

# The man in the grey flannel suit

Sociology



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The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit

Universally acclaimed when first published in 1955, "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" by Sloan Wilson is one of the best novels written about the post-WW II lifestyle and how families were coping with the traumas induced on the men who saw combat overseas. "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" was an international bestseller, translated into twenty-six languages and its title has become a permanent part of our cultural vocabulary. The novel was made into a movie in 1956, starring Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones as Tom and Betsy Rath, with Fredric March and Lee J. Cobb in supporting roles. The book has become hugely popular, and it continues to appear in

the references of sociologists to America's discontented businessman it has been re-

released by Four Walls Eight Windows after more than four decades (Peak, 2003).

The story of novel revolves round the Tom and Betsy Rath, a young couple living

in a rundown house in Westport, Connecticut. The immediate impression that whole plot

of story gives are its ties with traditional values and instances. The first things that brings

the Tom and Betsy Rath's family close to a traditional middle class family is their

continuous struggle to find contentment in their hectic and material culture.

They have

every thing: three healthy children, a nice home, a steady income, to be happy and enjoy

the life, but for some reason they are not. They live in a traditional style rundown house.

and as Manhattan charitable organization pays Tom an average salary so they have to

face financial tribulations too. Their three children are very much like a middle class

traditional family children are very much TV-addicted kids. Tom finds himself caught up

in the corporate rat race what he encounters there propels him on a voyage

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of self-

discovery that will turn his world inside out. All their problems seem small, and most of

their problems stem from themselves; Tom's apathy, Betsy's panic, their unwillingness

and following inability to live within their modest but sustainable means (Meader, 2003).

There are few examples of external stress that contribute to difficult (familial)

environments for interactions. The prominent example of external stress that greatly

influenced the Tom and Betsy Rath's family is Tom's adulterous affair that he has with a

woman named Maria while waiting for redeployment orders in Rome during World War

II. Tom lived with Maria for two months before being sent to the Pacific front. Right

before he leaves, Maria tells him that she is pregnant, but he never sees her again.

Ten years later, when one of Tom's old soldier friends, who's Italian war bride is

a relative of Maria's, tells him about his shameful secret of having an illegitimate son -

and the irony is, of course, that it results the greatest stress to family environment as Tom

have cheated his wife and fathered an illegitimate son and it was The worse

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act than to

killed 17 men during WW II (Elisabeth, 2007).

The second example of external stress, is the tension that develops when the

caretaker of Tom's late grandmother made an attempt to fraudulently inherit her home.

Rath has to take stand against Schultz (Joseph Sweeney), the former caretaker of his late

grandmother, for his native home where his family was living. He must convince Judge

Bernstein that Schultz is just a fraudulent conniver in order to retain his household (Man

in the Gray Flannel Suit, n. d. para. 2).

The greatest example of change within the context of the traditional family values

is the Tom and Betsy's careful process of figuring themselves out. Tom Rath learns to

become responsible to his wife, family, neighborhood, the things he did in the past. He

accepts his past faults, decides that if he's ever going to make it in the world

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he has to improve his relationship with his wife and family first and foremost. He becomes a better person by deciding to face the truth and live responsibly. To gain respect from his family and peers instead of working towards a life with no substance at all might be harder work than anything he'd ever attempted before but, by God, he was going to try. Tom Rath, responsibly, decides he would rather have a soul. Tom and Betsy's struggles again put meaning into their lives while meeting their obligations to the world that they owe (Elisabeth, 2007).

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, by Sloan Wilson, was a best selling novel for over half a year after its publication in 1955. There has been much assumption as to why this novel became so popular. The most important reason of its success was its ability to depict the everyday working man his family and the issues that he has to face daily. Tom Rath became a character that shared many of the same struggles that working class America had to face in their own lives.

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