FROM ARCHITECTURE TO ARCHETYPE:

SPACE AND SELF IN SUBURBAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

My project examines the complex correlations between architectural changes in the suburban home and representations of the suburban man. For years, these ideas have been discussed separately, but I forward a reading that presents architecture and archetype in concert. My project focuses on architectural changes to the suburban home and how those changes affect middle class anxieties of the midcentury. To further my argument, I rely on twentieth century suburban literature, starting with Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* and ending with John Cheever, Richard Yates, and John Updike. By comparing literature and architecture, I highlight the cracks in the monolithic image of the suburban man in media.

To identify shifts in his character, I study the suburban man's home. Material and architectural changes to the suburban home create specific zones within the house. For this project, I have designation the bedroom, office, living room, lawn, and kitchen as the key spaces to understanding the suburban man. The suburban man responds to the changing issues of his time, and the design modifications in the twentieth century work in tandem with the nuanced changes of the archetype. The suburban man performs a different identity dependent upon the room he is in, and as the rooms change, so does the suburban man. Despite his attempts to adapt, economic, social, and architectural changes leave him grasping for an identity that is no longer relevant to a world in which he lacks total control over his social and occupational life.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Dr. Albert E. Elmore, who supported this project when it was a kernel of an idea sent in an email from a nervous first-year graduate student to his former professor.

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CHAPTER 1: THE MAN OF THE HOUSE: ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHETYPES IN SUBURBAN LITERATURE

"But sensitivity to architecture has its more problematic aspects. If one room can alter how we feel, if our happiness can hang on the color of the walls or the shape of door, what will happen to us in most of the places we are forced to look and inhabit? What will he experience in a house with prison like windows, stained carpet tiles, and plastic curtains?"- Alain de Botton, *Architecture of Happiness*

First staged at the 1964 World's Fair, the *Carousel of Progress* remains one of Walt Disney's finest creations and a staple of Walt Disney World since its relocation from Disneyland in 1975. The ride provides a narrative of national and technological progress conducted in the American home by its mysteriously un-aging protagonist and paterfamilias John, the prototypical "man of the house." Over the course of four acts, the Carousel moves from the early 1900s to the 1920s to the 1940s and the 2000s. Within each act, the drama moves through different scenes—and rooms—in the house.

Like virtually all Disney rides and, indeed, the parks themselves, the manifest narrative of the *Carousel* is the blend of celebratory nationalist theatre and jokey, feel-good entertainment.[1]

[1] The history of the *Carousel of Progress*, much like the ride itself, is split into several different sections. In the 1950s, Walt Disney wanted to design a ride that showcased the importance of electricity and technology. Unfortunately, technology had not yet outpaced Disney's imagination. In 1964, General Electric (who would go on to sponsor The *Carousel of Progress* up until the 1985) approached Walt Disney to design a ride for that year's World's Fair. With the burgeoning field of animatronics, Disney could create his ode to technology: The *Carousel of Progress*. The ride, standing as the centerpiece of GE's Progressland, immediately connected with the World's Fair audience. According to Disney historian, Johnathan Heigl "[Carousel] was one of the most visited attractions at the World's Fair, entertaining as many as 4,500 people a day." After the World's Fair, the ride found a new home at Disneyland and a new name "The GE *Carousel of Progress*". The ride ran from 1967 to 1973 before being bumped to Walt Disney World. In 1975, the *Carousel of Progress* reopened in the Magic Kingdom's Tomorrowland (the spiritual successor to Progressland). The move saw the first of many re-toolings of the ride. GE thought the theme song "There's A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow" told people "to wait until the next big thing to buy instead of portraying that 'now is best time' to buy new GE products. So, the theme song changed to "The Best Time In Your Life" (Heigel). After GE stopped sponsoring the ride in 1985, Disney retooled the ride again to remove all reference to GE products and replace the inferior "The Best Time In Your Life" with the original theme song. In 1993, Disney

In this case, *Carousel* outlines a historical vision of American life progressively improved through technological innovation in the home. And like most products of national celebration, close inspection reveals a considerably more complicated set of issues at play. The legerdemain of a cheery single protagonist narrating a century of changes, while aging at most ten years himself, suggests a static and continuous American subject moving through historical time. John rides waves of historical progress, and relatively effortlessly accepts a progressively better, easier, and happier life through technology.

Sustained attention to the *Carousel* reveals anxieties in the protagonist's responses to these changes. Oddly, the historical narrative that the ride purports to tell is abrupt and discontinuous. The viewer in 1964—and indeed of the middle decades of the twentieth century—gets an account of the past and the future, but no direct depiction of the present moment. Thus, a ride dedicated the heralding advancements in home technology as a fundamental part of the American narrative is curiously silent about one of the most important chapters—the postwar moment of suburban expansion and prosperity and its principal beneficiary, the suburban man. However, the past and future tellings that the ride *does* present provide a displaced but suggestive picture of the anxieties of the *Carousel*'s absent present—a shifting privacy in the bedroom, a growing unhappiness towards his office, a newfound public image in his living room, a loss of knowhow out on his lawn, and a fear of displacement in the kitchen. Thus, despite the absent present, in its depiction of past and projected architectural changes, the ride reveals a host of anxieties about the suburban man's identity. The *Carousel* is a microcosm for the world of the suburban man, in which everything around him changes; and yet, he mostly remains the same. Because John refuses to change, he becomes more and more obsolete as the narrative progresses,

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World retooled the ride again removing the 1970s ending of the ride with the new "Christmas in the House of 2000" ending. The ride has not been retooled since 1993.

and by the end, he is no longer center stage, the lone narrator in his own story, but side-stage, a mere onlooker in the larger narrative of growing technology, gender equality, and a family that no longer needs his guidance.

There are, of course, extensive bodies of criticism on both the emergence of the suburban man as an incarnation of American national character and architectural history. Catherine Jurca (2001), Andrew Hoberek (2005), and Lynn Spiegel (1996) have already identified the topography of suburban literature and mapped out many of the tropes and traditions of the genre. Conversely, Kenneth Jackson (1987), Witold Rybcynzski (1987), and Alain de Botton (2008) have written studies on the spatial and philosophical importance of home. My project contributes to both conversations. First, by synthesizing what have largely been separate critical conversations[2], I identify what each has to bear on one another. In particular, the project looks at what architectural changes to the home and the reception of those changes reveal about shifting concepts of masculinity in the postwar era. In order to gauge those intentions and effects, I examine suburban fiction, an area which, in contrast to the *Carousel*, represents a time when the man and the house of the present moment was particularly robust. Second, by bringing these two currents of analysis together, I identify the ways in which the archetype of the suburban man is far less stable and monolithic than has generally been discussed in the critical literature. Catherine Jurca, focusing on the influence of Sinclair Lewis, argues that authors who followed Lewis "did not invent middle-class suffering, but instead follow[ed] a general pattern established by Lewis [in *Babbitt*]" (162). Jurca's claim, which is often cited in later suburban studies, has the

[2] Lynn Spiegel (1996), John Archer (2001), Robert Beuka (2004), and Robert R. Coon (2014) have studied the important connections between representations of suburbs in media and the interesting spatial features of suburban locations.

particular virtue of being the first to recognize George Babbitt[3] as a forerunner of suburban literature; however, her claim leaves crucial issues about the complicated relations between Babbitt and later suburban novels unaddressed.

Of course, this notion of an unchanging suburban man isn't unfounded. For most of the century, the suburban man retained many of the same external features—white, middle aged, married, etc. Many of the houses in suburban literature look the same on the outside—square little boxes, front lawns, car in the driveway.[4] Representations of clean looking suburban dads on television and film combined with aerial shots of suburban developments can certainly produce a disorienting effect. Images of prison and internment camps spring to mind as one studies row and row of similar looking houses. Yet, an aerial photograph of suburban homes do not tell the entire story, just as portraits of a crowd cannot answer existential questions about humans. Seen from above, suburban homes—and the families who inhabit them—do become homogeneous and indistinguishable. From street level or within the home, one realizes that each suburban home, and, indeed, each suburban home, tells a different story. Therefore, my project walks readers through specific rooms in the suburban home to show not only how the room changes, but how changes to the room alter representations and expectations for the suburban man.

This project is concerned with the archetype and character changes of the white, middle class suburban man in suburban literature. The story of a singular character type cannot, of course, provide an accurate portrayal of the whole of suburban literature or the suburbs themselves, and I do not propose to undertake such a project. I am particularly interested in authors who resemble the character of which they write, and in trying to understand the ways in

[3] For the reason of the dissertation, I will refer to George Babbitt as simply Babbitt for two reasons. One, the narrator of *Babbitt* often refers to the character by his last name. Also, I refer to him as Babbitt to avoid later confusion with *The Big Clock*'s George Stroud.
[4] Malvina Reynolds had already covered this terrain in her song, "Little Boxes."

which traditional gender roles, combined with whiteness, came to represent the picturesque representations of the American suburbs. Such a reading necessarily creates an erasure of other voices, in particular the suburban wife and female suburban authors. This erasure leads to a muting of various viewpoints, but suburbia itself was originally an exercise in erasure, since early suburban communities were rigidly white. This project focuses on the novels that create and reflect an idealized white suburban identity by erasing other racial and sexual identities. Like many feminist scholars before me, I believe that to ignore masculinity and whiteness in its many toxic forms is to ensure we continue to fall prey to its oppressive and harmful patterns. I study white masculinity and track how representations of the suburban man illustrate the ways in which these characters, in holding on to nonexistent ideals of identity and the suburbs, attempt to understand their roles in a changing world.

In these novels, the suburban home operates much like the suburban man's anachronistic hopes for the promises of suburbia. At home, the suburban man hopes to feel shielded from Soviet era anxieties or economic insecurities. Yet, the suburban man realizes that his home does not offer a freedom from middle class anxieties. This realization is played over and over throughout suburban literature. These anxieties, however, change with time, and the suburban man's reaction to these anxieties change as well. I also offer a reading of the suburban wife as she faces similar changes to her expectations within the home—and later, changes to occupational expectations as well. A larger project may further explore the nuances of her character change, and the ways in which these two heads of the suburban home work with and sometimes against one another.

In addition, this project offers a study of the homes present within the literature. As with the character focus, this project has several architectural parameters placed on it. A larger project

would be able to incorporate all of the spaces usually connected to popular ideas of the home, including the garage, den, or bathroom. Due to these constraints, I have focused on the five rooms I view as the most important to the development of the suburban male character, particularly in the novels I study. My project, sometimes anachronistically, attempts to establish a literary blueprint of the post-1945 pre-fabricated suburban home, a space that saw the disappearance of the den and the transformation of the garage into the carport. An attempt to trace the multitude of changes to the suburban home throughout the twentieth century is outside the scope of this project.

My second chapter "Little Deaths In Little Boxes: The Bedroom in Suburban Literature" focuses on the expanding suburban bedroom and the roles performed within that space. Most rooms in the suburban home shrink over time, but the bedroom expands, which leads to the rise of the master bedroom suite, a relaxing place for domestic partners. The suburban man, however, wishes to be anywhere else—preferably the bedroom of his mistress. In this chapter, I examine how representations of both the bedroom within his home and the bedroom of his mistress undergo a public transformation. As the twentieth century progresses and Americans grow more comfortable talking about sex and relationships, suburban literature begins to explore the publicness of the private bedroom. Adultery in particular becomes an accepted and almost requisite action. I follow the shifting publicness of these rooms by starting with Sinclair Lewis's seminal *Babbitt* (1922) and John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), two novels that establish longstanding tracks for suburban men in the bedroom. From there, I trace popular sentiments towards discussions of sex, architectural and material changes to the bedroom, and how later suburban novels interpret and modify the tracks started in the pages of Lewis and O'Hara.

In my third chapter "Neither Employee of the Month Nor Father of the Year: The Work and Home Offices In Suburban Literature," I turn my attention to the suburban man's home and work office. The home office plays an important role in the suburban man's mental well-being as it serves as an in-home escape from his disappointing work and family life. In this space, he can be—or at least pretend to be—the type of person his work does not allow. However, the home office largely disappears from the blueprints in the suburban boom in the 1940s. Along with the vanishing home office, his work office begins to be overtaken by—per David Riesman (1950)—other-directed men[5]. With a workplace that forces him to stifle his personality and nowhere at home to displace his sometimes sinister urges, the suburban man's undesirable traits begin to bleed into his everyday life. In this chapter, I follow the reverberations the character feels as his home office fades in Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* (1946), Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* (1961), and Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* (1961).

The fourth chapter "Hollow Men: Identity and Mass Culture in the Living Room"—like the *Carousel of Progress*—opens in the living room, a space the suburban man fills with possessions and people he does not like. As with the bedroom, the living room undergoes a public transformation in the twentieth century. In novels like *Babbitt*, George Babbitt exists in the living room with his family, of whom he is outwardly dismissive. As such, the living room is a place of relative familial privacy. However, with the rise of suburban advertising promoting the living room as the pinnacle of the American Dream and suburban sitcoms beaming clean-cut father figures into homes, the living room transforms into a space where the suburban man is expected to be an active domestic partner. When he is not doling out life advice to his children, the suburban man is expected to entertain guests in his living room and show off his many

[5] "Other-direction" deals with a personality type that arises in the twentieth century. Instead of focusing on the individual, the other-directed personality type frets over the opinions of the collective. personality trait operates as the unspoken villain in most of suburban literature.

purchases. Yet, in suburban literature, characters begin to yearn for the simpler times of Babbitt's living room, where he was left alone and at liberty to ignore his children. In John Marquand's *Point of No Return* (1949), Charles Grey exists in a living room split between the Babbitt living rooms of yore and the modern living room. With a private living room, Charles is able to consider his problems, compartmentalize them, and not burden his family with his ennui. Rabbit Angstrom, in John Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1960), lacks a private living room and his problems spill out into his daily interactions with his family.

My next chapter "To Live or DIY in the Suburbs: Masculinity, Nature, and the Lawn In Suburbia," takes the suburban man out of his house and places him out in the lawn. The American front and back lawn are perhaps the most iconic "suburban" space discussed in this project. Meticulously kept grass is second only to the white picket fence as the go-to suburban reference, but this was not always the case. In this chapter, I follow the lawn's introduction in the suburban novel and the multitude of ways the lawn rewrites suburban masculinity. I focus on four stories that either directly or indirectly focus on how the suburban man views his lawn. In Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) and Updike's "Separating" (1974), the reader sees suburban men simply ignoring their lawns to mask their insecurities or hide deeper problems. John C. Keats' *Crack in the Picture Window* (1956) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1951) both follow men who take to their lawns as an expression of their long, lost pioneer spirit only to find themselves embarrassed and emasculated.

My last chapter "From Breadwinner to Bread Burner: Gender, the Kitchen, and the Suburbs" —like the *Carousel of Progress*—ends in the kitchen. Throughout most of suburban literature, the kitchen was considered a gendered space, a zone for mothers and children. With the rise of the ranch style home, which saw the kitchen moved the front of the home, the kitchen

becomes a co-habitable space and carries with it new expectations for the suburban man. He can no longer simply exist in the home—as Babbitt does—and is expected to do his part around the house. The literary suburban man fails to realize that it is not just his kitchen that has changed, but the social dynamics of his relationships to those in his home. He can no longer live in idealized masculine spaces like Babbitt or Julian English, and must instead redefine his identity in relation technological and social progress. In this chapter, I examine two men who refuse to change—*Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler and Neddy Merrill from John Cheever's "The Swimmer" (1964)—and the repercussions these men face for looking backwards instead of forwards.

CHAPTER 2: LITTLE DEATHS IN LITTLE BOXES: THE BEDROOM IN SUBURBAN LITERATURE

"I just did a very private thing in a very public place for you!"
-Pete Campbell, "The New Girl," *Mad Men*

The room is dark and secluded. The thick curtains are drawn, and once the doors are shut, no natural light escapes. A shared sense of voyeurism, excitement, and intimacy fills the space as the strangers find a place to watch. The excitement is palpable; the air electric. They have never done this before, there might even be participation required. The knowledge that people have been doing this for a long time quells any fears; some people even do this several times a day. The thick curtains open. A muffled voice cuts through the dark. The voice says, "Put your hands together for Walt Disney's the *Carousel of Progress*!" The curtain rises, the music starts, and the show begins. While John walks the viewer through his home, his bedroom remains private.

Attractions at Walt Disney World do not generally raise existential questions about the bedroom.[6] While never being directly addressed, John's bedroom plays an important function in *Carousel of Progress*. Considering that every room in John and Sarah's home gets referenced (including the bathroom twice), the absence of the master bedroom illustrates the inherent privacy of the space. The bedroom is often represented as a place for private moments—from the obvious biological aspects to tender conversations not meant for public ears. While never mentioning this connection, John treats the darkened audience area as his own private bedroom. When speaking directly to the audience, John admits to things he could never admit to his

[6] Except in EPCOT's *The Making of Me*, which inexplicably operated from 1989 to 2007. Having Disneyfied (and white washed) American history and the future, *The Making of Me* was Disney's attempt to sanitize human reproduction. The ride, which starred Martin Short, confused children and parents alike for almost two decades.

family—for example, his penchant for stereoscope photographs of Little Egypt, a popular belly dancer who appeared at the World's Fair. After catching his son with the pictures, John gives a brief run-down of Little Egypt's career, a topic of which John is obviously well-versed, before catching himself and embarrassingly clearing his throat. John's openness to the audience, albeit fairly sanitized and private, represents an important development in American culture. While still maintaining an aura of privacy, the bedroom was becoming more public.

This transformation of the bedroom matches representations in suburban literature. Through architectural shifts and changes in American culture, the bedroom becomes a more public space. Americans began spending more time in the bedroom, and as the century passed the midway point, they also started talking about what happens there. In this chapter, I track how representations of both the suburban man's marital bedroom and the private bedroom of his mistress (or, in later cases, his mistresses) change throughout the century. In these bedrooms, readers see the suburban man performing two distinct roles—that of a civic father figure and that of a private, self-involved adulterer. Both roles, however, become public in the face of changing politics and sexual mores. In the public imagination, the role of the father remains a constant throughout the roaring twenties, the conservative midcentury, and the revolutionary sixties.[7] Over four decades, this traditional father figure grows increasingly bored, and he escapes this boredom in the bedrooms of his mistresses. While the thrill of sneaking around initially excites the character, by the 1960s even the role of adulterer becomes an expected plot point in the suburban man's story. No longer contained to seedy bars on the outskirts of town or in shady hotels, the act of adultery becomes as rote and tiresome as his duties as a husband. When the private bedroom loses the thrill of secrecy, the suburban man loses interest. Despite his growing discontentment with affairs, adultery becomes an integral part of the suburban man's fabric—

[7] And for suburban literature, to be a suburban man is to be a father.

which, obviously, is gray flannel.

The shift towards a more public bedroom, however, does not happen overnight; it occurs only after an array of political and social changes in America. In *Carousel*, John's bedroom remains hidden, yet the audience sees subtle changes to other bedrooms throughout the ride. In the first scene (1900's), John speaks to his daughter Patricia, and the stage lights illuminate her bedroom as she fixes her hair at her vanity. Patricia first protests the intrusion, "Papa, all these people, I'm indecent!" but John assures her, "Don't worry, Patricia. They're friends." This moment is decidedly odd for many reasons, most noticeably, John' s comfort with the idea of a public bedroom. In the next scene (1920s), Patricia, dressed as the Statue of Liberty, no longer has any qualms with the audience's intrusion into her bedroom aside from being seen in such ridiculous garb.[8] By the third scene (1940s), however, Patricia fails to notice the audience or the stage lights as she talks on the phone to a friend. The intrusions have become routine, just as they become in suburban literature. Sinclair Lewis, like John, gives knowing glimpses into the bedroom; later authors, however, turn the literary stage lights on the bedroom and remain there.

The concept of an intrusion and function of the bedroom alter as public opinion about the roles of bedroom and sex shift. In the nineteenth century, the bedroom operated strictly as a place for sex and sleep. While twentieth century bedroom is also the site of those functions, as John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988) argue, sex itself was changing: "[s]exual expression was moving beyond the confines of marriage…and the growing availability of contraceptives removed the dangers of non-marital heterosexuality" (241). Moreover, the rise of the awareness of recreational sex not only changed relationships in marital bedrooms, but helped redefine suburban living as well. Unlike the nineteenth century, discussions of sex no longer necessitated

[8] Patricia's garb is certainly odd, but one could read Patricia's clothing choice as a moment of conversion, from the feminine private citizen resisting the prurient audience gaze to the feminized symbol of the nation acceding, albeit self consciously, to the publicizing of the bedroom.

a fainting couch. As this change occurred, the midcentury, literary suburbanite either began to cultivate his personality *in* the bedroom or attempt to find an identity *removed* from the bedroom. Consciously or unconsciously, sex becomes not only a part of the suburban man's identity, but an essential facet of his character.

This chapter establishes two primary tracks of the bedroom represented by the character's desires—either for a public identity that fulfills the expected roles of the suburban man, or a private identity found in the bedrooms of mistresses. I raise notions of privacy in relation to the history of the bedroom, and read the suburban man's bedroom as a place for sex, consumerism, and most importantly, a place in which the suburban man either accepts the expectations of his public roles or rejects them for his own private desires. Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* (1922) and John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (1934) introduce two versions of the suburban bedroom (public and private) and establish the public and private tracks negotiated in the novels of the 1940s and 1950s. *Babbitt* enacts the sexual ennui apparent in later suburban novels, but he has not yet decided that these affairs are the answer to his problem. George Babbitt wants to retain his all-American father figure image, but he finds himself beckoned to the younger, sexualized mores of the 1920s. He stands on an important sexual fault line—while Babbitt reflects conservative nineteenth century ideals of sex, he feels the pressures of 1920s promiscuity. In the end, Babbitt chooses the *public* image over his private desires and trysts.

Conversely, in O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra*, Julian rejects his public image for his private desires. As a depression-era suburban man, Julian does not suffer from the same pressures as 1920s Babbitt, and so he establishes a different path. Instead of focusing on his domestic and public image, Julian relies on sex to establish his place and power within his home and community. While sex is not the answer in *Babbitt*, *Appointment in Samarra* furthers the

idea that sex, both in public and private bedrooms, is where identity is built. From there, sex becomes firmly entrenched in the suburban novel, sometimes unspoken and other times explicitly discussed. Regardless of the content or form, the novels that come after Lewis' and O'Hara's work follow one of the two paths there established—the choice between the public image or the private desire.

While later novels follow the paths of *Babbitt* or *Appointment in Samarra*, representations of the bedrooms within said novels change immensely. The first three chapters of *Babbitt* show how the bedroom had already started changing representationally. The room now served as a place for sex, sleeping, dressing (where Babbitt dons the accoutrements to his public image), and gossiping with his wife (where he accrues information to bolster his social standing). Twelve years later in *Appointment in Samarra*, O'Hara introduces two new dimensions to the bedroom. It becomes a place to establish power through sex (or, in Julian's terminology, through "submission") and, when that fails, a place to hurt the people closest to him, such as when he tries to have sex with another woman in front of his wife. From there, the bedroom's development splinters into different directions while still following *Babbitt* and *Appointment in Samarra*'s tracks. Bedrooms in the *Babbitt*-esque novel become chaste. Sex and nostalgic resistances to sexual changes become sublimated in other ways in midcentury novels. Novels following in O'Hara's tradition delve deeply into key parties, partner swapping, prostitution, and other debaucheries. Either unspoken or openly ribald, sex remains a driving force for change in novels like *The Big Clock (1946)*, *The Tunnel of Love* (1951), and *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

Although representations of the suburban bedrooms change drastically, the space retains many of the same spatial features over the twentieth century. Though the room engenders much discussion and change, the bedroom remains almost spatially the same from the century's

beginning to its end. The kitchen, living room, office, and lawn all see major relocations, resizing, and renovations in the twentieth century. The bedroom, however, maintains the same shape and placement, whether it is found in a Dutch Colonial or Ranch Style design. Even Patricia's bedroom in *Carousel*, despite changes to her opinions of intrusions and the décor, remains stage right. The real heat of change happens in representations of what goes on in the bedroom. Advertisers and developers broadcast the bedroom as a place for consumption. Sexual reformers partake in frank discussions about sex while politicians try desperately to keep the door closed. Suburban authors, aware of the changes to the bedroom, often simultaneously buttress popular opinions of the bedroom while disrupting the status quo. No longer operating as a simple place for rest and biological issues, some suburban authors cast the bedroom as a place for sex, relaxation, hangover management, and both inane and important conversations. As the century progressed, the bedroom became an important location even if people felt uncomfortable discussing it.

The bedroom was not always considered an important location or even a worthy topic of discussion. Studying the history of the bedroom, Lucy Worsely (2011) notes that medieval society did not have designated bedrooms, only a "simple living space in which they happened to rest" (1). This simple living space posited sleep as a necessity and practicality. As time progressed, the bedroom would transform from an austere sleeping place into a zone for comfort and leisure. The bedroom would become a dedicated zone for rest, but as Elizabeth Collins Cromwell (1990) notes, the bedrooms of the eighteenth century lacked what we might consider essential amenities and the conveniences of a modern suburban bedroom.[9] Writing about eighteenth century bedrooms, Bill Bryson (2010) asserts that beds were often filled with a variety of items: straw, cornhusks, wood shavings, saw-moss, and hair (321-322). The rise of the

[9] Like heat or space.

spring mattress and electricity, which also aided in the suburban boom, added new public dimensions to the bedroom[10]. When these advances in bedroom technology started appearing across the country, people spent more time relaxing and reading by lamplight in bed. Couples could spend time discussing bills, neighbors, or work. With these developments, the size of the suburban master bedroom and the number of bedrooms in a house became main selling points and fostered a bedroom consumer culture.[11]

Consumerism helped expand the suburban master bedroom and add to the public nature of the space. Mass culture found its way into the American bedroom necessitating a need for expansion. Developers and advertisers started marketing luxury bedroom suites, and architects began taking the suburbanite's concern with bedroom size seriously. As Larry Gordon (1991) asserts, the master bedroom needed to stretch since suburbanites started to expect the bedroom to contain space for their possessions and a private bathroom. Gordon observes that the room began to bulge with "deep bathtubs, separate showers, toilets behind private doors, and walk-in closets" (3). As the room grew, suburbanites felt the need to consume. The suburban bed, which started as a split twin, changed into a double—and modified briefly, for some reason, into a water bed. Radios, telephones, and televisions eventually found their way into the master bedroom. Mass producers promoted luxury rugs and bed coverings, and changed their wares year after year. Thread counts rose as time passed and the ubiquitous wind up alarm clock went digital. This consumerism added to the public nature of suburban bedrooms. Advertisers felt comfortable enough to market products solely for the bedroom, and suburbanites felt secure in buying them. Despite all this change, one constant remained throughout the century, a person still had privacy

[10] The introduction of electric light also drastically changes the other zones of the suburban home. Offices could stay open later. Radios and televisions reshaped living rooms. And so forth.
[11] And as HGTV's *House Hunters* proves, the size of the suburban master bedroom continues to be a major selling point.

in the bedroom, even if the room was more public.

Despite common misconceptions, the bedroom has not always been a strictly private affair. Lucy Worsely (2011) notes that in medieval bedrooms people were often invited into the space that served as a sleeping location (1). Starting in the seventeenth century, the bedroom came to be assigned the privacy the suburban man would later rely on. Accounts of the bedroom were, as Sharon Ullman argues (1997), confined to "divorce records and vice investigations" (2). While things were certainly happening in the bedroom, no one wanted to discuss those matters—at least, not publically. However, privacy underwent several changes at the turn of the twentieth century. Deborah Nelson (2002) highlights the complications of privacy by arguing "the simple binary of public and private has already been complicated by the recognition that modern society is divided into a multiplicity of public spheres" (xii-xiv). The division of public spheres (and the privacy therein) became a defining feature of the American suburbs, an idyllic place where a person could have a home space removed from his or her work sphere and community sphere. Realtors and developers tapped into this ideal and advertised the promise of a private home with tales of hedges, fences, and lawns that kept nosy neighbors at bay. While the bedroom was being fashioned into a private space, those advertising and commercial entities refashioning it were likewise responsible for its publication representationally. To people fleeing crowded apartments, the suburbs seemed like their own private oasis; yet, as evidenced in suburban novels, privacy, even in the private confines of the bedroom, is a forever changing and fleeting concept.

Marjorie Garber maintains the location of the master bedroom contributed to the concept of privacy (1). At the back of the home, the bedroom remains, at least spatially, out of sight and out of mind. As John L. Vollmer, Pamela Schulze, and Janice Chebra (2005) note, the Victorians

first sought to remove the bedroom from social spaces like the parlor or the dining room to create a designated private space. Many Victorian homes moved the bedroom to the second floor to distinguish a social zone (first floor) and private zone (second floor) (5). While many midcentury suburban homes lacked a second floor, this acknowledged separation continued well into the twentieth century. As Gordon (1991) asserts, developers attempted to create a space for parents in the bedroom. The suburban home often catered to children—the living room and lawn often became a space for play—so the master bedroom was often pitched as a child-free zone.[12] The introduction of fireplaces, master bathrooms, and reading nooks in the parents' bedroom symbolized a private space for Mom and Dad (3). Privacy, however, proves to be difficult to find even behind the closed doors of a master bedroom suite.

The familiar sight of closed doors, hushed voices, and drawn curtains builds on the private nature and adds to the appeal of the bedroom. A person might keep the bedroom door closed to conceal a messy room—or that person might be hiding an array of BDSM equipment. Suburbanites whisper in hushed tones to avoid waking up children, but they might also be drawing out the particulars of their separation.[13] Closed doors and curtains create an aura of privacy, but for anyone on the outside, they create a desire to know what is going on in seclusion. Many a suburban kid placed their ear to their parents' locked bedroom door only to recoil in terror, psychologically scarred forever.[14]

Hushed voices and closed doors may have kept the bedroom out of sight, but the room certainly wasn't out of mind. As Bill Bryson suggests, "There is no space within the house where we spend more time doing less, and doing it most quietly and unconsciously, than [in the bedroom]" (320). The literary suburbanite spends copious amounts of time there: sleeping in

[12] This pitch came for realtors to buyers hoping to pray on frazzled parents hoping for a few seconds alone.
[13] As witnessed in John Updike's "Separating" (1974).
[14] This scene is perhaps captured best in the episode "The Diary" of *Freaks and Geeks*.

bed, dressing in the morning, discussing matters not appropriate for children, regretting the previous night's drunken mistakes, and so forth. As the twentieth century progressed, suburban authors dissected sexual and non-sexual activities in the bedroom. *Babbitt* opens in the space, but the title character eventually leaves the room. In Peter De Vries' *The Tunnel of Love* (1949), Dick Pepper spends the entire first chapter in bed, worrying that he has impregnated his mistress. For a room so often situated at the back of the home, the bedroom is—so to speak—where the action is.

In early suburban literature, the bedroom manifests itself as center of the male character's identity. The bed he shares with his wife is a constant reminder of his public self—dutiful suburban husband and father. In the bedroom, the suburban man must maintain his husbandly duties as a domestic, social, and biological partner. Yet, the suburban man finds the figure of monolithic suburban father to be boring. Therefore, the marriage, the centerpiece to their public selves, is essentially doomed from the start. As Hannah Arendt argues (1958), love is "killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public…love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes" (51-2). Love might be dead in the suburban bedroom, but the public role of suburban husband was not. As the bedroom becomes more public, the more stringent the role of father figure becomes. By the 1950s, the archetypical figure of the station-wagon-driving, azalea-watering suburban father had cemented itself into the national consciousness. To escape these expectations, the suburban man turns to the private bedroom.

The private bed he shares with someone else or his dreams of sharing with someone else represent a chance to reject the public bedroom, and the character carries this idea throughout the twentieth century. From Babbitt in the 1920s to *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler in the 60s,

these men view sex in the private bedroom as a pathway to reject their unfulfilling lives and feel young again. Yet, the private bedroom, a space that lacks the public functions of his home bedroom, represents a public gambit for the character. A mistress's bedroom can never truly be "private" since he always runs the risk of being caught. If he's caught, he runs the paradoxical risk of losing the status he has been running from but, at least to appearances, wishes to maintain.

The bedroom, however, serves many sexual and non-sexual functions. It gives readers the first glimpse of the mass consumerism for which the suburbs are renowned for. Babbitt displays his many purchases including his "alarm-clock [with] cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial" (7) and his never used khaki camping blanket that "[suggested] to him freedom and heroism." These items represent a constructed consumer identity that starts in the bedroom[15], a space where suburbanites transform into their constructed selves. The reader sees a hungover Babbitt change from "feel[ing] like punk" (6) into a sparkling, civic leader simply by changing his attire. As Vance Packard (1959) notes, "clothing has been one of the most convenient, and visible, vehicles for drawing class distinctions" (115). By putting on his glasses and his "gray suit" in the bedroom, Babbitt transforms into "the modern businessman; one who gave orders to clerks and drove a car and played occasional golf and was scholarly in regards to Salesmanship" (Lewis 11). Babbitt's morning routine won't be the last time the suburban man attempts to mold his personality through his accoutrements.

The reader first meets a hungover Babbitt in his bedroom, after a milk truck jolts him out of bed. The narrator focuses on the physical and material attributes of the bedroom, and these descriptions establish long-standing conceptions of the space. The first concerns the public nature of the Babbitts' bedroom. The narrator outlines a laundry list of the Babbitts' items: "the bureau with its great clear mirror, Mrs. Babbitt's dressing table with toilet-articles of almost solid

[15] The consumer culture will eventually find a different home—the living room. I'll discuss this in chapter 4.

silver, the plain twin beds…" (15). These possessions represent the functions of the bedroom in the novel, the mirror, which allows the characters a moment of self-reflection, the dressing table, which showcases Myra's many—but not perfect—possessions, and the beds, which denote a division of spheres between the couple. As the narrator notes, these items create a bedroom that resembles "a masterpiece among bedrooms, out of *Cheerful Modern Homes for Medium Incomes*" (15-16). The narrator's joke helps establish the already public nature of the marital bedroom. While the room is supposed to be off limits, the upkeep of the room shows that someone aspires to show off the room, be it to a neighbor or a magazine with a highly specific name. The opulence of the bedroom should broadcast the health of Babbitt and Myra's marriage, but this upkeep establishes another trope of suburban literature. Appearances are deceiving, especially in the bedroom. The magazine suggests that advertising is showing people who they are through their homes—in this case, middle class optimists. And although a third-person narrator is describing the items in the bedroom, his narration is ironic and his tone pokes fun at its content.

The health of the marriage stands as another important designation established in these opening chapters. The Babbitts' bedroom lacks love, the most important component of the public bedroom. The narrator quips, "It had the air of being a very good room in a very good hotel…[a room] for people who would stay but one night, go without looking back, and never think of it again" (15-6). Like the narrator's fancy hotel, the Babbitts' bedroom operates as a place for sleep, for dressing, and for casual conversations. The couples' bedroom lacks an important designation—a place for sex. However, the sexless bedroom does not spring from Lewis' prudishness. As Babbitt readily admits, the marriage has become both loveless and sexless. In a groan-inducing moment, the narrator quips about Myra, "she had become so dully habituated to

married life that in her full matronliness she was as sexless as a nun" (10). The public bedroom often projects domestic happiness, but as evidenced in the opening chapters, and in descriptions of Myra, the underlying message is wholly different.

Babbitt also establishes elements of the private bedroom since the space operates as a rejection of his unfulfilling, public bedroom. To the suburban man, the private bedroom becomes a space of possibility, an integration into a misguided fantasy removed from his domestic duties. Babbitt initially establishes his sleeping porch as a private bedroom, a psychic space where he lazily dreams of "the fairy girl" (34)**.** Despite spending hours dreaming of this vision, Babbitt cannot define who "the fairy girl" is, but he believes that it ties into eroticism and youth. Gore Vidal (1992) views this imaginary creation as a character flaw, an "uneasiness with sex, mature or otherwise,"[16] representing an immaturity in the character's person by placing blind faith in something that does not and cannot exist. These immature desires live up to claims made later in Alfred Kinsey's exhaustive study *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), and Babbitt, mirroring many younger, white middle class men, spends his day fantasizing about sex (in this case, the fairy girl) but has no real plan to follow through with his desires (509).[17] Instead, he fetishizes not a young person, but an idyllic and unattainable concept of youth. For Babbitt, the sleeping porch allows him to dabble in extramarital affairs without physically cheating on his wife. Yet, he cannot quell the pull towards youth and begins to hatch a plan to make his sleeping porch fantasies a reality.

Babbitt's, and the later suburban man's, fascination with youth stems from his belief that youth is the antithesis of the suburban father figure. Beth L. Bailey notes (1988) a drastic change in the way that people viewed and approached youth at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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[16] In Vidal's opinion, this goes for both George F. Babbitt and his creator.

[17] Kinsey would also note that working class males did not spend their time fantasizing about sex. Unlike Babbitt's (and many other middle class men) ennui, working class people have no time to fantasize or be bored.

Middle class citizens started to "redefine youth as a period demanding special institutions and protections" (9). This redefinition helped create what would be referred to as 1920s "youth culture"—a culture largely focused on music, unsupervised social gatherings, and commercial products **(**10**).** Despite being middle aged, Babbitt attempts to tap into the 20s youth culture, especially their dating policies and loosened sexual mores as a rejection of his fatherly image. Unlike his Babbitt and his peers, young people were open about their sexuality. Babbitt wants to experience this new, sexualized youth culture but needs to warm up to the idea of adultery. To do so, he initially relies on fantasies of the fairy girl, but his eyes begin to wander to the real world.

Ultimately, his bedroom desires coalesce into an affair with a younger woman. While he struggles to name these desires, Babbitt understands the urge to stray is attached to youth. His erotic fantasies focus not on a woman—and not even a fairy woman—but a "fairy girl." Despite the unsettling name, Babbitt does not harbor a proclivity for young flesh. Instead, he wants to return to a time when he still had sexual mobility. Coming of age at the turn of the century, Babbitt did not get enjoy his bachelor days in the same fashion as other later suburbanites. He did not go on dates like the oversexed Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* (1961); he courted Myra, and later admits to only marrying her out of sympathy because he found her weeping after she confused his romantic advances as a proposal of marriage. When Babbitt finally sets out on his adventures, he attempts to pick up two women younger than him, Ida Putiak and Tanis Judique. In keeping with the times, he turns to "sexual satisfaction as a critical component of personal happiness" (D'Emilio and Freedman 241). This notion of extramarital sex as the answer to his problems proves highly informative for Babbitt, and influential for suburban literature.

Babbitt's two affairs are radically different from one another. He first pursues a private affair and later a public affair. In the end, neither affair accomplishes Babbitt's goal of finding an

answer for his problems. The private affair starts after he forgoes his "fortnightly hair trimming… [at] the Reeves Building Barber Shop" (229). Babbitt convinces the manicurist Ida, who isn't that much older than Babbitt's eldest daughter, to go out to dinner. When she agrees, Babbitt realizes he has a public problem and uses his societal knowhow to escape the scrutiny of his social circle. He gives in to private desire, but he still accounts for his public persona since a well-renowned and married realtor can't take Ida out in public. Luckily for Babbitt, his car breaks down before the date, and he hires a taxi, which eliminates the possibility of anyone identifying Babbitt's car. He takes her to Biddlemeier's Inn, a roadside bar on the outskirts of town, a bar where Babbitt finds himself confounded when the bartender doesn't acknowledge "who George F. Babbitt was" (234). His reaction highlights his paradoxical nature. He seeks anonymity, but that anonymity is at odds with his sense of himself. After they leave, Babbitt finds himself enamored of the secrecy and the "motors…parked [with] dim figures… clasped in reverie" (235). Yet, at Ida's apartment, Babbitt cannot commit to the affair. The sight of Ida's "drab wooden house" (236) causes him to wish Ida an amiable and chaste goodnight. He spends the rest of the taxi ride home praying and exclaiming, "Oh, my God!"

In the moment, Babbitt goes "cold with failure" (235) and his inaction comes from not understanding what he wants. He had convinced himself that he wanted the private affair like the ones happening on the dark ends of the street. With Ida, he was, presumably, well on his way to achieving this dream, but the private nature of the evening scared him. He could not commit because he derives no joy from sneaking around or spending time at roadside inns where the waiters don't know who he is.[18] It is one thing to imagine an affair of this nature on your sleeping porch, but carrying one out proves a more difficult task. Babbitt realizes a private affair isn't for him, but he still believes in the "not impossible she who would understand him, value

[18] Babbitt should have went to *Cheers*.

him, and make him happy" (236). To find her, he must refine the parameters of the fairy girl.

Babbitt is again cursed with a lack of understanding. Without cultural awareness of the unhappy nature of suburban plight, which descriptions would only come in his wake, Babbitt's self-reflexivity is limited. Sex is emerging as a recreational act, but Babbitt has no vocabulary to engage in society's willingness to discuss the act. His understanding of changing sexual politics touches on later concerns of the suburban man, but his knowledge is insufficient for them. Thanks to his nagging nineteenth century furtiveness, Babbitt cannot comprehend his unhappiness. While he might be doing what he dreamed about on his sleeping porch, his desires fail him since those desires stem from a fantasy that doesn't exist. Instead of investigating these feelings deeply, Babbitt searches for a different type of affair: a public affair. He wants to go on dates like the young people of Zenith, and being seen out on the town with a younger woman excites him. This search for a public affair ultimately proves to be a dead end for Babbitt as well; yet, the desire for this type of affair persists in the literature. The bedroom, even the private bedroom, becomes public as the twentieth century progresses, and Babbitt, yet again, is clumsily ahead of the pack.

As I will argue later, the adulterer becomes part of the suburban man's archetype. By the 1960s, virtually every literary suburbanite cheats on his wife.[19] Babbitt, however, adds this dimension to his public persona forty years early. He wants to maintain the suburban father image, but also wants an affair where he doesn't have to hide in the shadows of Biddlemeier's Inn. He wants to go out on the town and drunkenly dance with the fairy girl, and the opportunity arises when Myra leaves town to take care of her ailing mother. With Myra gone, Babbitt is free to explore the confluence of his public and private desires.

[19] The visual example of this is *Mad Men's* Harry Crane. Over the course of a decade, Harry goes from drunkenly cheating on his wife and crying about it to a man whose entire being seems to be dedicated to cheating on his wife and general terribleness.

Babbitt's public affair starts when he meets Tanis Judique. Tanis is closer to Babbitt's age, and she is much more social than Myra, which allows Babbitt to be seen out and about with a younger woman. Tanis, perhaps most importantly, listens intently to Babbitt's self-aggrandizement. She compliments his deftness at real estate, his political viewpoints, and even his youthfulness, "Oh, you're a boy yet. I mean—you can't be a day over forty-five" (260). Babbitt finds himself enamored of Tanis—mostly because of her acknowledgment of his "youth."[20] The couple spends the night cuddled in front of a radiator. The next chapter opens with Babbitt feeling restored, and "the assurance of Tanis Judique's friendship fortifie[s] [his] self-approval" (265). He will soon discover that these feelings rarely last.

Babbitt believes he can both feel young in the arms of the fairy girl and reject his public persona while doing so. The narrator describes the once stuffy Babbitt as "rotund with laughter" while slipping and sliding on ice with Tanis. The image of Babbitt laughing as he makes a fool of himself is far removed from his earlier suburban father image, a man huffing about the seams of his clothes or grousing about his kids while shaving. Babbitt casts off his adult responsibilities, and he expresses his adoration through youthful expressions. As Beth L. Bailey (1988) notes, the 1920s marked a change in courtship. The days of front porch courting gave way to dating, which moved from the observation of the courtship model to a freer, public form of romantic self-expression (13). Babbitt's affair does not resemble the later, more sordid affairs of suburban literature. The couple appropriate youth culture and go on a series of dates at movie theatres and dance halls in Zenith. Freed from the fear of public ostracism, Babbitt feels safe to chase the youthful restoration he believes the fairy girl promises.

[20] This also reappears in later suburban literature, as well. One begins to wonder if the suburban man finds himself invigorated by the sexual act or finding someone who will listen to his self-loathing and complaints and reply to them in self-aggrandizing tones. In the third season of *Arrested Development*, a prostitute makes major money at the Bluth Corporation solely by listening to the men in the office cry in a hotel room.

Everyone in Zenith seems to know about Babbitt's adulterous relationship, but the reader is left to imagine what happens in Babbitt's private moments. Lewis never explicitly discusses sex in *Babbitt*, and the reader never sees Babbitt physically cheating on his wife. Babbitt and Tanis (and a few other random women tossed in) spend intimate moments alone, but the text never says if those intimate moments lead to sex. Lewis does, however, make several references to Babbitt "making love," but this reference, while sexually charged, doesn't always signal sex in the novel. Babbitt admits to having "made love" to Louetta Swanson, but the reader is later told that Louetta simply "dropped her head on his shoulder" (273). As Hollywood films make clear, in this time period, "making love" doesn't mean sex but rather an erotically invested exchange or pursuit. The expression doesn't become a synonym for sex until later. Regardless, Tanis castigates Babbitt for "being affectionate with Carrie Nork" (275), which Babbitt interprets as "making love to every woman possible." Babbitt's interpretation of his private moments, and Lewis' reticence toward sexualized language, stands in direct contrast with later suburban novels and men. Babbitt might be having an affair with several different women at the same time, but his interactions compared to later serial adulterers like *The Big Clock*'s George Stroud (1946) or *Something Happened*'s Bob Slocum (1966) sound almost Victorian.

The political scene of Zenith shifts as Babbitt chases Tanis, and he finds himself uninvited to meetings and left off memorandums. The fear of public retribution or sagging business overcomes the private desire for the fairy girl. He can no longer lie to himself. His new youthful persona isn't real nor can he deny that his true personality is much closer to the suburban father figure than the wild, romantic lover of the fairy girl. No longer lying to himself, he sees Tanis in a different light. Again, Babbitt lacks an understanding of what he truly wants. At a club, he realizes the sight of Tanis dancing with other men causes him to hate her. He now

wants her alone, more akin to the private affair with Ida. While at her apartment one evening, Tanis pulls herself closer to Babbitt to console him. Instead of appreciating this tender moment, Babbitt once again realizes, "She's…old!" (293). He once ran to Tanis as a figure of youth, going so far as to refer to her as "the fairy girl". Now, he can no longer escape his realization that Tanis' age serves as a reminder of Babbitt's own middle-agedness and his inability to shake his public persona. The restorative aspect of the sexual relationship is over. Tanis, a woman Babbitt who makes him feel "as if…his own aunt were making love to him" (293), now represents the same as Myra, a reminder of who he actually is.

In a mad dash to escape Tanis' bedroom, Babbitt uses his public persona to cast off his once private desire. He exclaims, "I've got a business to attend to and, you might not believe it, but I've got a wife and kids that I'm awful fond of" (293). This desire for home stands in direct contrast with his thoughts upon returning from Tanis the first night, "he was absorbed by a rapture in which all fear and doubting were smoothed away; and when he reached home, at dusk, the rapture had mellowed into contentment serene and full of memories" (264). With the restorative effects of youth absent, Babbitt moves on and rejoins the suburban society of Zenith.

The foray into the private bedroom is finally over for Babbitt. Despite failing to make Babbitt feel young again, the affair proves to be helpful. He returns home and starts to make positive steps in his life, a change more akin to a nineteenth century father figure than the adulterous father figure that would develop over the course of the twentieth century. The desire to stray seems to be excised from Babbitt, but those feelings remain in suburban literature as more suburban men leave their homes to chase private desires and ultimately return home. Babbitt's choice of the public identity over private desires establishes a domestic track in

suburban literature, and it continues in several novels and stories for the next two decades. However, Babbitt's pursuit only represents one track the suburban man followed.

In contrast, *Appointment in Samarra*, written by John O'Hara in the dark days of the Great Depression, veers from *Babbitt*'s domestic ending and contributes a new path for the suburban man, a path that rejects the domestic for personal desire. O'Hara was an stringent supporter of Lewis and celebrated *Babbitt*'s influence by proclaiming, "all other novelists and journalists…were equally blind to *Babbitt* and Zenith and the United States in 1922" (qtd. in Schorer 14). Lewis, however, did not return the favor with O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* and attacked the novel as "nothing but infantilism—the erotic visions of hobbledehoy behind the barn" (xii). Lewis' reticence towards O'Hara's sexualized material isn't due to Lewis' uncomfortableness with sex; it's that, as Babbitt's failed attempt to reinvent himself through sex attests, sex in *Babbitt* isn't where identity is built. In contrast, *Appointment in Samarra* proffers sex as the potential locus for identity. Unlike *Babbitt*, which takes place in a more hopeful and sexually liberated 1920s, *Appointment* takes place over Christmas in 1930, a time when people still held out hope for a swift end to the Great Depression. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988) argue that the 1930s snuffed out the 1920s sexually charged atmosphere when "society and gloom replaced the buoyant exuberance of the previous generation" (242). Yet, the reader finds characters in *Appointment in Samarra* turning to sex as a response to economic pressures that weren't present in the 1920s. O'Hara's novel bucks the popular notion of the 1930s and establishes the bedroom as a place for sex. Julian English's sexual struggles make Babbitt's stuffy unhappiness seem mundane.

Julian utilizes both bedrooms, the bed he shares with his wife Caroline and the beds he attempts to share with other women, differently from Babbitt. At home, Julian uses sex with his

wife to bolster his self-esteem. He might be a disappointment to his father, a social pariah in his community, and an unsuccessful car salesman, but he ignores all this since he stringently believes that he can sexually gratify his wife.[21] In his mind, his sexual prowess far outweighs the other troubles in his life. However, his one bulwark against his crumbling economic and social standing, a belief in Caroline's full submission during sex, proves to be a façade. Julian's worldview is crushed when he realizes Caroline submits less because she wants to and more because she thinks Julian wants her to submit. This realization initially feels like a simple character pronouncement, but his failure in the bedroom represents a shifting conceptual landscape.

Julian represents a different response to sexual failure than that of Babbitt. Babbitt attempts to redefine himself through sex, fails in this regard, and returns home a little worse for wear. Julian's reaction, however, shows the impact of sexual failure on some suburban men's psyches. Instead of returning home defeated, Julian disassociates from his wife, his friends, and his society. O'Hara paints Julian's damaged libido as an existential untethering from the world around him. Julian's entire personality is built around the belief in his sexual prowess. When he loses this key component to his personality, he searches out other bedrooms as a mode of lashing out at Caroline and his neighbors in Gibbsville. Untethered from his public persona, Julian delves deep into his private desires, but he only finds further sexual failures leading up to eventual suicide.

Despite their differences, *Appointment in Samarra* furthers *Babbitt*'s theme of pulling the curtain back on the bedroom. In *Babbitt*, Lewis casts the bedroom as a place for gossip, for dressing, and for sleep. While *Babbitt* carries out an affair, Lewis only occasionally mentions sex

[21] This belief carries on well into Julian's eventual downfall. After his marriage ends in the street, Julian admits to himself, "a man who is good with women, as good as he had been, is not wholly trusted and liked by men" (194).

in any of the bedrooms and most of those references revolve around a lack of intimacy. O'Hara, known and sometimes reviled for his sexualized stories, taps into the heretofore unspoken role for the bedroom: a place for sex. [22] From the opening pages, the reader sees that the novel intends to discuss the nature of sex by discussing character's sexual pasts and preferences. Ahead of his time, O'Hara ripped the bedroom door off its hinges and placed an emphasis on sex as a marker for identity. This shift from *Babbitt*, however, proves disastrous for Julian since he stumbles from one sexual misfire to another, and his failures in the bedroom match his failures in life.

By the midpoint of *Appointment in Samarra*, Julian has already sunk himself into a self-destructive depression. He starts his descent by throwing a drink in the face of his business partner Harry Reilly, a man who had recently loaned him $20,000 during the Depression. After realizing that her husband is spiraling, Caroline turns to submissive sex to both convince Julian to apologize to Harry and also to cheer Julian up. When Julian returns from a failed attempt to apologize, he finds Caroline waiting for him the bedroom, but she submits too eagerly. She says "the words he had taught her" (58) and "[did] all the things he wanted her to do" (60), but the moment rings false, and Julian realizes his power in the bedroom is a sham. Understanding that he has placed blind faith in something that does not exist, Julian begins to utilize the bedroom in a different fashion than Babbitt. He uses the bedroom to establish a new personality far removed from his public persona, an identity intent on punishing those closest to him.

Despite the earlier failure in the bedroom, the Englishes make plans to slip out of a country club party and have sex in the car. The plan seems spontaneous and fun, but it also smacks of desperation. The Englishes will prove that they're happy by being seen slipping out of

[22] As Charles McGrath writes in his 2002 introduction to the novel, "*Appointment in Samarra* is still the only American novel I know that begins with a scene of a married couple…having sex and on Christmas morning, no less" (ix).

the party to go have sex. The plan resembles Babbitt's public affair since the sex is important, but the public acknowledgment plays a larger role. Earlier in the novel, Julian's employee Lute Fleigler and his wife Irma have sex in their living room. When they do, the act lacks any ceremony. The Fleiglers do not need to prove to anyone, especially themselves, that they are happy. Julian and Caroline lack the intimacy and trust shown by the Fleiglers, and their plan to slip away to the car falters when Julian begins discussing his business partner to a priest. As Caroline enjoys herself at the party, Julian, in a drunk stupor, accosts her, accuses her of "being on the curse" (92), and ruins the evening. In this moment, Julian realizes his sexual failure had bled into all of his interactions with Caroline. His second failed attempt at submission pushes him into a precipitous descent that ends with suicide. However, before committing both social and actual suicide, Julian attempts to enact his new identity in two public affairs.

As with Babbitt's public dates, Julian publicizes his affairs, but his intentions are more malicious. These affairs are purposefully chosen to hurt Caroline the most. Instead of broadcasting the health of their marriage, Julian intends to broadcast the fissures between the two. Since Julian failed in the public bedroom, he wants to succeed in the private bedroom, but he also wants Caroline and the people of Gibbsville to know of his successes. His first attempt happens after Caroline rejects him at the club. He tries to recreate the previous night except without Caroline and sets his sights on Helene Holman, a torch singer dating a local rum baron and the one person everyone in the room would be watching. After flirting, Helene offers to take Julian to her room, but he exclaims, "No, I want to go outside. Out in the car" (133). If Julian's openness is a way to strike out at his fellow Gibbsvillians, his insistence on the car is a way to punish Caroline. When Julian and Helene leave, Caroline watches them slip out the back door. The reader doesn't witness the scene in the car; instead, the reader sees Caroline and her friends'

reactions to finding Julian passed out in the front seat. Word quickly spreads of the affair, and the town's gossip, which the reader has been expected to take at face value, convicts Julian of adultery. During an argument later, Lute Fleigler yells at Julian and sheds a light on public opinion in Gibbsville, "everybody thought you did and that amounts to the same thing" (212). Regardless of what happens in the car,[23] Julian's plan only succeeds in hurting Caroline and infuriating his neighbors and friends.

The next attempted affair comes after the dissolution of the Englishes' marriage, which happens in the street. The doorbell wakes Julian from a drunken stupor. He has spent his afternoon alone, drinking strong highballs from a flower vase, a scene that John Updike (2002) refers to as "the unforgettable freak of the mammoth highball glass" (xv). Opening the door, Julian sees Alice Cartwright, a young, female reporter sent to review the Englishes' now cancelled New Year's party, and he invites her in for a drink.[24] While discussing various Gibbsville topics and politics, Julian realizes he has a misguided but "enormous desire to discover this girl" (198). Julian again chooses a public figure to try to "discover." At the *Gibbsville Standard*, Alice writes under the pseudonym Gwen Gibbs, and her column serves as "a dumping ground for all the society gossip." She knows the societal pulse of the town, and Julian's actions will clearly be, at best, whispered among the various social circles. Despite his advances, she turns him down and quickly exits the house.

After Alice leaves, Julian continues to drink until he eventually commits suicide via carbon monoxide poisoning. While his suicide appears to be the culmination of a social, economic, and psychological collapse, the act is directly linked to his sexual failures. Earlier in the novel, Julian places a gun in his mouth while sitting at his desk. His mind races as he

[23] While the text never states outwardly, it is heavily inferred that Julian suffered from an alcohol-induced "equipment" failure.
[24] Sadly, he doesn't pour her a drink in a flower vase.

considers the act, but his fears do not rest in his twenty-thousand dollar loan, the angry rum baron who wants revenge for Helene, or his rapidly declining social standing. His suicidal thoughts start after he imagines Caroline having sex with Harry Reilly. Julian admits that the thought of Caroline having sex with another man was "the worst fear he had ever known" (170), and this fear ties directly to his earlier failure in the bedroom. Julian could not elicit true submission from Caroline, but someone might replace him and gratify Caroline. Later, when Alice quickly exits the house, Julian realizes that Caroline would obviously marry again and start a sexual relationship with said person. Julian, however, sees his own hypothetical prospects as much grimmer. He imagines a series of affairs that all end because his imagined partners, who get younger and younger, couldn't stand the indignity of being married to an already divorced Julian or, more importantly, submit to defeated man. The failure of his economic and social identities do not end Julian, but the collapse of his sexual life does.

The suburban man's connection to the bedroom becomes even more complicated after the publication of *Appointment in Samarra*. Thereafter, the midcentury novel traverses the two paths laid out by Lewis' and O'Hara's works. Novels either slam the door on the bedroom altogether or offer deeper insights into the bedroom. Some works, such as those by John Marquand, Sloan Wilson, and John C. Keats[25], follow the path of *Babbitt* and focus more on domestic issues than sexual ones. These novels showcase what Elaine Tyler May (1988) deemed the midcentury's "surge in family life and reaffirmation of domesticity that rests on distinct roles for women and men" (6). The men in these midcentury novels draw their identities from their roles as family men rather than exploring the bedroom. Other novels, however, explore characters who intend to find identity through the bedroom at any costs. Regardless of midcentury mores, characters in

[25] *Point of No Return (*1949), *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), and *Crack in the Picture Window* (1956), respectively.

these stories focus their search for an agreeable identity in the bedroom of others instead of his own.

The shift to the domestic partly ties into the mainstream public's perception of sex after World War II. As D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) note, the rejection of "sexual frankness was gathering momentum by the 1950s" (282). Soldiers returned home from war intent on reclaiming lost time and focused their energies on biological and domestic matters. Many authors—and many of their creations—served in World War II, where soldiers were bombarded with the dangers of pre-marital or polygamous sex. In pamphlets like 1940's "Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease," soldiers were explicitly told "Disease may ruin the sex organs and deprive a man of his health and happiness" and "Will power and self-control help to keep a man's body and mind healthy" (139). Other wartime materials asked doom and gloom questions, "Well, they thought they were having fun…but was it worth it?" On the home front, the Hays Code (released in 1930 and in force until 1968) sought to be "directly responsible for spiritual and moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking" (133). In the process, the Code eliminated scenes featuring "adultery…scenes of passion… seduction… [and] sex perversion" to show "correct standards of life" (134-5). In the domain of print, Congress held hearings on comic books while local authorities raided book stores carrying "pornography."

Middle class America seemed to be intent, at least publically, on pushing the bedroom further and further into the private realm; and many suburban novels of the time helped engender a focus on more domestic than sexual matters. The novels following in Babbitt's track seem intent on nostalgia for simpler times and emphasize domestic issues over sexual ones. These novels feature characters who acknowledge that they are unhappy but do not turn to sex as an answer to their problems. In John Marquand's *Point of No Return* (1949), Charley Gray comes to

understand his unhappiness through recalling an influential relationship in the past. Similarly, in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Tom Rath establishes a firmer connection to his family by correcting problems with his past sexual indiscretions. John and Mary Drone in *Crack in the Picture Window* live in the overly sexualized suburb of Rolling Knolls, replete with stereotypical key parties and partner swapping, but the Drones never partake in the debauchery and eventually move away. In the *Babbitt* track, the suburbanite might stray initially but ends the novel with a focus on his family.

While the Drones never join in the suburban debauchery, the Rolling Knoll's key parties prove that the mid-century novel wasn't completely sanitized of sex. People may have publically approached sex in a conservative manner; but as Peter Filene (1974) notes, Americans in 1944 birthed "more children within ten years than the class of 1921 had borne within twenty-five" (178). Though it may have gone unnamed and undiscussed, something sexual was happening behind closed suburban doors. The concerns of the private bedroom continued to play a major role in the novels that followed in the tradition of John O'Hara. These Julian-esque characters derive their identities and personalities from their sexual exploits. James Thurber's Walter Mitty, in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," escapes his staid, white-collar life by adopting an imaginary identity, replete with "lovely dark haired girl" on his arm (4). Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* (1949) follows the exploits of serial adulterer George Stroud, a man who after having yet another extramarital affair states, "I found out the reason we are on this Earth again" (40). John O'Hara's own *Butterfield 8* (1935) features Weston Liggett, a man who abandons his extra-marital affair only after watching his prostitute girlfriend drive off a cliff. Louis Weed in John Cheever's "The Country Husband" (1954) survives a plane crash and celebrates his new lease on life by trying to have sex with his maid. These novels and stories were not as popular as the

domestic suburban novel, but these character's nihilistic approaches to their families and the bedroom would gain traction and become the norm in the 1960s.

The *Babbitt* and the *Appointment in Samarra* paths seem to be two disparate forms; however, as midcentury novelists argued the merits of the bedroom, the comedic novel mined the confluence of the domestic and the sexual for laughs. The unsuccessful philanderer, a comedic role influenced by Babbitt and Julian's hopeless flights of fancy, developed in an interesting place, the sex-starved suburban husbands found in the comedic novels of Peter de Vries and Max Schulman. Both authors relied on the comedic trope Peter Filine refers to as "poor Dad" (187), the bumbling, emasculated father figure so popular in American sitcoms and comic strips. De Vries' *The Tunnel of Love* (1949) and Schulman's *Rally Round the Flag Boys* (1957) lampoon the concerns of the bedroom. In both novels, the suburban lead finds himself embroiled in an affair that risks his public persona; but unlike earlier characters, Dick Pepper and Richard Bannerman stumble blindly into private bedrooms.

The Tunnel of Love's Dick Pepper highlights a growing openness of the bedroom. The novel opens in medias res with Dick trying desperately to find a moment's peace while lying in bed. Dick wants a moment of quiet meditation to figure out how he will handle his possible impregnation of his mistress. His plan fails when first his wife followed by a doctor and later an agent from an adoption agency barge into his bedroom. Eventually, Dick's throat swells and he's unable to speak. The novel then reverts to the beginning of the story, and the reader discovers why Dick believes he needs a moment to himself. He's simultaneously convinced he's impregnated a woman who isn't his wife while harboring the knowledge that his neighbor has impregnated someone else.[26]

[26] Since this is a comedic novel, the reader later finds out that Dick never actually has sex with this woman, and the entire misunderstanding is played for laughs.

Dick spends most of the novel escaping his suburban existence by living vicariously through the sexual exploits of his neighbor, Augie Poole. Unlike Dick, Augie has no trouble with adultery. He admits to having sex with forty-three women, which causes a bug-eyed reaction from Dick. Augie assures him that only ten affairs have happened since he's been married. Dick thinks, "Ten. So he had gobbled up more sex on the side that I had partaken in my entire thirty-five years, wild oats included" (94). Dick and Augie's frank and open discussion of their sexual histories, or in Dick's case, lack thereof, would have turned many a face red in *Babbitt*'s Zenith. Finding himself simultaneously repulsed and intrigued, Dick becomes a liaison to help coordinate the affair between Augie and a woman named Constance Bly. This role acknowledges that both parties are aware of Dick's involvement in their sex life and are seemingly at ease with this knowledge.[27] In *Babbitt*, Babbitt discovers his friend Paul having an affair and fights the urge to violently accost his friend. Dick learns of his friend's infidelity and finds himself an active participant. While he initially grouses about his participation, Dick's role as a liaison, at the very least, gives him an escape from his boring job.[28]

Living vicariously through Augie also elicits another unexpected response. He, too, wants to experience the freewheeling lifestyle of his neighbor. When his wife leaves town, Dick finds himself embroiled in a possible affair with Terry, a young journalist. Dick drinks too much and passes out in his would-be paramour's bedroom without consummating the affair. The novel plays out like a sex-charged sitcom. Dick overhears a conversation and mistakenly believes he's impregnated Terry. In hopes of drowning his sorrows, he turns to the bedroom, one room where he truly feels comfortable processing this information and the room that got him into this trouble in the first place.

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[27] What a sentence.

[28] Since the novel is a comic novel, this role becomes even more important when Dick becomes convinced, thanks to a misinterpreted conversation, he somehow slept with Terry and got her pregnant.

Like de Vries' novel, Max Schulman's *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* (1957) features a character whose troubles start in the public bedroom. The novel comically posits Harry Bannerman[29] as the most suburban of all suburban men, "he was between 35 to 40 in age, married, the father of three children, the owner of a house, a first mortgage, a second mortgage, a gray flannel suit, a bald spot, and a vague sense of discontent" (23). Grace, Harry's wife, participates heavily in community politics, HOA meetings, and PTA gatherings. In Harry's mind, her political advocacy stifles their love life. "For me, romance has not retired to a back bedroom. It's still in the front parlor and wide awake," Harry tells his wife early in the novel (41). On the surface, the argument appears to be a fight between Harry's desire for a more modern, public form of sexual expression and Grace's desire for a more private and intimate relationship. Reading closer, one discovers Grace lines up closer to the public sexual discussions of later suburban literature. Harry might be screaming to bring their sex life out of the confines of the bedroom, but he sounds more like Julian English than the later suburban man. His desires are still private since he wants to be the one to call the shots instead of Grace's more public form of intimate communication and agreement. In the end, Harry's constant and mostly sad pleas fall on deaf ears, so he spends the opening of the novel sulking until he starts planning an affair with his neighbor Angela.

After having sex with Angela, Harry guiltily plans a quiet evening away for his wife. He unwittingly schedules the romantic evening the same night as a school board meeting. When Grace chooses civic duty, Harry exclaims, "Grace, God damn it, I don't want to go to the town meeting! I want to make love to you tonight!" (144). Shocked by his language, Grace looks for a resolution, "All right, Harry, we'll go to the meeting and then we'll come home and make love when we go to bed." This causes another angry exclamation from Harry to which Grace ponders,

[29] Get it, he's the banner man for suburban men. Or something. I don't know.

"Why not? Isn't that when people make love? When they go to bed?" Grace, representing more of a concept than a character, represents the public bedroom and wants Harry to be a husband and not a child. Unlike his mistress, Grace approaches Harry's fit as childish. She tells him to "grow up" and "stop being a damn schoolboy" (145). This moment marks a momentous shift because couples now have protracted conversations about their roles and desires in the bedroom. Married couples, up until this point, haven't had discussions about their sexual frequencies or sexual proclivities. Caroline English discusses her sex life with her mother. Dick and Augie compare their sexual histories. Myra Babbitt comes close to calling Babbitt out for his dalliances, but she backs down after being angrily bullied by her husband. Grace, however, does not back down, and, in a reversal of Babbitt's vicious attacks on Myra, Harry relents and eventually returns to his domestic role. Again, this decision denotes an important development in suburban literature, a loss of power in the domestic role. As much as the suburban man has resented and ignored this oncoming change, his domestic identity and the punishment for straying was changing.

This foray into the comedic might seem like a strange offshoot of *Babbitt* and *Appointment in Samarra*, but these two comedic novels predict yet another shift in suburban literature. These novels represent the beginning of the suburban man's accountability for his exploits in the private bedroom while still following the more domestic Babbitt track. In *Tunnel of Love*, Dick fails to quiet his public and domestic persona and cannot commit to his affair. Even his foray into his neighbor's affair stems from his desires to keep the Poole's marriage together. Harry Bannerman, however, uses the domestic aspects of his public persona to justify his affair. In the end, he crawls home, and his wife forgives him. *Rally* stands as the last time the suburban man gets away with straying into the public bedroom. Up until this point, the character

returns home relatively unscathed.[30] Babbitt cheats on his wife and, somehow, becomes a better father afterwards. George Stroud's wife is aware of his many dalliances. Even Grace takes Harry Bannerman back after cheating. The character almost always returns to his public identity. By the late 1950s, the character lost the ability to simply stroll back into his home after an escape—thanks to upheavals in both his domestic and sexual identities.

Unable to return to the public bedroom, the 1960s suburban novel swings wildly towards the sexual. This shift marks the end of the domestic track as established at the end of *Babbitt.* To compensate for lost sexual freedom, the suburban man revolts from his public persona and firmly establishes adultery as part of his character. His sexual identity is no longer an either/or, and he cheats on his wife without worrying about the well-being of his public persona. In the end, the Julian track becomes the standard for later literary novels. The man who willingly chooses domestic responsibility fades as literary men turn to sex to establish an agreeable identity. However, this shift towards a sexualized identity proves to be disastrous for the suburbanite. The bedroom becomes public as does his role as an adulterer, but the suburbanite quickly learns that public opinion of his indiscretions has changed as well.

Throughout the twentieth century, forms and feelings towards the bedroom change in the face of historical developments. Sexual mores shift by decade and seesaw from the jubilant and sexually charged twenties to the conservative midcentury to the sexual revolution in the sixties. The publication of *The Kinsey Reports*, the onset of second wave feminism, the legalization of the pill, various Supreme Court decisions, and a variety of other factors rewrite and recast the dimensions of the public and private bedroom. As D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) note, "the nation had traveled a long way…[and] efforts to subsume the erotic had given way as sex became an integral part of the public domain" (300). However, the sex that had become public—

[30] Except Julian English.

a sexual expression that focuses on both partner's experience and satisfaction—challenged the long-standing power the suburbanite had in the bedroom. The male, middle-class sexual power structure started to shift and, yet again, sent the suburban man careening in different directions.

The shifts helped the bedroom to become a more public space, even in the face of rigid, mid-century conservative ideals. Male and female suburban characters begin openly discussing bedroom. Once conveyed only through internal dialogue, private and sexual thoughts become blasé conversations pieces in John McPartland's *No Money Down* (1957) or Joseph Heller's *Something Happened* (1966). D'Emilio and Freedman (1988) argue that people in the late 50s and 60s wanted "new expectations of pleasure, satisfaction, and mutual enjoyment" (256). Even the outlines of the public bedroom saw change as "[t]he integration of contraception into middle-class married life also meant that the reproductive requirement for marital intimacy… receded." (278). The realignment of the public bedroom forced real discussions taking place in the bedroom, as witnessed in *Rally Round the Flag, Boys'* discussion between the Bannerman's sexual frequency. As Lucy Worsely (2011) asserts, the fifties, which are often cast as traditional and repressed, saw a "new model for marriage… [where] a mutually satisfying sex life began to be prized" (71). The realignment also created real repercussions for those who strayed outside the public bedroom, creating a massive problem for the suburban man. Adulterous men, like "The Swimmer"'s Neddy Merrill and *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler, end their stories wifeless and defeated.

These shifts create a shared mobility in the bedroom. Initially, the suburban man freely moved from bedroom to bedroom. Yet, the suburban wife slowly starts gaining her agency in the bedroom. "Female sexuality," Filene (1974) writes, "had become the undisputed fact of marital life (and, for a minority, of premarital life as well)" (188). Myra Babbitt once called out

Babbitt's hypocritical double standard, "You can run around with anybody you please, but I'm supposed to sit here and wait for you" (284). Yet, she never moves beyond pointing out the obvious to Babbitt. The suburban wife of the midcentury finally gains the agency to call some shots in the bedroom, as seen in James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941), Max Shulman's *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* (1957), John Cheever's "The Swimmer" (1964), and Yates' *Revolutionary Road*. Filene (1974) asserts that by the 1950s the common perception was a "husband must not only think of his own desires… he must develop his lover's skill toward a literal togetherness" (188). As Filene notes, this shared sexual experienced represented an "anxiety-producing demand" (188), but most middle-class men were expected to, at the very least, start acknowledging the sexual wants and desires of their partner. The literary suburban man, however, goes down kicking and screaming in a variety of ways.

Despite these shifts, later suburban fiction featured men even more lax in their philandering. As Albert Ellis (1968) asserts, the sixties saw people exploring "unconventional sex lives with much less shame, guilt, and self-deprecation that they ever did at any other time in American history" (62). Later characters do not suffer from the hand wringing of the conflicted Babbitt when planning their affairs. When April's pregnancy halts a trip to Europe, Frank Wheeler reignites his affair with Maureen Grube. Rabbit abandons his pregnant wife and toddler to start an affair with a prostitute. Both characters reverse the trajectory of Babbitt, who abandoned his affair to resume the role of traditional father. Frank and Rabbit, rejecting the role of father, run to the arms of other women. Their actions are cowardly, but pale in comparison to Bob Slocum in Joseph Heller's *Something Happened* (1966).

Bob Slocom might be the most egregious example of promiscuity present in later suburban novels. Bob partakes in a multitude of faceless affairs, which are described in a

disaffected tone, "It is sometimes pleasant; sometimes sad; it is never pleasant for long without turning sad (and uncomfortable…I find close relationships suffocating). There is usually something drunken about it (that's my fault, I guess—I like to drink and to get them drinking too)…, something forlorn and pathological…" (88). Unlike Babbitt or Julian who view extramarital affairs as a reaffirming event, Bob approaches his mistresses as a burden. Since adultery has now became part of his person, Bob sees his affairs as another uninspiring aspect of his personality.

By the publication of *Something Happened*, sex had taken on a different meaning in the suburban novel. The immature dream of the "fairy girl" had turned into yet another source of dissatisfaction in the suburbanite's existence. As David Riesman (1959) argues, promiscuity didn't come from a desire to express their identity but from a need to quell "the anxiety that they may not be truly and deeply loved, or capable of love" (213). Babbitt's public bedroom featured everything but love; Bob Slocum's private bedroom lacks love and any other emotional connection.

Men like Bob Slocum weren't the only people mindlessly chasing affairs in the later suburban novel. With shifts in both the public and private bedroom, infidelity grows immeasurably in the later suburban novels. The collision of public and private creates a hybrid space where both marital partners are more open to the concept of adultery. The narrator in John C. Keats' *Crack in the Picture Window* (1956) tells the reader "key parties" and suburban swinging was simply the natural culmination of innocent parlor games and dirty jokes. John Updike's *Couples* (1968) features a confusingly high amount of partner swapping. The suburbanites in *No Down Payment* and Charles Mergandahl's *It's Only Temporary* (1951) clamor for a private moment their neighbor's significant others. This sexual openness is

obviously a major development. The frank sexual discussion of the wives in *Crack in the Picture Window* would send shock waves across the stuffy societies of *Babbitt* or John Marquand's *Point of No Return* (1941). This change, as Elaine Tyler May (1988) suggests, lines up with the decade's "[rejection of] the political assumptions of the Cold War, along with the domestic and sexual codes of their parents" (9). As I will argue in later chapters, the changes and developments in the suburban bedroom drastically change everything about the suburban man's place in his home and changes elsewhere—like changes to his office or the kitchen—shift his place in the bedroom.

I close with a quote from Bob Slocum in *Something Happened*. Slocum tells the reader, "[sex] used to be called sexual intercourse. Today it's called *fucking*" (342). The line crystallizes many of the changes to the bedroom and the suburban man by the end of the 1960s. The polite, technical term "sex", a term Babbitt might have whispered, has been replaced by the non-reproductive term of "fucking." This linguistic shift to a curse word highlights the change in opinion towards sex for later suburban men. Slocum uses the word "fuck" to denote sex, but the curse word represents a sexual encounter in a private bedroom. A person "fucks" a stranger, not their partner. Yet, the term has not only been replaced in the mind of characters like Bob but accepted. Sex for these characters represents something else entirely. No longer does the character turn to the bedroom as a marker for his identity, as seen in *Babbitt*. One can imagine Babbitt sweating at these changes as he clasps his expensive alarm clock to his chest, while characters like George Stroud and Bob Slocum "rediscover" themselves in dingy hotel rooms and just as quickly forget their lesson. Regardless, the bedroom remains the driving force for these characters and their novels.

The suburban bedroom ultimately represents a microcosm of American's feelings about

sex and sexuality. Americans simultaneously wanted to privatize their bedrooms, and the bedrooms of their neighbors, while wanting to know what was happening behind closed doors, in other people's bedrooms. This interest, fueled by studies, publications, court cases, and debates, moved the bedroom to the forefront of conversation and led to, as Sharon Ullman (1997) argues, "a redefinition of sexuality as a means of self-realization rooted in pleasure and unconnected to reproduction" (3). Under this spotlight, suburbanites realized sex didn't necessarily look like what they thought.

CHAPTER 3: NEITHER EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH NOR FATHER OF THE YEAR: THE OFFICE IN SUBURBAN LITERATURE

"I'll tell you, boys, life is crazy. One day you're in community college driving a Camaro T-top, cock of the walk, and then you need some cash. So, you get a job. You think it's only temporary, but then you get a promotion. And then a raise. And all of these doors open up for you. Except they're not really doors. They're trapdoors. And then all of sudden, Bam! Twenty years has zipped by and you're thinking, 'Is this all I have to my life?"
-Hal, "Hal Quits," *Malcolm in the Middle*

From Bartleby's time at the dead letter office to Homer Simpson in Section 7G, work is an involuntary occupation that is, according to Sebastian de Graza (1962), "unavoidable, but nonetheless a curse" (35). However, for John in the *Carousel of Progress*, work begins to feel unfulfilling around 1940.[31] In the first two scenes, John discusses his family, his house, his car, his dog, and even his stove, but interestingly, not his job. When referencing work in the third scene, John loses the celebratory cadence in his voice and dismissively references two newly coined terms. He incredulously observes, "I just heard a new term on the radio. Fella says we've got something now called 'the rat race.' Did you ever hear that one?" His initial skepticism changes into resignation, "It sure describes my life. I'm involved in something now called commuting. I drive into the city for work all day and then turn around and drive all the way back. And the highway is crowded with other rats doing the same thing." Work now carries a negative connotation, and John expresses his disappointment through a loaded vocabulary. Terms, like rat race, conjure images of agitated workers stuck in gridlocked traffic. John's shift in opinion coincides with the midcentury's changing perception of work, especially white-collar work.

[31] As Alain de Botton writes in The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work: "all societies have had work at their center; ours is the first to suggest that it could be something much more than a punishment or a penance" (106).

Judging from the resignation in John's voice, he is not pleased with the new developments to his occupation. After commiserating with the audience, John's wife Sarah reminds him, "That's what we call progress." John begrudgingly agrees, but his consternation towards work seems odd in a ride so dedicated in presenting a singular, white-washed version of American history. As C. Wright Mills (1951) asserts, the American work ethic, a concept bandied around for centuries, has been "central to the historic tradition of America, to its image itself" (219). Yet, John, the all-America father figure, deviates from this idea by lapsing into discontent with his place in a changing labor force. John quickly changes the subject, but his brief exposition on his workplace highlights a growing malaise among white-collar workers, a malaise indexed by his new metaphoric vocabulary. These new terms, which arrive in the suburban man's purview in the midcentury, establish an unhappiness, but the negative feelings towards work and the office had been simmering under the surface for decades.

This chapter focuses on the offices present in suburban literature, both at work and home. As with the bedroom, both offices undergo several transformations as the twentieth century progresses. In the work office, a character like Babbitt derives his public persona from his work in his realty office but forty years later Frank Wheeler cannot name what he does at his job. This aversion towards the work office developed incrementally as white-collar work grows impersonal, and critical works introduce new vocabulary into the suburban man's purview. The open acknowledgement of his job's impersonality and unfulfilling nature, coupled with a growing list of terms to accentuate these feelings, indexes the literary work office's change from a place that leaves characters vaguely unsatisfied[32] into a place the suburban man perceives to be intent on destroying his personality. Consequently, the home office began to represent a safe-haven against the multitudinous changes to the suburban man's workplace. Unfortunately, the

[32] As is the case in *Babbitt* or Marquand's *Point of No Return* (1949)

suburban man's hopes for the home office are dashed as the space becomes another architectural casualty to twentieth century progress.

Throughout this chapter, I consider the work and home office as separate but conceptually related forms. In the work office, the suburban man undertakes a persona and strives hard for acceptance. As Mills (1951) asserts, a white-collar worker sells their personality not a product, so that personality should be likable. This persona creates a problem for the suburban man; he enjoys neither his work nor his work personality. At home, the suburbanite affects the idealized suburban father figure image, yet another unenjoyable identity. Only in the privacy of his home office does the suburban man grouse about the unfulfilling roles in his life. In this space, he can close himself off from the rest of his family while still inhabiting his home. He can also imagine his home office as the ideal work office, a place where he escapes the power dynamic and is free to do whatever he wants. Edward T. Hall notes that these distinct locales for the affected work office personality and the idealized home office identity help "keep the two often incompatible personalities from conflicting and may even serve as idealized versions of each" (104-4).[33] The home office allows the suburban man to tap into talents unused at work, but the space also intensifies the aspects of his personality rejected by the work office. However, when the home office starts disappearing in suburban homes, the alcoholism, vanity, and promiscuity, all personality quirks shunned by his employer, begin to bleed into the suburban man's identity at home.

I focus on three novels that deal with the pervasive influence of the work office and the disappearance of the home office. Without the cover of an office within the home, the suburban man is surrounded by the conformity present in his workplace, and he begins to lose the ability to

[33] Or as Charles Gray admits in *Point of No Return*: "[white collar work] gave you a split personality since you had to toss your own problems completely aside and never allow them to mingle in any way with those clients and depositors when you reached your desk at the Stuyvesant" (28).

separate his work self from his home self. Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* (1946), a novel written as home offices were disappearing, offers George Stroud the ability to expertly tell his bosses exactly what they want to hear while maintaining an agreeable existence outside of his work office. Later suburban men, however, cannot find the type of resolution Stroud finds at the end of *The Big Clock*. Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* (1961) and Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* (1961) spend more time trying to prove who they are not instead of finding fulfilling outlets. Yates' Frank Wheeler attempts to build a life outside of his work office, but he can never shake the personality his work requires. In the end, his resistance to the work office falters, and he becomes the office drone he tried so desperately to escape. Percy's Binx Bolling, however, affects a false identity in a pseudo-anthropological study of the white-collar suburban man. He shares the same disdain for the staid lifestyles as Frank; but unlike Frank, Binx willingly chooses conformity at the end of his novel. All three novels highlight a growing anxiety about the changing identity of the white-collar worker that manifests itself in the novels the 1940s, 50s, and 60s.

Unlike John's midcentury work doldrums, representations of the office shifted drastically at the turn of the century. Sinclair Lewis biographer and critic Mark Schorer notes that authors writing about business in the nineteenth century often focused on "tycoons." He argues that those authors laid bare the "savagely competitive, brutally aggressive, [and] murderous" (323) aspects of those characters. And yet, this concept of captain of industry carries an implication of success, albeit one founded in self-service. With the publication of *Babbitt*, however, the focus turns to workers stuck halfway up the corporate ladder. Instead of following the violent ascension to the top of the business world, suburban literature trails the characters who Carousel's John might refer to as "rats." Authors, ranging from Sinclair Lewis to Richard Yates, investigate the

hopelessness of occupational stagnancy, and help complicate representations of white-collar work. Unlike the grandiose titles for their bosses, the terms used for white-collar workers (office drone, desk jockey,[34] or rat) denote a loss of identity and upward mobility. As with the vocabulary used to describe him, the literary suburbanite has little agency. Any chance of promotion often requires a larger sacrifice of his already drained work identity. Laughing at an unfunny joke or siding with a disagreeable position could mean a step up an impressively tall corporate ladder. Unhappy with this servility and enforced hypocrisy, the white-collar worker turns to his home office as the locus of an agreeable identity, but as the century progresses, the drudgery of his work life, and the jargon used to describe this grind, becomes more pervasive.

As with sex in the bedroom, the more discussions about the negatives of white collar labor, the more the changes are present in suburban literature. The suburban man's aversion towards the work office developed incrementally as white-collar work grew impersonal, and social critique introduced new vocabulary into the suburban man's purview. The open acknowledgement of the work offices' impersonality and unfulfilling nature highlights the literary work office's change from a place that leaves characters vaguely unsatisfied into a place where characters perceive their personalities are under attack. Consequently, the home office begins to represent a safe-haven against the multitudinous changes to his workplace.

The problem starts when the suburban home begins to shrink in the 1940s, which causes the suburban office to be less common. The office joined the parlor, the library, the workshop, and the sleeping porch as vestiges of a bygone era.[35] Without this space, the suburban man is deprived of an area within the home that is distinctly his own. Lynn Spiegel (1996) suggests that the home office once represented a "masculine extension of the feminine sphere" where the

[34] The top definition on Urban Dictionary reads, "Desk jockey: someone who has a shitty job and is stuck behind a desk and a computer all day."
[35] The home office, unlike the library or parlor, does make a comeback in many modern suburban spaces.

suburban man found “solutions to tensions felt in everyday life” (88). He could barricade himself in his office or keep artifacts of his identity or the identity he aspires to. Home offices, belonging to men who had never stepped foot in nature, were adorned with landscape paintings of ducks and wildlife. Even if his home office identity wasn’t based in reality, the space offered one of the last places where the suburbanite felt in control. Without his outlet, the frustrations with his identity leech into his work and home identities, forcing him to reorient his domestic identity while also wrestling for a place on a corporate ladder. The façade of respectability starts to disintegrate as characters, like *Revolutionary Road*’s Frank Wheeler or *No Down Payment*’s villainous Jerry Flagg (1957), begin to lash out at the people closest to him.

If my project were a study of suburban architectural designs, the office would have likely been disregarded. By the 1940s, most builders had eliminated the office from their blueprints. However, as Barbara Miller Lane (2015) notes, media often features suburban houses “far more elaborate than what was actually being built” (44). Unlike actual suburban homes, viewers and readers of suburban media see unrealistic or frivolous spaces that would not be found outside of fiction. Several suburban homes in media have a rumpus rooms, from John’s home in *Carousel* to the underused back room of the Simpsons’ home. The house in *Crack in the Picture Window* has both an attic and a basement. While not a detached home, Rabbit Angstrom’s dingy suburban duplex even has a front porch. Most of these features had already vanished at the advent of the pre-fabricated suburban home. The office, too, anachronistically remained in literature and television long after it faded from real life. Even in the works that do not directly reference home offices, the suburban man’s desire for a private space within his home persists.

One could point to a multitude of reasons for the shrinking of the suburban home and the disappearance of the home office. Some critics identify a post-World War II shortage of building

supplies while others note changing government regulations on building codes and sizes. Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen (2000) assert the housing crisis following World War II simultaneously started the suburban flight and created, almost out of necessity, the gradual shrinking of the suburban home (130-131). Building on Baxandall and Ewen's assertions, Dolores Hayden (2003) pinpoints the rise of the pre-fabricated, single family home as an influential shift in house sizes. The pre-fab home allowed for the rise of "thousands of almost identical 800-square-foot homes, with a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, one bath, and a driveway but no garage" (134). Suburban authors, however, are quick to point out the seedier elements of the pre-fab home. *It's Only Temporary*'s Charles Mergendahl (1950) and *Crack in the Picture Window*'s John C. Keats (1956) both forward the idea that greed is the culprit for the changes in the home, and the disappearance of spaces like the home office. If a builder or contractor could eliminate square footage from every house, they could easily and happily squeeze two or three more homes into an already cramped subdivision. Regardless of the reasons, the shrinking of the suburban home led to the disappearance of the home office, which causes direct consequences for the suburban man.

While the home office might feel like a luxury, the absence of the space reverberates throughout suburban literature. Without the home office, the suburban man loses his connection to masculine expressions, which causes a deep identity crisis in the character. The suburban man often looks backwards to a time where work represented some sort of expression of masculinity.[36] As Michael Kimmel asserts, these expressions proved important since masculinity "needed to be constantly demonstrated…lest the man be undone by a perception of being too feminine" (81). Yet, the suburbanite's work no longer satisfies the desire for masculine

[36] Babbitt wants to be pioneer. Julian wants to work at a lumber camp. Rabbit wants to be a Mennonite. Paul Proteus wants to be a farmer.

expression. As critics from David Riesman (1950) to Joey Ramone (1981) have already argued, the white-collar office worker is meant to kowtow to a boss several stories above them. Often, the character doesn't even know his boss, and only recognizes his bosses' name from his checks. With this in mind, the early suburban man turned to his home office as the space for his more masculine pursuits. He could drink in his office, call his mistress, hide trinkets from a former life, and all sorts of other private and "manly" pursuits. Without this space, he loses this connection to masculine expression and moves ever closer to the other-directed man, a dreaded archetype in suburban literature.

This fear of the archetype arises with the publication of David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1951), where Riesman designated the modern white-collar worker as "other-directed." As defined by Riesman, the other-directed worker lives not for his own desires but for the desires of others.[37] Unlike his predecessor the inner-directed man, the other-directed type defines himself by his ability to please those around him (19). "[The inner-directed man] is job minded," Riesman argues, "[the other-directed man] is people-minded" (116). Early suburban men are openly and unashamedly other-directed. George Babbitt and Julian English, who both predate and inform Riesman's work, make decisions based on other's opinions. Even a character like *Point of No Return*'s (1949) Charles Grey, who belongs to the post-WWII white-collar explosion, exhibits open other-directedness, or as he calls it, "polishing apples" (79). After the publication of *The Lonely Crowd*, however, the other-directed type became a gray-flannel caricature in both serious and popular literature.

The caricature grew after a chorus of sociological works followed Riesman's model and attempted to further define the ennui of the suburban office worker. C. Wright Mills (1951)

[37] Riesman wasn't the first person to notice this character trait in white-collar workers. Erich Fromm wrote about the conformity within the ranks of Americans in the 1930s. Riesman, however, was one of the first to give personality trait a name ("other-directed") and trace the development through history.

introduced "the managerial demiurge," an attempt to define the labyrinthine series of other-directed managers and vice-presidents in the typical American office (77).[38] Following in Riesman and Mills' footsteps, Vance Packard contributed terms like "status seeker" (1959) and "pyramid climber" (1962), two terms pre-loaded with knowing winks to the audience since neither term inspires confidence. If a person seeks status, they do not have it. Moreover, the notion that it can be sought disrupts a notion of natural preferment; and as elucidated by Mills' demiurge, a step up the pyramid reveals a new set of sacrifices that must be made to rise in status. William Whyte (1956) examined the psyche of the new white-collar worker and contributed "the organization man" to the lexicon. The influence of these studies permeated throughout suburbanites' lives. They not only debated the latest sociological work at numerous suburban soirees but also found representations of these changes in the literature that they read. These gray-flannelled men were bombarded with constant reminders of how the world, their neighbors, and their families expected them to act.

Literature often functions, at least in part, as a mirror to the world around it, and suburban literature is no different. Influenced by the suddent interest in white-collar workers, suburban authors also partook in the midcentury vocabulary game. Babbitt struggled with vocabulary, but his name lent itself to "Babbittism": a derogatory term synonymous with the language of like-minded gray flannel men in the suburbs.[39] The title of Sloan Wilson's best-selling *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) became the catchall term for similar looking men catching trains in the morning. Nikil Saval (2014) notes that "gray flannel man" denoted "an easy shorthand for

[38] Outside of Mills, the managerial demiurge is, perhaps, best defined in Mike Judge's modern classic *Office Space* (199**9**): "It's a problem of motivation, all right? Now if I work my ass off and Initech ships a few extra units, I don't see another dime, so where's the motivation? And here's something else, Bob: I have eight different bosses right now… Eight, Bob. So that means that when I make a mistake, I have eight different people coming by to tell me about it. That's my only real motivation is not to be hassled, that and the fear of losing my job. But you know, Bob, that will only make someone work just hard enough not to get fired."

[39] Vance Packard uses a lower case "babbitt" to denote the type of people a bohemian might treat with scorn.

designating a conforming, corporate stooge" (153). These terms added to the suburban man's belief in the sweeping conformity of the American office. Later characters become armchair sociologists themselves and try to categorize crowds of fellow other-directed workers by their suits, their fedoras, and their droll office conversations. By the 1960s, characters like Frank Wheeler and Binx Bolling battle against other-directedness, but their will to fight is snuffed out, along with their personalities, in the work office.

While workers struggled to find likable identities in their offices, corporations began hiring architects equipped with wood paneling and glass elevators to inject their white-collar office spaces with panache and personality. When imagining the typical modern white-collar office, a person might imagine the opulence of the Sterling-Cooper offices in *Mad Men* (2007) or the disorienting rows of desks in Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960). Like the bedroom, however, the work office started as a small, cramped affair. In a thought experiment with affinities to the *Carousel of Progress*, Nikil Saval (2014) imagines the shock an 1860s bookkeeper would feel after seeing an office in the 1920s, "[he] might be surprised to see that his familiar small surroundings had melted away entirely, converted into a space whose high ceilings and tall columns resembled nothing so much as a cave swollen with stalactites." (33). Saval's time travelling bookkeeper touches on the spatial changes of the office, but this imaginary person—and workers in 1920s offices as well—would be shocked at the sleek, 1960s white-collar office. The office architecture inspired awe from those viewing the exterior, but the white-collar work done within failed to inspire the workers inside.

Despite being viewed as the bane of suburban man's existence, white-collar work was the result of decades of economic and social changes in America. As noted by Mills (1951), large property owners replaced the small businessmen and farmers that dotted the American landscape

(13). Once the backbone of the economy, farm work gave way to factory work and eventually white-collar work. In this shift, workers stopped producing[40], and, as Mills writes, began "liv[ing] off the social machineries that organize and co-ordinate the people who make things" (65-6). In short, the suburban man became a middle manager, a designation that carries a connotation of being stuck. Unsurprisingly, this new work created alienation and anxiety as the worker was given more responsibility and less power within his company. Work changed drastically, but the desire for a work identity remained. Since white-collar work rewarded conformity, the suburbanite needed a place to establish an identity outside of the work office—and he tried to find that identity at home.

As with the multitude of changes to work, the home office began to change as it in size and importance in suburban blueprints. As other rooms expanded, the office, like its predecessor the disappearing workshop, was converted into extra bedrooms in the most popular midcentury suburban house styles.[41] In Eric Hodgin's *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1946), Muriel Blandings lists the home office third in level of importance (preceded only by the living room and the dining room) and notes that the room's paint color "must be masculine" (216); however, by 1961's *Revolutionary Road*, the home office consists of an oft-ignored desk sitting in one corner of the living room. With no home office, the suburban man lacked an outlet for his less desirable traits, which creates a problem for his work identity.

Since other-direction required a likeable personality, the suburban man stifled his undesirable traits during work hours, which helped create two incongruous identities. As Michael Kimmel (1996) observes, the white-collar worker needed to toe the company line during work

[40] Erich Fromm (1934) identifies production as the natural condition of man. When he realizes he can produce tools, he "transcends nature." By overcoming nature, he also realizes he is going to die, regardless "if he tries to deny it in manifold phantasies" (49).
[41] Most plans for the Ranch Style, the Bungalow, and the Split-Level all lack a dedicated space for the home office.

hours and find escape during his leisure time. However, he couldn't be too wild during his leisure lest he upset his familial obligations (155). Men who live too close to the edge often find themselves either fired or castigated by their communities, as witnessed in *Appointment in Samarra* (1934) and *Rabbit Run* (1960). Interestingly, this doesn't seem to be a problem for the worker who shuns the suburbs. As Packard (1959) suggests, the city dwelling office worker is not "dominated by their company's shadow," which allows them to "become wicked wits…in the safety of their patios and their favorite bars" (110). Packard doesn't explicate why distance from one's workplace disqualifies oneself from a wild lifestyle, but one assumes the unspoken social contract has something to do with it. When one moves to the literary suburbs, that person signs themselves up for a set of strict social codes and mores.[42] The suburban man discovers the expectations of him at home bear a striking resemblance to his bosses' expectations. Unable to openly stumble home in a drunken haze, the suburban man strikes a tenuous balance between his home and work identities and his own desires.[43] To do this, he begins to displace the unlikable aspects of his personality into his private search for an identity in his rapidly disappearing home office.

With newfound importance, the home office began to respond to the harried desires of the suburban man, cravings that dwarf Babbitt's immature dreams of the fairy girl. As work changed, the suburban man pushed his desires closer to the edge, and whatever space he called a home office came to represent a place to plan and enact what John Cheever's Johnny Hake refers to as his "more hardy and dangerous pursuits" (300). In "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill," Hake rents a separate office space and ruminates on the many new changes in his life, specifically, his

[42] No one actually follows these established rules as we see in these suburban stories. Regardless, those unspoken rules and expectations exist.
[43] However, this expectation doesn't stop the suburban man from coming home drunk throughout the twentieth century.

evolution into a house burglar. His transition into crime starts with a "premonition of death" (305) while staring into a toilet at a boring house party. Hake's office becomes the place to freely let his guard down and express his own undesirable traits. Hake realizes that a man can call up a friend and tell him that he's been spider bit, but he can't tell anyone his felonious exploits. Therefore, he uses this office to express these criminal urges.[44] Similarly, in *Mad Men*, Don Draper uses his home office to hide the remnants of his past self, the clumsy, son of a prostitute Dick Whitman, in a locked desk drawer.[45] Like Johnny Hake, Draper's office operates as a place to hide the things that could cost the suburban man his life, his family, and, in many cases, his liberty.[46]

The rejected personalities of the home office, however, aren't strictly made of negative qualities. Authors often cast their suburban leads as intelligent men who work jobs that do not require all, or sometimes any, of their faculties. *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler quips that the best part of his job allows him to "sort of turn off [his] mind every morning at nine and leave it off all day, and nobody knows the difference" (81). Both *The Big Clock*'s George Stroud and *The Moviegoer*'s Binx Bolling possess highly creative and intuitive minds that go unused in the work office. The problem starts when these long stretches of mental activity begin to lead to trouble and mischief. Without the home office, these men find themselves utilizing their underused intellects and personalities to plan elaborate ways to cheat on their partners or build impressive double lives.

Riesman believed that other-directed types needed some type of an outlet (291), but he

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[44] In the end, Hake undergoes a Babbitt-esque understanding of his own place in his unhappiness and returns all of the stolen things to his neighbors.

[45] These item include pictures of a young Dick with his younger half-brother Adam, Draper's dog tags, divorce papers from Draper's first wife Anna, and so forth.

[46] *Mad Men* showcases the dangers of allowing someone to see your private lives and the necessity of the home office. Any time someone discovers his former identity, his life gets turned upside down. Case in point, Betty finally opening the desk drawer in Don's suburban office leads to his divorce at the end of season three and unraveling as a person in season 4.

couldn't have imagined the disparate paths literary suburban men would take. Instead of a release valve from their lives, the suburban man vacillates between finding escape from two unfulfilling office identities. At work, he might begin flirting with the secretary like Frank and Binx to help pass the time in the office. At home, he might begin curating painting collections (Stroud), drinking aimlessly (Frank), or carrying on studies of suburbanites (Binx). Each of these new identities ultimately becomes tiresome. When one identity ends, a newer, more precarious one arises. As Paul Goodman (1956) warns, this type of self-one-upsmanship leads to "self-destruction… [and] is a sign that the person is not in contact with his real needs" (131). Goodman's accusations prove true in suburban literature since the suburban man so rarely investigates the roots of his discontent. Instead, he blindly convinces himself that his new avenues of escape are beneficial, but they often lead down dangerous paths towards identity crises, adultery, and even crime.

Being unhappy with a work identity becomes a cornerstone of the suburban man's archetype, but the suburban novel did not create the theme of discontentment with white-collar work. Stories like Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853) and Sinclair Lewis' *The Job* (1917) predated and highlighted themes present in white-collar suburban literature. Even Babbitt's relationship with work differs from later representations since he revels in his duties as a realtor. Yet, at points, occupational disappointment creeps into his mind. Early in the novel, Babbitt grouses as he observes his office, "the tiled floor, like a bathroom, the ocher-colored metal ceiling, the faded maps on the hard plaster walls, the chairs of varnished pale oak, the desk and filing-cabinets of steel painted in olive drab. It was a vault, a steel chapel where loafing and laughing were a sin" (31). Babbitt's complaints about the uninspiring surroundings and lack of amusement in the office would become the mainstays of later suburban men's disgust with their

work offices. Since he predates the studies which helped refine office discontentment, Babbitt blames his negative opinions of his office on his new but faulty watercooler, the "very best of water-coolers, up-to-date, scientific, and right-thinking" (31). For Babbitt, work still carries a positive connotation. While he might be disappointed in his surroundings, he firmly believes in his role as a realtor, a job that informs his day-to-day existence. If he is unhappy, work could not be the culprit for Babbitt, so he blames his surroundings and moves on to other concerns, like his tie, seating charts at dinner parties, or fairy girlren. By the 1960s, the literary suburban man lacked any connection to the work he did and lost the ability to simply move on from his occupational unhappiness.[47] Yet, this discontentment felt by these characters was nothing new and had been fomenting for decades.

We see the seeds of the later suburban man's discontentment planted when the white-collar world expanded in the 1940s. Men returned from World War II, took jobs in offices, and fled for the suburbs. Sensing this shift, critics, anthropologists, and sociologists began publishing innumerable studies of these men and their offices. These works introduced buzzwords (other-directedness, organization man, status seeker, and pyramid climber) into the national zeitgeist. A firmer understanding of the American office worker lead to a torrent of white-collar novels[48] that fictionalized many of the aspects of the studies of white-collar men. The characters in these novels have a firmer understanding of their existences than their predecessors, but this knowledge only exacerbates their problems.

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[47] *Babbitt*, however, establishes an important dimension to work identity by noting, "[Babbitt] made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the art of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay" (6). Babbitt's discontentment is influential and two-fold: he neither produces anything nor does possess talents he would define as worthwhile. This feeling will last throughout the century.

[48] John C. Keats' *Crack in the Picture Window*, Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, John McPartland's *No Down Payment*, Cameron Hawley's *Executive Suite*, and so on.

By the end of the 1940s, the American white-collar office was a major factor in suburban literature, film, and culture. Saval notes that "few jobs rivaled in prestige and symbolic power that of the white-collar workers in mid-twentieth century America" (5). Despite this status, suburban authors approached white-collar work with a critical lens. In the 1940s, John Marquand's *Point of No Return* (1949) casts the life of a bank executive as a dull wasteland. While sitting in a conference room, Charles Grey begins to wonder if "he really wanted to be there, and he wondered whether anyone else around that table had ever shared those thoughts" (51). Predating midcentury studies, Marquand highlights the growing conformity of the office when Charles realizes his co-workers all think alike because "they had all arrived there as he had, through some sort of accident, if only because banking was a dignified and fashionable pursuit and there wasn't much else but business when you finished college." Charles knows his work is unfulfilling, but he cannot name why. At the end of the novel, he shakes off this feeling and shrugs at the idea of being an unfulfilled white-collar worker. This type of reaction, however, disappears as acceptance begins to represent a metaphorical death in suburban literature. Most characters view tolerating their place in their corporate office as the final submission before counting down the days until their death. Part of this hyperbolic reaction rests with the publication of Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and the introduction of "other-direction," a trait that gave suburban literature a new buzzword and a new enemy.

Riesman's other-directed type adds layers to the dilemma between the home and work office. At work, the suburban man finds himself surrounded by faceless other-directed people. At home, he struggles with the fear that he, too, might be other-directed. His fear drives him to convince others—and himself—that he isn't other-directed while battling with the truth. This schism creates anxiety, and anxiety leads to an attempt to distance oneself from other-

directedness. William Whyte (1956) argues that the ability to distance oneself from conformity was once possible, but the possibility withered away (5). As Whyte argues, the later suburban man strives "to believe he follows the tenets he extols, and if he extols them so frequently it is, perhaps, to shut out a nagging suspicion that he, too, the last defender of the faith, is no longer pure" (5-6). Later suburban novels feature characters similar to Whyte's organization man and follow characters who struggle to create a personality removed from their work selves but ultimately accept other-direction.

This battle between a likable personality and the expectations of office often drives a large portion of the suburban novel. Suburban literature is largely a villain-less form of storytelling. Suburban men may paint their bosses or co-workers as their enemies, but the meat of the novel often rests in the struggle between the suburban man's worst impulses, which suggests this is not a problem of individual villainy within the character but rather a malaise produced by the system. These privileged men are largely upset at their own privilege. Their greatest fear—being perceived as a sycophant—pales in comparison to the demands of real life work. Andrew Hoberek (2005) notes the strangeness of "worry[ing] about postwar white-collar workers whose comfortable jobs putatively threaten their individuality" (6). In many of these novels, the man, who openly hates his job and co-workers, rises in the ranks of his company.[49] Despite spending his entire day complaining, Frank Wheeler does work *once* in the novel and gets fast-tracked in his company. Naturally, this development compels Frank to complain about the superficiality of his bosses. This willful ignorance of his privileged position in the world stands in direct contrast to representations of white-collar work in other mediums. The urban, blue collar characters in Harvey Swados' short story "Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn" (1960) or the Skid Row denizens of *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) aspire to the middle-class existence so

[49] *Point of No Return*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and *Revolutionary Road* to name a few.

disdained by men like George Stroud and Frank Wheeler. Their jobs require long work days with little pay and substantial physical toil. Conversely, the literary white-collar worker only worries about how he is perceived by his coworkers and his own personal doldrums.

The growing fear of white-collar conformity is perhaps best crystallized in Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* (1949). Fearing's novel is a harsh indictment of office work and critiques the burgeoning white-collar explosion two years before the publication of *The Lonely Crowd*. George Stroud exhibits the worst parts of what would be known as other-directedness, but Riesman's other-directed man isn't as devoid of morals as Fearing's novel suggests. In fact, the character type Riesman describes is fairly milquetoast since he dedicates himself to blandly telling people exactly what they want to hear in the hopes of a congratulatory pat on the back or a promotion. Stroud, however, has bastardized other-direction and uses the ability to tell people exactly what they want to hear both inside his office and his home. He tells his wife, his young daughter, and his employers exactly what they want to hear without considering the hurtfulness of his lies. His work and home families see Stroud as a standup guy, which allows him a cover to partake in nefarious activities. Fearing uses Stroud to critique the white-collar world, but the novel furthers an idea that would stand in stark contrast to later suburban novels when Stroud discovers an identity inside the conformity-laden, other-directed world.

In *The Big Clock*, the reader sees the first instance of a true displeasure with both home and work identities. In *Babbitt* and *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), Babbitt and Julian are displeased with certain aspects of their lives, but they both occasionally enjoy their work as salesmen. At the very least, these men have a work identity to cling to. Stroud, living in a post-1945 world, spends his days cataloging the inanity of his white-collar job and suburban living. The people closest to Stroud, however, might be shocked at his anger since he crafts a seemingly

perfect suburban existence. He lives in the suburbs with his nuclear family, who all share derivations of his name, and works as an executive at a magazine entitled *Crimeways*. Despite these immaculately crafted identities, Stroud finds himself disillusioned with suburban and white-collar living.

Fearing establishes early that Stroud no longer identifies with his job as an executive director at *Crimeways*, a magazine dedicated to reporting and studying criminal activity. Stroud complains, "the whole organization was full and overrunning with frustrated ex-artists, scientists, farmers, writers, explorers, poets, lawyers, doctors, musicians, all of whom spent their lives conforming" (114).[50] In suburban literature, white-collar work shuns identity while celebrating conformity. Rather than submit, Stroud wages a silent protest against other-direction in private through the accumulation of Louise Patterson paintings and affairs. By the midpoint of the novel, both escapes have failed Stroud, and his less desirable traits begin to bleed into his work and home life.

As with many suburbanites who follow him, Stroud's house lacks a home office. The home, which Stroud refers to as a box in a collection of "huge square boxes" (16), does not allow him the privacy to act on his desires. However, the lack of a home office does not slow him down. Stroud believes he has perfectly compartmentalized his many identities—his work self, his home self, his alcoholic self, and his philandering self. As the novel progresses, he discovers these personalities are not separate and make up the whole of his character. After a bartender describes one of Stroud's drunken escapades, Stroud admits that wasn't the first time he'd been drunkenly rowdy in public and pulled out of a bar. Try as he might, Stroud fails to keep his alcoholism under wraps. He also fails to keep his extramarital affairs undercover as well. Late in

[50] This idea also appears early in the first season of *Mad Men*. Don Draper yells at the perpetually other-directed Pete Campbell: "Sterling Cooper has more failed artists and intellectuals than the Third Reich!"

the novel, Georgette, unbeknownst to her husband Stroud, admits that she knows about his many extramarital dalliances. Without a private space, Stroud finds himself laid bare to his co-workers and his family. While the novel swerves into a different direction, part of Stroud's narrative follows his search for the underlying reasons for his impulses.

Stroud initially blames his current work surroundings for his unhappiness. He feels distant from his role as a suburban breadwinner, a condition heightened by his lack of connection to work. In his study of changing representation of work through history, Sebastian de Graza (1962) asserts that the disconnection from work lead to a desire for self-identifying work. "Before the nineteenth century's close, if you worked, you labored or toiled," de Graza argues, "you did not work as you do today; you were something—a carpenter, mason, soldier, physician" (36). One still finds remnants of this work identity in early suburban literature. For Babbitt and Julian, work represented something by which they could define themselves. While real estate and car sales might not be as self-affirming as they would like, they both identify as "salesmen." Identification started slipping away for men like Stroud in the post-1945 world. He tries to offset his lack of identity with home office activities by buying paintings, drinking alcohol, and cheating on his wife. When these activities fail, he looks for a new identity, an identity he finds following the murder of Pauline Delos, his newest mistress.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Stroud assures the reader that he often strays from his wife, but he always "finds his way home" (6). Outside of the home, he is a philanderer, but when he crosses the threshold of his home, he becomes a doting husband and father. He convinces himself that his cheating never interferes with his work or home identity. Again, the reader finds Stroud relying on the space between his work and home spheres. The affair with Pauline, however, directly affects both zones of work and home. Pauline represents the lynchpin to both

identities since she happens to be the mistress of his boss, Earl Janoth. If he was caught, Stroud would be sacrificing both his job and his family; however, he finds himself attracted to the danger. The affair proceeds smoothly until Pauline is murdered by Earl in a fit of rage. From there, Stroud finds himself in a race to clear his own name in the murder and keep his finely tuned identities intact. Again, the reader finds Stroud attracted to the danger of losing everything.

Following the death of Pauline, the novel takes a turn towards a noir murder mystery. Before Earl murders Pauline, he sees a shadowy figure leaving Pauline's apartment. In the hopes to pin the murder on that figure, Earl seeks to discover the identity of the man leaving Pauline's apartment, which happens to be Stroud. In noir fashion, Earl hires Stroud to find the person who was leaving Pauline's apartment. Stroud finds purpose after being hired by Earl to find the shadowy figure outside Pauline's apartment. This new job allows Stroud to break from routine and use the entirety his faculties, especially since his public and private lives rest in the balance. This new role sees Stroud become what I will refer to as an "anti-detective," which leads to finding identity and agency at the work office. A noir detective solves a crime when the police cannot, but the anti-detective hinders the investigation so the police cannot solve the crime. Stroud purposefully chooses a ragtag group of his underlings to encumber the search for the shadowy figure. The job proves to be perfect for Stroud since he's spent most of his life lying to himself and others.

Stroud's reinvigoration as an anti-detective syncs up with an argument later made by Daniel Bell (1956). Unlike Riesman, Bell saw self-affirming work as the panacea for the white-collar worker.[51] The job, as Bell argues, should "not only feed his body, it must sustain his spirit" (42). For the first time in the novel, Stroud finds a job he enjoys, albeit a temporary, private job

[51] In Riesman's mind, the other-directed type needed to cast away mass-produced leisure products and find self-affirming past times, or as Riesman calls it "play."

that could end in his arrest.[52] Nevertheless, in this role, the reader sees Stroud excel by hindering his team's investigation just enough to clear his name. Stroud approaches his new job with a zest he never felt for his other job at C*rimeways*. Predating Bell's argument, Fearing casts the anti-detective as a role that requires Stroud to use his dormant intellect and creativity. In this new role, Stroud finds the self-fulfilling identity he longs for.

At the end of the novel, everything works out for the anti-detective. Moments before being blamed for the murder, Stroud learns that Earl, after giving Stroud a raise and a promotion, commits suicide. Before learning of Earl's death, Stroud admits, "I asked for this" (145). He searched for an escape from his work and home identities, and the search, after a few noir twists and turns, led him to the role of the anti-detective. The new job energizes Stroud, but the role is short lived. However, Stroud does not walk away empty handed since he finally understands his place in his white-collar doldrums. The ending stands in stark contrast to the rest of the novel, which recurrently condemns the white-collar world and other-directedness. Stroud, selfish, arrogant, and philandering man that he is, ends the novel on a victorious note. He realizes that his work and home identities, identities he spent years crafting, are worth fighting for. "The man who really accepts his fate," Stroud postulates, "…[t]here is no such man, there never has been, never will be" (164). With a newfound appreciation for his identities, Stroud stringently believes that his fellow other-directed men would put up the same fight. However, in just a few short years, Stroud's theory is disproven. Suburban men unwilling to fight not only exist but become the norm in suburban literature.

Following *The Big Clock*, most suburban men resemble Stroud, a group of disaffected, white-collared men living in the suburbs and searching for an agreeable identity. Like Babbitt,

[52] Stroud, before working at *Crimeways*, found employment as a "timekeeper on a construction gang, race-track operative, tavern proprietor, newspaper legman, and then rewrite, advertising consultant" (15).

however, Stroud's influence does not always travel in a straight line. Most suburban novels predating the deluge of office vocabulary end similarly to *The Big Clock*. Characters like *Point of No Return*'s Charles Gray (1949), *Executive Suite*'s Don Walling (1952), and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*'s Tom Rath (1956) come to a better understanding of themselves through the activities in the home office by a self-affirming type of work or leisure. The roots of white-collar ennui are visible in the first half of the century, but the hope for the home office still seemed plausible. The second half of the twentieth century saw a change in the possibilities of the home office as words like "organization man," "status seeker," and "other-directed" crept into the national consciousness and suburban literature.

By the late 1950s, the American white-collar office had transformed yet again. As Saval (2014) asserts, the small offices seen in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," which resembled "dank caverns," had transformed into "offices portioned by glass… [featuring] couches, desks made of mahogany and sometimes topped with marble, lounge chairs, and ottomans, all done up by the very best names in American design" (143). Saval jokes, "Looking back at the offices of mid-century America you might think that office work had reached the pinnacle of comfort and prestige." The offices of the 1950s and 60s changed to keep up with the changing economic world.[53] As with the workers within the office, the office itself became part of the personality of the company. Businesses began paying as much attention to their office layouts as their marketing campaigns. Top architects, designers, and even psychologists were brought in to discover new ways to maximize business space. The work paid off, as even curmudgeonly Frank Wheeler admits having a "homely affection" (84) for his fifteenth-floor office space. The work done within the office also changed, but as Frank and other characters make painfully clear, the

[53] Saval writes, "In 1960, white-collar workers were a full third of the workplace. Being middle class in America used to mean starting your own business; by 1950, it meant, almost invariably, that you put on a suit and tie and went to work in an office, alongside millions like you" (156).

result was not as pleasing.

As architects studied maximizing potential, midcentury sociologists and critics considered the effects of white-collar work. These scholars came to a similar conclusion that new forms of white-collar work rewarded conformity and stifled creativity.[54] While they often agreed on the ills of modern capitalistic work, critics differed on how to lighten the symptoms. Riesman (1951) believed in the power of leisure while Daniel Bell (1956) saw self-fulfilling work as the answer to suburbia's ills. William Whyte (1956) thought blowing up the entire system would fix the problem. Meanwhile, the suburban novels of the 1950s often sided with one of these viewpoints. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*'s Tom Rath silences his demons by spending less time at work and more time with family. *Player Piano's* Paul Proteus (1951) saw new work as a solution to societal ills. The narrator in *The Crack in the Picture Window* argues that abandoning the suburbs altogether is the solution. While these answers were not always successful, they represented the possibility of change through the home office.

The last bastion of the promising home office comes from an interesting place, 1959's *The Man in the Dog Suit*. Based on a novel by Edwin Corle, the play offers a final look at the successful home office identity. Oliver Walling struggles between his desires to leave the suburbs to become a tree surgeon and the relative comfort of working as a bank teller. He finds escape at home by dressing up, as the title suggests, in a dog suit. In the suit, he musters up the courage to tell his wife's overbearing family that he does not want to work at the bank and wants to live in Oregon as a tree surgeon. After enacting on his desires for self-fulfilling work, Oliver leaves behind the dog suit since he no longer needs the home identity. Despite the oddity of the piece, the play relies on a theme popular to 1950s suburban literature. The suburban man's

[54] This proves true for Riesman and Mills in the 1950s, Sebastian de Graza in the 1960s, Barbara Ehrenreich in the 1980s and 1990s, and Alain de Botton and Nikil Saval in the 2000s and 2010s.

solution is simply finding an identity outside of work that he enjoys, either through new work, new play, or dressing up as a dog.

The suburban novels of the 1960s proffered a different answer. There was no solution. Kenneth Fearing, who critiques white-collar work, had still offered George Stroud an out with the role of the anti-detective. Authors in the 1960s, however, did not extend a self-fulfilling life raft to their protagonists. The literature matched what Saval (2014) refers to as the "doom-laden messages of despair" (152) of the times. People were being told that they were "tending toward a soft totalitarianism, shaped by hidden networks of elites of tyrannical managers… and, of course, by manipulative admen, who got you to buy things you didn't need" (152-3). The suburban novel synthesizes these midcentury fears into the work and home lives of their suburban leads. Conversations, both at home and work, focus on the changing nature of work and the perceived destructiveness of those changes. The later characters still buy into the vocabulary of the office but lose faith in the solutions for white-collar work.

This defeat is, perhaps, best captured in two books published within the same year, 1961's *Revolutionary Road* and *The Moviegoer*.[55] Both novels present other-direction as the natural condition for the literary suburban man. *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler and *The Moviegoer*'s Binx Bolling are strikingly different, yet both men stringently fight against other-directedness in their lives. These later suburban men understand their unhappiness in a way that Babbitt does not, but this understanding does not lead to a happier existence. The cultural knowledge gained by later suburban men does little to mitigate their worries and anxieties.

As evidenced by Frank and Binx, vocabulary increases the problems of the white-collar worker; both men learn that simply giving a name to something does not equal understanding or

[55] *The Moviegoer* finished first in the national book award voting that year. Revolutionary Road came in second. According to Blake Bailey's stellar autobiography of Richard Yates, the author never lived down the indignity of finishing second.

assuage discontentment. This separates Binx and Frank from the suburban men of the 1940s and 50s. In the novels from those decades, the suburban man is often presented with a choice. As Riesman notes, the 1950s suburban man was often presented with a choice between "the well-heeled organization man (other-directed) and the well-shod cowboy (inner-directed)" (xliv). Some men chose the other-directed path (1949's *Point of No Return*, 1952's *Executive Suite*) and others blazed their own trails (1956's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and 1959's *The Man in the Dog Suit*). The 1960s suburban man, however, has nowhere to go except back to his work office.

Unlike George Stroud, *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler fails to unearth an agreeable identity or escape from his other-directed doldrums. Other suburban men find themselves through pursuits in the home office, but Frank lacks the outlet of a home office personality; in fact, he lacks a home office altogether. In an effort to save space, later suburban homes converted the home office into an extra bedroom. Frank's house retains a single vestige of the home office, a solitary desk in the living room. With no home office, he seemingly has no escape, save for a few formless ideas about being an artist in Paris and a milquetoast affair with his secretary. Earlier characters like Charles Grey or Tom Rath could turn off their work selves to deal with their home problems. With no outlet, Frank allows the office to bleed into his home life. As he sits watching his wife's stilted performance in *The Petrified Forest*, he thinks about how he works "the dullest job you can possibly imagine" (13). Yet, the boringness of the job affords Frank the time to create an elaborate picturesque evening of holding his wife's hand under a table after the play finishes. Like Babbitt's plans, Frank fails to foresee the "weight and shock of reality." The play is a disaster, and on the drive home, the Wheelers erupt into a hateful argument.

During the argument, Frank's anger, less at his wife April than about the person he has become, boils over: "I don't happen to fit the role of dumb, insensitive suburban husband; you've been trying to hang that one on me ever since we moved *out* here, and I'm damned if I'll wear it" (26). The line proves to be highly important in understanding Frank's, and the later suburban man's, motivations. Frank battles against an other-directed archetype that would be firmly entrenched by the 1960s. His compulsion to distance himself from the archetype represents his sole motivation for the entire novel, and he wasn't the only character in the 1960s to try to distance himself from it. The 60s literary suburban man spends more time trying to prove who he is not instead of attempting to find an agreeable identity.

In *The Moviegoer*, Binx Bolling takes the rejection of other-direction one step further. He lives among other-directed people in suburban Gentilly, Louisiana to study their ways. Binx's role as a subversive suburbanite, coupled with his younger age and bachelorhood, makes him a clear outlier to this project. Binx ends the novel in a similar place as Frank, but he starts somewhere completely different. Most suburban novels novel open after the suburban man has already established himself in the suburbs. He has already married, bought a house, and started a family. In the course of the novel, the suburban man looks back to his younger days as a time of unbridled freedom and mobility. *Appointment in Samarra*'s Julian English considers jumping a train to head west to discover his potential (143). Frank recalls being an "intense, nicotine-stained, Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man" (23) in his early twenties.[56] Instead of focusing on a character already mired in other-direction, Percy's novel follows Binx and the decisions he makes that lead him to the other-directed lifestyle.

Binx's other-direction has to come as a great disappointment for the character. After

[56] This concept carries over into film as well. In *American Beauty*, Lester Burnham tells his teenaged drug dealer, "When I was your age, I flipped burgers all summer just to be able to buy an eight track… it was great. All I did was party and get laid. I had my whole life ahead of me."

returning from the Korean War, he dedicates his life to studying the suburban world. The reader, thanks to Binx's narration, sees a man well-versed in the works of Riesman, Mills, and Whyte. Unlike Frank's vague notions of other-directedness and the organization man, Binx's knowledge of the inner-workings of the organization comes from living and working subversively among suburbanites. This role as a subversive suburbanite works similarly to George Stroud's anti-detective since Binx's research at home gives him a purpose. He exists among other-directed types in the suburbs, and he studies their ways even going so far as to generate his own vocabulary to explain their actions. Even with his expansive research, Binx fails to truly understand the people around him. He understands their motivations and their pratfalls, but he cannot fathom why they have chosen this lifestyle. Suburban homes especially rile Binx. As he wanders his subdivision alone at night he notes, "at this hour they are forlorn. A sadness settles over them like a fog from the lake" (73). Binx's neighbors also confound him until he, too, becomes another other-directed person by abandoning his search. Disproving George Stroud's belief that a man who wouldn't fight for himself doesn't exist, he finds himself exhausted, always existing in the borderlands between what he perceives to be inner-direction and the other-direction he avoids. He realizes that a man cannot fully exist in two worlds, and instead of fighting, Binx settles into a life with his by marriage cousin and now wife Kate, a more common lifestyle for suburban literature.

Frank and Binx both end up in the last place they want to be. While the novels seem to suggest that the men succumb to other-direction, the suburbanites of the 1960s has been other-directed their entire lives. Frank, who has lived his life trying to please others, gives up the fight and becomes a full-fledged other-directed stereotype, a "walking, talking, smiling, lifeless man" (347). Shep Campbell, Frank's neighbor and friend, admits, "You couldn't really picture [Frank]

laughing, or really crying, or really sweating or eating or getting drunk or getting excited—or even standing up for himself" (348). The Frank Wheeler who yelled at people for asking what he does for a living now "[spends] at least an hour talking about his half-assed job" (349). William Whyte (1956) asserts that the white-collar worker who "does not fight [the organization]…will make a surrender that will later mock him" (15).[57] Unwilling to fight for anything in his life, Frank succumbs to what he once termed "a disease" (62) and now, as he once accused his fellow neighbors and co-workers, no longer "thinks or feels or cares anymore…gets excited or believes in anything except [his] own comfortable little God damned mediocrity" (62). Frank, like Riesman, Mills, and Whyte, categorized the dangers of white-collar conformity, but Frank fails to realize his protestations were a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Moviegoer ends where most suburban novels begin. Binx decides to end his search and settle into a life with his cousin Kate. Instead of living subversively among suburbanites, Binx accepts his other-direction and begins to take many of the steps already taken by most literary suburbanites. He abandons his youthful whims to prepare for his life with Kate. His narration, which earlier read as a stream of consciousness barrage of reflections on life, becomes a staid run down of current affairs. He sells off most of his properties, makes peace with his family, leaves his job in banking, and returns to medical school. Leaving the banking world behind seems like a positive, but the return to medical school was always expected of Binx by his family. His subversive identity represented a youthful rebellion; and now, his youthful rebellion is over. The novel ends with Binx's proving that he isn't that different from his fellow other-directed compatriots—his story only takes place in a different time of his life. In most

[57] This mirrors Stroud's proclamation at the end of *The Big Clock*.

suburban novels, the suburban man recalls the decision that places him in the suburbs[58]; however, Binx—and Percy—muddles the scenario. He puts off getting married, leaves a white-collar job to return to medical school, and abandons his escape instead of starting one. However, despite Binx's many differences from a character like Frank or even Stroud, his natural condition is other-direction.

As stated earlier, Binx seems like the odd character out of the tracing of the archetypical suburban man and *The Moviegoer* seems like the odd novel in the Sinclair Lewis lineage. Binx might become a character like Frank as he ages, but that interpretation is left to the reader's imagination. However, Binx represents a natural progression for the suburban man. By 1961, other-direction had become a way of life in suburban literature. The personality type no longer served as a metaphysical villain as it does in novels like Marquand's *Point of No Return*. The home office had fully disappeared, and with its disappearance, the hope for inner-direction. Binx represents the one last gasp in the battle against other-direction. The suburban men who follow the publication of *The Moviegoer* do not rage against their other-direction situation. Those men are certainly unhappy about their place in corporate world, but they realize their fight is with their bosses and less with themselves. The home office, the little bastion of identity, finally disappears from suburban literature.

Despite their many similarities, Stroud, Frank, and Binx offer different representations of the loss of a home identity. Stroud finds himself bored with his existence and attempts to mix his work and home personalities. When this fails, he finds fulfillment through his role as anti-detective, a choice of meaningful work over meaningful leisure. Frank and Binx, however, fail to find any fulfillment in either their work or their home offices. Frank avoids the platonic ideal of

[58] For Babbitt, he blames the moment he reluctantly agrees to marry Myra to avoid hurting her feelings. For Frank Wheeler, he blames April's first pregnancy.

an other-directed man for so long that he eventually becomes everything that he hates. Binx comes close to an understanding of his self in spite of his search, but he winds up in the same situation as Frank. Written before many of the treatises on white-collar conformity, *The Big Clock* offers the idea that a solution to white-collar ennui is possible. *Revolutionary Road* and *The Moviegoer*, however, argue that searching for a solution is as an exercise in futility. As Frank quips, "A man could rant and smash and grapple with the state police, and still the sprinklers whirled at dusk on every lawn and the television droned in the living room" (68). His identity, as unfulfilling as he believes it to be, had become part of the suburban experience.

These disparate endings highlight the many shifts and reactions in the suburban novel. Stroud's anti-detective role may have been short lived, but the act ultimately led to something positive when Stroud finally turns the blame inward. Novels that pre-date the deluge of office vocabulary offer the character a similar type of resolution. Characters like *Executive* Suite's Don Walling, *Point of No Return*'s Charles Gray, and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*'s Tom Rath come to a better understanding of themselves through activities in the home office, a self-affirming work or leisure. The roots of white-collar ennui were obviously visible in the first half of the twentieth century, but the hope for the home office still seemed plausible.

The suburban novels of the 1960s do not offer their characters any positive resolutions. For characters like Binx and Frank, self-affirming work or leisure is a fleeting concept. Babbitt spent most of his novel hoping for some type of understanding; these men have entire libraries explicating their unhappiness, and they are worse off than Babbitt. *Babbitt* ends with its titular character arm in arm with his son. *The Moviegoer* ends with Binx becoming exactly what he hates, and *Revolutionary Road* closes on Frank as a broken man. The literary image of the other-directed, white-collar worker coalesced into a monolith, an unhappy, harried figure. The later

suburban man discovers that he cannot run from what Stroud deemed to be "the big, silent invisible clock" (174). The personality he cooks up in the privacy of home cannot outweigh the public persona his job demands.

Both offices became a major identifier in the monolithic representation of the suburban man. However, as de Graza writes, "Status…still resides in what a man does" (225). The home office grants a respite from the rigors of white-collar life but fails to offer any real solution. As with the bedroom, the feelings generated in the home office are fleeting. Even characters who end their stories on a positive note still return to their white-collar existences. As Daniel Bell suggests, "[t]he worker, like the mythical figure of Ixion, is chained forever to the endlessly revolving wheel" (23). Try as they might, work remains the suburban man's major identifier, even if white-collar work doesn't allow oneself to hang a slate like a butcher or a barber. By midcentury, suburbia and white-collar work had become intrinsically linked.

CHAPTER 4: HOLLOW MEN: IDENTITY AND MASS CULTURE IN THE LIVING ROOM

"a room which gives you away: with the things
you've acquired at a cost, the things you've been given
and kept, the things you choose to exhibit"
-William Meredith, "The American Living Room: A Tract"

The names of rooms often directly state their purpose. We bathe in our bathrooms, the same as we dine in our dining rooms. These verb rooms carry expectations, and they often live up to what we assume happens in those spaces. The living room, however, is a different story. Our expectations of the living room differ from the bathroom or the dining room. While we "live" in the living room, the name does not address what happens in the space. These spaces are supposed to indicate the action that happens there, but in the case of the living room, the verb is so broad as to encompass everything else—bathing and dining are, after all, part of living. The term "living room" implies that living, as opposed to performing the functions that keep you alive, is essentially a public, social affair, essentially life is performing yourself for your neighbors, your family, and yourself. If the house as a whole is not just *where* a man lives, but *who* he is, the living room seems the ultimate concentration of this concept. However, the expectations and realities of life in the living room remain do not remain static throughout the twentieth century and suburban literature. The living room and the expectations within the space transform from a private domain relied on by the suburban man to a public, domestic space for the family.

We see, perhaps, the best visualization of the private to public transformation of the living room in the *Carousel of Progress*. The attraction opens in the living room, which makes

sense considering John's clear affection for the audience. Unwelcomed guests or annoyances—like his family for the first three scenes—would be trundled off to a side room. As he welcomes us in to his home, the audience sees that the 1900s living room is clearly a private space for John. His family is kept elsewhere in the house and, like Babbitt, John is aware of his family but dismissive. They may chime in a joke or two, but the attention is solely focused on John. As the ride progresses, the living room changes both socially and architecturally.

In the third scene, we begin to see the living room as both a more public space and de-compartmentalized zone. John, no longer sitting front and center, has shifted stage right and sits behind a table. The living room has taken on an open-concept, ranch style design. Despite once being a place with a single dedicated function, the living room has blended with the kitchen. John changes along with the architecture and loses the Babbitt-esque role he played in the first two scenes. With fewer walls separating him from his family, he is now expected to play a more integral role in his household. However, the reaction to this new expectation points to a new development also witnessed in suburban literature. Formerly the suburban man could posture as the master of his domain when all that his audience could see were the four walls of the living room. When those walls start to disappear, the reality of the situation becomes more clear. The third scene of *Carousel* highlights many of John's flaws—and some of the more family-friendly flaws of the post-1945 suburban man. John can tell the audience about the fancy paint-stirring robot he builds for his wife, Sarah, but when the wall disappears, we see that the malfunctioning invention makes the work of his wife even harder. When she asks John for help cleaning up the paint he indirectly spilled, he laughs off the request. The scene, which may have been played for laughs in the earlier two scenes, is largely devoid of humor as Sarah exasperatedly sighs and John changes the subject.

Along with the social transformations in the living room, the *Carousel* also hints at the growing importance of the material world to the suburban man's interpretation of himself. In John, the audience sees Disney's embodiment of middle-class success, a man who does not rise to the top of company but also does not see his family tossed out in the street. To celebrate this middle-class version of success, John boasts about the products he owns, and the act of buying represents success for him. While he will never be a rich man, he can convince himself and his captive audience that he lives a comfortable life. Throughout the century, John's home bulges from a celebratory bounty of, for lack of a better term, stuff. John builds his identity through his purchases, and as the most public room, the living room represents a natural landing spot for the things he wants others to see. He welcomes guests into his living room and blindsides them with possessions, and in this action, Disney is in step with literary concerns of the twentieth century. Despite being an animatronic in a theme park, John faces similar problems to his literary counterparts. As the living room becomes more public, John slowly moves from the middle of the stage. He might look like Babbitt at the opening of the attraction sitting essentially on a throne directing the narrative, but he ends the attraction on equal footing with the rest of his family.

As a character who opens the attraction with a clearly defined personality, John witnesses the world and his identity change over the course of the twentieth century, and he turns to the products in his home to anchor his personality. His rapidly changing inventory projects the idea of a man not only capable of change, but happy to welcome technological and material advances into his living room. This is where John and the literary suburban man split. When the ride was retooled in 1994, writers approached John's consumerism with fifty years' worth of studies of mass culture, sitcom episodes, and suburban novels to cull information from, but authors

working in the moment lacked this cultural understanding. Mass culture, even in the novels written after the term became a hot topic, represented a seismic change to the American way of life. Yet, the literary suburbanite never comes to a unified position on mass culture. Some characters, like Babbitt or *Point of No Return*'s Charles Gray (1949), fall head first into spending sprees and cocktail parties. Others, like *Rabbit Run*'s Rabbit Angstrom (1960), approach their living rooms, and their changing identities in the space, with anxiety and dread. Despite changing expectations and anxieties, the living room remains key to the suburban man's concerns over mass culture, spending, and identity within the home.

As witnessed in suburban literature, the life people choose to project in their living room rarely represents an accurate portrayal of day to day life. Families specifically and often superficially choose the most impressive books for their guests' perusal. Furniture is meticulously arranged to best engender conversation or more likely to create the best sight lines for the television. When suburbanites are alone in the space, they can let down their guard at the end of the day. Yet, when others enter the living room, they must put on our best face, the best image of themselves. They might occupy their living rooms, but the space occupies them as well. In this chapter, I examine the change of the living room as a private space into a more public space and how that change affects the suburban man and his interpretation of himself.

As the twentieth century progresses, the living room begins to serve less as a space with a singular purpose into more of a catchall room, a space where all families members could gather, converse, and relax together. At the turn of the twentieth century, the space served as the center of the suburban father's domain, and the literary living room often appears as a decidedly masculine space. Babbitt sits in his easy chair, reading the paper, and delivering witticisms and advice to his family. No one intrudes into Babbitt's domain without being invited. His family

obviously exists in the space with him, but their existence rarely shakes him from his private ruminations on life or reading of his paper. The Babbitts' living room is a private and compartmentalized space. This set-up is germane to the image of the American father in the 1920. Naturally, as the living room overtakes other rooms, the space became a place to gather, and the suburban father was expected to partake in the day-to-day activities of his family. Scenes in novels like Marquand's *Point of No Return* and Updike's *Rabbit Run* are much more indicative of these changes to the living room and the suburban man's interpretation of himself and his role within his home.

As with other rooms in the suburban home, the living room's transformation is the culmination of technological advances, architectural changes, and changes in political norms. Due in large part to a shrinking of the American home after World War II, the living room overtakes spaces like the parlor or the greeting room and assumes the expectations of those rooms. When this happens, the literary suburban man is faced with a much less defined role in the living room. He must now play the domestic father and fun host instead of the stoic father in his throne. As more and more people come into the living room, suburbanites needs to place their belongings in the space to be viewed and appreciated by their visitors. And as Diane Harris (2015) argues, these belongings and the space also serve as a reminder that the decision to move to the suburbs was a good idea. The television, which rewrites the layout and expectations of the living room, further rewrites the suburban man's public identity as representations of all-American, clean-cut father figures are weekly beamed into his home. During those suburban sitcoms, advertisers further affirm the idea that the American Dream could only be complete with a full set of furniture and fixtures. Sociologists and critics—aware of this phenomenon—begin dissecting the growing mass culture movement in the midcentury and the American

compulsion to spend beyond one's means. These shifts and advances force the suburban man to accept an unappealing realization that his once private living room had become one of the more public spaces of his home.

This chapter identifies the transformation of the living room from a private space to a public space and the repercussions of that transformation in Marquand's *Point of No Return* and Updike's *Rabbit Run*. Over the course of the twentieth century, the living room overtook the parlor as the space to gather and developed into a showroom for one's possessions. Sensing this change, suburban authors began casting the room as a place of personal conflict, a space that forces the suburban man to acknowledge his own hypocrisies within his home. He simultaneously romanticizes the quiet moments spent with his family while actively blaming his home identity for his multitudinous problems. When he buys new things, be it a record player in the 1930s or a wood paneled stereo in the 1960s[59], the suburban man does so in the hope that the item will project the image of a self-assured, successful person, an identity he actively dislikes over these three decades. In *Point of No Return*, Charles Grey buys more to impress his friends with his success than for personal benefit. But inevitably, he begins to despise the marginally successful, suburban dad image his living room projects. In John Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1960), Rabbit initially attempts to untether himself from the archetype but finds himself later running to the relative comforts of his living room. Both men hypocritically despise their possessions while relying on them to foster an appearance of success. The items that once served as an inspiration mock suburban men by ensuring that they are in fact archetypical suburban men. Their possessions become reviled set dressings for nightly performances of suburban dad. Charles,

[59] We see a visual form of suburban preening during Pete Campbell's dinner party scene in *Mad Men*. Pete actively hates his existence as a suburban man. Throughout the series, he resists the suburbs as long as he can, eventually succumbs to a suburban identity, and then begins looking for ways out of the suburb. However, this anger towards his identity doesn't stop him from bragging to Ken Cosgrove about his fancy stereo system.

however, eventually turns the blame inward and discovers why the idea of being a suburban man bothers him while Rabbit steadfastly turns the blame outward and never gains an understanding of his unhappiness. In the span of less than twenty years, the literary suburban man loses the ability to find any comfort in his existence, and the ability to control the people and the things in his living room plays a major part.

Despite major spatial and cultural changes, the living room maintains these two core designations, a place for possessions and a place to gather, throughout the twentieth century. The suburban man relies on these two designations, but he reacts differently to the space as the century progresses. Babbitt, who basks in house parties and purchases, stands in stark contrast to Charles and Rabbit, two men who cannot bear the sight of their own living rooms. Charles fears the expensive rugs and lamps in his living room and anxiously frets over his ever-growing debt. Rabbit, however, cannot even exist in the space without feeling compelled to flee. His, and the later suburban man's, compulsion to escape the living room participate in anxieties described by critics like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, (1944) and Dwight MacDonald (1957) who slam both the suburbs and mass culture as indices of the erosion of society. The later suburbanite, as with Rabbit, may not sit down and read *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but these men are equipped with a better understanding of their surroundings than their forebears. This knowledge comes to them through a blending of newspaper headlines, talking points from the radio and television, and discussions with neighbors. John from *Carousel* adds the term "commuting" to his vocabulary repertoire and begins to complain about the term after hearing it from a "feller" on the radio. He never explains if this "feller" was a scholar or a "feller" in a commercial. Regardless, the cognizance of the term affects John deeply. Similarly, the literary suburban man, easily influenced by public opinion and criticism, introduces arguments from critics, topics that

may have been filtered from original source to radio to neighbor to suburban man, to spice up his own cocktail party conversations. However, as he bashes the culture of mass consumption in the suburbs, he still maintains a twinge of appreciation towards his mass-produced products.

This milieu of social, economic, and political influences is highlighted in both Marquand's *Point of No Return* and Updike's *Rabbit Run* as both novels focus on the lure of advertisers, the opinions of neighbors, and the nagging fears and anxieties of the space. Their living rooms display the fruits of their labor at their jobs, but Charles and Rabbit both feel distraught in these spaces and struggle with conflicting opinions. Albeit reluctantly, Both men understand the living room's importance to achieving their dreams. Charles needs to appear as the type of person with a full living room to ascend into the societal elite while Rabbit dreams of a happier, uncluttered life for himself. However, they believe their many possessions eliminate their ability to achieve these aspirations with Charles referring to the items in his living room as "Lilliputian ropes" (139) and Rabbit seeing them as "a tightening net" (19). Both men find themselves at a contradictory impasse. As with many suburban men, Charles and Rabbit buy into the idea that a living room cluttered with possessions is a marker of success. Yet, neither feels inspired by their belongings. In fact, both men believe if they could cast aside these possessions they could carry on with their dreams. They both learn, as Lester Faigley asserts (1992), that relying on purchases represents "a temporary and unstable attempt to occupy an imagined identity provoked by an image" (13). In an attempt to become the very thing they wish to avoid, these characters buy their way into the image of the ideal suburban man. Instead of presenting an image of success and stability, the living room represents their greatest fears—Charles' fear of economic collapse, Rabbit's fear of "emptiness," (233), and the private fear of paradoxically becoming the public person they at once aspire to and despise.

The shift in the living room from a private space to more public space could perhaps be best understood with a concept often connected to the suburban man's office. Even though he often views his home as an unappealing respite from his other-directed work office, he soon discovers that his living room has transformed into yet another other-directed space. Instead of being attuned to the needs of his bosses and co-workers, the suburban man must be attuned to the needs of his family and his guests. He must subscribe to a similar set of social codes to maintain his place among his neighbors while performing the role of doting father. In the 1920s, a character like Babbitt could acknowledge his family's existence in the living room while still being dismissive of his family. In the more public living rooms of Charles and Rabbit, the character can no longer be outwardly dismissive of his family without paying some sort of price. *Point of No Return*'s Charles Grey attempts to find some respite in what he assumes to be his private living room, but he discovers that he cannot quiet the thoughts and anxieties of his home life. Rabbit runs from the responsibilities of taking care of his pregnant wife and child and finds himself vilified in his neighborhood. Charles and Rabbit both discover that they must learn to co-exist in the living room with their wives and children; however, their responses to this realization are drastically different.

Like most suburban spaces, the modern living room has roots in the nineteenth century. In 1896, home designer Alice M. Kellogg describes the living room as, "an improvement in modern methods of house building;" the living room is a space in which "family interests are consolidated, in place of the old-time parlor or keeping room" (118). Kellogg's quote highlights many of the changes the living room brought to the suburban lifestyle. The living room swallowed up many of the rooms meant for singular social moments. Instead of designating rooms by social needs—strangers and salesmen for the parlor and family and close friends for

the keeping room—the living room became the singular social space in the home, a catchall for strangers and friends alike.

The modern living room maintains this public dimension, and as John Archer (2001) notes, the living room also retains its long standing material interests as well. The choice of living room furniture in the nineteenth century played a vital role in "inculcating good taste and refined manners" (Archer 196).[60] The twentieth century living room retains not only the nineteenth century materialism but also the idea that our belongings serve as an advertisement for our tastes. From Babbitt's hoarding of goods to Charles' collection of rugs and vases, literary representations of the space often cast the living room as a mecca of both materialism and self-aggrandizement. The world around the suburban man may change, but his living room continues to operate as both a social hub and an advertisement for his success throughout the twentieth century.[61]

As Trevor Denton (1970) argues, the spatial placement of the living room adds to the material and social aspects of the space (226). Barring outliers and creative architects, the living room is almost always located near the front of the house and is often visible through the front windows or the suburban picture window.[62] As Denton suggests, the placement of the windows are intentional and help establish the social and material goals of the living room since open windows allow neighbors and passersby a quick peek into the suburbanite's public living room (226). Readers of suburban literature can easily find examples of this confluence between the public and material aspects of the living room stretching from *Babbitt* to Joseph Heller's

[60] Alain de Botton (2005), however, questions the taste being inculcated: "The history of Victorian furniture, for example, was dominated by the sale of some candidly tasteless items" (81).
[61] The influence of furniture and décor carries into twentieth century, suburban literature. In Cheever's "The Scarlet Moving Van" (1959), the Folkestones decide their new neighbors must be "nice people" when they notice that their furniture is "real Chippendale" (426) After inviting the neighbors over for drinks, the Folkestones are shocked to discover their guests are drunken exhibitionists.

Something Happened (1974). The material motivations in suburban literature change from novel to novel. Some men buy for status, others buy for pleasure, and some buy simply because they were told to buy. However, the social aspects of the living room remain throughout the genre. The suburban man might retain a twinge of adoration for the monolithic image of the suburban father sitting quietly in his living room, but despite the suburban man's wishes and his purported desire for privacy, his living room represents a social and material zone.

The public aspect of the living room, however, proves to be a long-standing problem. While a suburban soiree might seem innocuous, the literary cocktail parties and neighborly gatherings ultimately represent a moment to not only compare but outdo their neighbors. Vance Packard's study (1959) of American middle-class values explores this competition, which creates a suburban ranking system where suburbanites host parties to see where they fall in their suburban caste system (4). Readers find examples of this jockeying for position in suburban literature. The suburbanite is in constant flux between trying desperately to leave the suburbs and assuring himself that he belongs near the top of the suburban social ladder. In the latter case, his attempts to maintain this coveted spot are often extreme. Babbitt frets for weeks over seating charts at yet another suburban dinner and cocktail party. While he relishes his role as a host, his favorite post-soiree activity is "making fun of his guests in the relaxation of midnight" (108). Families in John Cheever's "The Swimmer" (1964) use party invitations like weapons to retain their place atop the social ladder. The Merrills' often ignore the Biswangers' dinner invitations and scorn them since the Biswangers' refuse to "comprehend the rigid and undemocratic realities of their societies" (722).[63] The suburban social competition between neighbors also drives the material aspect of the space; a living room filled with fancy furniture and appliances easily alerts

[63] Neddy Merrill admits, "they did not belong to [his] set, they were not even on [his wife's] Christmas card list." He also finds himself shocked to discover that he has fallen in the suburban caste system, and the Biswangers are now atop the social ladder. More on this in chapter 6.

party guests to the success and happiness of the hosts.

Consumer culture, which contributes to the material aspect of the living room, also gained momentum after the end of World War II as families began buying suburban homes in record numbers. Advertisers sold new suburbanites on the idea that their homes needed to be filled with appliances and gadgets, which simultaneously helped shape the image of the suburban dream home while stoking the flames of mass consumerism. The living room, especially one filled with appliances and furniture, became the cornerstone of this Rockwellian image. As Clifford E. Clark (1986) notes the ad campaigns plastered in magazines and broadcast over the airways championed the living room "as the focus of fun and recreation" (172). A white-collared father and his happy housewife could gather by the glow of the television while children played with toys on the floor. By midcentury, this romanticized image became the norm, and the living room was transformed into a private haven for suburban men into a place of domestic leisure.

As noted by critics like Sebastian de Graza (1962), David Riesman (1950), and C. Wright Mills (1951), among others, the middle class discovered leisure in the twentieth century. Once a playground for flaneurs and loafers, leisure was brought to suburbs thanks to the massive economic and technological shifts following the turn of the twentieth century. Advertisements promoted the idea that living in the suburbs and spending money were not only healthy but also American. Packard notes that the ads worked as the midcentury saw "an era of abundance… [where] nearly a half trillion dollars' worth of goods…were being produced" (1). The products being churned out and rapidly bought needed a place to go, and many of them found their way into the living room. Clark (1986) claims that advertisers understood this development of the living room, and proffered suburban leisure as a "happiness [coming] from…decorating the home to one's own tastes and sitting back in the evening with other family members and relaxing

in front of the new TV set" (172). This setup of the family gathered together cozy on the couch became an idealized image in suburban leisure, which was reproduced in many advertisements and television programs.

The introduction of the television bolstered the importance of the living room and helped rewrite the makeup of not only the space but the entire suburban home. Dining rooms now sat empty, save for important functions and holidays, as suburbanites started eating on TV trays in front of the television. Front lawns went unused in the afternoons as children crowded to watch *Howdy Doody* or *The Mickey Mouse Club.* The living room, however, proves the television's power not only over suburban culture but also suburban architecture. Living room couches that once faced one another for the ease of conversation now faced the television. This shift, from looking at another person to watching people on the television, only added to the publicness of the space and the impossible expectations of the suburban living room.[64] Outside of urban sitcoms like *The Honeymooners* or *I Love Lucy*, suburbanites flocked to ever-popular suburban sitcoms, like *The Danny Thomas Show* or *Father Knows Best*. Watching the television to find out who one is or should be usurped the instrumental private functions of other rooms. Suburban fathers no longer needed to creep into other people's bedrooms or hide in their home offices to find a new identity—he could find it while watching television.

However, the image of the clean cut, successful sitcom father figure doling out life advice to his children created a dilemma for the suburban man. He could neither fulfill the role of the doting father in the easy chair nor was he certain that he wanted the role in the first place. Regardless, the image solidified into an expectation, an expectation few suburbanites could achieve. As the television caused both spatial changes and identity crises within the home, critics

[64] The television certainly draws more people into the living room, but the television is a fairly isolating activity. Families sit together and see how suburban life should be, but they don't interact with one another. The invasion of the television is simultaneously a public and isolating phenomena.

began arguing many of the same points relevant for today's social critiques of digital screens.[65] While critics disagreed on the individual effects of the television, they could not ignore the changes it brought to the home and American culture.[66]

With a room dedicated to the television, consumerism had a foot in the suburban door. This development spawned several decades' worth of critical studies and essays on television and mass culture. However, as Leo Lowenthal (1950) argued, the study of mass culture did not start with the invention of the television. Alexis de Tocqueville, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Blaise Pascal all argued against earlier forms of mass entertainment and culture (328-330). Even suburban literature lampooned mass culture before the glut of post-1945 culture critics.[67] Sinclair Lewis illustrates the dangers of mass consumption as Babbitt fawns over his belongings, well before the lure of television jingles, but derives no joy from his fancy ties and alarm clocks. His purchases only create more questions instead of answering his many existential crises. Following *Babbitt*, suburban flight and the introduction of the television created an even larger market for blind consumerism. In this shift, critics and scholars turned their critical lens towards mass culture.

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[65] Clark (1986) claims that the television kept people inside their suburban homes instead of venturing out into their neighborhoods or nature (171). Similarly, Witold Rybcynzski (1991) casts the television as patient zero for all of American culture's ills, a device that "engages eye and ear simultaneously in a relentless and persistent way that leaves no room for daydreaming" (193). But both David Manning White (1957) and Diane Harris (2015) discuss the ways the television helped broaden the suburbanite's world by beaming in news from across the globe, orchestral symphonies, and travel documentaries.

[66] Literary works often interpret the major changes brought by the television in a negative light. John C. Keats, in 1956's *Crack in the Picture Window*, casts the television as an encompassing threat that "even penetrated the fastnesses of Colorado, appeared in the lonely mountain chains of Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau" (71). However, Keats pinpoints the American suburbs as ground zero for the consumption of television. In the novel, the Drone family worry about the television's influence on their children and their neighbors. Yet, even the Drones find themselves transfixed by the glow of the screen and rearrange their furniture—along with their schedules—to accommodate the television. Even the *Carousel of Progress* lampoons the television's ability to rewrite our expectations. John sings the praises of his TV and foresees a time "where millions of people learn Latin from their televisions." John's hopes are crushed as the audience sees the grandmother change the channel from a scene of people dancing to classical music to professional wrestling. After checking to see if the grandfather is asleep, the once prim grandmother yells at the TV for one wrestler to attack the other one.

[67] Riesman (1953) notes the ubiquity of these types of critiques, "You know the indictment, I'm sure—an indictment that includes most of popular culture, radio, TV, and best sellers as well" (130).

Two critical works established long standing attacks on mass culture and served as a blueprint for suburban authors, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944) and Dwight MacDonald's "A Theory of Mass Culture" (1953). In "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Adorno and Horkheimer paint modern culture as a homogenized wasteland where film, art, television and even the automobile industry began "infecting everything with sameness" (94). By homogenizing culture, mass production created a system where independent thought and a true connection to leisurely activities were no longer needed. People could encounter a new activity, enjoy it, and just as easily forget about it. In *Point of No Return*, the narrator mentions everyone reading *Man, The Unknown*, sharing the same tired talking points, and forgetting the book even existed (3). In *Revolutionary Road*, the reader sees the influence of sameness when suburban drivers no longer feel safe driving on quiet, country roads and only begin to feel safe surrounded by what they know best, large neon signs advertising national gas stations, shopping malls, and chain restaurants (26). These midcentury fears might sound hyperbolic today, but Adorno and Horkheimer helped lay the foundation for later critics and authors to further lambast the living room, mass culture, and suburban living.

Following the publication of Adorno and Horkheimer's work, critics dissected mass culture from every conceivable angle. Some like David Manning White (1957) wrote positive arguments for mass culture, asserting that all major cultures had relied on some sort of consumption to ease the stresses of everyday life. Others follow the lead of Adorno and Horkheimer and attack mass culture. Dwight MacDonald published his "A Theory of Mass Culture" in 1953, and his invective-laden article helped further draw the parameters around mass culture critiques by postulating that all hope was already lost.[68] Instead of offering solutions,

[68] An argument that appealed to the writers of the post-1960s suburban novel.

MacDonald pontificates on what further disasters mass culture will bring. To him, mass culture represents a disposable culture, "a piece of gum," something to be thrown away when it loses its value (59), and this idea carried throughout the midcentury. In "Some Observations on Changes in Leisure Attitudes," Riesman (1952), who originally believed in the positive aspects of leisure, began to worry that mass culture created a system of buying for prestige and not for fulfillment (135). Mills (1951), like Riesman, believed that the spending of the white-collar worker did little to lessen his problems. The white-collar worker desired an agreeable identity outside of work, but buying an identity failed to correct any of his problems (238). As with fears of white-collar conformity, suburban authors infused their novels and stories with the concerns and anxieties identified by these midcentury critics.

One might scoff at the concept of someone being swayed so easily by negative critiques of mass culture, but a scene early in *Babbitt* (1922) highlights the longstanding malleability of the literary suburbanite's opinion. On a quiet afternoon, Babbitt and his family relax in their living room. The scene highlights the dominion the early suburbanite enjoyed in his living room as Babbitt reads the comics while his son Ted does homework on the floor. Ted complains about having to read Shakespeare, which interrupts Babbitt's focus on his comics. His reaction to Ted's protestations establishes an early flexibility and reliance on mass produced entertainments:

> "In the living room… Babbitt looked up irritably from his comic strips in the *Evening Advocate*. They composed his favorite literature and art…With a solemn face of a devotee, breathing heavily through his open mouth,[69] he plodded nightly through every picture, and during the rite he hated interruptions. Furthermore, he felt that on the subject of Shakespeare he really wasn't an authority. Neither the *Advocate-Times*, the *Evening Advocate*, nor the *Bulletin of the Zenith Chamber of Commerce* had

[69] Is anyone surprised that Babbitt is a mouth breather?

> ever had an editorial on the matter, and until one of them had spoken he found it hard to form an original opinion" (64).

Lewis reveals much of Babbitt's personality, or lack thereof, in this small moment in the living room. Babbitt lacks an opinion on Shakespeare, but he can catalog the ins and outs of "these illustrated chronicles where Mr. Mutt hit Mr. Jeff with an egg, and Mother corrected Father's vulgarisms with a rolling pin." Coupled with his devotion to the comics, Babbitt, a man with an opinion on everything, admits that he relies on other people's opinions to form his own thoughts. Naturally, he sees no problem in this other-directed way of thinking, but his problems often arise when he finds himself dealing with conflicting opinions, and there were many conflicting opinions of mass culture.

As with midcentury critics' disagreement on mass culture, two opinions run concurrently through suburban literature about mass culture and the living room. For the first half of the twentieth century, literary suburbanites bask in the glory of mass culture. After World War II, suburban novels change markedly in their approach to the ever-encroaching mass culture. A character like Babbitt loves his belongings more than he does his wife, his family, or even his house. If purchasing needed a mascot, it could do much worse than Babbitt, who gets excited thinking about the fancy dials on his alarm clock. For early suburbanites, purchasing represented a newfound leisure. If work was moving towards an unsatisfactory act, he could supplant an occupational unhappiness with gadgets and appliances. In the end, though, possessions rarely help the early suburban man. Babbitt might come to better understanding of his life, but his alarm clock fails to inspire it.

Early suburban men attempt to find meaning in their leisure, which aligns with Riesman's faith in leisurely activities, but these men muddle the scenario. Riesman disagreed with mindless

purchasing and the suburban man's attachment to his acquisitions (287). The later thesis of *The Lonely Crowd* revolves around Riesman's belief in finding "autonomy" in leisure. Needless to say, the hoarding of alarm clocks, paintings, and refrigerators fail in this regard (157). Riesman asserts that the leisurely activities of the inner-directed person had already been rolled into suburban living. Yard work or simple relaxation in family rooms were already considered part of the suburban experience, a box to be mindlessly checked instead of enjoyed (79). Yet, as Riesman postulates, the "craving" for leisure lingers in the suburban man (79). Everyone else around him seems to be having fun, yet he still yearns for an autonomous way to pass the time. His desire proves to be, in Riesman's words, an "objectless craving," a longing for something that cannot be bought or showcased in a living room. If one could find an answer for this craving outside of "more stuff," perhaps that person could find affirmation. These suburban men attempt to fill their lives with consumer products; but as Riesman asserts, the desire remains.

The other mode of thought, largely found in post-1945 literature, does not place faith in mass produced items. Babbitt has yet to learn that his purchases ultimately fail him, but characters who followed come to that realization. Charles Grey and Rabbit Angstrom understand that their living rooms both socially and materially represent a problem for them. Spatially, the room rests in the dead center of their home and represents the culmination of their progress. Even if their job is unfulfilling, the home, at least, should inspire these characters. However, both Charles and Rabbit find themselves disappointed with the living room and the things within.[70] As James Howard Kunstler (1993) argues, men like Charles and Rabbit discover that they "came of age and realized with a rude shock that there was something wrong with the creeping crud economy they had grown up with" (108). Despite existing in a society that tells them that possessions are the key to happiness, suburban men want more out of their lives than the simple

[70] Even Babbitt feels this way.

accrual of things. If the room represents his life's work, the suburban man fails to comprehend why he feels unfulfilled with his purchases of fancy rugs and reproductions of paintings.

Both novels focus on the drawbacks of suburban leisure and the anxieties fostered in the living room. In *Point of No Return*, Charles battles with his hopes to remain economically stable, his desires for social acceptance, and his plans for a bigger house in a nicer neighborhood. Since the novel appears before many of the midcentury critiques of mass culture, Charles questions his impulses to spend money, but he ends the novel uncertain about the living room. *Rabbit Run*, written after many of the critiques, features Rabbit Angstrom, who feels trapped in a world where he sells a useless gadget while feeling ineffectual himself. Unlike Charles, Rabbit is much more attuned to the disadvantages of mass culture, but this cultural understanding doesn't stop Rabbit from being drawn to his television or pop songs on the radio. Even with his knowledge, Rabbit ends the novel with more uncertainty than Charles. Both men, however, find themselves in a familiar conundrum since neither feel inspired by their work or leisure. Unable to find release in the living room or the office, both men run away from their problems. While their motivations and attitudes differ drastically, both men find themselves running from the same space, their overcrowded living rooms.

In *Point of No Return*, John Marquand does the unthinkable; he creates a likable main character in Charles Gray. Unlike Babbitt or Julian English, Marquand's creation doesn't cheat on his wife, drink to an excess, or ignore his children. Despite Charles' likability, he still suffers from the same types of anxieties and fears found in the pages of Lewis and O'Hara. Chiefly, Charles sees his home a place of both great pride and existential dread. This contradictory opinion manifests itself in the living room. As with other suburbanites, Charles hopes his living room, a room crammed with ornate rugs and lamps, projects the image of a successful man. The

type of man who, in Charles' mind, appeared "like one of those suburban husbands you often see in advertising illustrations, a whimsically comical man" (8). Yet, at the same time, he also acknowledges that his living room and his entire person cast the image of a man stuck in the middle. This image fosters anger and anxiety in Charles, and these feelings first acknowledged in the living room drive the rest of the novel.

To avoid appearing as a man caught in the suburbs, Charles, much to the detriment of his mental health, lives above his means. He isn't alone in this predicament since his neighbors all spend to appear happier and healthier. Marquand paints Sycamore Park as a place filled with the type of men that appear in Vance Packard's study of the middle class *The Hidden Persuaders (*1957*)*, a book that attempts to understand people who "had bought a better house and finer furniture because [they] felt obliged to live on a higher scale" (56). Charles feels this same compulsion to spend, but as a bank executive, he understands the perilous economic situation he finds himself in. Even a minor economic depression could mean the loss of his house and his social standing. Despite this, Charles still cannot "analyze all the urges that made him lay everything on the line in order to live on a scale he could not immediately afford" (102). His inability to probe his desires leads to a near constant struggle of wanting to save money for economic turbulence and feeling compelled to maintain his successful identity with his neighbors. As the novel progresses, Charles slowly begins to realize he has spent years crafting an identity he may not even like, an identity based in the living room.

Unlike other suburban novels, the living room in Marquand's novel is not always a social space. Oftentimes, the living room serves as a space for lively gatherings or family time, which aligns with most advertisements and media surrounding the living room. For Charles, the living room exists on the fault line between the private living rooms present in a novel like *Babbitt* and

the more public living rooms of later suburban literature. Marquand shows the quieter moments in the living room as a time where the suburban man can relax, yet Charles cannot quiet his ruminations on his public persona. Charles' home might be one of the last remnants of the compartmentalized, singularly-purposed living room, but Charles himself has already transformed into a more much public and other-directed person. This split between the waning private nature of the living room as a place to think and Charles' other-directedness creates uneasy feelings when Charles inhabits the space.

Spatially, Charles seems fine with his living room. He views the space as "largest and most comfortable room in the house" (103). Yet, a few pages later, both Charles and his wife Nancy admit to being "afraid" of the room. At night, the cleanliness and emptiness of the space only intensifies the distance in their seemingly perfect marriage. The living room is supposed to engender the idea of the perfect suburban family. Instead, the space often sits empty save for Charles' nervous sitting and fretting. Nancy admits to Charles that she worries he'll never be happy with the person he is if he cannot learn to deal with his past. As a young man, Charles ran from his hometown to avoid facing the aftermath of the suicide of his destitute father and the rejection of his first love. Nancy's admission opens a torrent of fears residing deep in Charles' psyche, a flood of complaints about his work, his past as a lovesick and economically challenged young adult, and his current identity as a suburban man.

Charles fails to truly investigate why his identity as an upper middle class man riles him so much. After the death of his father and the rejection of his upper class first love, Charles places a premium on economic stability and class mobility, a decision that drives him to leave his home town and move to New York. Instead of acknowledging his unresolved issues with his past, Charles turns his anger towards the purchases in his home. Earlier, he bemoaned the hall

furniture bought by his wife, a decision labored over and reconsidered all to Charles' dismay. The items in his living room, however, cause an unexpected reaction in Charles. He realizes, "it had been a long time since he had seen himself so clearly—tied down by the little things" (139). For Charles, his dreams of moving into a bigger home in a better neighborhood aren't hindered by his uncomfortableness with other-direction at work or the growing list of debts in his life. His anger stems from the things he perceives as holding him back. "They were a steady accumulation of little things," the narrator intones, "innocuous in themselves, like the ropes the Lilliputians used to pin down Gulliver" (139). The accessories in the living room—"the ship picture, the Islamic rug, the wax on the floor"—serve as constant reminders of the larger sacrifices Charles has already made for a disagreeable identity. His "mortgage..., insurance policy,…[and] tiny half-forgotten decisions" gnaw at Charles and fuel his often inconsistent anxieties about his life, his living room, and his identity.

Witold Rybczynski (1986) claims that "furniture tells all" (204); and by studying furniture, a person can identify "the domestic interior, and attitudes of its inhabitants." The Grays' living room instills the image of a family that does not truly inhabit the space where in which it lives. Charles, Nancy, and their children all avoid the space despite the relative comfort the living room affords. For Charles, his avoidance of the living room coincides with dreaming of a bigger house in a better neighborhood. The furniture and the fireplace, a fixture Charles never uses since it was "too beautifully constructed for him to want to disturb the logs by lighting" (133), doesn't engender the idea of a successful man. The unused couches and dusty shelves project a distant and scared man. He avoids the living room, a space he fears; and by doing so, he avoids the unhappiness he feels with his possessions, his home, and his life.

In the days following his living room discussion, Charles realizes that he had spent his

life "trying to forget the present by immersing himself in something else, by striving to identify himself with someone else" (144). This moment of clarity represents a level of reflexivity rarely seen in suburban novels. Most suburban men must hit rock bottom before they turn their critical lenses inward.[71] Charles bucks that trend and realizes his reliance on the things around him to define his personality. He is neither the backslapping, drink-refilling suburban man nor is he the cold, distant man his living room currently projects. Charles spends the rest of the novel investigating his past to try to find who he truly wants to be and how he wishes to project that image to the world.

The characters who follow Charles do not come to his realization—or, if they do, the realization comes far too late. Like Charles, however, the suburban man of the 1940s and 1950s begins to doubt the possibilities of their purchases while still maintaining some semblance of hope for the living room. In *Crack in the Picture Window*, the Drones find themselves barraged by advertisements and discover they cannot live without "rotating toasters, electrical blankets,…[and] radios on which to catch the purest tones of the current commercials" (103). The advertisers' pitches work, and the Drones and their neighbors "buy gadgets, expensive gadgets, on time and in great quantity" (104). When considering the midcentury's love of mass produced devices, Alain de Botton (2006) wondered years later, "why in our society the greatest sums of money so often tended to accrue from the sale of the least meaningful things" (84). As de Botton notes, the objects bought so rarely offer anything in return. From Babbitt's unused jazz records to John Drone's fancy toasters, the items bought are not bought for, in Riesman's terms, "building a private hoard or hobby" (118) but for broadcasting one's success. He spends to seem the type of person who can spend, and he worries more about his image than his happiness. As

[71] For *Appointment in Samarra*'s Julian English, it takes throwing a drink in his business partner's face, failing at having an extramarital affair, putting a gun in his mouth becoming a pariah to his neighbors and friends, and losing his wife before he turns the critical lens inward. And even then, Julian still blames everyone else for his troubles.

both de Botton and Riesman assert, buying is fine when the products mean something to the buyer. Instead of buying for personal growth and satisfaction, the suburban man makes purchases to create an aura of taste and sophistication. In the end, the purchases only create anxiety, dread, and doubt. As the 1950s ended, the tide slowly turned on the hopes and aspirations for the living room.

By the 1960s, suburban authors approached the living room and its connection to mass culture as a detriment to society, an argument shared by midcentury critics. While entertaining guests in his living room, Frank Wheeler sounds like a person who fervently read Adorno and Horkheimer when he declares, "this whole country's rotten with sentimentality… it's what happens when all those things start working at once without any real cultural tradition to absorb them" (135). *The Moviegoer*'s Binx Bolling recalls William Whtye as he notes the "defeated" looking houses on his street with their "patio furniture, the Junior Jets and the Lone Ranger pup tents" (74). *Something Happened*'s Bob Slocum seemingly appropriates MacDonald's shotgun approach of critiquing every aspect of mass culture, and MacDonald's penchant for apocalyptic predictions of the future. Yet, for all their bluster, these characters retain a soft spot for the living room and mass culture. They hypocritically spent their time railing against mass culture while being guilty of the same suburban sins as their neighbors. The most conflicted character in the 1960s might be John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, a man who spends his time constantly running from, and then back to, his family and the "clutter" of his living room.

If Charles Grey is suburban literature's least despicable character, Rabbit Angstrom represents the other side of the likability spectrum. Through the course of the novel, he is referred to by other characters in the text as a "monster" (46), a "menace" (92), a "bully" (105), a "coward" (126), "human garbage" (154), and a "crumb, a dope" (209). These terms are just a

brief sampling of the vitriol and invectives thrown at Rabbit, whose own father refers to him as "my enemy" (153). Somehow, Rabbit lives up to most of these names through the course of the novel. However, for all his hate and bile, Rabbit shares a few traits with Charles since both men feel uncomfortable when considering their living rooms. Charles' fears and escape were introspective and quiet while Rabbit's prove to be violent and mad. Unable to find a medium between reverence and repulsion from mass culture, Rabbit swings from extremes by running from the "clutter" in his living room in one chapter and making a mess in his living room in another.

Early in *Point of No Return*, the narrator mentions that "the appearance of any house depended on one's state of mind" (133), and this maxim proves true in *Rabbit Run*. Of course, the appearances of the homes in the two novels differ as drastically as their owners. Charles resides in a well-kept suburban home where every lot had "its own acre" (101) of land. When he felt anxious, Charles can easily avoid his living room and reside in one of the many different rooms in his home. Rabbit, however, lives in a suburban duplex. He lacks the square footage to easily avoid his living room. Even if he had the square footage, Rabbit lives in the time where the living room had shifted from a space with a singular action to a catchall room. Charles' long hallways and library had long vanished from the suburban home, especially in a suburban duplex. When Rabbit is at home, he is in the living room. If the space is any indication of his state of mind, Rabbit is a deeply troubled man.

When Rabbit first returns home, the reader sees the stark differences between Rabbit's existence and Charles'. Charles works as an upper executive at a bank and lives in a Northeastern, affluent, upper-middle-class suburb replete with country clubs and other niceties. Rabbit resides in a working class suburb in Philadelphia and sells gadgets in a department store.

A pungent smell emanates from Rabbit's neighbor's front door, and a pile of unwanted toys molder under the rotting front steps of his duplex. When he enters the room, the scenery is just as dire. He is immediately met with a living room in disarray, "the Old fashioned glass with its corrupt dregs, the choked ashtray balanced on the easy-chair arm, the rumpled rug, the floppy stacks of newspapers" (19). He continues to survey his living room and finds more broken toys, dust balls under the radiator, and, in his words, a "continual crisscrossing mess." Like Charles' "Lilliputian ropes," Rabbit describes the disorder in his living room as a "tightening net." Yet, unlike Charles, Rabbit never turns the blame inwards. He instead places the blame on his family. The messy living room and the equally untidy identity the room engenders rest solely on the shoulders of his pregnant wife and toddler.

In suburban literature, the living room often operates as a space that represents who the suburban man wants to be. Charles' living room was a clean, orderly affair, a room perhaps too clean and orderly for Charles' liking. Rabbit's living room, however, matches ideological changes in the years between the two novels. The living room operates as a place that the suburban man wants to be, but over the course of time, the person the suburban man wants to be and the person the suburban man is expected to be changes drastically. Charles operated on the borderline between the Babbitt-esque private father figure and the more domestic partner of the later suburban novels. Some characters, like John from *Carousel*, make the change, but Rabbit does not. Rabbit—and the later suburban man—never reconciles the shift from who they want to be and who they are expected to be. This schism is often played out in the living room. In *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), Sloan Wilson places a question marked shaped crack down the wall of Tom Rath's living room to represent the discord between Tom and his wife Betsy. In *The Crack in the Picture Window*, John Drone buys a television despite the steep price tag to

serve as a distraction from the many responsibilities of a suburban father. In *Rabbit Run*, we see the damage this inability to accept changes can cause—first in the living room and then in the character himself.

Rabbit's living room is dirty, unkempt, and not fit for entertaining guests, and the disarray in Rabbit's home matches the disarray in his life. Janice and Rabbit live in a constant state of agitation with one another, a couple bent on blaming each other for their problems. Janice is not alone in her disdain for her husband as seemingly everyone in the novel despises Rabbit. When he isn't deservedly bringing scorn upon himself, he peddles a useless gadget called the "Vita-Peel" at a department store. Despite his messy home and work life, Rabbit is haunted most by his once promising youth. As a teenager, Rabbit was a renowned, high school basketball star. Now, approaching middle age, Rabbit looks around and realizes that everything in his life from his living room to his marriage is a mess. Unable to handle both the physical and emotional "clutter," Rabbit lashes out the people closest to him.

His anger, which he believes to be at the breaking point, is mollified by the television. As with many later suburbanites, Rabbit and his family uses his living room as a television room. Updike pointedly critiques the television early in the novel, but he also highlights Rabbit's contradictory feelings towards the television. During the afternoon, Janice watches *The Mickey Mouse Club*, a show Rabbit refers to as "a program for kids under two" (17). He believes the program represents everything wrong with mass culture—and everything wrong with Rabbit himself—since the program lacks substance. During a commercial break, Rabbit notices an ad for Tootsie Rolls where pieces of candy tumble out of their wrappers and sing the wonders of the sugary treat. "He's seen it fifty times," the narrator tells the reader, "and this time it turns his stomach" (14). Rabbit reaches his limit. Despite seeing this commercial fifty times, this viewing

sends him questioning how he went from a teenage basketball star to a man grousing at children's programming.

Yet, immediately after Rabbit's apoplectic rage, he waffles on his opinions of the television, mass culture, and *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Rabbit, as prophesied by MacDonald (1957), feels antipathy towards the Tootsie Roll commercial, but just as quickly forgets his anger when the program changes. Despite earlier making his throat "feel narrow" (14), the television begins to lull Rabbit the same way it does Janice. When an adult Mouseketeer named Jimmy appears, Rabbit goes quiet and "watches [Jimmy] attentively, he respects him… [and] expects to learn something from him helpful in own line of work" (14). In this moment, Rabbit resembles the comic strip loving Babbitt, a man who gets his opinions from newspaper comics. Jimmy tells his audience "Don't try to be Sally or Johnny or Fred next door, be yourself" (14) and "God wants some of us to become scientists… And He gives to each of us the special talents to become these things; *provided we work to develop them*. We must *work*, boys and girls" (15). These two aphorisms, a duo of platitudes intended for children, could also be applied to the suburban man, especially Rabbit. However, Rabbit only focuses on the wink and the smile. The affectation pleases Rabbit since it is an easy out. Instead of working towards becoming a functioning adult, Rabbit would rather rely on sleight of hand to mask his inner demons. He drowns himself in the television to avoid the mess of his life.

Rabbit's problems lie in his split feelings towards seemingly everything in his life. Rabbit attacks a Tootsie Roll commercial for lacking substance; but he reverently watches an empty sermon from an adult Mouseketeer named Jimmy. Similarly, he tries to distance himself from mass culture, but he peddles a useless gadget, the Vita-Peel, in a department store. Even The Vita-Peel, which promises to "[take] the skin off turnips, carrots, potatoes, radishes, neat, quick"

(168), elicits split emotions in Rabbit. Standing in his living room transfixed by the television, he denounces the product as "a fraud" (15). However, as Rabbit puts distance between himself and his living room, his opinion changes and he admits, "the funny thing about it, it really did what they said" (168). Naturally, Rabbit's anger stems more from a deep self-hatred than from the Vita-Peel. As with his opinions of the Vita-Peel, Rabbit, while never publically admitting so, sees himself as a fraud, a man who simply exists in a living room filled with things and people he dislikes. Yet, the further he gets from his living room and his public identity, he begins to realize that perhaps he is the very person he hates. Just as the Vita-Peel easily peels vegetables, Rabbit falls into all of the same categories he uses to attack his neighbors and family. He even admits at one point that he is "not entirely miscast as a barker for the Magi-Peel Peeler" (203). Rabbit exists in a world where he simultaneously wants to accept his place in life while also wanting to violently rebel from it. These double thoughts and inability to make a decision lead to an unhappy life and a neurotic personality.

As with many literary suburbanites, he wants to escape when he's at home and wants to be at home when he's away. Rabbit flees his home, eventually returns home, and then runs away again. The novel follows Rabbit's exploits as he navigates two lives: his life with Janice and his somehow even more depressing life with Ruth, his prostitute girlfriend. After returning home following the birth of his daughter, Rabbit discovers the dangers of living on both sides of the fence. Alone at home with his son, he finds himself terrified by the quietness of his suburban apartment. In a reversal of the novel's opening, Rabbit begins to create "clutter" by "rattl[ing] around the apartment, turning on all the lights and television, drinking ginger ale and leafing through old *LIFE*s, grabbing anything to stuff into the emptiness" (212). Rabbit, who once saw the television and junk in his apartment as the catalyst of his escape, turns to clutter to quiet the

“emptiness” of his life. Rabbit’s attempt to re-clutter his living room ends in defeat, and the reader finds Rabbit running again—seemingly forever.

Charles Grey and Rabbit Angstrom might be the two most disparate characters studied in this project. Charles is a mostly likeable character who learns an important lesson about himself and his material dependency at the culmination of the novel; Rabbit, however, proves to be the inverse of Charles and ends the novel a despised figure within and outside of his home. Charles, a midcentury suburban man, feels disconnected from the items in his living room and escapes into a protracted memory of his youth. Like his living room, Charles’ escape is compartmentalized and private. He is afforded a chance to delve deep into his memories due to midcentury expectations of him as a present but not always active father. His escape from the living room ultimately ends in a place of understanding. He might end the novel slightly disappointed, but he understands his own culpability in his depression. His choices, not his living room and the items within, landed him in his current situation. Rabbit, however, fails to learn that lesson or any lesson in his novel. Unlike Charles, Rabbit exists in a time where his living room serves as a headquarters for his entire family. Due to this spatial change and a shift in domestic expectations, Rabbit must operate under the guidelines of an identity he actively hates. His violent reaction to the “clutter” in his home—spurned by a deep hatred of himself—is more visceral and frantic than Charles’. Rabbit believes he needs to put distance between himself and his messy living room, and this need to escape trumps almost everything else in his life—his social standing, his job, his long-suffering wife, and even his deceased infant daughter. The novel ends with Rabbit gaining no great understanding of life.

By the mid-1960s, the hope for the suburban living room, in the suburban novel at least, faded. 1950s advertising promised picturesque images of families gathering in the living room

while enjoying their Admiral televisions, 7-Ups, and, occasionally, Phillip Morris cigarettes. In 1960s novels, the readers see a distinct rejection of this image. In *Revolutionary Road*, Frank Wheeler settles into his living room sofa to read comics with his children, an image that recalled several commercials of the time. He enjoys playing the role of the doting suburban father, but his patience wanes when his children, whom he actively dislikes for most of the novel, want him to read a comic advertisement for toothpaste. The innocuous request proves too much for Frank who feels "as if he were sinking helplessly in the cushions… the only thing in the world he really and truly wanted to do [was pick] up a chair and throw it through the picture window" (59). In this moment, Frank rejects the image reproduced in commercials, and also wishes to destroy two defining features of the living room in the couch and the picture window. Yet, his anger feels empty, and he appears to simply be acting out yet another role. Men, like Rabbit and Frank, attempt to project mature identities, but their actions only highlight an immaturity present in later suburban men.

Buried in their endless critiques of mass culture, critics also often highlighted a growing immaturity in the suburban man, especially when it came to his leisure activities. Gilbert Seldes argues that in a time where the suburban man could be entertained constantly in his living room, the suburban man acts like a teenager when work or home interrupts his entertainment (145). These over-stimulated men simultaneously reject mass culture as pap, but lean on mass culture as an escape from their suburban realities. Lewis Mumford, the fieriest of suburban critics, asserts this immaturity arises when "play became the serious business of life" and when "compulsive play fast became the alternative to compulsive work" (495). The suburban man's downtime became the driving force of his life, but he failed to find any agreeable form of leisurely expression.

The later suburban man and the living room meet at an interesting intersection. Men like Babbitt place faith in products, but they ultimately let him down. The later suburbanite is already aware of this development. Characters, like Rabbit and Frank, pepper their conversations with points presumably lifted from critics like Seldes, MacDonald, and Riesman. Yet, he still places faith in the living room. Rabbit, despite many efforts, cannot escape the lure of the living room as a place to center himself. Frank attempts to be a stereotypical suburban father in the living room, but he winds up considering putting a chair through the window. Again, we return to the concept of immaturity. Charles looks back into his past and understand the mistakes he made as a younger man. Instead of focusing on those mistakes, he makes strides to improve his current situation. The later suburban man, however, lacks the ability of reflection. He continues to make the same mistake he made in his youth, only his reactions are now much more violent and hurtful. The doom predicted by the mass culture prognosticators prove to be true in suburban literature. The suburban man developed, per Updike's description of Rabbit Angstrom, "an indistinctive taste for the small appliances of civilization, the little grinders and slicers and holders" (203). Despite developing a taste for gadgets, the suburban man derives no joy from them. The items become ulcer inducing; the men become unhappier and unhappier. Unable to cope, the men take to escape, but mass culture and the living room ultimately prove inescapable.

CHAPTER 5: TO LIVE OR DIY IN SUBURBIA: MASCULINITY, NATURE, AND THE LAWN IN SUBURBIA

"Tools to be believed with be beloved.
Give what you can to keep to comfort this
plain fear you can't extinguish or dismiss"
-The Weakerthans, "Past-Due"

"Arruough?"-
Tim "The Tool Man, every episode of *Home Improvement*

If we can glean anything from the "humor" of Tim Allen, home repair and masculinity are intrinsically linked. On Allen's hit 1990's sitcom *Home Improvement*, Tim "The Toolman" Taylor embodies early forms of masculinity, all the while bumbling his way through do-it-yourself projects and doling out life advice to his moppet children. On the television show within the show, a do-it-yourself program called *Tool Time*, The Toolman espouses and fetishizes expressions of manliness. He fawns over power tools, automobiles, expensive lawnmowers and the like, all of which is punctuated by grunts and a perpetual search for "more power."[72] Allen's show follows in the long-standing tradition of masculine symbols, a tradition David Riesman (1950) claims stretches back for centuries (295). The masculine comedy of the 1990s harkens back to midcentury suburban sitcoms like *The Danny Thomas Show* or *Father Knows Best*, programs partially influenced by the suburban novel. Like those comedies, the suburban novel is rife with men who look backwards to simpler, more "manly" times. Like Tim "The Toolman" Taylor, the literary suburbanite finds himself out on his lawn mimicking the know-it-all carpenter, an over-romanticized pinnacle of nineteenth century masculine ideals. With his tools

[72] This expression was also often grunted.

in tow, the suburban man quickly realizes his own ineptitude. *Carousel of Progress'* John comes to this realization as well, but it takes him a few decades to fully accept his futility out on the lawn.

Carousel illuminates the erosion of masculine competence that is played out much more complicatedly in the suburban novel. John devolves through the attraction from a wood chopping and water pumping man in the first scene to the comedic, incompetent sitcom father of the 1990s. At the opening of the ride, the audience sees a pastoral backyard with clothes on the line, a slightly weather beaten picket fence, and no houses on the horizon. Suburbia has not yet invaded John's existence, but technology has already started changing his daily life. He notes that his lawn is still a place for physical labor, but the new water pipes and coal stove are quickly eliminating the need for chopping wood and pumping water. Both *Carousel* and suburban literature cast technological advances as a distancing from physical labor, and this leads to a disconnect between the suburban man's masculine ideals and his actual self. The further John moves from the 1900s, the less competent he becomes around the house and lawn.

In the 1920s, suburbia arrives abruptly, and John's back windows open on a suburban development instead of an idyllic backyard. The bucolic landscape of the previous scene gives way to houses and store fronts, and as the property changes so does John. Once acquainted with an ax and water pump, John now sits in his home idly fanning himself. His home has become a mess of poorly rigged electric cords that support a multitude of fans. When a fuse blows, the neighbors immediately blame John and loudly express their displeasure. The indignity of being the development's most incompetent person is bad enough; however, John compounds his embarrassment when he cannot fix the fuse himself. Instead, he sends his son, who easily replaces the blown fuse, another rung in his ladder of public emasculation.

John's embarrassment and incompetence continues throughout the attraction. Seemingly borrowing a future plot line from *Home Improvement*, 1940s John builds a painting robot to help his wife Sarah paint the rumpus room. Of course, both the inventor and invention fail when the robot spills paint everywhere. The malfunctioning robot garners a laugh from the audience, but again, they see John send a substitution when home repair is needed, and his family acknowledges his uselessness around the house. The 2000s see John take a more active role in the family by volunteering to cook Christmas dinner with the help of a new hi-tech oven. John, however, fails to master the technology, and when the turkey burns he faces more public humiliation as his family laughs at his ineptitude. As the ride closes, the lawn that once shined so brightly has disappeared altogether along with John's ability to understand his tools and technology in his home.[73]

Carousel provides viewers with a look at two literary representations of the lawn in the twentieth century and illuminates the rise of do-it-yourself culture in America. Literary suburban men are often faced with the decision between facing embarrassment by failing out on the lawn or facing scorn by ignoring their lawns altogether. Unlike other suburban men, John attempts and fails at both. He gets yelled at when he tries to help around the house, and he gets yelled at when he doesn't. Men like John turned to the do-it-yourself kit, a perceived easy fix to his masculinity problems. Mass producers, the same manufacturers that turned his living room into a showroom, found a way to monopolize the newfound emphasis on lawn care and home repair in the twentieth century.

The rise of the American front lawn and do-it-yourself culture are an important milestone in the development of twentieth century, suburban domestication. In many forms of media, the

[73] As I'll discuss in the final chapter, everyone in his home has mastered the tools in his house (computers, voice automated Christmas lights and toilets, virtual reality gaming consoles) while John loses his mastery of his home.

lawn is portrayed as an evasion of the home. When the children get too loud or the arguments with his wife turn angry, the suburban dad turns to the lawn with his lawn mower or weed shears to work out some form of deeply internalized aggression.[74] Yet, the story of the suburban man in his lawn embodies one of the many tensions between the character's perceived domestic identity and his masculinity. The home is his domain, but at the same time, his home is also the cause of his many occupational, familial, and sexual boredoms. To assuage ennui, he turns to the joys of the do-it-yourself movement, an invention of late capitalism that unsurprisingly appeared around the same time as the suburbs. DIY quickly became the solution to the suburban man's imagined neutering at both work and home. Yet, the character rarely considers the economic realities of the movement and fails to realize that DIY becomes yet another monetary anchor to the suburbs. The lawn simultaneously becomes the image of suburban escape but also the image of domestication and monoculture. All the lawns begin to look the same, and after a while, all the suburban men sweating and swearing out on their lawns do too.

Suburban men might look alike, but this chapter focuses on how suburban authors cast the lawn in their respective works. Few authors dedicate large amounts of page time to the space, but when the lawn does appear, characters negotiate a multitude of identities attached to their lawns. I will focus my attention on Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1956)*, John Updike's "Separating" (1974), John C. Keats' *Crack in the Picture Window (1956)*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano (1951)*. These works offer differing looks at the types of evasion present with the suburban front lawn and express on two different forms of suburban anxieties. For each of these men, the lawn is a product of disparate ideological tendencies, simultaneously

[74] For example, in an episode of the first season of King of the Hill, Hank Hill begins pruning a tree to mask his anger at his wife Peggy's new job as a sex education teacher. As she practices the verbiage needed for the sex ed classroom. Hank prunes another branch. By the end of the scene, Hank has pruned the entire tree and is left with a branchless eye sore. At no point does he actually satiate his anger.

representing a problem and a perk. Ideology, mixed with a healthy dose of consumerism, produced the lawn, and these authors intentionally examine the space and critique the larger DIY lifestyle. In Wilson and Updike's works, the suburban man is presented to the reader as an object of pathos. Both stories feature characters who see their evasion from the lawn as a flight from the regime of lawn care and DIY. Keats and Vonnegut, however, cast the lawn-obsessed suburban man as a satirical figure who relies on material purchases, power tools and a farmhouse respectively, to connect to the regime of DIY only to be mocked and disappointed.

These two representations of evasion carry with them a double failure present in their front and back lawns. If the character is cast as an object of pathos, his inability or refusal to maintain his lawn masks the deeper pressures felt by the suburban man. If he is cast as a satirical object, his failure becomes yet another reason to laugh at the inanity of the struggles of the highly privileged suburban man. Regardless of the mode or promises made by DIY advertisers, the suburban man's lawn comes to represent yet another anxiety-producing aspect of his life. The character faces two equally distressing options when considering his lawn. He can evade his lawn and allow his home to fall into disrepair while the grass grows, the paint chips, and the driveway cracks. This disrepair alerts his neighbors that he doesn't know how to take care of his lawn and he doesn't make enough money to pay someone to do the work for him. His other option is to work just enough to convince his neighbors that he can take care of his lawn and home, but this often ends with stress, unease, and failure. These anxieties highlight suburban literature's propensity towards relying on the suburban man's surroundings, in this case the lawn, as an identity marker, a force in history that shapes the individual. The suburban man doesn't shape his lawn, the lawn shapes him.

American history tells us that the lawn is the "father's domain," or at least, an area of

masculine pursuits. While making a case for the front lawn, Michael Pollan initially views mowing as a form of dominion over his property, "I thought of the lawn mower as civilization's knife and my lawn as the hospitable plane it carved out of the wilderness" (1989). And yet, in suburban literature, we often see a reluctance when it comes to the front lawn, a worrying signal to neighbors that the suburban man lacks control over his lawn, his home, and even his self. In *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Wilson casts Tom Rath's inability to take care of his lawn as a lack of knowledge and money. His lawn and home suffer because he doesn't know how to take care of them and cannot afford someone to do the work for him. This lack of knowledge does not end with the home or the lawn. Tom doesn't know how to play the role of suburban father, and this lack of understanding is witnessed in his evasion toward his lawn. Tom grows into the role as the novel progresses, but his initial reticence towards his lawn signposts his immaturity for the reader. Updike, however, reverses the maturity of the suburban man in "Separating." At the onset of the short story, Richard Maple, appears to be everything Tom aspires towards as he masterfully repairs his neglected home. Unlike Tom, Richard's evasion of his home is initially cast as a symptom of sexual boredom. Richard could have done these repairs as needed, but he was too busy with his mistress in the city. As the story progresses, the reader discovers that Richard suffers from similar deficiencies to Tom. Despite being older and more settled, Richard is not mature enough to fulfill the roles of the suburban father figure. So, he avoids home repair, one of the basic tenets of the suburban role. The lawn remains a problem, a drawback steeped in the character's rejection of his expectations.

Keats and Vonnegut, however, create characters drawn to the lawn specifically because they are immature. John Drone and Paul Proteus know their lives are missing a key piece, and they both believe the lawn is the final fragment to complete a fulfilling and whole identity.

Drone turns to the lawn to be viewed as a respectable and successful man, and Paul ventures into nature to discover a rugged, pioneer spirit. Unlike many suburban men, Drone has one simple desire, a dream of being blandly happy. He doesn't desire riches, yearn for fame, or partake in the sexualized, Babbitt-esque dreams of other women. For Drone, happiness is the respect of his family and his neighbors. As a man stuck in a dead-end job in a struggling suburb, Drone's only hope for respectability might be his lawn and finding respect proves to be a tall order. Keats' paints Drone's struggles out on the lawn as a concern that encompasses all suburban men. Drone, a man aware of his current situation, will never find the deference he desires since he does not respect himself. Conversely, Vonnegut moves his Paul Proteus out of the suburbs and into nature in a search for self-respect. If the front lawn fails to inspire a character, surely the upkeep of a country farm will assuage any fears of suburban living. Yet, the simple struggles of the suburban man on his lawn are amplified in a different setting. With no neighbors to compare oneself to and no DIY kit to guide the way, Paul's failures are laid bare. These men all fall into a similar trap in suburban literature, and each man realizes in differing ways that the lawn and do-it-yourself culture are not cure-alls for suburban living.

The do-it-yourself craze, which started in the 1920s, gave rise to the weekend carpenter, repairman, and craftsman. For only a small fee plus the hidden cost of tools, the suburban man could reconnect to masculine symbols without worrying about his lack of knowledge or competency. With the DIY kit, a person could finally discover a masculine space within his property. He could build an impressive outdoor barbeque grill or wow his neighbors with his hand-crafted lawn furniture. Of course, his hopes are soundly quashed when these simple do-it-yourself projects turn into disaster and bring derision from his neighbors. Suburban literature is rife with unfinished walkways, untrimmed yards, and amorphous BBQ pits. While DIY's end

goal is production, the movement produced only protracted hospital visits and rising debt. Men like *Crack in the Picture Window*'s John Drone sink large amounts of money into kits and receive little in return except social and physical injury. As with the lawn, DIY fails to become the masculine activity the suburban man pines for.

To best understand the precariousness of the suburban man's masculine identity, one must understand the history of the American lawn. For most of the twentieth century, the lawn represented a familiar trope in suburban media. From the pristine front lawns of the 1950s sitcoms to Seymour Krelborn pushing a mower during *Little Shop of Horrors*' idyllic "Somewhere That's Green," a well-kept lawn was part and parcel of the suburban experience. Advertisements for suburban developments featured blandly handsome men mowing the lawn on Saturday and resting in a hammock on Sundays. Kenneth Jackson (1985) suggests a healthy and grassy lawn represented "an essential aspect of the suburban dream" (57), and as Pollan suggests, an unkempt yard signaled "a scar on the face of the suburbia, an intolerable hint of trouble in paradise." However, the lawn wasn't always a part of the sales pitch. Initially, the lawn was an afterthought. Jackson asserts that before the mid-nineteenth century front lawns were "almost non-existent" and the placement of "privy vault[s and] outhouse[s]" made the backyard an undesirable location (56). The modern American lawn came to existence through a series of architectural and technological advances starting with the invention of the push mower and later the introduction of the suburban front lawn in the Riverside suburban community outside of Chicago.

The innocuous invention of the push mower in 1830 enabled the lawn to be, as John Archer (2005) notes, "domesticat[ed] …for the suburban bourgeois household" (233). With the push mower, servants, and later suburbanites, no longer needed the scythe or the backbreaking

process of scything a yard. Yet, Robert Messia (2006) argues that the initial push mowers were difficult to use, unwieldy, and not popular with owners (78). For the push mower to gain traction, people needed to be convinced that it was worth the investment. The spark the mower needed happened with the proliferation of front lawns in the 1860s.

As with the push mower, the suburban lawn did not spring up overnight. As Kenneth Jackson (1985) notes, our perception of the lawn is the culmination of spatial developments, social changes, and technological advances throughout American history (61). Up until 1860, houses were placed somewhat randomly on lots, and this system of placement left little room for a front yard (56). Several critics, including Jackson (1987), Michael Pollan (1989), and Virginia Jenkins (1994), note the importance of developer Frederick L. Olmstead in changing how houses were placed spatially and the development of the suburban lawn. In 1868, Olmstead had been commissioned to plan the suburban community of Riverside, Chicago. In a spark of genius, Olmstead decreed that "developers [must] place each house thirty feet away from the sidewalk" (qtd. in Messia 78). This decree started the development of the suburban lawn, and "carefully tended grass became the mark of suburban respectability" (Jackson 60). When the health of lawns began denoting status, the push lawnmower became a must have. As Messia notes, post-1830 technological improvements lead to a revitalization of the lawnmower, which later became a status symbol in suburbia (72). The suburban lawn became the norm, and suburbanites began judging themselves and their neighbors by the health of the lawn. However, the way suburbanites took care of their lawn became yet another way to denote status. As the twentieth century progressed, an arms war was waged in suburbia where gas powered push mower owners looked down on manual lawn mower users only to be later looked down upon by owners of gas powered, riding lawn mower monstrosities. Hedge trimmers, edgers, and string trimmers became

must haves to avoid stinging rebukes from neighbors. With Olmstead's historic decree and the no longer cumbersome lawn mower, the lawn slowly became part and parcel of the suburban experience, and the suburban men took to their lawns to show their masculine prowess.

The suburbanites' desire to work with his hands out on the lawn also ties into the rise of specialized labor during the Industrial Revolution. As discussed in chapter three, the focus on highly specialized jobs flooded the market with less talented and skilled workers and sounded a death knell for the independent mechanic, artisan, and farmer. Instead of being talented at several tasks, workers in the 1920s turned to white-collar jobs that required one or two specialized tasks that often served no purpose outside the office.[75] Work changed, but these reverberations were felt at home as well. The suburban man, unhappy with his job, yearns to create something. This desire led to a renaissance for physical labor, carpentry, gardening, construction, and especially do-it-yourself activities out on the lawn.

While the lawn's roots stretch back to the nineteenth century, the space remained an afterthought well after the turn of the twentieth century. Since most early suburban homes still had workshops, the lawn remained, as John Archer (2005) notes, a "preferred setting for passive activities, or no activity at all" (233). For any over-romanticized masculine endeavor, the nineteenth century homeowner relied on their workshop, and the workshop retained this designation until the space began disappearing from homes. From there, the lawn gradually came to replace it as a masculine space. Initially, the lawn is absent in early suburban literature as *Babbitt* and *Appointment in Samarra* both fail to reference the lawn. Babbitt even calls a specialist to help with a problem at Tanis' apartment, an act that would be viewed with scorn in later suburban novels. Neither character represents the typical lawn-focused suburban man since neither turns to the lawn as an expression of identity or leisure.

[75] For example, *Crack in the Picture Window*'s John Drone works in "the office of pencil procurement" (62).

Despite Babbitt and Julian's inactivity, the most atypical suburban man when it comes to lawns and home repair springs from Eric Hodgins' famous *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1946). After a disastrous and hands-off building process, James Blandings still relies on repairmen and specialists to correct the problems. This causes his architect to exclaim, "You'll find a lot of loose screws around, here and there; you can either tighten them yourself or spend $25 to bring a man thirty miles with a screw driver" (223). The statement is clearly preposterous, but Hodgins uses the architect to highlight James' total lack of home repair knowhow. The architect, who is also a man out of his element in the country, inflates the price of labor and ignores the multitude of carpenters and farmers who are now James' neighbors. Unaware of the architect's own failings, James takes his assertions to heart. Since he could neither do the work himself nor afford to pay the price the architect outlined, James simply disregards the problems until they miraculously solve themselves or he grows accustomed to them. In this small comedic moment, Hodgins inadvertently creates the problem that most literary suburban men face. He can either ignore the lawn or admit his shortcomings. James makes his decision and establishes the route that later men like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*'s Tom and Richard from John Updike's "Separating" will take by simply ignoring his home and lawn. However, the solution is not a healthy one as the novel ends with James smiling in his sleep and dreaming of his house on fire.

The reluctance shown by Babbitt, Julian, and James towards the lawn and home repair slowly changed into a pressing concern. Starting in the 1940s, suburban homes began losing rooms dedicated to workshops or rooms that could be easily converted into work spaces (garages, basements, attics, etc.).[76] The lawn (both front and back) became the dedicated space

[76] Stephen Gelber (1997) mentions that "most of the prominent developers of the time" (95) had eliminated the workspace from their blueprints, including suburban giant William Levitt.

for DIY projects and home repair. Stephen Gelber (1997) argues that this concession worked perfectly for the suburban man because the DIY and handyman craze was born out of a need for a "masculine space [which] permitted men to both be a part of the house and apart from it, sharing the home with their families while retaining spatial and functional autonomy" (69). By finding an identity through the lawn, the suburban man could, technically, be a part of his family while retaining a masculine identity removed from his family.[77] By accomplishing this, he might finally strike the balance between his public identity and private desires. As with the bedroom, the balance between public and private is not easily achieved.

Christena Nippert-Eng (2010) draws comparisons between the front and back lawn and argues that the front lawn is the more public of two spaces. The front lawn operates as a visible space since the lawn often faces the street and has a walkway leading to the front door (222). As he mows the lawn or tinkers with the car, the suburban man realizes he is in a vulnerable and supervised space. His back lawn operates as more of a safe space, the location for more private activities. This privacy becomes important as the suburban man relies on the cover to navigate his precarious position in the do-it-yourself movement. He can try and fail at all sorts of activities in his back yard without fear of humiliation or laughter. However, the privacy (or assumed privacy) of the backyard eliminates an important aspect of the do-it-yourself craze since no one can admire a person's handiness and craftiness if it is hidden in the backyard. One must work in the front lawn to be seen as a master craftsman, which poses a problem for inept suburban men.

As with the other spaces in his home, the lawn plays an important function in both his public and private identities. Publically, the suburban man wants everyone to think he is a

[77] Being a member of his family is part of his masculine identity, but the suburban man desires an identity far removed from his "suburban identity." His white-collar job and his nuclear family make him suburban, but he wants something else.

capable handyman. He may feel no connection to his office work, but the repairs he makes can reinvigorate himself and his home. If he can project the hardscrabble lifestyle of a craftsman, the suburban man can achieve some type of masculine acceptance. Extramarital affairs, escape from work, and blind consumerism fail to alleviate ennui; perhaps, the accolades for having a nice lawn or building a BBQ pit can. In John Cheever's "The Country Husband" (1954), Francis Weed discovers the benefits of simple craftsmanship after his psychiatrist suggests it as a last resort for his ennui. The narrator tells the reader, "Francis finds some true consolation in the simple arithmetic involved and in the holy smell of new wood" (409) and, at the culmination of the story, "Francis was happy." However, Francis' newfound happiness stands as an outlier in this chapter. Where Francis finds joy in building a new desk, other suburban men only find disappointment and misshapen DIY projects.

Unlike Francis, most suburbanites, at least privately, know their attempts are doomed to fail. David Riesman (1950) asserts that the men who turn to DIY as a remedy to their problems are "almost certain to become a caricature" (295). The suburban man fails to understand the realities of the hardscrabble lifestyles he lionizes. As Paul Alpert (1958) asserts, the pioneer and frontier lifestyles idolized by suburban men were not an expression of masculinity but a means of survival (24). Since he is far removed from these experiences, the suburban man fails to understand the impossibility of image he desperately wants to project. As the twentieth century progresses, the suburban man's need for acceptance as a craftsman grows stronger as workshops start to disappear and men move further from the basis of their romanticized masculine forebears. As predicted by Riesman, the suburban man becomes a caricature that bases his identity on something that possibly never existed.

The masculine identity the suburban man strived for is difficult to name because he

doesn't quite understand who he is or what he wants, and unbeknownst to the character, his masculine ideals of wilderness, handiness, barrel-chestedness are anachronistic. The masculine symbols he desires were born out a late nineteenth century masculinity panic. In his influential study of the nineteenth century masculinity crisis, John Higham (1965) notes that "[Nineteenth century] Americans …learned to live in cities, to sit in rooms cluttered with bric a brac… [and] to accept the authority of professional elites" (27). Fearing the loss of the autonomy, men in 1890s revived masculine symbols like sports, carpentry, frontier lifestyles, and literature focusing on rugged men in the wild.[78] Michael Kimmel (2006) identifies the genesis of the masculinity panic as the loss of occupational identity. As work became less personalized, men looked for symbols that recalled "an age before identity crisis, before crisis of masculinity—a past when everyone knew what it meant to be a man" (81). Unbeknownst to suburban men, the symbols they longed for were created by men who also longed for expressions of masculinity. These misinterpreted symbols continued throughout the twentieth century, but the suburban man fails to understand where they came from.

While he is confused on many topics, the suburban man stringently believes that the home owner should be able to mow his own lawn and do repairs to his home just as his forebears once did. However, as Stephen Gelber (1997) suggests, these men fail to understand that "American middle class men would not embrace the idea of doing manual home labor until after 1900" (70). Regardless of their misconceptions, the suburban man believes the path to masculinity rests in home repair and the lawn. This longstanding belief typifies the two possible approaches the suburban man can take. He can either ignore his lawn and try to find an agreeable identity through other activities (work, sex, drinking, etc.) or he can attempt to build an identity through the lawn by focusing on activities like physical labor, home repair, or nature. In both

[78] For example, the literature of James Fenimore Cooper and Jack London.

paths, the lawn and home repair serve as a burden on the character. As the narrator of *Point of No Return* helpfully points out, "the appearance of any house depended on one's state of mind" (133). Throughout the century, the reader sees—regardless of the path the suburban man takes, the lawn and appearances of homes symbolize a discord within the character and his house.

Sloan Wilson's influential *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* best represents the connection between discord and a lack of home repair. Tom Rath ignores the basic upkeep of his home and lawn since he and Betsy, his wife, despise their small, suburban home. As with many suburbanites, the house was bought as a starter home, yet three years later, the Raths remain in their unhappy, ill-kept abode. The lack of upkeep and growing decay loudly broadcasts the Rath's familial struggles by alerting to the neighbors that "Thomas R. Rath and his family disliked 'working around the place' and couldn't afford to pay someone else to do it" (1). His overgrown lawn and dilapidated house represent a failure for Tom's work and home identities. As with many suburban men, he neither possesses the perceived masculine knowhow (or the will) to do the work himself nor the income to hire someone to do the work himself. Tom's station is emblematic of a middle-class man in crisis.[79] He is stuck between what he perceives to be two fulfilling identities, the working-class person who works a job that necessitates the skills he lacks and the upper-class person who can afford to ignore his lawn.

The interior of the home does little to assuage Tom's various anxieties. A large crack rises from the floor in the shape of a question mark in the living room. As with his overgrown lawn, the crack haunts Tom since he is to blame for the problem. While throwing a tantrum over expenses, Tom lobbed an expensive vase at his wife Betsy. The vase luckily missed Betsy and

[79] This is interesting since *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* became a catchall term for suburban white-collar workers in the city.

smashed into the wall. [80] Together, the Raths' attempt to both ease their marital strife and try to fix the crack together. They find themselves enjoying the process of painting the entire wall until the paint dries and the question mark and looming collapse of their marriage reappears. Again, the reader sees the crack anger Tom because of his "inability to either fix the walls properly or pay to have them fixed" (2). He decides to ignore the question mark—a literal and figurative crack in the home—and focus his attention elsewhere. However, Tom finds ignoring home repair problems and the strife in his marriage easier said than done.

Despite Tom's best efforts, he cannot ignore that the crack in the wall highlights the difficulty of simply ignoring a problem in the hopes that it will simply dissipate. After sharing the anecdote of Tom and Betsy repainting the wall, the narrator references a house party thrown by the Raths. At the party, a drunk guest questions Tom about the crack, "did you ever notice that big question mark on the wall?" (2). The question irks Tom for several reasons. Despite being a simple, drunken query, the question serves as both a public slight and an emasculation of Tom since it implies that the unhandy Tom may have not even noticed the damage to his wall. The inquiry also highlights the way a messy lawn or cracked wall completely changes one's interpretation of the space.[81] After being pestered by his drunk guest, Tom wonders why the house "preserve[s] a souvenir of such things, while allowing evenings of pleasure and kindness to slip by without a trace" (3). In this moment, Wilson uses the Raths' home as a pathetic fallacy as the house's problems serve as manifestations of the Raths' deep unhappiness. The closeness felt by the Raths' while repainting the crack disappeared while the damage and memories of the violent argument that begot the damage remain.

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[80] The vase in question was an expensive purchase. Tom's anger is misdirected because he isn't angry at his wife for spending the money. He's angry because he also bought a new suit at the same time, and the family's budget can't support two big purchases at the same time.

[81] I've often felt immediately unclean in a hotel room after noticing water marks on the ceiling or cracks in wall. Or—in the case of a hotel in Gainesville, FL—what I assumed to be an enormous blood stain on the floor.

Similarly, in John Updike's "Separating" (1975), Richard Maple learns the lesson that Tom Rath ultimately learns that making repairs is not a panacea for suburban ills. The Maples' home and marriage resemble the Rath's. The front door lock has rusted, the paint has started to chip, and the marriage has fallen apart. Instead of fixing the base problems with the home, the Maples decided to build a tennis court and undertake a kitchen renovation. The narrator quips, "the Maples had observed how often, among their friends, divorce followed a dramatic home improvement, as if the marriage were making one last twitchy effort to live; their own worst crisis had come amid the plaster dust and exposed plumbing of a kitchen renovation" (193). The Maples' observation proves true as the short story focuses on the night the Maples' plan to tell their four children about their impending divorce.

Before breaking the news, Richard spends the day making the needed repairs to the home. His craftsmanship is on full display as he correctly drills a new hole to replace a broken lock. This action makes him an outlier in this chapter. Unlike Tom Rath, Richard manages to repair his home with few problems. However, his reasoning for repairing the home sets him apart from Tom Rath and other suburban men. Suburban literature often posits the incapable but willing do-it-yourselfers as searching for a masculine outlet or attempting to put their lives and marriages back together.[82] Richard can make the repairs, but he chooses not to because he's too busy cheating on his wife in the city. He repairs the house since "he had become obsessed with battening down the house against his absence, replacing screens and sash cords, hinges and latches—a Houdini making things snug before his escape" (196). Richard manages to make the needed repairs to his house, but, as Tom and Betsy hoped some spackle would fix their marital problems, Richard discovers that he cannot easily untether himself by reattaching shutters and replacing locks.

[82] The proto-Tim Taylor.

Richard might be a capable craftsman, but through the course of the story, he struggles with a different pillar of masculinity—fatherhood. When his youngest son runs out of the house in a mixture of anger and tears, Richard learns of the multitude of problems his son has had at school, a problem he would have caught if his attentions were at home. [83] After dispensing advice to his youngest son, Richard has all but put the final touches on his impending divorce and retreat to his mistresses' apartment in the city. The only remaining piece is explaining the separation to his oldest son, Dickie. Richard's plans work perfectly until he goes to tell his son goodnight. Dickie asks, or "moans" (211), the all-important question, "*Why?"* The question freezes Richard, "Why. It was a whistle of wind in a crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness…Richard had forgotten why." He cannot answer the question, and in this moment, he realizes that occasionally doing home repair or sporadically doling out life advice is not enough. His private desires do not outweigh his moral and public obligation. While he can ignore his lawn or his home, he cannot ignore the responsibilities his identity as a father requires.

In both *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and "Separating," the characters learn that ignoring their problems—both lawn and familial—is not a viable solution for successful living. However, the stories end before the readers discover what these characters do with this information. Richard learns that a renovation job and snippets of advice do not excuse abandoning his family. At the culmination of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Tom's lack of upkeep remains unanswered. He vanquishes the twin villains of the novel[84]: his own curmudgeonly attitude and an irate gardener, a man talented in all the ways that Tom is not. Tom

[83] Also, Richard only notices these problems after his son eats a wadded-up napkin, some lettuce, and a half-smoked cigarette.

[84] In their introduction to *Mad Men, Mad World*, Lauren M.E. Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert A. Rushing assert that Tom Rath's positive transformation tie into the media's mindset of the 1950s: "films like *Gentleman's Agreement, The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, and To Kill a Mockingbird* are firm in their conviction that secular progress, however precarious, is achievable through moral agency" (4). Goodlard, Kaganovsky, and Rushing go on to assert that more "naturalistic narrative[s]" (like *Mad Men*) reject this idea.

casts off many of the traits that made him a terrible person[85], yet the reader wonders if his new personality includes the ability to mow his lawn or fix the shutters. This becomes important considering that Tom moves from his original suburban home to an even bigger house—thanks to his deceased aunt who left him the home and a parcel of land—at the end of the novel. In his afterword to the novel, Wilson wrote that he was proud that he gave Tom a happy ending.[86]Yet, the novel ends without answering the question if Tom's better place in life affords him the ability to hire people to do his yard work for him or will his home repair problems continue to haunt him at his new home. Wilson's "happy" but ultimately indeterminate ending ignores Tom's lawn problem altogether and serves only as a small bandage on a much larger wound. Tom's aversion to his lawn represented something much larger than a dislike of home repair. Money and a larger house may have made Tom happy, but one wonders how long that happiness will last.

Not all suburban men escape the lawn or home repair as easily as Tom and Richard. Like Babbitt or James Blandings, Tom can now hopefully pay someone to do his upkeep or continue to ignore the work. Richard could have kept his home from falling into disrepair; he simply let it deteriorate out of negligence. Other suburban men, however, approach the lawn to better themselves and the places they call home only to be saddled with mounting debt, bad repair jobs, and anxiety. *Crack in the Picture Window*'s John Drone and *Player Piano*'s Paul Proteus both approach home repair and craftsmanship as a chance to better their lives and their family's lives. While the motivations might differ from Tom and Richard, they share one similarity, a fixation on the lawn and home repair that sidesteps the larger problems in their lives.

John C. Keats' *The Crack in the Picture Window*, which combines references to Keats' former career as a journalist in Washington D.C., fiction, cartoons, and sociological studies, may

[85] Namely his aversion towards other-directedness.
[86] Wilson's opinion changes, I guess, in the 1980s when he writes the highly panned and much delayed sequel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit II*. Tom reverts back to his old ways and barely resembles the Tom Rath of the 1950s.

be the harshest indictment of suburban living. Few aspects of suburban life escape Keats scrutiny—from white-collar jobs to housewife boredom to the sex life of suburbanites. Throughout the novel, Keats constantly reminds the reader that the suburbs are, in his opinion, a failed experiment. The novel opens with a white hot sermon from the narrator, "For literally nothing down,—other than a simple two per cent and a promise to pay, and pay, and pay until the end of your life—you too, like a man I'm going to call John Drone, can find a box of your own in one of the fresh-air slums we're building around the edges of American cities" (7). From there, the narrator covers the familiar critiques of the suburbs: monotony ("you can be certain all other houses will be precisely like yours, inhabited by people whose age, income, number of children, … and perhaps even blood type are also precisely like yours"), neighborly rivalries ("it is possible to make enemies of the folks next door with unbelievable speed"), familial discord ("you are assured your children will leave perhaps even sooner than they should, for at once they will learn never to associate home with pleasure"), and suburban sprawl ("They destroy established cities and trade patterns, pose dangerous problems for the areas they invade, and actually drive mad myriads of housewives shut up in them"). All of this on the first page—the first paragraph—of the novel.

The novel focuses on John and Mary Drone and paints them as the typical post-World War II suburban family. The Drones were living in poor and cramped conditions in the city, relied on John's VA benefits to acquire a housing loan, bought a suburban starter home without understanding their housing contract, and moved into an undeveloped, suburban quagmire. The Drone's joyous moving day opens with muddy, unpaved roads and an ordeal to open the front door, "[t]he key turned stiffly in the lock, and John had to throw his weight three times against the already-warped door before it burst open and he half sprawled into his new living room"

(28). The suburban house might look nice on the outside, but as the Drone family learns, the inside is falling apart. The narrator, however, offers Drone a solution, "the only light glimmering faintly in the surrounding darkness was that will o wisp, Do It Yourself" (40). Naturally, the vitriolic narrator isn't going to give Drone an escape that easily, "But [DIY] was not only a dancing illusion; it was a Welsh wrecker's lamp, as we shall see." Through his caricature of Drone, Keats would join a long list of people who critiqued the suburban DIY kit.

The popularity of the do-it-yourselfer hit impressive highs in the 1950s. Studying the DIY phenomenon, Stephen Gelber (1997) writes of the massive uptick in DIYers, "by mid-decade only reading and watching TV were more popular forms of recreation than do-it-yourself among married men." This popularity lead to suburbanites' spending six billion dollars a year on various kits and provisions (Gelber 97). Midcentury critics, however, questioned the positives of the commercial based DIY movement. Riesman (1954), who believed in the positives of leisure, cautions against "trying to deal with the modern challenge of modern leisure with the play styles drawn from the past in Europe or America" (295). Riesman and other critics understood the dangers of looking backwards. Daniel Bell (1956) catalogs the problems with relying on the past since an insistence on previous forms of physical labor as leisure leads to a "loss of satisfaction in work" (38). Mills (1951), too, identifies the same problem as Bell. DIY and other leisurely activities lead to work becoming secondary to leisure, but as Mills argues, these activities do not inspire men the way that work once did but only "wears them out" (333). DIY may have drained the suburbanite's energy, but it also emptied their wallets.

The DIY movement, as shown in *Crack in the Picture Window* and elsewhere, fails to inspire greatness in the suburban man and serves only as a vacuum on his pocketbook. Various companies allow the suburban man to buy the accoutrements of a craftsman, but these men lack

to knowledge to properly use these tools. Building a shed or repairing a fence should allow the suburban man some type of occupational control. His bedroom, office, and living room may have been co-opted by economic and social changes, but the lawn is his domain. As Bell writes, "individuals who controlled their own work routines liked their work much more than those subject to administrative control" (44). With the lawn, a man like John Drone can finally express his own control on his own domain. Naturally, the lawn falters as a mode of escape, and ultimately, becomes a place where the character sinks precious money and time into a failing enterprise.

Luckily, Drone isn't alone in this quest to become the master of the do-it-yourself. Everyone in Drone's subdivision of Rolling Knolls undertakes DIY projects to improve their homes, and the results are comical. One man falls off of his roof; another saws through his arm. The suburban buffoonery is not solely contained in *Crack in the Picture Window*. Albert Roland (1958) notes that mid-century cartoonists often lampooned "inept amateurs painting themselves in corners" (155). This suburban ineptitude generates laughs; however, the buffoonery (and physical pain from said buffoonery) is based in real-life. Roland notes, "General magazines have stressed safety hazards and bungling" (155). The warnings fell on deaf ears; as Richard Harris (2012) notes, 1954 saw "600,000 injuries, not all minor" from DIY related activities (319).[87] Gelber (1997) asserts, "The constant, often indulgently humorous, references to handyman disasters make it clear that for do-it-yourselfers there was pleasure in the pain" (101). Drone, however, fails to find comfort and publically suffers—both physical and social—injuries in his attempt to build a backyard BBQ pit.

[87] Pre-dating Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor, Disney riffed on DIY culture utilizing their ignoramus Goofy as the proto-typical DIYer. In "Home Made Home," the viewer sees Goofy incur the following injuries or indignations while building a home: he saws through a plank causing him to fall, runs through a large piece of plate glass, spills an entire paint can into one of his shoes, and fights a viper-like paint gun that sprays toxic amounts of paint into his face. In the end, partygoers destroy Goofy's house, without inviting Goofy in to the party, and leave.

When Drone finishes, the pit is a blob of bricks instead of a social hub.[88] The narrator tells the reader that Drone's struggles "took no more than four years off [his] normal life expectancy" (67). The damage done to Drone's physical well-being pales compared to the social beating he takes. The failure to construct the pit brings the ire and laughs of the neighborhood. "Word eventually got back to Drone that George Spleen reportedly said the Drones could make money by selling tickets to see the world's smallest leaning tower," the narrator joyfully tells us. Drone's public DIY project outs him as not handy or crafty. Even though he lives among men with almost sawn off limbs and broken bones from falls, Drone's failed BBQ pit is an immovable, public failure.

Drone never recovers from the do-it-yourself *faux pas* either. Broken bones and bruised egos will heal over time, but Drone is forever stuck with his brick failure. However, he continues to try to define himself out on the lawn in misguided ways. After failing to build a BBQ pit, Drone realizes that he can certainly take care of his lawn and sets his eyes on a power mower. While Drone might think the power mower is a great purchase, our narrator interprets the scene differently. "There is no doubt," our narrator sagely notes, "many gadgets were purchased purely for prestige, the purchase motivated by that ageless habit, common among ineffectual people, of keeping up with Joneses" (77). Drone's "need" for this tool is driven solely by mimetic desire. One neighbor bought a power mower and then another. Soon, Drone was the only man on the street without one. As William Whyte (1964) argues, "[a]t this point only the most resolute individualists can hold out, for just as the group punishes its members for buying prematurely, so it punishes them for not buying" (347). The decision is almost out of Drone's hands since he

[88] I return to the world of animation. We see a similar version of this embarrassment in *The Simpson*'s "Mom and Pop Art." Homer attempts to build a BBQ pit in his backyard and his efforts are confused as an expression of avant-garde art.

cannot be the only person on his street without a power mower. Regardless of his staggering debt, Drone buys the power mower.

As with most literary suburbanites, Drone fails to understand his wants and desires. He certainly doesn't comprehend what his wife has already learned that superfluous purchases create debt and debt creates anxiety. With advertisers help, this warning largely fell on deaf ears. Quoting from a 1950s *LIFE* magazine, Virginia Scott Jenkins (1994) lists the myriad of tools needed for a "good lawn": "bamboo rake, grass shears, hand sprayer (alternate is shoulder sprayer), wave sprinkler, a hoe, wheelbarrow, roller, iron rake, lawn mower and spade, an aerator and a weed knife" (102). Back in *Picture Window*, Drone sets out on a quest to compile his own tools for his yard. The narrator points out the hole in Drone's logic, "you might think John Drone's simple lack of money would render him immune from the gadget-buying epidemic that swept through Rolling Knolls. Not a bit of it" (76). Drone has already bought the power mower, and he turns his sights on even more expensive gadgets and tools. As the Goodmans argued in *Communitas* (1947), "when the user understands nothing and cannot evaluate his tools, you can sell him anything" (14). The relationship between man and his tools starts ominously: "in trying to start the [power mower], he tangled the cord in the flywheel, didn't let go, and broke his wrist." (78). Unperturbed by his broken wrist, Drone goes full force into "gadget buying;" and unluckily for Drone, the 1950s market was more than ready to satiate his needs and empty his pockets.

Drone wasn't the only literary suburban man to believe he was fit for the pioneer lifestyle. In Kurt Vonnegut's first novel *Player Piano* (1951), Paul Proteus seeks to escape his dystopian white-collar existence through physical labor and sweat equity. Paul lives in a not-too-distant future, a future controlled by automated machines. In many ways, the novel reads as if it

were an additional final scene in *Carousel of Progress*. Technology replaces physical labor and displaces factory workers, engineers, and laborers. Vonnegut terms this shakeup as "the Second Industrial Revolution." In the wake of this revolution, society splits into two halves. The remaining white-collar workers who babysit machines all day and the displaced blue-collar workers who either work menial labor, join the Army, or drink their lives away. Paul falls on the side of the white-collar workers. Like many suburban leads, Paul should be proud of his elite standing in society. However, as the reader sees in the novel, a familiar type of ennui creeps into Paul's daily life.

Vonnegut blends Paul's futuristic ennui and desire for escape with discontent felt by workers after the first Industrial Revolution. As Higham (1965) notes, the Industrial Revolution lead to a renaissance for nature. "The great outdoors," Higham asserts, "signified spaciousness—an imaginative release from the institutional restraints and confinements [of] Americans" (29). With Emerson and Thoreau on the brain, post-Industrial men took to the woods for self-discovery and adventure. For suburban men, this yearning for nature leads only to disappointment. Nature is a foreign concept in suburban literature, especially within the pages of Vonnegut. The suburbs have often been derided for replacing nature, as witnessed in Sinclair Lewis' description of suburban Zenith supplanting "a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and maples" (26).[89] In *Player Piano*, the reader finds nature buried under factories and similar looking homes. Following in the misguided footsteps of his nineteenth century heroes, Paul seeks nature as the last free domain from his regimented lifestyle. The simple lawn maintenance that fulfilled John Drone isn't enough for Paul. He wants the real, authentic sweat and toil of a physical life or, at least, what he perceives of that life. On his quest, he fails to

[89] Or, as "Oh Susquehanna!," folk-punk band Defiance Ohio's screed against suburban expansion, claims: suburbanites "will never know what stood beneath those cookie-cutter houses: fields and streams and woods."

discover the wonders of nature, only the hardships a natural life requires.

As with characters before and after him, Paul fails to understand the scope of the life he aspires to. Literary men who preceded Paul discover that nature cannot fix their problems at home or work.[90] Intent on finding nature, Paul buys a dilapidated farm house to live out his fantasies. No one in Paul's life understands why he wants the place. Dr. Pond, a realtor who resembles Babbitt in career, mannerism, and shape, tries to convince Paul to look at the modern homes in the vicinity. Paul refuses to budge, even after meeting Mr. Haycox, the landlord of the farm. Haycox represents the closest thing to natural living Paul will ever meet, and he is immediately put off by the man's brash and bleak nature. His repulsion should have been an indication, but he continues to pursue the farmhouse despite the many warning signs.

The draw of the pioneer lifestyle proves to be too strong for a character like Paul. Despite protestations from Pond, Paul plans to buy the farmhouse and fix up the place. Blinded by his desire, Paul fails to understand the insurmountable task he is about to undertake. Pond asks him, "Would you like to see the termites, the dry rot, the hog pen, and the manure spreader?" (150). The question falls on deaf ears. As with James Blandings before him, Paul is too inspired by the promise of country living to see the dark clouds gathering around him. Instead of seeing the many problems, Paul envisions a life of "completely isolated backwater, cut off from the boiling rapids of history, society, and economy" (150-1). Again, as with James, the dream of country living fails to match the reality of the situation. Paul might envision the place as "backwater," but as Pond points out, modern homes are in the vicinity. Even if the farm had been far removed from society, Paul lacks the know-how to live in this imagined pioneer lifestyle. To help assuage Pond's growing anxiety, Paul assures him the place was "simply a play thing" (152). His

[90] Sinclair Lewis sends both Babbitt and *Mantrap*'s Ralph Prescott (1926) into the woods to find a new agreeable identity. Both men discover something about themselves out in the woods. They discover that they hate the natural world. Despite his best efforts, Paul Proteus makes a similar discovery.

declaration unfortunately proves to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

With a farmhouse, Paul feels comfortable enough to sacrifice his current, suburban life for the dream of a pastoral life. In the process, he leaves his cushy job at the Ilium Works and his marriage to his wife. When asked by a now former co-worker what he was going to do, Paul replies, "Farm, maybe. I've got a nice little farm" (236). The dream, however, fails to live up to the reality of situation. As the narrator sardonically notes, "Paul had gone to his farm once, and, in the manner of a man dedicating his life to God, he'd asked Mr. Haycox to put him to work, guiding the hand of Nature" (259). This sounds well and fine until Paul realizes, "The hand he grasped so fervently, he soon discovered, was course and sluggish, hot and wet and smelly." The physical work he had once fetishized from afar proves to be too difficult for him. Unwilling and unable to do the work, Paul begins to view the entire farm as "irrelevant as a statue at the gate of a sewage-disposal plant" (259). Paul realizes he has placed his faith into an anachronistic lifestyle. His sacrifice goes beyond John Drone's—at least Drone still has his terrible job and destitute family. Paul sacrificed his life for a bet that didn't pan out.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, "Separating," *Crack in the Picture Window*, and *Player Piano* all maintain, albeit in differing ways, that the reliance on the lawn for identity is just another dead end. Instead of focusing on ways to better his life, the characters in each of these novels blame their inability or unwillingness to master their tools as an impediment to their happiness. Instead of asking questions about the larger reasons for his doldrums, the suburban man relies on the lawn as an easy strawman, a space to either displace his fears and anxieties through unfulfilling forms of leisure or act as yet another place to find an answer to his problems. Tom and Richard forgo their responsibilities out on the lawn but fail to find any grand understanding of their lives elsewhere. Drone faces laughter and humiliation for his neighbors

while Paul loses everything as he chases an identity that doesn't exist. These men, despite their hearty attempts to shed them, are stuck with their identities. The decision to swing a hammer will not and cannot ease societal, economical, and occupational pressures. As much as the suburban man would like to believe otherwise, this has never been the case.

The lawn, however, remained in representations of the American suburb alongside white picket fences and station wagons as the go-to symbols for suburban living. Literary suburbanites, however, find themselves split when dealing with the troubles of the lawn. The suburbanite can redirect boredom with home life or anger at work into his lawn or ignore the space altogether. Regardless of his choice, he receives little in return. His neglect of the lawn leads to scorn and ridicule. His attempt to project a mastery of his land only highlights the impossibility of the pioneer or frontiersman lifestyle. Some men find release in a freshly mown lawn or a new coat of paint, but most struggle with even the mundane tasks. The struggle for a masculine identity turns into despair and, ultimately, the lawn becomes yet another problem the character finds himself running from.

CHAPTER 6: FROM BREADWINNER TO BREAD BURNER: THE KITCHEN, GENDER, AND THE SUBURBS

"I feel like I live a world of scared robots. This is terrible, but two of the worst ones are mom and dad…They are the most boring, repressed people on the face of the entire Earth…They say they love each other, but who knows? Their whole life is this monotonous routine: she cooks dinner—practically the same meal every night—and he comes home barking at everyone like a fascist dictator who is scared his penis will fall off if he ever helps to clear the table, and she lets him walk all over her. I love them, but it's not the life for me."
-Lindsay Weir's diary, "The Diary," *Freaks and Geeks*

A Communist and a Republican walk through a kitchen. Though this set-up resembles the beginning of a terrible joke, it was in actuality a major event of the Cold War. In 1959, vice president Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev toured the *American Exhibition in Moscow*, an exhibit showcasing the many wonders of the American suburban home. From historical accounts to social criticism, several critical works focus on the magnitude of Khrushchev and Nixon's "kitchen debate." As Elaine Tyler May (1988) asserts, the two world leaders did not discuss weapons or politics, instead their conversations focused on the "relative merits of American and Soviet washing machines, televisions, and electric ranges" (16). Throughout the discussion, Nixon formulated the suburban, domestic ideal as a home consisting of a male "breadwinner" and a female "homemaker" (18). Alain de Botton (2005) also touches on the gendered discussions between the two leaders, and notes that Khrushchev jokingly singled out a lemon squeezer as a useless contraption, to which Nixon quipped, "anything that makes women work less hard must be useful" (qtd. in de Botton, 13). Nixon's description of the suburban home and its gendered spaces was not a new concept. Since the mid-century, Americans flocked to the suburbs for the comfort of strict domestic expectations of breadwinner

and housewife, a way of life that had already started to change before World War II. As the century progresses, however, these spaces become less gendered as roles shift and alter according to each household.

The *Carousel of Progress* presents this gender role shift in a sanitized form. For the first half of the attraction, the audience witnesses John and Sarah play the traditional roles of breadwinner and housewife, the same roles championed by Nixon. Mostly hidden in back rooms, Sarah performs in her expected roles. She runs clothes through a ringer in the 1900s and sews hems of costumes in the 1920s. John, however, does not do much breadwinning in the first two scenes. As witnessed in many suburban homes, John exists in his home, but he doesn't help around the house. He jokingly shrugs when the clothes on the laundry line get pelted with rain. When a fuse blows in his home, he sends his son to correct the problem. Until the final scene, John acts as if his role as breadwinner excuses him from any housework, a bullish opinion present throughout suburban literature and media.

John's home and his place within the home significantly changes with the introduction of the popular ranch style design. This innovative design moved kitchens to the forefront of the home. In *Carousel*, the new placement of the kitchen displaces John from center stage to slightly stage right. Since the kitchen now operated as a public space, John entertains guests behind the dining room table. Spatial changes, however, are not the only changes he faces in the 1940s. John might open the third scene with the nonsensical phrase, "Everything is better than ever now," but his following statements belie his faith in progress. For the first time in the attraction, he bemoans his existence by complaining about his diminishing role within his home and work.

Advances at home and work sour John's experiences in the 1940s. He complains about "commuting" and "the rat race," as well as his roles around the house. John's complaints of

housework represent his new, participatory domestic role. As he tells the audience, the automatic dishwasher eliminates manually washing dishes, which allows him to go on walks with his dog Rover. The scene is meant to play for laughs, but John's walking of the dog removes him from the house. Dog walking might be a chore, but it is a chore than removes him from other things on his home to-do list. As John entertains guests in the kitchen, Sarah is plastering wallpaper to the walls of their new rumpus room. Now fulfilling the assumed masculine role of the do-it-yourselfer within the house, Sarah asks John for help, to which he replies, "Now Sarah, didn't I set up that helpful paint stirring machine for you?" The scene that follows is fraught with marital tension and bitterness, a scene we might not expect to see at the Magic Kingdom.[91]

John's interaction with his wife reflects the sitcom trope of the put-upon wife and the good-humored father. This scenario has been a staple of radio and television for decades, but John and Sarah's mini-argument seems crueler than your typical sitcom family. Sarah legitimately needs help with the wallpaper, and John rebuffs her request. After John mentions the paint stirring machine, Sarah acidly responds, "Yes, John… you're a genius. Of course, this will ruin my food mixer. Not that you'd care." Sarah's tone alerts the audience that this schism in their marriage is not a new wound. Ignoring Sarah's rebuke, John replies to the audience, "Good old Sarah, always with the last laugh." Before he can finish his statement, the paint stirring machine spills paint everywhere. Sarah yells at John, but he laughs off her anger. He finds the entire situation hilarious and tells the audience, "I always say, 'if you're going to be married, marry a girl with a sense of humor." The third scene ends with John imploring the audience to sing "There's A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow" to cheer up Sarah. John doesn't realize that a great tomorrow of a sort does exist for Sarah, and he also doesn't realize that he isn't going to

[91] Or, at least, not in an attraction at Disney World. The sometimes toxic combination of long lines, Florida heat, and overexcited children has probably served as the fuel for many a bitter argument between parents at Disney World.

like it either.

The next scene opens with John still in the kitchen except now he's an active and equal participant in his family. With no master of the household, the entire family gets a moment in the spotlight, no longer housed in back rooms at the side of the stage. His family discusses progress and mocks John as he attempts to cook a Christmas turkey using the fancy, new, voice-automated stove. John fails to notice the turkey burning as his futuristic oven interprets his reactions to a video game as directions. John tries to find a silver lining in the burnt turkey and muses, "Hey, as long as we're all here and we're happy and together for the holidays, who cares if I burned our Christmas turkey?" The grandmother interrupts, "I do. I'm starving" and the whole family laughs. Instead of 1950's John laughing in response to Sarah and the paint stirring machine, John's entire family is laughing at his expense. To make his father feel better, John's son says the scene closes, "Don't worry, dad. Someday, everything will be so automated, you won't have to cook another Christmas turkey again." [92] John doesn't get a chance to close his own narrative as the scene ends with the entire family, not only John as was the case in the opening scene, singing "There's A Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow." For the first time in the ride, John's voice is equal volume with the rest of his family. Most people take this as a true portrait of progress as many voices—young, old, male, and female[93]—sing about the promise of tomorrow. The literary suburban man, however, interprets this as a threat.

This chapter focuses on the expectations for both partners, how those expectations affect representations of the suburban kitchen, and why those expectations change throughout the twentieth century. Representations of the kitchen often include wives preparing hot meals for working husbands, or sitcom moms slicing immaculately made peanut butter and jelly

[92] John's son is predicting a nightmare for John and terrifyingly Orwellian future here.
[93] But still all white… it is Disney we're talking about.

sandwiches. Because of the supposed femininity of the space, the kitchen, and the wives within, are often ignored in suburban literature. However, with the rise of the ranch style home, the kitchen could no longer be forgotten in the pages of suburban novels or in television and film. As Clifford E. Clark (186) argues, the ranch style home moved the kitchen from the back of the house to the front spatially and representationally (179). In doing so, the kitchen became a focal point of the home, both in real life and suburban literature. This architectural shift forced suburban men to spend more time in their kitchens, and with this shift, suburban men were expected to take a more active role in raising the children and housekeeping. The suburban man could no longer be the dismissive father figure found in the pages of *Babbitt* or *Point of No Return*. This seismic change in his identity allowed suburban authors to both investigate the changing domestic dynamics of the 1950s and 60s and portray the suburban man as a character desperately trying to grasp fading masculine ideals in the twentieth century.

It comes as little shock that most literary suburban men do not welcome their changing roles inside their homes and the world at large. As Michael Kimmel (1996) argues, "Together feminism, black liberation, and gay liberation presented a frontal assault on the traditional way men had defined their manhood" (185). This rise of other voices created a perceived threat for the suburban man. As the world changed around him, he turned to his home as the last place where he reigned supreme. Outside forces were rapidly transforming the world, so the suburban man scurried to the happy comforts of his house. Inside his domicile, he could continue to live as he had, a man with no consequences. As gender politics shifted in the twentieth century, the suburban man lost the ability to live without consequences. As Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) suggests, the 1950s saw "a firm expectation that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives…[Those] who willfully deviated from those plans [were] judged to be somehow 'less

than a man'" (11-12). The literary suburban man, however, wants the best of both worlds. He certainly wants his neighbors and peers to celebrate his "manliness" as a father and provider, but he also wants to continue to live as other suburban men once did. Yet, in the 1960s, the suburban man discovers that the transformative forces that sent him running to his home were also fomenting under his own roof. Men like Frank Wheeler or Neddy Merrill enact many of the same plans as Babbitt, but find themselves ridiculed, divorced, broke, and even barred from their communities.

Naturally, the changes to his domestic identity create public and private problems for later suburban men. These men, like Frank or Paul Proteus, spend their lives romanticizing their forebears for ruling their homes, working fulfilling but backbreaking jobs, and escaping into wilderness when the urge struck them. They look at their own privileged situations with a home, a stable job, and a family and feel depressed. Instead of seeing changing domestic and racial politics as a positive, the suburban man interprets these developments as the motivation for further problems. Privately, these men want no part of progress. When Rabbit Angstrom verbally attacks his wife for being tired during the day, he attacks progress by claiming, "you're supposed to look tired. You're a modern housewife" (19). Yet, publically, suburban men cannot admit these feelings without revealing their racist or misogynist tendencies.[94] Even in the suburban novel, a genre comfortable with misogyny and racism, suburban men do not want to appear as uneducated hicks or women-hating villains. The suburban man has two choices: he can either adapt or he can, metaphorically (but, on occasion, actually) die.

Many suburban men refuse to adapt in the face of changing gender expectations. Those characters, like *Revolutionary Road*'s Frank Wheeler and Neddy Merrill in "The Swimmer,"

[94] Rabbit voices some of these thoughts in *Rabbit Run* and literally everyone in the novel—including the narrator in parts—hates Rabbit.

grasp onto outdated forms of masculinity and roles once expected of the middle class, white male.[95] The only role left for Frank is a biological role, and his ability to father children is his only successful expression of traditional masculinity in the novel. In "The Swimmer," Neddy opens the story as the mid-century masculine ideal by resting firmly atop his social ladder and basking in the knowledge of his physical and sexual prowess. As the story progresses, Neddy clings to the last vestiges of the traditional white male role, which includes social dominance over people viewed as weaker, economic stability in the white-collar world, and the expectations of the breadwinner. As he swims, he learns the world, both globally and locally, has changed without him, particularly in regard to gender roles.

When discussing gender in the American suburb, the kitchen is perhaps the most highly gendered space. The kitchen has played an important role in both gender and class distinctions throughout history. Over time, however, the kitchen became its own dedicated room, and the space became gendered along class lines. Women continued to cook in working class and servant's kitchens; but, as Bee Wilson (2012) notes, the kitchens of European elites were often filled with male servants.[96] After the male dominated kitchens of the elites faded, the kitchen became a space synonymous with "women's work." With this designation, as Worsley suggests, the status of the kitchen faced a precipitous fall (247). In this descent, the room was moved to the backs of homes, basements, cellars, or detached from the home altogether. During the Industrial Revolution, as Freida Dell Peatros and Mary Joyce Hasell (1990) argue, men began working jobs that could sustain their entire families, and their wives "largely withdrew from the industrial workplace and a patriarchal family form took root" (121). These women, now at home, took to the kitchen, a space that remained in the outskirts of the house and public opinion. Their

[95] For example, being the sole breadwinner of a family or being a barrel chested strong man.
[96] Also, according to Wilson, they often cooked naked "on account of the scorching heat" (xix).

husbands, who worked during the day, returned home and largely ignored the house and kitchen work.

Over time, the kitchen gained new importance and traction as the servant class became a distant dream for middle-class Americans. Lucy Worsely (2011) suggests that the kitchen unsurprisingly saw rapid advancements and improvements when people began working in their own kitchens (252). If individuals were going to be spending more time in the space, the kitchen needed an upgrade, and thanks to advertisements, suburbanites knew precisely how to upgrade their kitchens. According to Vance Packard (1957) asserts, 1955 alone saw advertisers spending nine billion dollars, which he calculates to $53 dollars per American, to convince them to buy brand name appliances (15). As with the lawn, the lure proved too enticing, and suburbanites filled their homes, especially their kitchens, with mass purchases of appliances and gadgets.

The advertisements for range ovens, refrigerators, and automatic dishwashers rewrote the importance of the kitchen and the roles performed within. Clifford E. Clark (1986) argues that by the 1950s advertisers were reinforcing the gendering of the kitchen or rather that, "the latest [domestic advertisements] were all used as sales pitches that would allow women to become better mothers" (180). Advertisements, ranging from Hamilton dishwashers to Fairy Liquid dish soap, portrayed immaculate housewives as solely in command of their kitchens and lives. [97] In her study of midcentury advertising, Caroline Hellman (2004) claims advertising agencies had a propensity to cast "the female body itself as a machine with detachable parts, working to please the husband and the children." The ads Hellman analyzes often feature women happy to express their joy in both the products and role of housewife. Exclamation points and bolded letters reinforce the enthusiasm of these smiling housewives. Yet, as Clark argues, the rapid advancement of kitchen appliances did not alleviate the challenges facing the suburban

[97] Fairy Liquid's catchphrase of "I Hardly Ever Buy It" was hilariously confusing and self-defeating.

housewife (173). She still had to juggle a grouchy husband, loud children, nosy neighbors, and a creeping boredom created by newfangled appliances. These feelings largely fell on deaf ears. Most advertisements continued to carry a two-fold message; appliances make the life of housewives easier but also reaffirm the concrete aspects of her wifely duties.

Appliances may have causes anxiety reaffirming these duties, but they also eased the burden and helped turn the kitchen into a desirable place to be. Labor-saving designs and increased attention to aesthetics contributed to the development of the kitchen as a social space. The range oven eliminated the overwhelming smoke that once choked cooks in the kitchen.[98] The dishwasher sped up cleaning, and the garbage disposal, refrigerator, and the sealing garbage warded off the unpleasant smells that once pushed kitchens into basements and backs of homes. The ever-popular kitchen conversations, ranging from Julian English apologizing for his drunken antics in *Appointment in Samarra* to Frank Wheeler also apologizing for his drunken antics in *Revolutionary Road*, would have been impossible in earlier generations. The kitchen became the desirable place for conversations that do not need the private cover of the bedroom or the formality of gathering in the living room. Without the fear of smoke or smells, people gathered in the kitchen for spontaneous but important discussions. The kitchen, with the help of innovation, developed into an important place in the suburban home, but the space needed the advent of ranch style to become a key component of suburban living.

The ranch style, as described by Clark (1986), saw kitchens relocated to the front of the home (171). As Clark asserts, the kitchen now represented a space for the gathering of friends and family (179). Suburbanites no longer needed to worry about unpleasant smells, unbearable heat, or the indignity of being seen in a servant's space. As male and female realms drew closer

[98] Returning to Wilson's note from earlier, the oven eliminated the blistering heat that once forced male servants to cook in the nude (xix).

in the midcentury, it made sense that their spaces would become cohabitated, as Hasell, Peatross, and Bobo (1992) note. Suburban literature mirrors this development; and authors, placing an emphasis on the kitchen, focused on the changes in gender relations in the twentieth century.

These changes are first noticed in the kitchen conversations between husband and wife in the suburban novel. In this space, the wife begins to assert some sort of control over her life, regardless of time-period. In *Appointment in Samarra*, Caroline explains to a hungover Julian his declining place in the all-important Gibbsville social scene in the kitchen. Joan Maple in "Separating" calls her children into the space to tell them of their parent's impending divorce, and both Betty Draper and Trudy Campbell pick the kitchen tell their *Mad Men* husband that they want a divorce. As the twentieth century progressed, the kitchen becomes the first of many places where female characters have control over their lives. The suburban wife then begins to move from the kitchen and to exert her power both inside and outside of her home.

Throughout this project, I've focused on the many identities of the suburban man within and outside of his home. Although this project is about the suburban man, and although the suburban women's identity could be a lengthy project to itself, some foray into the representation of the suburban woman is necessary. An understanding of various representations of the suburban women proves important when considering the kitchen, a space most literary suburbanites would consider the "wife's domain." As Joanne Meyerowitz (1994) notes, most people can easily identity the tropes of the archetypal suburban housewife. The major problem with this stereotype, as Meyerowitz suggests, is that it isn't a relic of a bygone era but still "a tenacious stereotype [that] persists today in television reruns of situation comedies, in popular movies, and sometimes in scholarly, historical accounts of postwar years" (1). The archetype's ability to last through decades of progress is highly problematic. As Betty Friedan (1963), who

tackled this archetype in the 1960s, notes, the stereotype was a falsity, an unachievable ideal "created by writers and editors who [were] men" (54). From Nixon's firmly drawn gender lines to advertising jingles to the flat female characters in suburban literature, the image of effervescent housewife is a construct often created and championed by men.

The archetype of the happy housewife appears just as often as the disgruntled suburban man in suburban literature. Before the 1960s, women in the suburban novel ran the gamut from flat characters (like Myra Babbitt, Muriel Blandings, Betsy Rath, and Georgette Stroud) to occasionally fleshed out but acquiescent characters (*Appointment in Samarra*'s Caroline English or *Rally Round the Flag, Boys*' Grace Bannerman, and *Revolutionary Road*'s April Wheeler). However, even the fleshed-out female characters represent a tether to suburban living for men, a connection the suburban man tries desperately to break. As Nina Baym (1981) asserts, male-centered American literature has a longstanding history of casting women as "domesticators and entrappers" (133). Baym's argument holds true in suburban literature, though the wife is often just as unhappy as the suburban man.

Early suburban literature continues American literature's tradition of wife blaming. When suburban authors weren't ignoring the wife, they were casting her in a horrible light. Julian English in *Appointment in Samarra* blames his wife for his own sexual inadequacies. In James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (1939), Walter's wife is an emasculating monster. Muriel Blandings in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream Home* (1946) shoulders much of the blame for the disastrous building process instead of James' sitcom level of ineptitude. In Lewis' failed novel *Mantrap* (1926), Baym's "domesticators and entrappers" (133) argument is brightly on display. During a trip through the Canadian wilderness, *Mantrap*'s Ralph Prescott falls in love his trail guide's wife, Alverna. Joe, his trail guide, chases after Ralph not to claim his wife, but

warm Ralph about the dull evils of Alverna. Both Ralph and Joe abandon Alverna, and the problems of their lives seemingly vanish. The suburban wife and kitchen are both pushed into the background of early suburban novels. However, literary and spatial changes would soon bring the character and the kitchen to the forefront.

By the midcentury, literary suburban women started to gain some agency and roundness to their characters. In James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce* (1941), Mildred supports her family with her culinary prowess and throws her deadbeat husband out of her kitchen and her life. *Crack in the Picture Window*'s heroine Mary Drone struggles with the gender roles expected of her.[99] Mrs. Bannerman in *Rally Round the Flag, Boys* gains agency by refusing her husband's control and accusing him of acting like a child. While she still allows Richard to return home after cheating on her, Mrs. Bannerman gets to make the decision. These portrayals were a step toward a more emancipated attitude toward female characters, but despite these minor attempts to represent women in a rounder way, their authors continued to cast them as the driving force for their husband's unhappiness.

In the 1960s, the balance shifted. As Peter Filene (1998) writes, the sixties saw "the era of tranquility dissolved into hurly burly scenes of rebellion." (191). While we generally associate 1960s rebellion with marches and campus protests, a kind of rebellion was also happening inside the suburban home. Nancy Rubin (1982) argues that the concept of being a housewife, which had been linked to suburban women for nearly fifty years, started to change with the help of economic shifts, the rise of birth control, and non-patriarchal forms of education (50). This shift created a massive opportunity for newfound autonomy for the suburban housewife. For so long, the character had been expected to serve the many functions under the umbrella as housewife, or

[99] Mary Drone is, however, cast in the role of domesticator and blamed for forcing John Drone to move to the suburbs.

as Clark (1986) argues, women had to be a "jack-of-all-trades: child psychologists, homemaker, cook, cleaner, and consultant on consumer products" (180). Instead, women started joining the workforce and leaving the home, and men were expected to take on a more advanced role in the household. In abstract, the new role seemed fine, but the literature shows, suburban men struggled to this new domestic role.

Suburban men may have publically stated their willingness to take on chores, but the characters privately believed their jobs in the city excused them from housework. As Elaine Tyler May notes, critics at the time weren't helping by arguing that "homemakers [were] emancipated and men [were] oppressed" (20). The suburban man believes his wife's chores are eased by automated gadgets. John Drone fails to understand his wife's unhappiness with her domestic roles since their home is often filled with the best appliances and products. And John isn't alone., Nancy Rubin claims that midcentury literature and critical works fostered the idea that housewives should bear domestic burdens alone and not bother their husbands (49). Friedan notes that the women who bucked this system were often castigated for upsetting American values. Some women, however, refused to be "restricted to the doll's house by Victorian prejudice" (Friedan 125). While these women faced being ostracized by their neighbors and peers, the strongest opposition came from within their homes.

As the suburban wife gains autonomy and mobility, the husband naturally loses part of his autonomy. His already slipping grasp within the power structure gets slightly weaker. While he complains about unfulfilling work or leisure, the suburban man still largely does whatever he wants—drinking, carousing, spending money wildly, and so forth. By the 1960s, he was expected to not be completely dismissive of his family, but this development rarely sits well with the character.[100] Some suburbanites, however, do their part. John from *Carousel of Progress* and

[100] Of course, even this small concession proves too much for men in suburban literature.

the sitcom dads of the 1950s and 60s, while still living up to midcentury gender standards by grousing about their increased home workload, at least attempted to help with the parenting and housekeeping. The fathers who refused to step up—as witnessed in *Revolutionary Road* and "The Swimmer"—pay dearly.

Though representations of women improved, the suburban authors of the 1950s and 60s certainly did not become supporters of feminist movements. Authors like John Updike and John C. Keats still relied on sexist representations of the women as manipulator who traps men in the suburbs. *Babbitt, Point of No Return (1949), The Tunnel of Love (1955), Crack in the Picture Window (1956),* and *Rally Round The Flag, Boys (1957)* all feature characters who blame their wives for forcing them into suburban subdivisions. Nevertheless, change was afoot. In *Revolutionary Road*, for example, the reader finds the roles reversed. Frank Wheeler convinces his wife to buy a house in Revolutionary Hills Estate and, later, tries to trap April in the kitchen as she does her best to escape the suburbs.[101] The novel provides insight into what happens when these roles are reversed and the characters appear somewhat self-aware of their shifting domestic identities.

At the surface, *Revolutionary Road* appears to be a novel about two characters ill-equipped for their roles in the suburbs. The novel opens with a rundown of a disastrous performance of *The Petrified Forest*, a play hindered by actors not fit for their parts. The disaster models the lives of the Wheelers, as both Frank and April struggle in their perfunctory roles as suburban man and wife. Yates, however, complicates the typical scenario of two suburbanites unhappy with their domestic lives by casting the Wheelers as people completely at odds with the roles they play. April acts as both mother and father while Frank idly worries about himself.

[101] When purchasing the home, Frank Wheeler even says "I don't suppose one picture window is going to destroy our personalities" (31). He's wrong. April succeeds leaving the suburbs, but she succeeds by dying.

Baym (1981) asserts that male-centric literature often portrayed women as proponents of domestication (133), but *Revolutionary Road* flips that long-standing tradition. Frank plays the role of entrapper and domesticator while April, who tries her best to escape Revolutionary Hills Estate, but the suburbs become her tomb.

The domestic role reversal first appears at the beginning of the third chapter. After a brutal fight the night before, Frank awakes to the sound of mechanical whirring and a blistering hangover. Frank takes refuge in the kitchen as he struggles with his hangover, and as his headache slowly subsides, he discovers the cause of the whirring noise. April is mowing the lawn, a job that Frank "had promised to do last weekend" (35). As with the *Carousel of Progress*, the wife seemingly takes care of the work in and outside the home while the husband recovers in the kitchen.

Yates uses the Wheelers' clothing and spatial placement to highlight the role reversals. As Kate Charlton-Jones (2014) notes, Yates routinely focused on clothing as identification markers (26). April, adorned in men's clothing, is adept at cutting the grass, an act and zone assigned to the husband. She successfully navigates two domestic roles, both mowing the lawn, an masculine act she wishes Frank would do "once in a while…instead of sleeping all day" (45), and taking care of the children. Frank, however, serves no purpose as he stands in the kitchen "still in his bathrobe, unshaven and fumbling" (41). As he considers drinking coffee, he realizes that April has already fed the children and cleaned the kitchen. He harbors a vague notion of "get[ting] dressed and go[ing] out to take the lawnmower away from her, by force if necessary, in order to restore as much balance to the morning as possible" (41). Unable to handle this affront to masculinity, he considers violence as the only means to right the morning.

Ultimately eschewing violence, Frank instead attempts to one up his wife by allowing his

children to accompany him as he tries to build a walkway through the backyard. Stealthily, Frank has put on his old military clothing for his masculine backyard display. If he cannot act masculine, he can at least dress like a roughhewn man. Instead of sitting quietly, his children barrage him with questions, which irritates him to no end. Frank, ignoring his children, attempts to sever a root with his shovel, but the blows he strikes are not strong enough. After a bit of angry confusion, he winds up beating his son. His children run and hide in April's skirt while she stares disapprovingly at Frank. Again, the reader finds April succeeding in both domestic roles while Frank, limply adorned in old military clothing, fails to live up to the expectations of either role.

This role reversal between Frank and April represents both the underlying problem of their marriage and the heart of the novel. Frank, as with many suburban men, starts looking for roles to replace the ones lost to twentieth century progress. Both his job and his neighbors grate on his nerves. He struggles out on his lawn, and his affair proves to be a hassle. Frank settles on being a father as the only remaining outlet for his masculinity. Yet, his role as father does not encompass successful parenting. When he isn't ignoring his children, he is referring to them as "gnats" (53). He mistakenly establishes a link to masculinity through biology since producing children is the only identifiable role he has.

An unplanned pregnancy early in life propels the Wheelers towards suburban life. For Frank, this development, while "seven years too early" (50), feels like a natural progression. April, however, plans to terminate the pregnancy, a decision she made on her own. Frank interprets April's decision to abort the child, a plan he wasn't consulted on, as an affront to his masculinity. Through a series of discussions, Frank convinces April to keep the child and admits to himself, "no single moment of his life had ever contained a better proof of manhood than

that…holding that tamed submissive girl…while she promised she would bear his child" (53). The moment, which he considers a success, proves to be a defeat for Frank. His search for an identifiable role, spurred by his masculinity crisis, starts with the creation of a child. It does not, however, extend to raising the child, an oversight that reaffirms the suburban man's conviction to exist inside his home without partaking in any familial duties.

Frank's problems continue after April introduces the idea of abandoning the Revolutionary Hills Estate for France. She envisions the escape as a chance for Frank to finally discover himself as an artist. Frank, incapable of change, wavers on the idea until April casts the move as a thank you for convincing her to keep their first child. With his masculinity confirmed, Frank starts to prep for the move to Europe. The plan has a few holes despite April's diligence and excitement about the move. Charlton-Jones (2014) asserts that Yates often relied on female characters who yearned for "something more than just marriage and motherhood [and] struggle to find meaningful employment and a satisfactory sense of self-worth" (126). Before running the plan by Frank, April has already hatched a plan to secure the needed paperwork for the move. Better still, she tells Frank she will be the one to get a job in Europe, so he can stay home and work on his art. Frank's masculinity woes creep back into his mind. As Charlton-Jones asserts, the idea no longer meshes with his vision since "it was unthinkable that a woman should consider supporting her family without, as a consequence, emasculating her man" (156). As a man who sees himself as constantly being emasculated, Frank begins to fret when he realizes has no role in the trip. April took the reins, and he cannot stand that she did this without his permission. He has spent most of his adult life using his role as breadwinner as a defense against his unfulfilling life and work. The trip threatens not only to remove the bulwark of his defense, but is also, yet again, reversing midcentury gender expectations. April would be the breadwinner,

and Frank would stay at home. As with his debacle on the lawn, Frank knows that April would thrive in the role of breadwinner. However, he worries that April, fresh from a fulfilling day of work, would come home to find him "hunched in an egg-stained bathrobe, on an unmade bed, picking his nose" (115). He starts looking to cancel the trip, and a familiar scenario presents an out for Frank.

April becomes pregnant during the preparation for the trip. After learning the news, Frank feels "the pressure was off; life had mercifully come back to normal" (219). Frank, contradictorily relishing and hating his role of father, spies himself in the mirror and sees "a new maturity and manliness in the kindly, resolute face that nodded back at him" (221). Order has been restored for Frank. Meanwhile, April has a different plan; she plans to abort the child. Frank, again, interprets this as a rejection of his masculinity. He enacts a series of roles to prove that they should keep the child by "enthusiastically romp[ing] with the children, [and] disdainfully mow[ing] the lawn in record time" (232). He attempts to appear as the type of man who approaches parenthood as a fifty-fifty split, but the plan comes too late. As the narrator prophetically intones, "The Wheeler's weren't going anywhere" (250). With the trip cancelled, the Wheelers take to their kitchen through a series of conversations to piece together their marriage and lives. The kitchen conversations, like the Wheelers and the Kitchen Debates, go nowhere.

The last conversation between Frank and April happens as the family gathers for breakfast in the kitchen. In an attempt to repair their marriage, both Wheelers play their respective roles. Frank drones on about his work, and April feigns interest. April watches from the kitchen steps as Frank backs out of the driveway, unawares of the life changing afternoon waiting for him. With the house empty, April attempts to carry out the at-home abortion and later

dies in the hospital from complications. Frank, after learning of his wife's death, runs to the house in a panic. He spends most of his adult life contemplating running away from April and his home in the suburbs. Now, the house and memories of April represent a balance to the horrifying reality of his life. As he surveys the scene, he finds a trail of April's blood on the kitchen floor and crouches to clean it up. He tells himself in April's voice, "try a damp sponge a little dry detergent, darling—it's in the cabinet in the sink" (341). The voice however disappears and Frank returns to "the kitchen, where he thought the pantry shelves and the racked plates and coffee cups would surely contain the ghost of her, but it was gone" (342). In the end, Frank receives exactly what he wanted, a new role in life. Unfortunately, the role encompasses both the roles April had earlier performed. He now must play the role of both caregiver and provider for his children.

Emasculation of the father figure was a popular topic inside and outside of suburban literature. Peter Filene suggests, "in the twilight of patriarchy, middle-class males had found it hard to be a man. In the days of domestic democracy, they found it no easier" (190). The allegation sounds preposterous, but as Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) argues, magazines, like *Playboy*, sprung up as proto-Men's Rights literature, promising to "reclaim the indoors for men…[where] women would be welcome…only as guests—maybe overnight guests—but not as wives" (44). As Ehrenreich notes, *Playboy* sought to bolster the idea that a person "didn't need to be a husband to be a man" (51). This rhetoric makes sense with the glossy pages of a magazine centered on centerfolds and cologne samples. The anti-wife clarion calls found in the pages of celebrated authors is more striking. However, John Cheever, one of the most celebrated authors of suburban literature, turns the wife-blaming on its side in one of his most accomplished stories, "The Swimmer." Cheever doesn't place the onus of blame on the wife; instead, Cheever—in

keeping with the time—turns the critical lens on the husband and essentially closes the book on the Babbitt-esque surburban man.

Cheever's "The Swimmer," published in 1964, marks an important moment in suburban literature. Throughout the text, Cheever deftly mixes the standards of midcentury modernism with the rapidly advancing stylings of post-modernism. Throughout the text, Cheever moves the time forward with little notice outside of Neddy's confusion of spring showers or burning leaves in midsummer. The temporal shifts and the tricky narrator would become standards of post-modernist storytelling, a form completely at odds with earlier, Sinclair-Lewis-influenced suburban literature. Along with mixing literary genres, Cheever also highlights the oncoming collision of hegemonic masculinity and the culture clashes of the sixties. Unlike many suburban men who spend a large portion of their stories at home, Neddy moves through pools instead of houses, but his flight can be viewed as the final flight of the character. Cheever's work highlights the twilight of this form of suburban man. The reader first sees Neddy embark on his swim in a time where he could live without consequences. He cheats on his wife with his neighbor's wife and draws joy from rejecting invitations from families in Bullet Park. With each pool, however, Neddy loses the things most important to him—his social standing, his money, his physique, his mistress, and his family (presumably in that order). As he follows Neddy's descent, Cheever chips away at the suburban archetype as well. As the layers of the suburban man get peeled back, the reader finds a cold, defeated, and bitter man.

"The Swimmer" marks the end of the suburban man's journey, and Neddy's swim mirrors the many changes to the suburban man through the course of the twentieth century. As with many of the suburban men who precede him, Neddy finds himself looking backwards to moments when he was younger, muscular, and atop his suburban development. To reclaim these

former glories, he plans a swim through the various pools of his neighborhood, an activity that he assumes will only take a day. In his mind, he views this excursion as a hero's quest, a journey that will see his friends cheering for him as he swims back to his wife. However, thanks to subtle hints from the narrator, the reader sees that Neddy is already on a descent when the story opens, and his swim takes place over years not days. At each pool, he is faced with painful reminders of his economic collapse, social ruin, and sexual failure. Characters who were once held down by Neddy's patriarchical rule—in this case, young people and women—serve as reality checks to his—and the suburban man's—loosening grip on the power structure. Neddy remains blind to many references to his past struggles throughout his journey, but the sight of his dilapidated home at the end of his swim finally breaks him.

The journey starts easily enough but quickly takes an ominous turn. Instead of being welcomed into his community as a conquering hero, Neddy faces the direct effect of gender, social, and economic changes of the 1960s. From this point on, the swim no longer represents a journey towards a "natural condition" (714) but a painful reminder that he no longer has role to play in the tight-knit Bullet Park community. He becomes a "swimmer" out of necessity, the only remaining role he can play. The next leg of his swim starts at the community pool, and Neddy knows this swim will be one of the hardest.[102] Neddy reviles the community pool not just because it is loud and populated by children but because the community pool is the place for people below his station. People who cannot afford a pool in their backyard swim there. The narrator mentions Neddy's fear of "contaminat[ing] himself—damage his own prosperousness and charm—by swimming in this murk" (161). His defeat comes not at the indignity of swimming in the community pool but when two lifeguards notice his lack of an ID tag. The lifeguards admonish the interloping Neddy, and this admonishment foretells of later struggles.

[102] Neddy envisions his quest as an epic journey, and the community pool represents his River Styx moment.

Neddy's identity, the self-assured leader of Bullet Park, has already faded, and he has no identity. Though they may have once admired him from afar, the lifeguards scream and chase Neddy for the breach of the pool's rules. Surprisingly, Neddy finds himself running from the young lifeguards but fails to understand that he can no longer live as if the rules do not apply to him. People once held by men like Neddy take joy in correcting his mistake.

Neddy's fall continues at the Halloran's, Bullet Park's elderly communists.[103] The Halloaran's are one of the last friendly families Neddy will approach and this represents a problem for him. The only people happy to see Neddy are both elderly and communists, two types of people at the bottom of suburban social ladders in the 1960s. The conversation proves to be as depressing as their friendly invitations. Mrs. Halloran says to Neddy, "We've been terribly sorry to hear about all of your misfortunes… we heard that you'd sold the house and that your poor children…" (720). Neddy replies, "I don't recall having sold the house." Mrs. Halloran, "Yes… yes." Mrs. Halloran's detached "Yes" highlights many important things for the reader. Neddy is clearly in denial about his station in Bullet Park. More importantly, a communist—literally the lowest person in Bullet Park—takes pity on Neddy. Later, he bristles at the idea that the elderly, nudist, and Communist family of Bullet Park takes pity on him. As his swim turns more harrowing, Neddy slowly begins to realize the only people happy to see him are the people at the bottom of the social ladder.

Any aspirations of returning to the top of the Bullet Park social scene are quashed at the Biswangers. The narrator mentions that the Merrills once took great pride in rejecting the Biswangers invitations, a family ranked so low that the Merrills didn't include them on their Christmas card list. Neddy now finds the situation reversed and begs Grace, who refers to him loudly as a "gate crasher" (722), for a drink. This isn't the first time Neddy has come to the

[103] They're also nudists.

Biswangers' to beg for help. As Grace loudly explains to the crowd, Neddy once drunkenly asked the Biswangers for a sizable loan. The mention of the loan represents a triple embarrassment. Not only are his economic woes broadcast to his neighbors and former friends, but he has been embarrassed in front of the societal elite of Bullet Park by a woman, a woman the Merrills once took joy in treating terribly. Unable to comprehend the upheaval of the social ladder, Neddy skulks off in search of sex, an act he considers the panacea to his growing list of disappointments.

As with many suburban men, Neddy hopes to find restoration in the arms of someone not his wife and believes "love—sexual roughhouse in fact—was the supreme elixir, the painkiller, the brightly colored pill that would put the spring back into his step" (723). Like Julian English, Neddy may be a social and economic failure, but he can reassert his power through the bedroom. However, he discovers the greatest fear of a hegemonic masculine man, the sexually dominant female. He sets his sights on the pool of Shirley Adams, his neighbor and former mistress. Neddy remembers ending the affair out of boredom, a position he believes gave him the "upper hand" (723). He gleefully recalls standing tall as Shirley wept at the culmination of the affair. While approaching her house, Neddy worries, "Would she, God forbid, weep again?" He quickly and painfully discovers the power had shifted during his long swim. Upon seeing Neddy, Shirley acidly asks, "Good Christ. Will you ever grow up?" Like Grace, Alice accuses him of reappearing to ask for a loan and quickly sends him away. Neddy, who once puffed out his chest at ending the affair and having Shirley cry on his lap, finds himself easily discarded. He starts to swim away, but not before seeing that he's been replaced by a younger man.

Neddy slowly begins to piece together that he can no longer rely on old Bullet Park gender standards. The women of his subdivision—Mrs. Halloran, Grace Biswanger, and Shirley

Adams—are not the same type of women who populated the suburbs of his youth. He finds himself both economically and sexually beholden to his female neighbors, and these women publically reject him outright. Unable to comprehend these changes, Neddy finds himself in a situation similar to Frank Wheeler. Their wives and neighbors do not represent an impediment to their successes; their stubbornness and unwillingness to change does. The world around Neddy changed, and he turns his attention towards his home, a place where his wife and his four daughters will be waiting for him.

In a moment that recalls the final scene of *Babbitt*, Neddy runs to his former identity as the world around him crumbles. Unlike Babbitt, the domestic role of breadwinner is the only thing Neddy can cling to. Instead of returning home and finding his family expectantly waiting, Neddy returns to find his house empty. Lucinda Merrill, an absent character for most of the story, has a mobility that Myra Babbitt did not. As Neddy approaches his home, he finds the place "dark" (724) and tries to open the garage but "the door was locked and rust came off the handles onto his hands." As he beats on the front door, he considers blaming the maid or the cook, but he realizes he hasn't been able to afford them for years. He tries his best to shoulder the door open, but he has wasted his strength—and time—on his long swim. He peeks into the dusty windows, but the house is empty. Neddy and his house sit unkempt and broken together—two relics of a time gone by.

Throughout "The Swimmer," the reader sees the control of patriarchy start to slip. Throughout his swim, Neddy finds himself mocked and ridiculed by people he once considered below him—young people, communists, families who rank lower on the social ladder, his mistress, and finally his wife. Unable to cope with these changes, the story ends with Neddy crying in the rain on his front steps. The Sinclair Lewis-influenced literary suburban man is

essentially defeated in this moment. And truthfully, the character never recovers. After 1964, the genre begins to dry up. Joseph Heller's *Something Happened* is published in 1974, but the story hews closer to "The Swimmer" in its post-modern form of story-telling, and Bob Slocum, the "hero" of the story, ends the novel having a psychotic break.

Despite being so prevalent during the midcentury, the influence of suburban literature starts to wane in the latter half of the 1960s. As Charles McGrath argues, stories about the suburbs seemed "too old, too square, too white and middle class." The suburban character underwent a massive transformation as the suburban novel returned to the literary consciousness in the 1980s and continued well into the twenty-first century. Many traits and traditions of *Babbitt* remain in the novels of Richard Ford, Chang Rae-Lee, A.M. Holmes, and Jonathan Franzen, but the character seems to have been filtered one too many times. Kathy Knopp argues the post-1980s suburban man comes from authors who turned to the suburbs "to violently punish their alienated protagonists, whom they now categorized as plagued by self-pity, solipsism, deviancy, avarice, and cowardice" (xviii). "The Swimmer" ends with Neddy finally realizing that he has waited too long to see the error of his ways. 1999's *Music For Torching* follows Paul, who starts smoking crack to alleviate his suburban ennui. When the crack fails to help, Paul turns to a dominatrix, gets his genitals tattooed, and develops a horrifying infection from his genital tattoos. These authors may still deal with "the ghost of Cheever," as Charles McGrath writes, but the characters and their suburbs themselves seem different.

In the end, Neddy and his empty home remain a lasting image for the literary suburban man: defeated on his front steps in the rain. The patriarchy wasn't defeated then—and it certainly isn't defeated now—but these novels show the fear of losing total control that haunts these men. Neddy Merrill cannot comprehend why anyone would treat them the way they often treated

people. When he finally received that treatment, he can't handle it. He breaks down and cries. The monolithic image of the American suburban man often ignores these aspects of the character. When one imagines the suburban man, the image often seems more like John from the *Carousel of Progress* or the fathers on midcentury sitcoms. Babbitt ends his novel arm in arm with his son after finally taking a stand for himself and for his son's future. One doesn't imagine the aging, broken, and lecherous men featured in the suburban novels of the 1960s locked out his home. Nor does one imagine the suburban home, once a beacon of hope and prosperity, to be broken, rusty, old, and forgotten.

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