

The
Job



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1926. Lewis, was the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Possibly the greatest satirist of his age, Lewis wrote novels that present a devastating picture of middle-class American life in the 1920s. Although he ridiculed the values, the lifestyles, and even the speech of his characters, there is often affection behind the irony. Lewis began his career as a journalist, editor, and hack writer. He became an important literary figure with the publication of Main Street. His seventh novel, Babbitt, is considered by many critics to be his greatest work. One of his major works The Job begins: Captain Lew Golden would have saved any foreign observer a great deal of trouble in studying America. He was an almost perfect type of the petty small-town middle-class lawyer. He lived in Panama, Pennsylvania. He had never been captain of anything except the Crescent Volunteer Fire Company, but he owned the title because he collected rents, wrote insurance, and meddled with lawsuits. See other titles by this author available from Kessinger Publishing.

The Job Details

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jess b says

Woops, I finished this book awhile ago and forgot to mark it. A good book if you're interested in the time period in which it's set (~1910), especially as regards women in the workforce. It's aged a little awkwardly, though it's still very clever. Sinclair Lewis was actually the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and I'm a little surprised he's not better known.

Andy says

Just read this early work by Lewis. Truly progressive piece (1917) about a woman struggling to make her place in the world of work.

Sonia Reppe says

About a career woman in 1920's New York. One of the first novels about feminism.

Lisa says

Had to read this for my book club. There is a lot of tell and very little show. The personality of every character is described in great detail, but we don't really get to form our own opinions based on their words or actions. The final third of the book is the most interesting, but then we're slammed with a ridiculous ending.

Crysta says

Classic Lewis. I love his writing and his stories of "woman alone in the big, bad city." Set in the first decade of the 20th century in New York, The Job looks at an American woman's career options: work a relatively meaningless job until you find a husband, or commit to a lifelong, relatively flat secretarial career and remain a spinster.

It's amazing how much has changed, yet how many little pieces ring true today.

Murray says

Written 101 years ago, "The Job" is, to me, a book that probably needs hardcore footnotes to help place it in a more specific context. There are two things going on here that are somewhat foreign to me. One is the

sociological context, whereby the heroine, Una Golden rises from a New York stenographer to a 'business woman'. Lewis presents her struggles in a male-dominated world in very black and white terms as Una does anything-but claw her way to the top. Her encounters with men and bosses, which we would now consider cliche, were probably very institutional at the time. So, readers must be willing to deal with serial insults and putdowns so that Lewis can get his point across in a not so subtle fashion.

The second is the literary context. Needless to say, a book of this age is filled with many cliches and old-fashioned argot that sounds alien today. Furthermore, I suspect that Lewis was bound by certain laws or mores of the time that causes much of the conflict in the book to seem very sugary when he wanted to pull out his knife and go for the throat.

For most of the book, I actually did not care much for Una and much of her self-imposed weakness. But, as she learns her way about the man's world of business, she becomes more interesting and likable. Most of this occurs about two-thirds of the way through. While the end is very satisfying, the last page seems like Lewis, who was not as emboldened as he later would be in his career, is conforming to literary devices of the day.

If you are a big Lewis fan, like I am, I do recommend "The Job". While not his best, most ever-lasting novels, it is far from his worst.

Ms. Chedwick says

Just finished this. Very good. If you enjoyed Arrowsmith and Main Street you'll enjoy this one.

Pamela says

Una is unforgettable, that's for sure. In a way, she reminds me very much of Tarkington's "Alice Adams." No, Alice and Una don't have much in common--Una lives in the real world--a world that Alice has only visited once or maybe twice in her life.

What they both are is real. You come away knowing them inside out. You know what they think, how they speak, what they like, what they don't like. It is amazing that two men managed to capture the spirit and essence of these two very different young women so well.

Guess that's the reason for the Nobel and the Pulitzer, huh?

Chris Selin says

Interesting take on the life decisions of women in the early 1900's: be an old maid secretary or get married to escape the deadend female career ladder.

Ke says

Zadie Smith confessed she was a kind of a writer who nurtured the beginning of her novels and then let her stories thrive. She admitted that the quality of the middle and the end of her novels would be inferior to the beginning. I feel the same way about Lewis' works. The beginning of *The Job* was charming and poetic, towards Una's marriage with Schwirtz and the end, I thought Lewis could have put in more work.

This may be a subjective thing, but what kind of ghastly name is "Una?" I could think of thousands of prettier names than that.

B says

Mostly depressing and meandering. At some point, there appears to be some point. But, in general, it's not clear. It seems like the thesis really is "Even though the world is unfair and unreasonable, if you work hard, you will still be rewarded immeasurably even if you also failed to work hard for most of your life." Confusing.

The most consistent part of the book was Lewis's criticism of people critical of novelists like him. Over and over again, he really goes after people who think novel-writing is easy or depressing and "realistic" fiction meant to teach lessons are unpleasant and bad.

Jen says

The setting is New York City, the time period is just pre-WWI, and the heroine Una is a New Woman who leaves her small town with her widowed mother and strikes out as a stenographer in the Big City. Along the way she loves and loses her True Love, makes a mistake of a marriage, and finally finds her way as a Career Woman. I think this is an interesting read for anyone who wants to learn more about the details of life for working women in the early part of the 20th century and isn't turned off by a Horatio-Alger sort of tale. I found ending plot twist a little sudden, but it didn't take away from my enjoyment of the book.

Period odds and ends from the book - Sinclair Lewis makes (somewhat delicate) references to sexually transmitted disease and of birth control. In passing, we find out that a woman's boarding house has no problem admitting Jews but won't take Catholics. Long Island is so far from the city, in commuting terms, that when Una is sent there for work, she has to set up a place to live there. While a single working girl, our heroine vacations in a bed and breakfast in the countryside, where it seems like everyone else also comes alone and spends their holiday hanging out and going to social events with their fellow travelers in the inn - a very different version of a summer getaway.

Irma Walter says

Curious little story. Set in a time when 'business' meant a pragmatic way of thinking. People found their position somewhere in a huge machinery and believed the tide would carry them into a meaningful future. Consider the class society that preceded this faith.

Alas, we know now where this kind of thinking will end us up.

Neat study of the pre-WW1 times.

Karla says

Lewis' style is one of my favorites. It's wry and penetrating with only a few words. He doesn't saturate the reader, but goes to the core of what the scene is about and the players in it. And Lewis writes women like dayum.

T.P. Williams says

Reading about the career of Una Golden was interesting; like his other novels, very dated, but it presents a snapshot of what America was like in the early 20th Century. Reading her adventures in commercial school, job hunting, early office jobs, etc. showed that some things remain the same after a century - soul-killing office work. Her romantic affairs seemed contrived, and the ending when Walter Babson, her first love, turns up, is ridiculous. I wondered if Babson is Lewis. The use of roman a clef - the department store is "Wanamacy's" and so forth ("The Zodiac Building" and the "Septimus Building" - not sure what they are supposed to be) also weak. Patronizing and bigoted view of Jews, Italians and "darkies." Good description of a packed subway car ride. Not as condescending or cynical as some of the other novels by Lewis, or I'm getting used to the narrator's voice.
