

**OPPONENT'S REPORT
BA THESIS**

**A Pious American Materialist: Analysis of Religious Elements in Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*
Bc. Pavla Taněvová**

Pavla Taněvová's central argument in this thesis is that for Babbitt “the Christian belief is only a label helping him to win a certain position in his community. His true religious belief is materialism (or consumer culture), since he admires its values and acts according to them” (vi). Following a brief Introduction, the second chapter discusses religion, the third one focuses on consumer culture, the fourth attempts to illustrate why consumer culture “can be taken as religion” (29), and the final fifth chapter is a detailed reading largely focused on the protagonist of *Babbitt*. The thesis closes with a concise Conclusion and a 6-page Appendix of Babbitt's hierophanies, idols and rituals.

On the whole, the text is fluent, clear (with some language errors) and substantially well-researched for a BA thesis. The fifth chapter, which characterizes Babbitt as “an archetypical businessman sitting in the middle of the consumerist, materialistic world and living his consumerist, materialistic life” (61) seems to me the strongest, although the focus on Babbitt, even as a representative of a managerial class characterized by the shallowness of its professed religion, its view of education as a way to status, its obsession with commodities, etc., seems to me too narrow. Also, some points here could have been developed more carefully, e.g. concerning the influence of Paul Riesling, who supposedly “fulfills the moral role of the church: he manages to make Babbitt look at himself and think” (44). (Has Riesling's impact on Babbitt been so profound? And does it make a difference that Riesling eventually shoots his wife, as Taněvová briefly notes later?) Or, it is argued that Babbitt's “conduct is driven by consumerist goals and values which, put simply, are 'to make money and be a responsible member of the community' (61–62)” (67). Would Taněvová herself characterize “consumerist goals and values” in this way? Finally, the underlying questions of religion, consumerism and materialism are complex, and their treatment in chapters 2-4 is rather cursory; particularly the Taněvová's use of the term “materialism” in this context is problematic (materialism is not consumerism, consumer culture or material culture—these are the three terms used here as synonyms or specifications of “materialism”) and the term “materialistic religion” is to me rather confusing. Also, if the set of beliefs that Babbitt represents may be described as a religion (but why not call it “ideology”?), what other characteristics besides the fascination with commodities does it have? (Again, the focus solely on consumerism here appears to me rather narrow.)

Proposed grade: výborně (1) or velmi dobře (2)

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