typewriter. Or Stan Graff fussing in the 'phone." (230). That sentence implies that George F. Babbitt finds that his job which is represented by the sound of type writer and one of his employee named Stan Graff is not pleasurable for him, thus he wants to get away from that. Furthermore, the following conversation between George F. Babbitt and Paul Riesling emphasize that both of them is alienated.

"We never thought we'd come to Maine together!"

"No. We've never done anything the way we thought we would. I expected to live in Germany with my granddad's people, and study the fiddle."

"That's so. And remember how I wanted to be a lawyer and go into politics?" (233-234).

Return from Maine, which is mean return to the estrange world, George F. Babbitt has more interest in life (237). In Zenith, he promptly employs his skill in public speaking, yet not as what he was expected when he was young, but to firm up his position within his class (394). Although, at glance it seems that George F. Babbitt is already actualizing his passion and his natural skill become an objective reality, in fact he ironically becomes more alienated from himself than before. It is because at this point, he not just alienates himself by entering a world that totally alien to him, but he use his passion and natural ability that has become an objective reality as merely an instrument for a sign exchange value which is needless to say is a position within his class.

For living his life in a world that totally alien to him and merely have Paul Riesling as the only friend who is human (351), the absence of Paul Riesling when he being arrested for shooting his wife truly agitate George F. Babbitt. Once again George F. Babbitt feels the restlessness within himself; he starts to question what he really wants in his hollow life (409). At this point, he recollects Maine woods – place where he and Paul escape from their ruts. But as he attains Maine, he finds that people in Maine whom he expects to be far from hollow life like his is dreaming about conformity that he tries to slip away from (449). Disappointed by what he discovers, George F. Babbitt goes back to Zenith.

Along his way back to Zenith, George F. Babbitt meets Seneca Doane, an old friend that will provide answer for his question. Through Seneca Doane, George F. Babbitt recollects lost pieces of puzzle reminiscent from his past; he finds the answer for his question. He remembers that his passion and natural ability are actually public speaking and use his skill to help poor people (453-

454); with the answer provided by Seneca Doane, George F. Babbitt decides to actualize his passion and his ability into objective reality and thus overcomes his alienation by rebel against his reactionary society.

The first experience for George F. Babbitt to overcome his alienation happened in Zenith Athletic Club. At that time George F. Babbitt defends Seneca Doane – a lawyer who care about the poor people, I would like also states that Seneca Doane is a representation of Young George F. Babbitt – who slandered by his friends (461).

Shortly after George F. Babbitt challenge his friends' opinion about Seneca Doane, a strike occurs in Zenith. The strike paralyze economic matters in Zenith so that Reverend Dr. John J. Drew – minister of Chatham Road Presbyterian church which George F. Babbitt attends – feels that he needs to deliver a sermon about that. In the name of religion, the sermon champions the competitive economic system (468). George F. Babbitt, who now try to overcome his alienation inflamed for hears the sermon. Since now George F. Babbitt want to actualize his passion into objective reality, his wrath can be understood since competitive and contradicted economic system like capitalism which is championed by the sermon will marginalized the poor. Back to George F. Babbitt's wrath, he angrily damns the sermon, his moves makes his friend at Athletic Club glancing at him doubtfully.

George F. Babbitt's attempt to overcome and actualize himself to be objective reality continues when he has his lunch in the Athletic Clubs. During his lunch he hears his friends slander the strikers by states that the strikers have

throwing bombs; George F. Babbitt who bothered for hear the statement challenges his friends by says; “oh rats Clarence, they look just like you and me, and I certainly didn’t notice any bombs.” (472). Shortly after George F. Babbitt leaves the Club, his friends discuss and questioned George F. Babbitt’s stance.

To anticipate the strike, George F. Babbitt’s friends form Good Citizen League and they are asking George F. Babbitt’s stance (518). At this first invitation, George F. Babbitt says that he is going to think about it. In the following day, another friends who possesses stronger social status, ask George F. Babbitt once again to join the Good Citizen League, at this point George F. Babbitt who perceives the league as an instrument to preserve the status of upper class declines the invitation (554).

As I have already discussed in the second chapter of my thesis, after the repudiating George F. Babbitt starts to lose his friends. Moreover, George F. Babbitt’s firm also begins to lose customers and employees. But the worst of all is Street Traction Company – George F. Babbitt’s partner in real-estate business – gives the new real-estate business to George F. Babbitt’s rival, Sanders, Torrey, and Wing Company.

This event reflects the irony of liberty within capitalism. This event evinces that under sovereignty of capitalism human being is free to actualize themselves as long as their actualization sustain the interest of capitalism. In other words, this scene shows that capitalism is a system that based itself on the alienation of human being, yet disguises it behind the myth of “freedom to be yourself”.

Back to George F. Babbitt, he begins to think to flee back to the security of conformity, he wonders if there is a decent and creditable way to return (563). The way to return to security of conformity which is also denotes the climax of this novel comes when Myra Babbitt – George F. Babbitt's wife – nursed in the hospital. The members of Good Citizen League drop in to see Myra, and once again George F. Babbitt's stance being questioned (579). Here George F. Babbitt is facing a dilemma; to stay true to himself by keep dissenting or estrange himself within conformity. Yet, for hear the invitation, George F. Babbitt as cynically narrates by the narrator:

“Almost tearful with joy at being coaxed instead of bullied, at being permitted to stop fighting, at being able to desert without injuring his opinion of himself, cease utterly to be domestic revolutionist. He patted Grunch's shoulder, and next day he became a member of the Good Citizen League (579).”

Thus, George F. Babbitt's attempt to overcome his alienation is ended in tragedy, he – as narrated in cynical tone by the narrator – embrace his alienation happily although the fire to overcome his alienation still ignites faintly within himself as he says: “I'm going to run things and figure out things to suit myself – when I retire (591). In addition, since I take my departure point from assumption that George F. Babbitt is a reflection of typicality of its era, I would like to state that the tragedy of George F. Babbitt is a reflection of the tragedy of human being under the sovereignty of capitalism who cannot overcome their alienation since this “horror” seems give no room for human being to overcome their alienation.



Beyond the tragedy of George F. Babbitt that generates pessimistic tone, in fact, Sinclair Lewis interjects optimist tone in the ending of this novel through Ted Babbitt. However, as illustrates by this novel, Ted Babbitt gives up his college for his dream; to be a mechanic (596). He refuses his father expectation to get a B.A for the sake of their family social status. Moreover, he poised to receive low salary in factory job for the way he believes in. implicitly, Sinclair Lewis contrasting George F. Babbitt with his son through what George F. Babbitt's statement after listening to Ted argument:

I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know's I've accomplished anything except just get along. I figure out I've made about a quarter of an inch out of a possible hundred rods. Well, maybe you'll carry things on further. I don't know. But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil! I'll back you. Take your factory job, if you want to. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours!" (596).

George F. Babbitt's statement implicitly evinces that he projected himself to his son. His statement also shows that at least he can overcome alienation even tough by back his son up. Furthermore, this ending also evinces Sinclair Lewis' faith and hopes that the new generation which is represents by Ted Babbitt could overthrow alienation and actualize their world.

#### 4.2.3. Alienation as Reflected by the Episodic Plot of Babbitt

As I have jotted down in the earlier chapter that besides paying attention to the content of a literary work, Marxist literary criticism also seeks for the conjuncture between other elements of literary work such as its form with the base or material condition when the work was written

In this light, there is interesting fact that I catch from Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt as I analyze this novel, this novel is constructed based on loosely connected plot. This loosely connected plot gives impression that this novel is like a collection of episodes which its unity is preserving merely by the presence of its central character, George F. Babbitt.

Based on my point of view, this episodic plot can be interpreted in two ways: First, I assume that Sinclair Lewis intends to present an exhaustive portrait of George F. Babbitt as the central character of this novel. In this respect, I assume that Sinclair Lewis wants to emphasize the tragedy of George F. Babbitt by allow the omniscient narrator provide detail information regarding to him, and at the same time mocking him by using satire and cynical tone.

Before I explain my second interpretation, I would like to discuss the material condition of era when this novel was written. As I have already discussed in the third chapter of my thesis, by the beginning of twentieth century, capitalism in America was getting stronger. It was denoted by the mammoth corporations that mushrooming at that time. This condition unavoidably increased the level of competition between them. In order to survive within that fierce competition,

every business owner has no other choice except aggrandize the profit margin by suppress the cost production.

The best way to suppress the cost of production is by sharpened work divisions. The direct upshot of the sharpened work divisions is labor becomes alienated from their product since they only produce a small part of a complete commodity. Thus, their product becomes alien for them.

Furthermore, the fierce competition also generates contradiction that not only occurs between capital owner and labor, but also between capital owner with another capital owner and labor with another labor. In short, human being is alienated from another human being. Moreover, regarding the alienation in the sense being alienated from another human being, the ideological states apparatuses that celebrated and championed the dominant idea of the Roaring Twenties which is needless to say is competition and individualism also leads human being in the roaring twenties alienated from another human being.

Moreover, the mass production in the Roaring Twenties that flooded America's market with commodities unavoidably determines a relative desire toward commodities and its medium. The direct upshot of this material condition is human beings do not perceive working as an actualization of themselves anymore, yet they perceive working and themselves as merely instrument to fulfill their relative desire. In other words, they become alienated from themselves.

As my argument goes, I would like to states that the fast-paced economic realm that happened in the Roaring twenties had generated human beings who instead experienced themselves in totality, they experienced themselves in a

loosely connected relationship with alien of commodities, themselves and other human being. As my argument goes, I would also argue that the fast-paced economic realm like the Roaring Twenties had unavoidably will require time-clock efficiency. The upshot of this time clock efficiency is the peoples are compelled to do overtime work while they are already tired. In the next morning they have to get up while they are still tired. Then, in the noon they have to eat their lunch while they are not hungry or maybe have to finish their lunch while they are still hungry. This condition can be summed up by stating that within the economic regime that requires time clock efficiency, human being is in loosely connected relationship with themselves; their selves – like what I have already stated previously – are alien to them.

Relating this fact to the loosely connected plot in Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*, I would like to argue that the loosely connected plot possessed by this novel reflects the alienation in its era. Furthermore, regarding the tragedy of alienated George F. Babbitt and Paul Riesling within this novel, I also would like to argue that the plot of this novel reflects its content.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

After analyzing Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* I conclude that this novel is able to reflect the typicality of the Roaring Twenties and its motivating social contradictions. As my analysis goes, I figure out two social contradictions, reification and alienation.

Reification is embodied within the central character, George F. Babbitt and some other characters of this novel. As my argument goes, George F. Babbitt is a vivid portrait of urban middle class of the Roaring Twenties whose life is controlled by the commodities such as expensive alarm clock and expensive electric cigar lighter. Moreover, some scenes of this novel also symbolize how commodities, objects, and the medium of commodities which is money govern George F. Babbitt's life. However, the reification within George F. Babbitt's life does not cease at that point. As the logic of mode of production in the Roaring Twenties draws human being attention to commodities and objects, George F. Babbitt as the vivid portrait of urban middle class of the roaring Twenties also perceive everything – from Ida Putiak the manicurist until the Mckelvey's and the Overbrook's and even his quality as human being – in terms of commodities that have exchange value, or sign exchange value. In addition, I also would like to state that the opening scene of this novel is a good foreshadowing to inform the readers that this novel will tell about human being whose life is governed by commodities and objects.

Besides the embodiment of human being whose life is a reified life, George F. Babbitt and other characters of this novel like Paul Riesling are also embodiment of alienated human being under the sovereignty of capitalism in the beginning of the twentieth century. Both of these characters are portray of how capitalism that always boast the rhetoric of freedom to be yourself in fact allows someone to be himself or herself solely if the actualization preserve the interest of the despotic system. Furthermore, as the novel illustrates, the effort of George F. Babbitt to overcome his alienation ends in tragedy, as he give up his effort in the face of absolute power of the horror called capitalism.

As my analysis goes, I also recognize that this novel does not solely reflect the reification and alienation in the Roaring twenties through its content, but also through its form. In this respect, I recognize that the fragmentary framework of this novel when the omniscient narrator narrates disconnected events at the time when George F. Babbitt prepare to go to bed as the reflection of the fragmentary life of reified society of the Roaring Twenties. Furthermore, the episodic plot within this novel reflects the alienated life of people in the Roaring Twenties. In addition I would like to insist that Marxist reading proves that the content of this novel is manifested in its form and the form of this novel is manifested in its content.

Furthermore, I also would like to state that this novel does not just reflect the reification and alienation occurred in the Roaring Twenties, but also criticize through the cynical and satirical tone of the omniscient narrator. Moreover, beyond the dreary picture of reified and alienated life of the Roaring Twenties reflected by this novel, Sinclair Lewis interjects positive tone which evinces his

faith and his hopes that the human being can resist the reification and alienation through the characters of Tinka Babbitt and Ted Babbitt.

Lastly, I would like to state that from the point of view of Marxist literary criticism, Sinclair Lewis had written a progressive novel without fall to banality of propaganda novel. In addition, from characters of Tinka Babbitt and Ted Babbitt that negate the motivating social contradiction of the Roaring Twenties, Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt can be categorized as critical realist novel in Georg Lukacs' term since this novel success in projecting a rich and many sided image of human wholeness and also the dynamic force of history.



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