

Palacký University Olomouc
Faculty of Arts
Department of English and American Studies

**Comparison of Social Roles of Men and Women in pre and
post World War two American Suburban Literature**

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Petr Chromec
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Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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PŘEDKLÁDÁ:	ADRESA	OSOBNÍ ČÍSLO
CHROMEČ Petr	Republikánská 8/138, Olomouc - Nové Sady	F14025

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prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr. - KAA

ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

1. Introduction
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 - 5.1. The Swimmer
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6. Comparison of the characters
7. Conclusion

SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:

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- Cheever, John. *The Swimmer*. 1964.
Levin, Ira. *The Stepford Wives: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 1972.
Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. 1922.

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- Beuka, Robert. *Suburbanization: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film*. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004.
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1 Introduction

A thirst for privacy, security and a social recognition are conceivably the main motivators for many American families or individuals to choose the living inside one of many Suburbs – a cultural phenomenon that is frequently portrayed in popular works of American fiction and film. Suburbs are virtually isolated from its surroundings which resulted in development of specific cultural aspects. Given the historical background of our country the concept of suburbia is not widely known nor implemented in Czech Republic as the housing problem has been solved by brutalist architecture and planning of the oppressive soviet dictatorship which unfortunately remains the dominant landmark of Czech cities. On many accounts foreign visitors have been somewhat dazed when they realized there is an abrupt switch from urban areas to rural country or nature.

The aim of this thesis is to observe and analyze the patterns and shifts in a quest for the primary social position among the inhabitants of American suburbia. While there was no apparent race or clash of interests in nearly sixty decades in the scope of the thesis there have been numerous occasions when the social positions of men and women fluctuated. The first section of the thesis will primarily deal with the concept of suburbia and suburban history to ensure wider perception of the topic. The following subchapters will focus on the American suburbia from its early beginnings, reasoning for the creation of suburbs and division into time periods when the suburb's sociological influence on contemporary American culture peaked.

The third chapter and will shift the focus to the 1922s novel by Sinclair Lewis *Babbitt* as it is the key novel for the thesis. Detailed analysis of the characters, their social statuses, symbols and attitudes will be later examined and subsequently compared with other primary sources selected for the topic. *Babbitt* is a crucial novel for this topic since it is widely considered as the pioneer novel amongst criticism of the American Suburbia. The subchapters will consider men and women of the novel as separate entities. Due to certain patterns that appear in the novel each separate entity will be divided into more subgroups that share similarities and matched to its competitors.

The fourth chapter will deal with the effect of the world war two on American social norms in the suburbia and the American society in general.. During this unfortunate era of human history a noteworthy shifts between social statuses of men and women occurred. This was a surprise for returning American servicemen and eventually some women in had withdrawn from their new and empowering positions to the safe,

isolated homogenous homes. This development had started another chapter in the American culture and Literature. The new form of Suburban Literature was embraced by both men and women alike and focused on the psychology and self-realization of the protagonists.

The section five will deal mainly with the post-world war two works by John Cheever and Ira Levin. *The Swimmer* and *The Stepford Wives* include a vastly different approach to social standing of both men and women in the American society or suburbia in a contrast to pre-war and inter-war suburban literature. Both aforementioned works will undergo literary analysis as well analysis of the social roles and standing of men and women in each piece of literature.

The quasi-final chapter will compare individual characters, their contribution towards the stories and their development. The last chapter will conclude the thesis, summarize the collected arguments, issues, evidence along with analysis of the selected works by Lewis, Cheever and Levin from the previous chapters. American literary culture. Each piece of literature, its characters, themes as well as t each novel or short story's contribution to American Literature. The social roles of men and women from both eras will be matched to one another and definitive conclusion of any movement on the social ladder will be documented.

2 Historical background of suburbia

When Suburbia is mentioned one thinks of the massive satellite cities of United States or the famous aerial photo of Mexico City where the houses create an optical illusion of never ending ocean waves. The most commonly overlooked fact is that suburbs are not a new concept and in fact their construction is mapped through various stages of human history. One of the early mentions come from era before Christ. Colin Stief writes in his article "The History and Evolution of Suburbs" the following: "Suburbs are not a modern concept, as this 539 BCE clay tablet letter from an early suburbanite to the king of Persia makes clear: Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to Babylon that we enjoy all the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home we stay away from all the noise and dust."¹ This old tablet already provides us with a certain link to more recent events.

At the very beginning American Suburbia began as a relief solution for overcrowded cities. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century the number of immigrants from Europe and other continents were gradually increasing through time and the cities had only limited capacity. This massive Immigration resulted in creation of slums and poor housing conditions. This particular trend eventually ended, however it was replaced with equally regrettable trend which shaped the American society for years to come. Suburbs turned into controlled symmetric environment that is blamed for influencing the human mind in a negative way resulting in either glorification of conformity and mandatory obedience of artificially imposed behavioral restrictions as could be observed in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* where the protagonist is oppressed into submission by "good citizens league" a truly ironic name given the approach this league chooses to those they deem worthy of joining. Such hypocrisy is common occurrence in suburban novels. It is a bold statement but it would not be wrong to claim hypocrisy is one of the main topics and themes of Suburban Literature as a whole. The symmetricity and uniformity of the suburban environment is typically blamed for the negative influence on the human minds. This is one of the topics of Beuka's *Subrubianation* and will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

¹ Colin Stief, "The History and Evolution of Suburbs," Thoughtco., August 15, 2018, accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/overview-of-suburbs-1435799>

2.1 Development of American suburbia

Development of Suburbia can be separated in two fundamental periods. Those would be Suburbs before World War Two and Suburbs after World war two. Each of these periods have distinct socio-economic backgrounds yet there are some surviving links which can be found. The initial period which was briefly discussed in previous chapter where the American population tried to flee the dirt of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century cities. The increasing influx of immigrants from various parts of the globe caused cities to experience difficulties with housing management which resulted in manifestation of poverty, unemployment. The Federal government later issued laws that regulated the prices of housing. Building the House on the outskirts of the city was in that moment cheaper solution, than building the house near the city center. The daily commute was easier with each upcoming year and inventions it brought to common people such as streetcars, busses and many more.

The Second Period begins at the end of world war two, when thousands of American servicemen returned from their combat duties in various theatres of war. Each American soldier was being paid during his deployment which accumulated into considerable sum over the unspecified period of time. This is the crucial turning point in American history when William Levitt and his company the Levitt & Sons began to rapidly produce housing on massive scale. "The architectural firm of Levitt and Sons, in creating this first embodiment of American "suburbia," exercised nearly complete control over the landscape; beyond their revolutionary decision to use assembly-line techniques to produce quickly some 17,000 essentially identical houses on identical plots of land."² Usage of this technique was what allowed the Levitt & Sons to forever reshape the visage of American cities as well the American landscape since the satellites were continuously growing in every larger city. Levitt & Sons continued to further enhance the homogeneity of the Levittown suburb by monitoring the state of the greenery. Beuka argues this trend of uniformity was the source of mental issues that appear throughout novels with suburban topics. "But the postwar expansion of the terrain that has come to be known as suburbia has marked more than a mere revolution in demographics. With its instantly identifiable, uniform architectural styles and

² Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004)., 8

landscape designs, the American suburb has contributed toward a proliferating sense of placelessness and in turn the perceived homogenization of American life. In this manner, the explosion of suburbia over the past half century has immeasurably altered the ways Americans think about place and their individual and collective relationships to it.³

3 Babbitt and the early Suburbs

Babbitt (1922) is among the first pieces of any literature that as a matter of fact challenged the course the American suburban culture is headed to. The novel was one of many Lewis's works connected to the routine life of American citizens. Lewis was able to identify the birth of consumeristic society more than twenty years before it reached the peak in its respective time period. The novel examines the life of George F. Babbitt. A successful middle-aged real estate broker from fictional Suburb Floral Heights of fictional Mid-western city of Zenith that enjoys his everyday life of being an ignorant, yet not malicious conformist. He is forty six years old, well-nourished man with pink colored baby face covered in wrinkles, thin brown receding hair. The only unusual aspect of his visage would be the dents his eyeglasses dug into the base of his nose. Babbitt is dissatisfied with the way he lives his life. Babbitt resents his life, his success, his children, his wife, their unromantic marriage and moreover he harbors animosity towards himself for loathing the closest and most devoted people to him. It is the success and complacency of the suburban middle class that causes the feelings of boredom and unfulfilled lives to manifest. In the opening scene we note that the narrator describes the city of Zenith as a beautiful, with modern visage, shining new skyscrapers dominating the landscape along with factories with dull wooden windows.

A prosperous city full of wonders. In a contrast of Zenith's pristine superficial presentation we are later welcomed with George Babbitt deeply sleeping on the porch of his Dutch Colonial house. Babbitt's slumber was induced by reveling in the secret, immoral festivities. "It may have been the tremendous home-brewed beer of the prohibition-era* and the cigars to which that beer enticed him; it may have been resentment of return from this fine, bold man-world to a restricted region of wives and stenographers, and of suggestions not to smoke so much."⁴ This particular scene helps

³ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 2

⁴ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

to invoke the image of the corrupt part of the “roaring twenties” in the reader. While Babbitt is at the beginning of the novel ignorant of everything wrong with Floral Heights and its effect on its inhabitants he is not a bad person. Babbitt is religious, punctual, and diligent in his duties whether in regard of his job as a real-estate broker or anything in his private life. More importantly he feels as a member of the society and is not afraid to commit a good deed. Fine example of his generosity would be the moment Babbitt offered a gentleman who was waiting for a trolley car to drive him downtown. After receiving a thank you he simply stated: “Oh, no, ’tain’t a question of generosity, hardly. Fact I always feel — I was saying to my son just the other night — it’s a fellow’s duty to share the good things of this world with his neighbors, and it gets my goat when a fellow gets stuck on himself and goes around tooting his horn merely because he’s charitable.”⁵

Aside from being a generous person there is not much a reader can expect from the stereotyped protagonist. Babbitt as a suburbanite from a small city truly does not excel in anything except his aptitude for acquiring deals in real estate. Although he is described as nimble in his job he is still prototypical bored middle class white man. Babbitt firstly realizes the oppressive reality of suburbs after his best friend shoots his wife. There is a certain claustrophobic effect of suburbia possibly connected to the homogeneity and closeness among its people that causes one of two possible responses from affected humans, either retreat or breakdown. Both responses will be observable in the upcoming parts of the novel since Babbitt as one of the few will have to endure both reactions to oppressive reality of Floral Heights Suburb.

Gordon Hutner notes in his introduction to the novel: “The novel follows this businessman’s career through what we now would call a midlife crisis.”⁶ This state of emotional and psychological burnout displays in several ways throughout the narration of the novel. First of many ways the crisis manifests is his emotional alienation from his own family. The dominant symptom of his emotional alienation is his annoyance with his own family members. Babbitt is unable to spend much time with his closest before he gets irritated by their presence. This psychological phenomenon has multiple causations or more specifically each family member is a separate cause, with the exception of Tinka, Babbitt’s youngest daughter who as the only family member seems

⁵ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25.

⁶ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), x.

to be successfully avoiding his misdirected wrath. What more, along with Myra Babbitt his wife, little Tinka is the fortunate relative that George F. Babbitt thinks of when he is traveling or plainly contemplating the life. Good example of this would be sending Tinka a Postcard from his business trip to Chicago, while the remaining family did not receive any sort of memorabilia.

The predominant disruptive element in George's life is from his point of view Matilda Babbitt, his wife, which he refers to most frequently as "Myra." Myra stand for the generation of the older women and it appears that her role throughout the story is to mostly remind various characters what is decent behavior and what is not. She is truly dedicated to her family and with a modest help of the maid she provides the household with sustenance and affection. Her knowledge and reminding of social etiquette is important, yet undesirable feature which complicates life of the protagonist. George thinks of Myra frequently when they are separated by distance, however that is usually when his conscience is not perfectly clear or when he at long last finds a retreat in the nature without having to worry about his social position, work. This triggers inside monologues such are apparent on one of his "wifeless" nights: "If she were here Myra would be hinting, "Isn't it late, Georgie?"⁷ In addition to Myra's bothering of George there is important fact about the state of their marriage. Miss Babbitt and George are bound by marriage for already twenty three years, however there seem to be certain pathological processes manifesting. Their marriage is not romantic which was already confirmed by Lewis himself in the opening sequence of the novel. "He seemed prosperous, extremely married and unromantic; and altogether unromantic." Babbitt's marriage appears to completely lack any sort of romance, empathy, love and most importantly they share no intimacy. During their time together they do not profess their love for one another or show any visible physical sign of affection. There are of course some exceptions as: "He kissed her — he didn't quite kiss her — he laid unmoving lips against her unflushing cheek."⁸ This wasn't always the case since in the later section of the book the Author describes their relationship during the early years: One evening when he was weary and soft-minded, he saw that she had been weeping. She had been left out of a party given by Zilla. Somehow her head was on his shoulder and he was kissing away the tears — and she raised her head to say trustingly, "Now that we're

⁷ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 226.

⁸ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20.

engaged, shall we be married soon or shall we wait?”⁹ It is safe to assume that during their marriage they lost interest in one another, since there is lack of any erotic or other suggestive material throughout the novel. George and Myra do not try to provoke each other into erotic actions, therefore it can be deduced that their marriage is asexual. The lack of the erotic element would explain several aspects of George Babbitt’s behavior in the upcoming parts of the novel, where he initiates a Rebellion towards the Suburb.

Another disruptive element in Babbitt’s family life is Theodor Roosevelt Babbitt. Ted is a seventeen years old boy when the book opens and George F. Babbitt’s only son who similarly as his father in near future does not succumb to social conventions of the early twentieth century. However in his particular case it is occasionally difficult to determine, whether it is active fight against conformity, a simple rebellious phase or something altogether different. Ted is high school student with aspirations to study mechanics unfortunately for him that is deemed inappropriate by his parents since the diploma from the school of mechanics does not have the same status as a college diploma. Ted is a lively young gentleman that enjoys driving his father’s car around the city in order to charm young ladies in company of his friends. His uprising and argumentativeness during the family meals and other family times ensures George’s miserable mood for the rest of the day.

Another sinner that encourages George’s emotional alienation from his closest is his older daughter Verona. She, unlike women of the older generation does not adhere to nor obeys every social norm and requirements for the young lady in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Verona has been working as a filling clerk at the office in hope to receive “suppressing” yet prestigious place of the Manager’s secretary, however she would rather obey her instinct to do what is right and would prefer to be more helpful to the society as she mentioned during one of the family breakfasts. “But now said Verona: “Father! I was talking to a classmate of mine that’s working for the Associated Charities — oh, Dad, there’s the sweetest little babies that come to the milk-station there! — and I feel as though I ought to be doing something worth while like that.”¹⁰ Verona as well as Ted frequently disturb George’s peace during his stay in the household when he wishes to relax or at least eat without any sort of confrontation at the family table. Their constant bickering without any significance reinforces Babbitt’s

⁹ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75.

¹⁰ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

Cabin fever which limits his tolerance towards his own kin and society alike. “Nice family, I must say! I don’t pretend to be any baa-lamb, and maybe I’m a little cross-grained at breakfast sometimes, but the way they go on jab-jab-jabbering, I simply can’t stand it. I swear, I feel like going off some place where I can get a little peace.”¹¹

One more symptom of Babbitt’s rebellion and dissatisfaction with his comfortable way of life are his extramarital affairs. Throughout the novel George becomes increasingly more daring when it comes to flirting and tempting other women, although as it was presented “Flirtation was an art unknown on Floral Heights.”¹² In the opening scene of the novel Babbitt may be observed waking up from recurring dream of his young fictional lover: “Yet Babbitt was again dreaming of the fairy child, a dream more romantic than scarlet pagodas by a silver sea.”¹³ This affirms the fact that Babbitt yearns for romance he is unable to extract from his marriage. During one of his contemplations he decided to continue in this form of Rebellion before he will become too old and the only option he will have is to settle down similar to his wife as illustrated in: “I’m going to have some fun before it’s too late. I don’t care! I will!” He thought of Ida Putiak, of Louetta Swanson, of that nice widow — what was her name? — Tanis Judique? — the one for whom he’d found the flat. He was enmeshed in imaginary conversations.”¹⁴ This resolve develops in attempts to seduce at least three different women, of various social statuses. Fortunately for George most of his romantic adventures remained hidden from the gaze of the Floral Heights. The first victim of Babbitt’s romantic insurgence is Louetta Swanson, a young beautiful wife of his neighbor Eddie Swanson. Babbitt was making his advances towards Swanson’s wife Louetta during the party he was invited to breaking several conventions and social norms with his actions. The next person gifted with Babbitt’s attention was Ida Putiak a young immigrant manicurist, which unlike Louetta was much less submissive towards George’s advances and ironically managed to manipulate him into providing entertainment and cigarettes for the evening they were on a dinner together. She was the one who emerged triumphant the evening. The last character to experience Babbitt’s advances was Tanis Judique. Tanis is a widow, slightly younger than George, which almost immediately gains his affection, which unlike in previous discussed cases is

¹¹ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

¹² Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96.

¹³ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

¹⁴ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 249.

returned. Their entire relationship was quite innocent at the early beginning since Tanis initially appeared only as a client of Babbitt's real estate company as she was searching for a new place to stay. This purely professional relationship deteriorated into casual friendship as the two characters started spending increasing amount of time together without any official business to discuss. Tanis becomes a character that influences George's life and his rebellion in two distinct ways. The first wave of influence is the romantic kind, where they start seemingly innocent, sexless affair and the second one is introducing George to her group of friends nicknamed "The Bunch." This group of people initially repulse Babbitt, however he quickly becomes a notable member in this social group despite their bohemian way of life similar to the lifestyle of his neighbors that organized late parties and disrupted Babbitt's conformist sleep schedule as described in: "Babbitt disapproved of Mr. and Mrs. Doppelbrau as "Bohemian."* From their house came midnight music and obscene laughter; there were neighborhood rumors of bootlegged whisky and fast motor rides." ¹⁵ He embraces their free spirited thinking and behavior of "the Bunch" that is in contrast with the rigid point of view of the Floral Heights inhabitants. This bohemian approach towards life leaves George fulfilled, however he is also very much afraid that some of the decent fellows from boosters or athletic club discover his exploits which would result in loss of his social position in Floral Heights.

The last phase of Babbitt's Rebellion against the Floral Heights was initiated just after Paul Riesling is arrested for attempting to murder his wife Zilla. Separation from someone he thinks of as a brother leaves Babbitt lost. It was one fateful train drive where he meets Seneca Doane the Lawyer who is described as radical by the decent fellows of the Suburb. Doane reminds Babbitt of his youthful aspirations: "I remember — in college you were an unusually liberal, sensitive chap. I can still recall your saying to me that you were going to be a lawyer, and take the cases of the poor for nothing, and fight the rich."¹⁶ Suddenly Babbitt was confronted with the image of what he could have become. This reminder by Doane changed Babbitt's perception of him and the entire labor movement which he ended up defending along with Immigrants in front of his peers as Lewis described in: "when Vergil Gunch observed that Seneca Doane ought to be hanged, Babbitt snorted, "Oh, rats, he's not so bad."¹⁷ This defense of the convicted

¹⁵ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

¹⁶ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 251.

¹⁷ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 255.

socialist was the last drop for Babbitt's acquaintances who intended to silence him by inviting him into the Good Citizen's League, however Babbitt initially declined, which resulted in him losing commissions and being frowned upon by the community. What Babbitt failed to realize is the fact that by fraternizing with the enemy of the American middle class he already rebelled against two foundations of American society which are God, Country and Family.

3.1. Roles and influence of men in Babbitt

Focus of this chapter will be the men in *Babbitt* as well as their power and position in the novel. Lewis presented every character in the novel with just sufficient amount of background information for a reader to create a personal opinion. Not necessarily too much information that would distract the reader from the core message of the novel, yet not too little to be overlooked. The setting of the novel is a restrictive element in this particular case therefore the prevailing adult male characters are Conformist white middle and upper class men some of which are esteemed businessmen and some of them are white collar workers. There are of course exceptions which would be their younger generations as well as some disruptive elements such Seneca Doane, Babbitt's college classmate, lawyer with unusual political orientation as well as one of the candidates in mayoral election of Floral Heights. Doane is a socialist and is very open about it, which causes him to be avoided by nearly every single inhabitant of the suburb that does not wish to fall on the social ladder or be under suspicion by a Good citizen's League which would mean certain involuntary isolation from the social life.

There is a specific group of men that frequently dines in Zenith's Athletic club and they would be named "Roughnecks" The roughnecks consist of Vergil Gunch, Professor Pumphrey, Sidney Finkelstein, Howard Littlefield, Chum Frink and Lastly George Follansbee Babbitt. Each of this males is influential in their own area of expertise. The most influential of the group was however Vergil Gunch. "Mr. Gunch was president of the Boosters' Club, a weekly lunch-club, local chapter of a national organization which promoted sound business and friendliness among Regular Fellows. He was also no less an official than Esteemed Leading Knight in the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and it was rumored that at the next election he would be a candidate for Exalted Ruler"¹⁸ Along with membership in several clubs Gunch was a

¹⁸ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47.

coal baron in zenith and one of the members of Good Citizen's league, which coincidentally pressured Babbitt into joining. Another Member of the Roughnecks would be Chum Frink. "Frink and his poetry parody various popular sentimental poets, whose works were often published in newspapers"¹⁹ Next member of the Roughnecks is Professor Pumphrey "Owner of the Riteway Business College and instructor in Public Speaking, Business English, Scenario Writing, and Commercial Law."²⁰ Another member of the Athletic club's table is "Sidney Finkelstein, the ladies'-ready-to-wear buyer for Parcher & Stein's department-store"²¹ A store owner another member of the American suburban middle class. The last frequent participant of the Roughneck was Howard Littlefield "Littlefield was the Great Scholar of the neighborhood; the authority on everything in the world except babies, cooking, and motors. He was a Bachelor of Arts of Blodgett College, and a Doctor of Philosophy in economics of Yale. He was the employment-manager and publicity-counsel of the Zenith Street Traction Company."²² Littlefield was highly esteemed member of the Floral Heights and Babbitt's neighbor. Occasionally he would provide Babbitt with confidential information that would provide him significant advantage acquiring good real estate deals.

Along with the Roughnecks there are two more people of interest, mainly Dr. Dilling who "was one of the most important men in the Boosters'. He was not a physician but a surgeon, a more romantic and sounding occupation."²³ The second person would be Colonel Rutherford Snow owner of the Zenith Local newspaper. All the mentioned gentlemen, whether the group of roughnecks or the Colonel and Surgeon have a common feature with Babbitt and that is a higher social position, according to which they ought to behave. For sake of peace and security of the community and the Zenith some of the men came together and formed what is known as "Good citizens' League and anti-communist, socialist and labor movement group intended to keep only the chosen in positions of power. The problem is that you have to be absolutely obedient conformist and must not deviate from social norms and requirements of the community. The people of Good Citizens' League achieved to acquire political power through lobbying and boosting that allows them to blackmail the non-conforming individuals. This may be observed on page 309 where Babbitt was a victim of this

¹⁹ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 331.

²⁰ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46.

²¹ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46.

²² Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.

²³ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 305.

unfortunate power play which resulted in losing real estate deals from Zenith Street Traction Company. The fact that Good Citizens' League was able to achieve the control over the city of Zenith without being a branch of state or Federal agency is quite alarming. This absolute control of the societal norms and expectations of the Floral Heights Suburb resulted in class as well as racial homogeneity, which according to Jurca was the condition which "affords Babbitt the luxury of experimenting with resistance to his privileges."²⁴

While there is a great amount of the old stereotypical characters in the novel there are observable exceptions. Characters worth of mentioning in this category would be Theodor Babbitt, George Babbitt, Paul Riesling and lastly Seneca Doane. Theodor Roosevelt Babbitt the son of George Babbitt presumably inspired by his father's insurgency against Floral Heights decided to terminate his college studies, which were requested and expected by the parents as Babbitt mentioned: "I've always wanted you to have a college degree"²⁵ This decision was discussed previously by the two Babbitts but it was strictly denied at first since George considered people without college education to be of lesser importance as compared to those fortunate with the college degree. Ted sacrificed the chance for degree in order to pursue his interest in mechanics and join one of the local factories, however those would only pay approximately one third of the average salary in the year 1920. Another aspect of his non-conformist approach is his sudden marriage with Eunice Littlefield with whom he already had a relationship. What more, this marriage was a secret and neither of the married couple have asked parents for permission which was strictly against ethics and social standards of the early twentieth century. The situation over the indignation of the families towards the marriage was fortunately resolved, when George encouraged Ted to pursue his non-conformist ways and personal ambitions with lamentable story of his own: "I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life!"²⁶ George Babbitt has already been discussed, however it is still worth mentioning the fact that his own social position in the Floral Heights has changed multiple times during the novel. It was established that during the opening scenes he was self-satisfied, well respected conformist that rebelled against Floral Heights which resulted in him losing his social position and real

²⁴ Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-century American Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2001). 75.

²⁵ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 329.

²⁶ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 329.

estate deals. At the end he was yet again abiding, yet suspected member of the Good Citizens' League.

The next character on the deviant list would be Paul Riesling George Babbitt's closest friend whom he had considered his little brother. Similarly to Babbitt, Paul is dissatisfied with the way his life unraveled, his employment. After the College Paul chose to build a decent career instead of pursuing his artistic passion. Another similarity to George Babbitt would be Paul's marriage. His wife Zilla Riesling decided to channel her ire's through Paul, which results in his desire to retreat to Maine, with George and be free of her anger. "Why couldn't you and I make some excuse — say business in New York — and get up to Maine four or five days before they do, and just loaf by ourselves and smoke and cuss and be natural?"²⁷ Eventually similar to George Babbitt he started an affair in a different city as way of coping with his dissatisfaction. Unfortunately during one argument he shot his wife Zilla. Paul was arrested and sent to jail. He was branded a criminal, lost his social position and recognition in Floral Heights in an instant and was not seen in the novel since.

The last exception from the suburban upper or middle class conformists is aforementioned Seneca Doane, the resented lawyer who although has a well-paying and respect worthy occupation is shunned upon as a socialist, "undesirable element" and a Labor agitator. Although this character is not radical by any means, the Floral Heights inhabitants demonize his very existence.

3.2. Roles and Influence of Women in Babbitt

In this chapter the focus will shift from the Men of Floral Heights to the Women of the Novel, their attitudes as well as social standing. The social roles and standing of the women in the novel are similar in specific detail to those of the Men. That detail being the duality which may be found between generations or more specifically between the parents and their children. This chapter will examine Myra Babbitt, Zilla Riesling, Tanis Judique, who will be compared to their younger contemporaries such as Verona Babbitt and Eunice Littlefield. As it was previously mentioned Myra, Zilla and Tanis represent the older generation of women which can be designated as the "Keepers" or "Guardians" of the social norms, conventions as well as Etiquette. This may be observed especially in Myra's behavior when she urges George to dress in dinner-jacket

²⁷ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 55.

instead of a regular suit for the occasion of evening dinner with distinguished guests. It would be possible to argue or hypothesize that through this control over the Etiquette is somewhat similar to tyranny and that women have actually much more social power than it would initially seem. This claim may be quite easily refuted. If the focus is shifted towards Myra Babbitt a woman that was already mentioned in relation to her and George's marriage but Myra herself wasn't discussed yet. Myra as woman also belongs to the American middle class and is also fatigued by her role of a Housewife in the controlled environment of the Floral Heights suburb as she confessed to Babbitt: "I get so bored with ordering three meals a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and ruining my eyes over that horrid sewing-machine, and looking after your clothes and Rone's and Ted's and Tinka's and everybody's, and the laundry, and darning socks, and going down to the Piggly Wiggly* to market, and bringing my basket home to save money on the cash-and-carry and —*everything*." ²⁸ Not only is Myra bored of her role but she is also dissatisfied with her life similarly to Babbitt and decides to start her own rebellion in search of empowerment as was noted by Jurca: "Although Myra has the chance to articulate her discontent with a busy and boring routine, her "small" protest isn't taken seriously." ²⁹ Her protest wasn't unfortunately as impactful as George's. Another way Myra has protested against the social expectations is telling her husband she is not content with the way George is free to roam around contrary to her. "That's exactly what I was saying! You can run around with anybody you please, but I'm supposed to sit here and wait for you. You have the chance to get all sorts of culture and everything, and I just stay home." ³⁰ From this it may be deduced that Myra although she is dissatisfied and tries to empower herself through various seminars she still is submissive to George.

Another character on the female list is Zilla Riesling a wife to Paul Riesling. Zilla, similarly to many character of the novel is likewise dissatisfied as well as fatigued by her lifestyle. This was observed by George Babbitt: "Poor Zilla, she's so unhappy. She takes it out on Paul. She hasn't a single thing to do, in that little flat. And she broods too much. And she used to be so pretty and gay, and she resents losing it." ³¹ He also noticed that the system of her own coping with the boredom is spoiling the life of

²⁸ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 291.

²⁹ Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-century American Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2001). 59.

³⁰ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 292.

³¹ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 114.

her husband Paul Riesling. From the information presented to us by the writer it seems apparent that Zilla is a middle class housewife, that however as a possible form of a protest decides to not to partake in certain housekeeping activities especially cooking: “I don’t mind sitting down to burnt steak, with canned peaches and store cake for a thrilling little dessert afterwards, but I do draw the line at having to sympathize with Zilla because she’s so rotten bad-tempered that the cook has quit, and she’s been so busy sitting in a dirty lace negligée all afternoon, reading about some brave manly Western hero, that she hasn’t had time to do any cooking.”³² Zilla appears to be enjoying and arguably exploiting her good social position. This luxury life ended for Zilla the moment Paul tried to take her life during one of their fights. The incident has taken a great toll on her both physical and mental as was described by Lewis in: “One shoulder was lower than the other; one arm she carried in contorted fashion, as though it were paralyzed; and behind a high collar of cheap lace there was a gouge in the anemic neck which had once been shining and softly plump.”³³ Those cheap laces were contrastive with her previous lifestyle, therefore it may be assumed that she fell on the social ladder after Paul was sent to prison or it may be one of the effects of the new found religious lifestyle.

Last female of the older generation that will be discussed will be Tanis Judique. Tanis is a widow that Babbitt initial helped to find a new place to stay after her husband passed. She appears to be a support character for George Babbitt, who uses her to get validation, praise, confirmation as well as some comfort. George saw her has the Dream lover which appears in his recurring dreams fueling his desire for the rebellion. On the other hand Tanis was using Babbitt as well since she required some sort of male company at the start although her requests started eventually increasing in numbers. As to her social standing and position, it was established that she is a rich widow however she has very submissive opinions about her own sex as she described in her dialogue with George during their car ride: “I don’t think any woman ever learns to drive like a man.”³⁴ Later she acknowledges the fact, that she is supportive of women who try to compete with men, although she is for unspecified reason intimidated by them instead of empowered. “Oh, of course, these women that try to imitate men, and play golf and everything, and ruin their complexions and spoil their hands!” “That’s so. I never did

³² Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53.

³³ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 253.

³⁴ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 234.

like these mannish females.” “I mean — of course, I admire them, dreadfully, and I feel so weak and useless beside them.”³⁵ From her statements in the novel it may be observed that she does not suffer from boredom unlike other female characters in the novel, does not have any feministic or empowering opinions and she accepted her place at the late husband’s side as any woman was supposed to according to social expectations of the early twentieth century.

The quasi-final character in question is Verona Babbitt, the Daughter of George Babbitt. She was previously mentioned as one of the possible reasons why George was growing emotionally distant from his family. At the beginning of the Novel she is twenty-two years old girl with college education that wishes to pursue an equitable employment rather than being a secretary. Since she received college education and is legally an adult it is safe to assume she can make her own decisions, however all the manifestations of her individuality are constrained by her parents who press her into submission to society and males just as described in: “Verona had for six months been fi ling-clerk at the Gruensberg Leather Company offices, with a prospect of becoming secretary to Mr. Gruensberg and thus, as Babbitt defined it, “getting some good out of your expensive college education till you’re ready to marry and settle down.”³⁶ Verona’s parents expect her to become fully diligent housewife once she finds a suitable man, instead of supporting her aspirations.

Lastly there is Eunice Littlefield a young, film crazed girl with aspirations to become a movie star herself. “Her ambition was to be a cinema actress. She did not merely attend the showing of every “feature film;” she also read the motion-picture magazines, those extraordinary symptoms of the Age of Pep.”³⁷ Since she is merely sixteen years old in the opening sequence and her social roles are not mentioned, therefore it may be only assumed that she is high school student preparing for future employment. When it comes to her social attitudes she describes herself as a feminist in the late chapters of the book, although her actions do not support this rather bold statement. Eventually she Marries Theodor Roosevelt without consent of either parents, which could indicate both Eunice and Ted can make their own decisions and are aware of the consequences

³⁵ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 234.

³⁶ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

³⁷ Sinclair Lewis and Gordon Hutner, *Babbitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 188.

4. World War Two effect on social norms in American Society

The Second World War was a traumatizing experience for humanity in ways the people could not even fathom before. The conflict was global in scale and it influenced every aspect of each and every country involved, no matter what is taken into consideration, whether it was art, social structures, industry or simple family bonds. United States of America directly entered the World War two on the eighth of December Nineteen forty one after the combined Attack of Japanese imperial Navy and Airforce on Pearl Harbor. This very act of aggression started massive industrial growth since United States Navy suffered most of the losses and the pacific war effort absolutely depended on construction of new ships. The fact that United States were now directly part of the war as opposed to being neutral and supporting wakened European nations with supplies via the Atlantic Ocean called for massive draft of men into the armed forces. “The World War II army was made up almost entirely of men who grew up during the years of the Great Depression of the 1930s and then were drafted into service after the fall of France in June 1940.”³⁸ What more after the attacks the draft numbers were exponential increased: “On June 28, 1941, the President ordered that, during FY 1942, an additional 900,000 men would be “selected and inducted”³⁹

This massive draft emptied the assembly halls and other industrial plants in America which Resulted in alarming lack of the work force to feed the ever-hungry war machine. This is where the American women join the course of the war. There were many way women were allowed to join the war effort. At the time of war, women would collect scrap metal that would be used in various industries, they would be employed in the positions of the missing males for the time being or they would simply be recruited by the various branches of the armed forces. Every single way that was just mentioned offered the women of United States various benefits. The First benefit was a stable employment for the entire duration of the war and perhaps even after the war has ended. The second benefit women would enjoy is the empowerment of their own sex as well as the assumption of the dominant social role in the war period since many of the women not only earned substantial amount of money as noted by McEuen: “Wage work in war industries offered hourly pay rates much higher than those to which most women

³⁸ Bernard Rostker, *Providing for the Casualties of War* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 176, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt2tt90p.17>.

³⁹ Bernard Rostker, *Providing for the Casualties of War* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 177, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt2tt90p.17>.

had been accustomed⁴⁰ but without excessive amount of males in the immediate vicinity they would lack competitors and keep their superiority, however there were certain complications. “Working women, especially mothers, faced great challenges during World War II. To try to address the dual role of women as workers and mothers, Eleanor Roosevelt urged her husband Franklin Delano Roosevelt to approve the first US government childcare facilities under the Community Facilities Act of 1942. ⁴¹Except for the dual nature of being a woman there were other adversities women had to face such as regular stigma: “There was also some cultural resistance to women going to work in such male-dominated environments”⁴² Fortunately, there was a little people could do to dissuade women from helping the War effort. While American women worked diligently, hard and with great passion, many of them retreated from their newly achieved top social position. This unfortunate turn of events was discussed by Kossoudji and Dresser:” Women were heavily recruited into industry during war conversion (after Pearl Harbor) and returned to more traditional jobs or to homemaker status during and after reconversion (late 1944 and 1945). Forty-five years later we still do not understand why and how women gave up these lucrative industrial jobs.”⁴³

In conclusion of this paragraph it is important to note that Social roles and standing of men and women drastically changed during the world war two for several reasons. First the men were drafted in massive numbers which had severe impact on the heavy industries such as construction of aircraft or ships that were essential for the United States armed forces. This resulted in shortage of workforce and increasing number of employed women. Women were on top of the social ladder for the duration of the war but at the end many women were made redundant and males simply returned to their original positions.

⁴⁰ Melissa A. McEuen, "Women, Gender, and World War II," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History, June 08, 2017, accessed April 24, 2019, <http://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-55>.

⁴¹ American Women and World War II," Khan Academy, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/us-wwii/a/american-women-and-world-war-ii>.

⁴² American Women and World War II," Khan Academy, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/us-wwii/a/american-women-and-world-war-ii>.

⁴³ Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Laura J. Dresser, "Working Class Rosies: Women Industrial Workers during World War II," *The Journal of Economic History* 52, no. 2 (June 1992): 431, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2123119>.

5. Roles of Men and Women in post war Suburbia

Literature, similarly to any other form of art gains inspiration from geopolitical situation in its respective time period. This phenomenon naturally occurred in case of post war American Literature. United States ended the World war in August 1945 and except some reconstruction and occupation units in Japan most of American servicemen including those in European theatre of war returned home. It is imperative to mention that every Soldier fighting for the United States had a salary, which allowed them to receive a mortgage and own a land or a house. With the ownership of houses the service men and their spouses could start a families, which lead to formulation of the “Baby Boom.” This massive increase in population toppled the balance of power between men in women. Beuka Noted, that “As numerous social critics have argued, the suburban migration in the years following the end of World War II, along with the postwar baby boom, effected a profound shift in social and economic gender roles. These concurrent phenomena contributed to a totalizing celebration of domesticity and family life at the expense of the social freedoms and economic responsibilities women possessed during the war years.”⁴⁴ Women who were previously in socio-economic spotlight were ushered into the suburbs and accepted the life of House-wives. This started a new era which Beuka described as: “This period is often considered significant for marking the return of "traditional" family structure and gender identities”⁴⁵ It is also worth noting that “The suburbs isolated them from political, social, and financial power and segregated them from opportunities for employment, education, and cooperative parenting.”⁴⁶ The new suburban house-wives became an Icon of American society, which many people hold dear even up to this day. In order to maintain this phenomenon of imbalance “the married woman of suburbia was at once a highly visible, even "targeted" social phenomenon, while at the same time being conditioned to accept a role characterized by confinement and estrangement from the world outside the home.”⁴⁷ Beuka also made certain remarks about usage of various media and other new

⁴⁴ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 151.

⁴⁵ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 151.

⁴⁶ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 151.

⁴⁷ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 153.

technologies: “As much as television helped to facilitate America's psychic migration to suburbia, shaping gendered identities for decades to come, worth considering is the fact that the socialization of American women in the direction of this "new traditionalism" occurred in other discourses as well, in a process that had been ongoing since the war years.”⁴⁸ After the women were welcomed in their new containment it was possible for the males to return to their working stations and post which they had occupied before the Second World War. The male paranoia concluded with the “Baby boom,” women were trapped in newly built Suburbs and their social roles vastly changed from factory workers that fueled the American war machine to house-wives with little agenda or aspirations.

5.1 The Swimmer

This chapter will deal with portrayals of social standing of Men and Women in John Cheever’s short story *The Swimmer* that was originally published in *The New Yorker* in the year of 1964. The short story follows Neddy Merrill an older, yet not too old gentleman who is introduced in the opening scene as a member of White middle or quite possibly upper class suburban citizen. He is described as: “a slender man—he seemed to have the especial slenderness of youth—and while he was far from young.”⁴⁹ Neddy wakes up during one particularly beautiful Sunday morning after night of heavy drinking. This debauchery is very similar to the opening scene of *Babbitt*, where George F. Babbitt wakes up hungover on his porch. The scene may be observed during the opening, where every character complains “I *drank* too much last night.”⁵⁰ It is the fantastic weather that possibly beckons Neddy to swim through every neighbor’s pool all the eight miles towards his own household. He decides to undergo this perilous journey alone, seeing himself as an Explorer, Pilgrim. This particular terminology is why other sources decided to point out certain mythological relations between this short story and ancient Epics. “In “The Swimmer,” Cheever invites us to keep in mind Homer’s ancient hero (and the model of humanity he represents) as we follow his modern American counterpart, and compare them in their Journeys.”⁵¹ Just like in

⁴⁸ Robert Beuka, *Suburbanation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2004), 153.

⁴⁹ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 726.

⁵⁰ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 726

⁵¹ Bowers, Terence, "John Cheever's Mock-Epic: "The Swimmer," the "Odyssey", and America's Pursuit of Happiness," *CEA Critic* 70, no. 1 (2007): 18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44378348>.

Odyssey the protagonist is influenced by indescribable supernatural elements that influence his fate. It could be argued that Neddy himself upset a supernatural element after slapping the statue of Aphrodite. As Neddy's voyage through the pools of the Suburb progresses he encounters his old acquaintances and noticed various reactions towards his presence which never drags him unnecessarily down and he continues on his exploration of the "Lucinda River."

5.2 The roles and Influence of Men in The Swimmer

The only male exemplar that had his social standing or backstory developed was the protagonist Neddy Merrill. Neddy's physical appearance has been already discussed, however the reader is left with some hints of his character and background with the exception of his occupation which cannot be confirmed or denied.

Neddy is an avid swimmer and "He had an inexplicable contempt for men who did not hurl themselves into pools."⁵² This may possibly signify his contempt for people that lack the will to commit to a deed, however that is debatable. Neddy is very social person and at the beginning of his journey he is warmly welcomed at many parties, where "He stopped to kiss eight or ten other women and shake the hands of as many men."⁵³ This indicates that his neighbors and friends hold him in very high esteem and his position on the social ladder is well established and secured. Unfortunately as the suspected supernatural elements commence their torture and turn Neddy's life into theatre of Absurd his social standing begins to change or more specifically wither. The first sign of this social fall is notable on the scene, where Neddy is trying to cross the highway and is exposed to mockery of the drivers: "Standing barefoot in the deposits of the highway—beer cans, rags, and blowout patches— exposed to all kinds of ridicule, he seemed pitiful."⁵⁴ The next piece of evidence for the social fall as well as the supernatural phenomena is the scene at the Halloran estate: "We've been *terribly* sorry to hear about all your misfortunes, Neddy." "My misfortunes?" Ned asked."⁵⁵ There are multiple instances where Neddy observed unnatural manifestations. The best possible examples would be rapid change in temperature and trees losing leaves in the middle of the summer. The last notable pieces of evidence for his social fall is the party at the

⁵² John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 727.

⁵³ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 728.

⁵⁴ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 731.

⁵⁵ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 733.

Biswanger estate where the hostess talks behind the protagonist's back: "They went for broke overnight—nothing but income—and he showed up drunk one Sunday and asked us to loan him five thousand dollars."⁵⁶ This scene makes Neddy uncomfortable and he continues on his journey and eventually manages to return to his home, only to realize all the gossip and remarks of his friends were true: "He shouted, pounded on the door, tried to force it with his shoulder, and then, looking in at the windows, saw that the place was empty."⁵⁷ This was the last drop for the protagonist as he has realized that he has lost everything he cared for, his American dream, his family all the social recognition and status.

5.3 The roles and Influence of Women in *The Swimmer*

Shirley Adams, Grace Biswanger, Mrs Halloran

This paragraph will deal mainly with Female attitudes and social standing in *The Swimmer*. Since *The Swimmer* is a short story the reader is not presented with every detail of every character's life, yet Cheever managed to leave just enough background information to draw certain conclusions.

It is important to establish the notion that *The Swimmer* takes place in middle or upper class suburbs. The first person that will be examined will be Shirley Adams Neddy's former mistress that had difficult time dealing with the end of their affair. While Neddy expected a warm welcome she certainly did not give him any, instead he was promptly berated.

"What do you want?" she asked. "I'm swimming across the county." "Good Christ. Will you ever grow up?" "What's the matter?" "If you've come here for money," she said, "I won't give you another cent." "You could give me a drink." "I could but I won't. I'm not alone." "Well, I'm on my way."⁵⁸

Shirley Adams has most certainly grown since their last meeting. She, unbeknown to him has the social upper hand and is not afraid to display her strength.

Another person too consider is Grace Biswanger. Grace hosts a party and calls Neddy a party crasher, since he is oblivious to his financial troubles. Her foul attitude is intended to hurt Neddy. "Grace Biswanger was the kind of hostess who asked the optometrist, the veterinarian, the real-estate dealer, and the dentist." This highlights her

⁵⁶ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 735.

⁵⁷ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 737.

⁵⁸ John Cheever, *Collected Stories and Other Writings*, First Edition ed. (Library of America, 2009), 736.

as a person that surrounds herself only with the “selected few” who possess enough money and have a similar social status which Neddy no longer has. This woman is very certain in her position possibly by the fact that she surrounds herself with similar people.

Last person to examine would be Mistress Halloran. Mistress Halloran is an elderly, kind lady who along with her husband possess considerable riches. While reading the Times she expresses her sadness about Neddy’s misfortunes: “We’ve been *terribly* sorry to hear about all your misfortunes, Neddy.” She and her husband were not surprised nor angry about his appearance which indicates they are not bothered by any change in his social status and have more humanity than the remaining inhabitants of the Suburb.

5.4 The Stepford Wives

As opposed to other representations of suburban Literature *The Stepford Wives* (1972) differ in certain literary aspects. This short novel written by Ira Levin contains elements of satire as well as elements of terror which results in its designation as a “thriller.” This novel was published in the era of the second wave Feminism and certain aspects of this movement are very well visible in the story. As it was mentioned before, this novel is satirical and the satire is pointed towards the Suburbia after Second World War as well as the Men of the Suburbs and their desire to control containing women in their comfortable captivity. Next target of the Satire is the female paranoia which developed from the after-war baby boom.

The story of *The Stepford Wives* revolves around the picturesque city of Stepford and follows fairly young protagonist Joanna Eberhart. Joanna is a “semi-professional photographer”⁵⁹ and many of her photos were printed in notable press. In her spare time she likes to tend to her hobbies such as tennis or photography. Joanna is also avid supporter of the Women’s Liberation Movement. This may be apparent in the opening sequence of the novel, where the reader is presented with a small window to the division of the domestic duties between her and her husband: “It was Walter’s turn to do the dishes”⁶⁰ Joanna is confident, Independent woman and what more, she has her own dedicated room in their house, similarly to how Virginia Wolf encouraged women to acquire in her famous essay “*A room of One’s Own*” where she tend to develop photos.

⁵⁹ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 2.

⁶⁰ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 4.

Additionally Joanna is mother firmly devoted to her two children, Pete and Kim who she tries to justly raise into well-mannered adults. Joanna is a newcomer in Stepford, therefore she tries to get the environment and its cohabitants. She immediately recognizes that with certain exceptions there is a dominant archetype of a female personality, which raises her suspicion of something being awry. This dominant character type was similar to acting because according to Joanna: “That’s what they all were, all the Stepford wives: actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants.”⁶¹ Other women in the book predominantly displayed little interest with anything else but domestic chores. This fact develops strange, crippling paranoia in Joanna that gradually increases during the novel and culminates into distrust towards her own husband Walter, who secretly schemes with other members of the Stepford Men’s Association to turn her into another mindless housewife. While Joanna slowly but certainly uncovered the truth she eventually fell into Men’s trap after an attempted escape and was actually changed. The Stepford was victorious and the Men’s Association secured the dominance of the Males in the social status and position.

5.5 The roles and Influence of Men in The Stepford Wives

The portrayals of Men in *The Stepford Wives* are fairly limited. The novel deals with the topics of cooperation between the two sexes yet it may appear at times that its main focus are women due to limited description of men. This subchapter will deal with influence of male sex in the town of Stepford and analysis of few selected males, namely Walter Eberhart, Ike Mazzard, Dale Coba, Claude Axhelm, Herb Sundersen and Frank Roddenberry will be conducted. It is important to note that with a quick glance on the representations of the males in Stepford the general image of a controlling male can be observed as well as other unflattering features such as secrecy, isolation and possible superiority complex although they try to appear harmless and hide behind a façade of goodwill. This is supported by the fact, that while they appear to be discussing new conservation strategies and Ike Mazzard begins to sketch Joanne, he isn’t drawing her but most certainly is creating a blueprint for the feminine robot to replace the protagonist: “She saw, to her surprise and embarrassment, that Ike Mazzard was sketching her.”⁶² Levin decided to share very little details about the personal lives of the

⁶¹ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 42.

⁶² Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 28.

Stepford men possibly so the reader may understand Joanna's paranoid behavior towards the end of the novel. What is an important detail however is the fact that the male agenda and the aforementioned details of their lives are hidden behind the inaccessible veil of Men's Association, which would be considered an antagonist had it not been inanimate object. What more the Men of Stepford "spare themselves the bother of loving and engaging with women who have their own points of view."⁶³ This claim by Meyers may be supported by the fact that Dale Coba did not even bother looking at Joanna when she was making her contributions to the discussion in her and Walter's house. "she took part in the talk about them, and the men (except Coba, damn him) paid close attention to her"⁶⁴

Now the interest of the thesis will shift towards specific male characters as opposed to men as an organization. First character worth noting is Walter Eberhart. Walter is Joanna's husband, who's physical appearance is mostly unknown with the exception of his eye color which is blue. His and Joanna's marriage appears very idyllic from her description:

"How many times had she gone to bed alone since they were married? Not many: the nights he'd been out of town on Marburg-Donlevy business; the times she'd been in the hospital with Pete and Kim; the night of the power failure; when she'd gone home for Uncle Bert's funeral—maybe twenty or twenty-five times in all, in the ten years and a little more."⁶⁵

While their marriage is peaceful, it is arguable that the dark side of Stepford may be what has attracted Walter towards the New York suburb. His wife is not a housewife and divides housework between them which could be another impulse for Walter to betray his own wife and trade her for thoughtless domestic robot.

The next person for examination will be Ike Mazzard. Mazzard was described in the novel as: "a cheery little red-faced man of about sixty, with toothpick-ends of waxed mustache"⁶⁶ While he is portrayed as unthreatening and unlike other men listens to what Joanna has to say, he is arguably the creator of the blueprints according to which the other males construct the robots and is indeed a member of the secretive Men's Association with strict no women policy.

⁶³ Diana Tietjens Meyers, "Whos There? Selfhood, Self-Regard, and Social Relations," *Hypatia* 20, no. 4 (2005): 208, accessed April 24, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810896>.

⁶⁴ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 27.

⁶⁵ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 14.

⁶⁶ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 25.

Next character for discussion is Herbert Sundersen about who it is only known that “Mr. Sundersen designs optical sensors for Ulitz Optics, Inc.”⁶⁷ and has trouble maintaining eye contact when he speaks with Joana: “Herb, he said, looking elsewhere.”⁶⁸ Sundersen is one of the core members of the Stepford’s Men’s Association and is directly related to the process of Turning the women into robots as can be seen when he and other men search of escaping Joanne.

Another notable male character is Dale Coba, the president of the Stepford Men’s Association. Coba is one of the few characters in the novel that had their visage described: “The tall black-haired one, laxly arrogant, was Dale Coba, the president of the association. He smiled at her with green eyes that disparaged her.”⁶⁹ Except for his appearance his career is also discussed: “Mr. Coba did postgraduate work at the California Institute of Technology. For the past six years he worked in “audioanimatronics” at Disneyland, helping to create the moving and talking presidential figures featured in the August number of National Geographic.”⁷⁰ He is the most important figure in fulfilling the dream of male dominated Stepford.

The next person that will be discussed is Frank Roddenberry. Roddenberry “had a pleasant pug-nosed blue-chinned face and a slight stutter” as for his career, Roddenberry “is associate chief of the CompuTech Corporation’s systems development laboratory.” Frank is another crucial member of the Men’s Association and key element if their alteration program. Lastly there is Claud Axhelm who “was thin and blond; bright-eyed, restless. Possibly working with audiototechnology since he was recording speech among the people of Stepford.

What these men have all in common is the fact that they are the main source of income for their families, they replaced their wives with thoughtless robots that obey their every wish and have no need for self-fulfillment or individuality. Men of Stepford completely seized the control over the suburb with their alteration program and in no doubt occupy the number one social position in the novel as well as in the suburb and it will most likely not change for generations to come.

⁶⁷ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 98.

⁶⁸ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 25.

⁶⁹ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 26.

⁷⁰ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 26.

5.6 The roles and Influence of Women in *The Stepford Wives*

There is an alarming difference between the social standing of Men and Women in Stepford. From the point of view of the protagonist: “The women she had met in the past few days, the ones in the nearby houses, were pleasant and helpful enough, but they seemed completely absorbed in their household duties.”⁷¹ They will not bother joining Joanna for a coffee or any other activity, which does not involve housework. Stepford women can be divided into two groups. The first group are the women which were already turned by men’s Association and the second more fortunate group which have not been turned so far. The first group include every wife of each member of the Men’s Association. The second group contains: Joanna Eberhart, Bobbie Markowe and Charmaine Wimperis. Joanna has been discussed in the previous chapters, therefore there is not much additional information to discuss. Just to establish her character again Joanna is loving mother, with interest in photography which helps her with income since she has managed to sell some of her photos. She is independent without unhealthy interest in housework and has her own dark room in the house. She has her motivations, desires and dreams that define her as a woman and a supporter of Women’s Liberation Movement.

Next uncorrupted character in the novel is Bobbie Markowe. Bobbie was described as: “short and heavy-bottomed, in a blue Snoopy sweatshirt and jeans and sandals. Her mouth was big, with unusually white teeth, and she had blue take-in-everything eyes and short dark tufty hair. And small hands and dirty toes.”⁷² She along with Charmaine expresses her surprise to see another “unorthodox” female in the suburb and helps Joanne become friends with Charmaine. When it comes to Bobbie’s personality she is no doubt caring mother but other than that she could be described as Lazy and laidback, which is illustrated by her attitude towards maintaining reasonably clean household “What a pleasure to see a messy kitchen!” Bobbie said. “It doesn’t quite come up to mine—you don’t have the little peanut-butter handprints on the cabinets—but it’s good, it’s very good. Congratulations”⁷³ It could be argued that Bobbie chooses this attitude towards cleaning as some sort of protest since she is the one who ought to do it, however there is little to no evidence to support this claim.

⁷¹ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 2.

⁷² Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 17.

⁷³ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 17.

Bobbie helps Joanna with her search for the truth about the dark side of the Stepford, however she is turned into a robot by the Men's Association before she is able to uncover the truth along with her friend. Before the turn she was independent thinker with her own passions and opinions, although her social position was a housewife even before the violent change. It could be argued that now she isn't allowed to think and therefore since her basic human rights are violated and she has no form of defense she most certainly dropped on the social ladder.

Next Woman to be examined is Charmaine Wimperis. Charmaine is ardent tennis player with her very own court which she uses to practice, a wife to a television producer as well as a mother to nine year old son. Her big interest is astrology and she religiously recites the Zodiac to her guests with witty remarks and other commentary. She also doesn't have a problem sharing her intimate life details with her guest which signifies that she is a rather trusting persona. Other than that she likes to gossip about her husband: "Ed was a sex fiend and a real weirdo. "He had this rubber suit made for me, at God knows what cost, in England. I ask you, rubber? 'Put it on one of your secretaries,' I said, 'you're not going to get me into it.'" ⁷⁴ According to other lines from the novel she spends most of her time in her and her husband's contemporary villa, where she tends to her hobbies. This claim is uttered while saying goodbye to Bobbie and Joanne: "I'm almost always here." ⁷⁵ While she spent most of her precious time at home, she had a maid that would take care of housework so she would not have to "lower" herself to do it. This changed approximately in the half of the novel where Charmaine was forcibly changed into another Fembot that was obsessed with housework. To conclude, the Suburban wives of Stepford that were not yet turned into robots were free willed women with their own passions and opinions and it was the Men's Association that reduced them into these thoughtless robots for slave work.

⁷⁴ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 33.

⁷⁵ Ira Levin and Peter Straub, *The Stepford Wives* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 35.

6. Comparison of the Characters

In the selected Literature there are numerous male characters and many of them display interesting similarity. In case of *Babbitt* and *The Stepford Wives* there is fairly well observable need for control and conformity by the men. To certain extent the “roughnecks” as well as The Good Citizen’s League are similar to the Men’s Association in Stepford, since each of the organizations require absolute obedience of their “subjects,” the citizens of Suburbia. The men in *Babbitt* are mostly of high social position and with the exception of George F. Babbitt whose position fluctuates during his rebellion. It may be claimed the same about the men in *The Stepford Wives* their Social Status does not change throughout the novel. When it comes to the Swimmer, Neddy is unfortunate victim of supernatural Elements and his social status keeps lowering as the short story progresses.

In case of Women the difference is slightly different. If the reader examines the women in *Babbitt* he is confronted with housewives which seem to not to even dare exit the households and just wait for their men and wither with boredom just as Zilla Riesling did. In case of *Babbitt* overall the women are fulltime housewives and their offspring are meant to follow the same path, although they rebel against the conventions just as Eunice and Ted did. Women in *The Stepford Wives*, those who were not changed by the Association enjoy their lives but contrary to Women in *Babbitt* their hobbies and free time as well. Additionally they are free thinkers and are not afraid to express their thoughts. In case of the Women of the Swimmer they established their social dominance over the protagonist and are not afraid to shun the man. The short story and the Novel representing the image of after war Suburban Literature have a disparate portrayal of Women in general. They are not portrayed as housewives waiting for their men to return home and remind them of social conventions but as individual beings with their distinct interests and motivations and greater freedom overall.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to observe, whether there was any change or shifts in Social roles of Men and women in Suburban American Literature. There is no doubt the Social roles and status of Men and Women in Literature changed throughout the time. In the first selected piece of literature the 1922 *Babbitt* the reader could observe a drastic gap between the possibilities in life of men and women. Women would lament about their empty, boring lives and their inability to achieve the skill mastery similar to men as was noted by Tanis Judique. The men would do as they pleased and spent their free time in company of one another or boosting their own companies and friend for various profits and the cycle would repeat till the end of times. *The Swimmer* has shown reader the progress after the War as well as the fact that Men are no longer untouchable by fate and misfortune. Neddy was the unfortunate victim of the Suburban theory that a worth of a person is equal to the worth of their material possessions. *The Stepford Wives* is the most progressive novel, where a Woman is free to dissent the opinions, advances and forceful behavior of the males. The novel portrayed Men still in power but with Women who had much better personal lives as well as personal freedom to attend their hobbies and interests. If the Reader compares Joanna Eberhart to any other examined female character it is obvious she is the most independent of all with their own source of income, free thinking and passions. The evolution of the portrayals of both Men and women changed similarly as the social norms and roles of men and women in the public changed. All this was instigated by the sociologic and economic situation during the events of the World War Two, where the massive lack of males during the draft would allow the females to attend the standard male occupations in heavy and other industries allowing them to become self-reliant personas. This empowering era for the women would partially end as the men would return from war, however there is no doubt that the idea of equality and progress lingered in their minds. To conclude the thesis it may be claimed that the Social roles of Men and Women in American Suburban Literature were changing in accordance to the events which were currently happening in the world and as a result the social roles, positions, attitudes of Women in the literature improved over time and the social roles, positions, attitudes of Men remained mostly the same with an increased vulnerability towards various external influences.

8. Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo zjistit, zda-li nastaly nějaké změny ve společenských rolích mužů a žen v americké předměstské literatuře. Není pochyb, že se sociální role a statusy mužů a žen v Literatuře se změnily v průběhu času. V první vybraném díle, *Babbitt* z roku 1922 může čtenář pozorovat drastickou propast mezi životními možnostmi mužů a žen. Ženy lamentovaly nad svými prázdny životy a také neschopnost dosáhnout na úroveň mužů v určitých schopnostech jak již poznamenala Tanis Judique. Muži dělali, co se jim zlíbilo a trávili svůj volný čas ve své blízkosti ložováním zas své firmy či kamarády za účelu různých zisků a tento cyklus by se opakoval do nekonečna. *The Swimmer* ukázal čtenáři pokrok po válce stejně, jako dokázal, že muži nejsou nedotknutelní smůlou a osudem. Neddy byl nebohá oběť předměstského pokrytectví, kdy hodnota člověka je přímá hodnotě jeho majetku. *The Stepford Wives* byl nejpokrokovější román, kde žena mohla odmítat mužské postoje, sexuální projevy a nepříjemné chování mužů. Román představil muže stále v mocenské pozici, avšak ženy měly o dost bohatší osobní život a mohly se věnovat svým koníčkům či zájmům. Pokud čtenář porovná Joannu Eberhart s jakoukoliv jinou postavou z této práce je očividné, že je to postava nejvíce samostatná se svým vlastním příjmem, myšlením a zájmy. Evoluce popisů mužů a žen se měnila společně jako sociální normy a nároky na muže a ženy v Americké společnosti. Toto všechno bylo možné ze sociologické a ekonomické situace za Druhé světové války, kdy nastal z důvodu odvodů masivní úbytek mužů na pracovním trhu, což umožnilo ženám se umístit na pracovních pozicích, které byly standardně považovány za čistě Mužské. Toto taktéž umožnilo ženám se více osamostatnit. Tato doba osvobození avšak částečně skončila s návratem mužů z války, i když ta myšlenka na svobodu rozhodně v myslích žen zůstala. K uzavření této práce je třeba podotknout, že Sociální role a postoje mužů a žen se měnily společně s okolnostmi měnící reálný svět. Co více, společenské role a statusy žen v literatuře Amerických předměstí se změnily k lepšímu a společenské role a statusy mužů zůstaly stejné s určitou zvýšenou citlivostí na externí vlivy.

9. Anotation

Name: Petr Chromec

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title: Comparison of Social Norms of Men and Women in pre and post World War two American Suburban Literature.

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

Number of pages: 42

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Number of characters (Bibliography excluded): 76007

Keywords: Men, Women, Suburbs, Stepford, Swimmer, Babbitt, Social Roles.

Characteristics: The aim of this thesis is to delve into the culture of American suburbs in search of a change in social norms or roles for Men and Women. Suburbia is isolated realm with its distinctive cultural and economic aspects. In the novels Babbitt and Stepford Wives along with the Short story The Swimmer such aspects may be observed and related to the geopolitical situation and national situation.

10. Anotace

Příjmení a jméno: Petr Chromec

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Porovnání společenských rolí mužů a žen v Americké předválečné a poválečné předměstské Literatuře.

Vedoucí práce: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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Klíčová slova: Muži, Ženy, Stepford, Swimmer, Babbitt, Sociální role.

Charakteristika: Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo zjistit za pomoci několika novel, jak se měnily sociální postavení mužů a žen v Americké předměstské literatuře. Předměstí jsou svým způsobem izolovaná kultura s vlastními kulturními a ekonomickými aspekty. V románech *Babbitt* a *The Stepford Wives* společně s krátkým příběhem *The Swimmer* mohou být tyto aspekty a změny pozorovány a také souvisejí s národní a geopolitickou situací.

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