

Family Values

in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*

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Introduction

[F]or now it is time to raise legitimate children, and make money, and dress properly, and be kind to one's wife, and admire one's boss, and learn not to worry, and think of oneself as what? That makes no difference, he thought – I'm just a man in a grey flannel suit. (Wilson, 109)

Tom Rath, the protagonist in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, has returned home from the Second World War and is trying to leave the years of war behind him and adjust to every day life. Just like many other American men he returned home to a country that had had to make some changes during the time its men were off to fight a war. They returned home to working women. Women had taken over the role as breadwinners while their husbands or fathers were fighting the war. The traditional gender roles had changed and women had more opportunities to make careers and wait with marriage and children. Still, the marriage rate went up and men and women returned to their long-established roles as breadwinners and homemakers.

There were certain behaviours that were considered more or less correct during the 1950's Cold War. Men had their fixed positions in society and women theirs. Men were the breadwinners and women were homemakers (McEnany, 52). These traditional gender roles can be traced in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* where for example the only working women can be found as waitresses or secretaries.

My purpose with this essay is to investigate how these traditional gender roles can be applied to a work of fiction written in the decade after the Second World War. My primary source is Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* which was first published in 1955. This essay will focus on the rules and norms that seem to have been widely accepted by the majority of people in America. Can these rules be applied to the characters in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and how well do the characters actually follow the codes of conduct? By analysing the different characters' actions and sayings my aim is to find support for my thesis which is that the characters still endorse the traditional gender roles of the 1950's. What the Rath couple is aiming for is the stable nuclear family launched by the government in America. I will use mostly Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound, American Families in the Cold War Era* to support my thesis since it is from this book I will use the descriptions of

how men and women were supposed to act and compare it to the characters in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*.

I will mainly concentrate on Tom and Betsy Rath's relationship to each other but also on their roles as father/husband and mother/wife. Tom's relationship to his former mistress Maria plays a big part in his life and I want to see if there are any differences in how he treats and interacts with the two women he claims he loves. I will also try to make a comparison between Betsy and Maria and see how well they fit the ideal woman of the 1950's. Ralph Hopkins, Tom's boss, takes up a great deal of Tom's time and I will therefore take a look at their relationship and the meaning of money and family to them. A comparison between the two men will be made to see how or if they would fit the ideal of a perfect 50's man.

After the Second World War young people had the opportunity to get an education and birth controls were becoming more easily available. These things could have delayed marriage but did not. One explanation is that people yearned to leave the years of war behind and enter the calm and secure family life (Tyler May, ix-xv). People of all colours, religion and economic backgrounds contributed to a rising marriage rate and young people all over America rushed into parenthood which led to a baby boom (Mcaneny, 71). What was the driving force behind this need to settle down and create a family and a home? Writer Elaine Tyler May's explanation shows a more complex side of post-war America's urge for marriage and children. America wanted to present itself as a unified nation, politically harmonious and blessed with widespread affluence.

Tom Rath and his wife Betsy also want a piece of the affluence and they are searching for that perfect life that America wanted to show the outside world. United States embraced its position as the "leader of the free world." As the struggle between the two superpowers, America and the Soviet Union, heated, America needed to show the rest of the world that their way of living was the correct way. America could not afford to show the damaging sides of racial and class problems that existed under the surface since that would hurt the country's well kept prestige. Democracy and prosperity would lead to a happy and good life to all. America feared two takeovers, one external and one internal. Communist takeover and a Soviet world domination was the external danger, but many American leaders feared that the real danger was racial conflict, emancipated women, class friction and family disruption. The solution was to create a secure and stable family which was promoted by leaders and

politicians who set up codes of conduct. American families believed in their leaders and agreed that family stability was the best defence against the dangers of the Cold War (Tyler May, xviii).

The Rath family

Family values in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* are not that easily analysed. On the one hand the Rath family is living a life within the traditional gender roles but on the other they still do not fit the picture of what the American government would like to show the outside world. Betsy Rath is a homemaker and her husband Tom is the breadwinner and in a 1955 American household that might not be very surprising to find. On the outside they look like the perfect couple with a beautiful wife, a hard-working husband and three well-adjusted children. However, Tom and Betsy are neither entirely happy nor perfect. I believe that one of the reasons why they can not find happiness is that they do not feel they fit the picture of what a perfect life should be. Betsy says early on in the book, "I don't know what's the matter with us. [...] We shouldn't be so *discontented* all the time" (5). This rather innocent statement says quite a lot about Tom's and Betsy's search for something else.

1950's American television shows showed families where the roles were clearly defined and where the children looked up to their parents and everyone was happy (Henriksen, 90). During the same decade Congress were discussing mass media's contribution to juvenile delinquency and how family life was represented on television. While this debate was going on three major television networks developed prime-time shows that would appeal to a general family audience. Families portrayed on television shows were often a white middle-class nuclear family where the full-time mother and wife was glorified (Spigel, 33). A married man and woman with children living in a suburb with other married couples and their children were portrayed as the happy families in a blissful neighbourhood on television. This was also what Congress wanted Americans to strive for (Spigel, Family on Television). It is clear in the novel that the Rath family watches a lot of television and Tom and Betsy must in some degree be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by what they see almost daily. Though they might not be able to put it into words they feel that they are a break from the norm. On paper they have everything the families on television have: marriage, a house in the

suburbs and children. Because they theoretically should live a perfect life they feel even more out of place when they still feel that they are discontent.

Tom and his women

Tom has two women in his life that he has loved greatly. His first love is his wife Betsy, whom he married before he went to war in Europe. His second great love is the mistress Maria who he met while stationed in Italy. Betsy and Maria combined would make up a perfect 50's woman where Betsy represents the wife and mother and Maria the lover. He is torn between the two women but comes to the decision that he wants to stay with his unsuspecting wife. During the forty-nine days Tom and Maria lived together in Italy they never had an argument. An explanation to this could of course be that they never even passed the honey-moon phase and therefore never really got to know each other. A great difference between Tom's behaviour towards the two women is that in the relationship with Maria he had the upper hand. Maria was poor and looking for a man who could provide for her and in return she would offer what she had to give, her body. It was not love at first sight and Tom was not just looking for someone to have a deep conversation with to when they first met:

She had come into the bar hesitantly with painfully obvious intention, [...] a pretty girl, eighteen years old, in a worn black dress and a coat that had once belonged to a soldier. [...] Tom had looked at her coldly. Young with a good figure, and a face which, if it were relaxed, could be beautiful-it might as well be this one as any other. When you only got a week, you can't look around forever. He had walked over and sat down beside her, "Can I buy you a drink?" (87)

Tom's intentions when he first sees Maria is to have a good time, sleep with her and never to think about her again. A few years earlier when he sees Betsy for the first time, his reaction is quite the opposite:

The grace with which Betsy had moved, the way her sparkling white dress accentuated the warm colours of her skin and hair, the curve of her cheek, the flash of her smile [...]. The moment he had seen her he wanted to marry her [...]. [T]hat night he had felt so bewildered by it that he had stood for a long while watching her dance with others before mustering the courage to make his way across the dance floor and cut her in (188).

There is a clear difference in the way he approaches the two women on their first encounter. Betsy is too beautiful and he has to work up some guts before even daring to ask for a dance.

When he meets Maria he knows he has nothing to lose and considering her “clear intentions” he does not have to put up an act and can therefore go straight to the point. Betsy represents the respectful, beautiful and pure young woman men dreamed to marry, whereas Maria is the temptress on the prowl for an easy target. How could Tom possibly respect Maria who not only had premarital sex, but with a married man? What kind of woman would do that? In America during that time it was the woman’s task to make a promise of life long sexual gratification throughout the courtship. It was through abstinence and that promise that she would win the respect and heart and eventually a marriage proposal (Nadel, 117). Maria did neither and could therefore never win true respect from her lover.

In Post-war America it was believed that single men could easily become homosexuals or go to prostitutes and it was the women’s duty to tame those wild men. It was women’s obligation to make sure that their men were satisfied sexually so they did not feel the need to have another woman on the side. It was also believed that men in vulnerable stages in their lives could become seduced by women who worked for the communists. In the 1950’s, experts in that area claimed that there was a clear connection between communism and sexual depravity (Tyler May, 82). At a time when Tom was feeling low and believing that he was about to live his last week on earth the temptress Maria swept in and lured him into her bed. Luckily Maria was not working for the communists but still it shows a picture of a time when a man’s infidelity could be excused by pointing the finger at a seducing woman or a wife who did not give enough time and affection towards her husband. Though experts at the time wrote books of the dangers of premarital sex and churches condemned it, studies show that nearly half of all married couples had sex before they walked down the aisle. However, due to the shame and social stigma most couples, and especially women, would rarely or never confess to this (Tyler May, 100). We can see in the novel how Maria lets the old ladies in her neighbourhood believe that she and Tom are married: “[...] men in bars nodded to them and recognized them as a couple who belonged together, old ladies on the street corners [...] addressed Maria as a married woman, respectable as themselves” (91). It is obvious in the novel how Maria and Tom want to justify their relationship by not just being lovers but by actually posing to outsiders as a married couple. In post-war America a woman could redeem herself if she succeeded in domesticating the man she had been involved with. Marriage was the only solution for a woman who had had premarital sex if she wanted to restore her reputation (Nadel, 121). In the novel Maria is not that fortunate. She is not able to tame Tom who

returns to the war and eventually to his wife even though Maria tells him that she suspects she is pregnant.

Tom treats Maria and Betsy differently. One of the reasons why he is so happy with his mistress is that she expects nothing from him whereas his wife not only expects but demands some sort of planning for their future. When Tom is with Maria he can take the day as it comes, never having to worry about bills and other expenses:

It wasn't the difference between the two women - it was simply the difference in circumstance. When he and Betsy had met [...] they had been children, and their happiness had been pale, fragile happiness about children [...]. And after the war, there hadn't really been time for happiness - there had been budgets and bills from obstetricians and frantic planning for the future. [...] But with Maria it had been different; they had both been reconciled to having no future [...]. With Maria there had been only the moment at hand [...] (193).

Because Tom never has to worry about his future and he never has to take anyone else in consideration but himself when he is with Maria he is a totally different person than when he is with his wife. Tom claims to love Maria which could be something he has talked himself into believing in order to justify their relationship.

It was believed in the 1950's that to become a perfect wife, a woman should fulfil her husband's sexual (and other) needs as well as being a stay-at-home mom and homemaker. A wife should always put her husband first and her children second and in the novel Betsy does in some sense fit that image. When Tom is off to work her priority is the children, though she thinks about Tom a lot during the day, like the time when she surprises Tom when he gets home from work:

"I can hardly wait to find out what it is," Tom said. The surprise turned out to be a large leather armchair with a matching hassock for Tom to put his feet on. [...] "Kids, go upstairs, the way you promised you would! [Betsy said] [...] They're going to have their quiet period in their room, while we have ours down here. We're going to do it that way for half an hour every night." (203)

Even though Betsy's and Tom's marriage is not as successful as they want it to be Betsy still wants to be his wife and she feels he deserves some gratitude for going off to work every day

and bringing home money to pay the rent. Her surprise is in some sense her way of saying that they need to work on their marriage and not having the kids around all the time. They need some alone time.

An American 50's husband was to be economically and sexually dominant and the wife was supposed to be submissive and sexually fulfilled and yet at the same time fulfil her husband. There are parts in the novel that show that Betsy is not submissive or afraid of expressing her opinion, like when she has a go at Tom for being uncertain on whether he should take the new job or not, "You're spoiled and you're licked before you start. In spite of all you did in the war, you're not really willing to fight for what you want. [...] And what's more, you're a coward. You're afraid to risk a god-damn thing!" (71) Betsy's and Tom's sex life has not worked for some time and Betsy says in an argument that they had learned to make love without passion (294). According to 1950's experts Betsy's attitude towards her husband would be the explanation as to why their sex life is not working satisfactory.

Betsy does the traditional female chores in the house such as cooking dinner for the children and her husband, cleaning the house and picking up Tom's laundry at the dry-cleaners. She does all her marital house duties and usually without complaining but feels that she does not do a good enough job and she therefore starts to re-new herself. She starts by introducing new routines in the house:

In the kitchen he found the breakfast table fully set and waffles cooking. "What's going on?" [Tom] asked Betsy. "Breakfast," she said. "No more instant coffee. No more grabbing a piece of toast to eat on the way to the station." [...] "No more television. I'm giving the damn thing away". [...] "Bad for the kids". [...] "And we're going to church every Sunday. We're going to stop lying around Sunday mornings drinking Martinis." (73)

Every family needed a woman to care for them and Betsy places herself in that position rather willingly. But as I mentioned earlier a man could not provide for his family if the sex-life was not satisfactory and Maria provides Tom with everything he requires in that area.

That had been a curious and wonderful thing about her that he had understood only gradually: her almost constant eagerness to make love. [...] physical love was the only form of reassurance she knew, and that she was completely happy and sure of him only when she was caressing him and giving him pleasure. (195)

Although Betsy and Maria are completely different they would be considered an ideal woman had they been joint together.

Betsy

In a time when the belief that the nuclear family was the backbone of America, Betsy Rath is raising her children and is very much influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the existing ideals of that time. She feels that she does not fit the image of what she pictures a perfect homemaker should be like. She sees herself like a failure because she can not live up to the standards she believes a wife and mother should keep. When Betsy sees how her neighbours are acting and she does not feel any connection or sense of belonging to the other group of women. There is a feeling of being left outside and keeping up appearance. She does not want to believe that the surroundings she is living in is the norm: "It can't be true that the whole street is like that, Betsy thought - it must be just the people we know" (120).

In the beginning of the book Betsy is a typical wife taking care of her husband and minding the children. Tom works and both of them feel that Tom needs to get a job that pays more money. It is never an option for Betsy to take a job and it seems that neither of them even considers that as an alternative. Being a mother is Betsy's job and it was a common assumption in America in the 1950's that all women were satisfied with motherhood. Because American women had little chance of ever fulfilling any goal outside the home most women put their energies into trying to be the best mother and home-maker they could be (Tyler May, 132, 141). When Betsy gets chicken pox she makes sure another woman, Mrs Manter, comes over to the house and takes care of not only the children but also the rest of the household. When Tom gets home from work he asks Mrs Manter how everybody is doing and she says, "YOUR WIFE'S NOT REALLY SICK AT ALL" (42). Though Betsy shows clear symptoms of the disease Mrs Manter does not say anything else about it and Tom does not ask any questions. Had Tom asked his wife whether this allegation of Mrs Manter's was true or not it would have been like telling her she was a bad mother. Mrs Manter is a woman of an older generation and lying about doing nothing (like Betsy is doing) is looked upon with great disapproval. Without Mrs Manter expressing it verbally it can be understood that she considers it to be a woman's job to take care of her husband and children. Therefore, when

Betsy “allows” herself to become ill and invites another woman to take her place Betsy fails not only as mother but also as a wife.

Betsy is not entirely happy with their life. She is not satisfied with the family’s living condition and she uses the children as an excuse to move: “It’s not fair to the children to bring them up in a neighbourhood like this. [...] It’s *dull*” (68). In post-war America there was supposed to be one place where men could feel powerful and prove his manhood without risking his job. That place was his home. No matter what job a man had he could always be sure that he was the authority at home. Their wives were subordinate and would remain so (Tyler May, 76). As mentioned earlier it is hard to categorise Betsy as subordinate but in the beginning of the novel she is usually waiting for Tom’s opinion and lets him make all major decisions. But when the Rathes inherit Tom’s grandmother’s estate something happens to Betsy and she starts planning for a new and happier future in their new home. Betsy gets something else to do during the day more than just laundry and cooking She no longer waits for Tom to make up his mind. According to the political agenda of that time Betsy fails her duties as a wife in not letting her husband run the show. She does not wait for her husband to make decisions regarding the family economy and where they should live. While Tom is at work she manages to put their house on the market and packs everything in the house in two days without the approval of her husband. Tom sometimes feels frustrated about his wife’s quick decisions and he wishes she could wait at least until he comes home from work so they can discuss it before she puts her plans in to work. Even though it is Betsy who runs the show at home Tom never expresses any major discontent regarding the switched traditional gender roles. Outside the four walls of the Rath home Tom is in the public eye considered to be the decision maker. During a meeting in the Town Hall the moderator addresses Tom when discussing The Rathes’ property: “Mr. Rath would you comment?” Bernstein asked. [...] ‘I didn’t come prepared to give a talk...’ [Tom] began lamely” (268). In fact Betsy probably knows more about the matter than Tom but handing the question over to Betsy would seem impossible. It was one thing for Tom to let Betsy run the show at home but admitting that to the rest of the town is never an option.

Betsy has never been a quiet person and she has never been afraid to disagree or speak up to Tom but when she gets this new interest of hers she start using her voice outside the house as well and there is a significant scene during the same meeting in the Town Hall. Without thinking or talking to Tom about it she gets up and lets her voice be heard,

“The Children need a new school,” Betsy [said]. “Don’t let our housing project be used as a weapon against...” “This will be only the beginning...” Parkington interrupted. “Mr Parkington!” Betsy cut in with remarkable self-possession. “I don’t think that growth will necessarily hurt the town. And although I may be taking advantage of being a woman, I refuse to let you have the last word!” (270-271)

When Tom and Betsy make the decision to move into Grandmother’s estate, Betsy changes and it could be said that she becomes a woman and not just mother and wife. For the first time she does something where she can feel important. She is the one who does all the calculating and measuring. She figures out how to make as much money as possible with the land they inherit and there is a sense of her finding out that there is more to life than being a homemaker.

Betsy’s strength as a wife is tested when Tom admits to having had an affair which resulted in an illegitimate child. As mentioned earlier, it was in the 50’s it was the wife’s job to make sure that her husband did not go to another woman. If he did have an affair it was probably because she did not gratify him sexually and he would be so weakened that it would be impossible for him to say no to another woman. If Betsy were to react as a 50’s wife she would have blamed herself, but her first reaction is not anything like that. She is rather hard and unforgiving towards Tom and does not let him get away with his confession and an apology:

“Where did you meet the girl in that photograph?” [...] “In a bar” “Was it a formal introduction, or did you just pick her up?” “Goddamn it,” he said. “Don’t let’s make this harder than it has to be.” [Tom said] “I’m not making it harder than it has to be! Was she just an ordinary pickup? Were you drunk?” [...] “What did you do with my letters when you were living with her? Did you lie in bed and read them together for laughs?” “Don’t,” He said. [...] “Was she pretty?” [...] “Was she better in bed than I am?” “Stop it” [Tom said]. (291-292)

Tom does not blame Betsy for being upset and angry and he apologises for hurting her and he understands her reaction. He does not, however, apologize for the affair and the child that was the result of it. Betsy is hurt but after a few hours of thinking she understand that Tom was not the same person during the war and therefore she can not put herself in his shoes and hold him responsible for what happened. She lets Tom knows that she has forgiven him for his mistake: “I realized for the first time what you went through in the war, and what different

worlds we've been living in since then. I'm sorry I acted like a child." (299) Here the submissive wife of the 50's appears in Betsy and she apologizes for her reaction, and she feels foolish for the way she behaved. In a few hours Betsy goes from a cold-hearted modern woman to a submissive wife blaming herself for her childish reaction and is now ready to welcome a new child in to the family. She transforms from a woman on the verge of leaving her husband for good to an understanding and loving 50's wife: "You're right about helping your boy in Italy. Of course we should do everything we can" (299).

Tom and Hopkins

When Tom returned home from the war he was quickly reinstalled as the provider and his main concern became how to make a decent living so he could give the family what was needed to live a comfortable life. Tom wants to provide for his family and to be able to reach the goal of a better life he realises he has to make more money. Having a house, car and family and being able to pay the bills every month is not enough for the Raths, they want more. The Raths are searching for happiness and they believe that if they could just leave their small house, with cracks in the walls, in a neighbourhood they dislike, they would be much more content and their marriage would improve. To reach the goal of owning a bigger house Tom starts looking for a new job. It is never a matter of finding a job where he can find his true calling (though he does not know what that is himself), but instead he is looking for a job that pays more than his current one. Being happy with what he is doing is never an option for Tom.

Tom's boss, Ralph Hopkins, goes out of his way to make money and spends the majority of his time awake in his office. One of the great differences between Tom and Hopkins is the way they look on the importance of family and spending time with them. Hopkins is living in a material world and he makes more money than he can possibly spend. He is unhappily married and he has a daughter whom he hardly sees and has taken no part in her upbringing what so ever. Tom and Hopkins are very unlike. One puts family first and the other his job. It can not be said that Hopkins is obsessed with making money, he just does not know what to do if he does not work. The two men put together would mostly consist of Tom's characteristics and few, if any, of Hopkins but neither of the men would be considered an ideal man in the 1950's. Hopkins is not a bad man but he lacks several traits to be even close to what an ideal 50's man should be like. They both love their families but in completely

different ways. Tom shows his love by playing with the children, helping his wife and being present after a long day at work. Hopkins has a much harder time showing his affection and tries to explain that to his daughter:

“Why the long speeches all of a sudden?” She asked. [...] “Because you’re my daughter,” he said. It sounded strangely inadequate, and he added awkwardly, “Because I love you.” “That is not true!” She exclaimed. [...] “You’ve hardly bothered to see me since I was born!” He was shocked at her vehemence. “People love in different ways,” he said. (231)

If Maria and Betsy together make up a perfect woman, Tom and Hopkins can be described as a decent man combined. However, the only thing Hopkins would bring into the osmosis of the two men would be money. Tom, on the other hand, would bring in his affection and love for the family and the belief that a family should stay together in good times and bad.

A good husband should provide for his wife and children and both Tom and Hopkins are doing that. The two men’s view on job and money are quite different, however. Hopkins works more or less all the time and to try to make as much of his time he squeezes in breakfast meetings in his private home before he goes to work. He gives his wife money so she can buy necessities but since she has everything she needs already she spends the money on trips and maids for her big house. It can be said that Hopkins has taken his role as breadwinner a bit too far. Tom, on the other hand, realises the importance of family. On his new job he tries to keep up with Hopkins and his work hours in order to promote himself as a man who is looking for a great career. Tom feels out of place at his new job because he is not that driven to make a fantastic career like his colleagues. Tom realises that he does not want to spend more time away from his family than is necessary. Success for Tom is finding a balance between job and family. When he is offered a better job his answer to Ralph Hopkins shows where his priorities lie:

“Look, Ralph,” [Tom] said, using the first name unconsciously [...]. I’ll say it frankly: I don’t think I have the willingness to make the sacrifices. I don’t want to give up the time. [...] I want the money. Nobody likes money more than I do. But I’m just not the kind of guy who can work evenings and week-ends and all the rest of it for ever. [...] I can’t get myself convinced that my work is the most important thing in the world. I’ve been through one war. Maybe another one’s coming. If one is, I want to be able to look back and figure I spent the time between wars with my family, the way they should have been spent. [...] Maybe it sounds silly. It’s just that if I have to bury myself in a job every minute of my life, I don’t see any point to it. (277)

When the two men talk about work it is clear that they have completely different views on what it means to do a good job. “*Somebody had to do the big jobs!*” [Ralph Hopkins] said passionately. “This world was built by men like me! To really do a great job, you have to live, body and soul! You people who just give half your mind to your work are riding on our backs!” (278) Apart from Tom telling his boss that he chooses his family over more money, Tom is also in fact telling Ralph Hopkins that he in no way wants to end up like him.

Though it was still in the 1950’s very much a mother’s job to raise the children it was believed that a child, and especially a boy, needed a strong and present father figure. Chances were that the boy would grow up to become a “sissy” had he been raised only by an overprotecting mother with no fatherly influence. Dr. Luther E. Woodward, psychologist and coordinator of the New York State Mental Health Commission at that time, provided the following definition; A sissy is a boy (or a girl) who gets too much satisfaction from what his mother does and not enough from what he does for himself [sic] “ (Tyler May, 130). Absent fathers (i.e. working fathers) were encouraged to help caring and talk to the child early on. Fathers should, among other things, talk to their children and tell them about their work and play different sports with them. This would in turn make the child proud of its father and if it was a boy prevent it from becoming a sissy (Tyler May, 130). Hopkins and Tom have very different relationships with their children. Tom interacts with his three children whereas Hopkins hardly knows his two:

He had tried. Especially when their first child, Robert, had come, during the second year of their marriage, he had tried. He had come home every evening at six o’clock and conscientiously played with the baby and sat talking with his wife, and he had been genuinely appalled to find that the baby made him nervous and that while talking to his wife, it was almost impossible for him to sit quietly. [...] For the first time in his life he started to drink heavily during those long evenings at home. Gradually he started staying late at the office again. (171-172)

Hopkins does not feel he needs to take part in this children’s up-bringing and does not interfere until there are some major disturbances which could cause problems for him and his job. Tom, on the other hand, wants to make sure that his children are alright which can be understood in the scene where he takes one of his daughters to school.

“Did something happen at school yesterday” [Tom asked]. “No.” [Janey] paused before adding, “I’m afraid.” “Afraid of what?” [Tom asked]. “The hall” [Janey answered]. [...] I’ll take you to

school today and you can show me the hall. Will that help?" [Tom asked]. [...] At breakfast Betsy said, "I can take her-you'll miss your train if you go." "I'll take a later train," Tom said. "There is something about that hall that bothers Janey. I want to see this school." (253)

There is such difference between the two fathers relationship to their children. Tom prefers being late for work rather than sending his daughter to a school were she is afraid as oppose to Hopkins who most likely would have gone to work before his children even had had their breakfast. Usually it was the mother in the 1950's who would take their children to school and attend parent's meetings but men were now recommended to step into this female territory (Tyler May, 131). Tom is a modern man and sees no problem with him taking his daughter to school and he wants very much to take part in his children's upbringing. When it comes to Tom's love for his children he would be considered an ideal 50's husband and father and he does not need to worry about his children becoming "sissies" whereas Hopkins children would be in great danger of becoming just that.

In 1950 eighty-five percent of the population in America had a yearly family income over \$ 5,000 and only about thirteen percent earned over \$15,000 (Tyler May, 156). Tom Rath makes \$ 7,000 dollars a year, before he changes jobs, which would seem as though he and Betsy would be able to lead quite a comfortable lifestyle. Still, Betsy and Tom can not afford to fix up their first house in the suburb. There is a crack in the wall, a dent in the floor and the kitchen carpet is starting to curl. In the years following the war consumerism became a widespread pattern in America. Commercials running on television were showing Americans what their lives could be like if they owned new kitchen appliances or washing machines.

It was the husband's job to make the money and the wives' to spend it (Tyler May, 145-150). Betsy does not spend Tom's salary on kitchen appliances and yet they hardly have money left at the end of the month. According to 1950's ideal Tom fails as a husband when he can not provide enough for his family. Tom's boss, on the other hand, can provide economically for his family. He makes more than \$ 200,000 a year and owns a large house in New Jersey and an enormous flat in Manhattan. Money this is the one thing something that Hopkins really can provide which would in an economical sense make him an ideal husband in the 1950's.

Neither Tom nor Hopkins have all the criteria that would be needed in the 1950's to be considered an ideal man but Tom shows several traits that would at least make him a potential one.

Conclusion

After I had finished reading *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* I first thought the characters to be rather modern and liberated, but when I started analyzing their actions I soon came to the conclusion that they embody the traditional gender positions of the 1950's. None of the characters are breaks from the gender roles where the man is the breadwinner and the woman the house maker.

All female characters in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* are portrayed rather similarly. They are somebody's wife, mother or lover. Mrs. Manter is the only female character, except for secretaries and waitresses, who works outside her house. Her job is, however, not in anyway groundbreaking. She does what she has been doing all her adult life, taking care of children and minding a home, and the only difference is that she is doing it in somebody else's home. Betsy might appear to be a strong woman and she shows characteristics of being a modern woman in the 1950's. Still, even if she speaks up to her husband she is nevertheless the kind of house wife/mother/wife the government promoted. A woman like Betsy can not be considered liberated because she makes decisions behind her husband's back. She is economically dependent on her husband and therefore his inferior. Betsy's only choice if she wants to live a decent life is to stay with her husband or find another man to support her.

All men portrayed in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* are breadwinners and none of their wives work. The male characters accept that it is their task in life to support their family and it does not look as if they have even considered that their wives could get a job. Being a mother is the women's job and the house her workplace according to the men and for the female characters that goes without saying.

My thesis was that the characters endorsed the traditional roles of the 1950's, even though they might at first appear modern. After analyzing the text I have found enough support through the characters' actions and sayings to draw the conclusion that they indeed can be applicable to the traditional gender roles that were accepted after the second world war. The characters in *The*

Man in the Grey Flannel Suit follow the codes of conduct and they react to different events as were expected of a 50's man or woman.

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