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瑪莉蓮·羅賓遜小說中女性與空間(居家和公共)
的關係

Women's Relationship with Space (Domestic and
Public) in Marilynne Robinson's Novels



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摘要

本篇論文聚焦於瑪莉蓮·羅賓遜四本小說《管家》、《遺愛基列》、《家園》和《萊拉》，作品中女性角色和空間的關係。從女性的精神空間開始，分析婦女在不同的家庭空間或外部空間的發展。女性角色藉由各種空間，促進精神與心靈之成長。全文分為三部份，第一章回顧十九世紀在居家空間的女性角色，女性在居家空間扮演妻子、母親和管家的角色，受到傳統社會眼光的束縛，女性能接觸到公共空間是有限的；第二章談及瑪麗蓮·羅賓遜作品中女性改變的居家角色，其中包含在家裡傳統女性居家角色的改變，承受外力影響婦女在居家空間的生活，羅賓遜提供給予女性打破邊界之機會；第三章試圖討論外部空間的精神冥想，論述羅賓遜的女性角色如何尋求獨處在野外、靜下心來。愛默生和梭羅的啟發，羅賓遜的人物成為局外人。此外依據加爾文的宗教背景，家庭成員在羅賓遜的小說中獲得歸屬感、穩固家庭。

關鍵詞：《管家》，《遺愛基列》，《家園》，《萊拉》，空間，女性角色，精神沉思

Abstract

This thesis explores women's relationships with space in American novelist Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*. Starting from women's spiritual space, I discuss women's different developments in domestic and outside spaces. In different spaces, Robinson's female characters have chances for spiritual growth. My thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter One focuses on fiction from the 19th century and the depiction of women's roles in domestic space, including how women play domestic roles of wife, mother and housekeeper; how women suffer the pressure from the traditional social gaze; and how women have a limited exposure to public space. Chapter Two analyzes women's changing domestic roles in Robinson's works, in order to show how traditional female domestic roles change in the home, how outside forces influence women's experience in domestic space, and how Robinson offers her female characters the chance to break boundaries. In Chapter Three, I discuss spiritual meditations in outside spaces. I argue that Robinson's female characters seek solitude in the wild so they can meditate. Inspired by Emerson and Thoreau, Robinson creates characters who become outsiders. Furthermore, I suggest that with influence from Calvinism in American history and Robinson's own background, family members in Robinson's novels gain a sense of belonging and strengthen their family.

Keywords: *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, *Home*, *Lila*, Space, Women's Roles, Spiritual Meditations

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Introduction

Born on November 26, 1943, American author Marilynne Robinson received her PhD in English from the University of Washington in 1977. She teaches writing at many universities, including University of Kent, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Amherst's MFA Program for Poets and Writers, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In her nonfiction *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, she advises her students to “forget definition, forget assumption, watch” (2012: 7), a principle that she reminds herself of when writing. Her reputation is built on four novels: *Housekeeping* (1980), *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014), and ideas mentioned in her novels are revealed in her nonfiction.

Robinson offers a redefinition of family in “Family” (1998), saying that family means members stay together, feeling loyalty and obligation, receiving identities, offering identities, and sharing habits, stories and memories. Referring to “Family,” I will study family relationships and women's roles in her work. I agree with this notion that family members share common memories so family members volunteer to follow and take care of each other. Family members thus gain a sense of belonging, strengthening their intimate relationships. Robinson's redefinition of family provides family with more freedom and independence, comparing to women writers' works in the 19th century. Through the discussion on family, I hope to learn more from Robinson's novels in terms of unique family lifestyle.

Robinson has referred to women's issues as women's rebirth, independence, freedom of spiritual space, and mobility in the introduction to *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories by Kate Chopin* (1989), and an interview conducted by Thomas Schaub (1994). She also has written about religion in “My Western Roots” (1993), a forward of *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings* (2006), “Preface to the Vintage Spiritual Classic Edition” (2006), an interview by Sarah Fay (2008), an interview by Ramona Koval (2008), and *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (2010).

Robinson's novels give insight into women's unique family life-style and spiritual development. In *Housekeeping*, Robinson describes Ruth as an orphan whose father never sees her in person and mother commits suicide. In *Gilead*, Robinson portrays Lila organizing a new family in Gilead as a new resident bride. In *Home*, Robinson depicts Glory as a new caregiver of her household, taking care of her old father, and her brother who returns home, after twenty years. In *Lila*, Robinson reveals Lila's secret vagrant childhood because she was a stolen baby, and further elaborates Lila's religious meditations in family life. One main part of my thesis study covers the design of Robinson's four novels, in particular the vulnerable family relationships of her characters. Robinson's characters search for spiritual growth through their family life.

Beyond American "men's" literary tradition, Robinson's works give a voice to women's situation and ideas that people often ignore. Another main part of my thesis investigates women's independence in her four novels. Her characters' pursuits show how women think independently when they have to meet the social environment's expectations. It is not so easy for them to be their own persons entirely, considering the traditions in the American society. In the early 19th century, the public did not listen to women's voices. It was until the late 19th century and early 20th century when feminist scholars collected women's sufferings into a review of scholarly study. As a woman writer, Robinson in the late 20th century and early 21st century rewrites women's identity-searching stories with more hope rather than the tragic endings especially shown in the late 19th century and the early 20th century.

I aim to discuss how Robinson's women characters find peace, energy, and hope, through sentimental resources and religious meditations on family and women's issues. I designed the study to answer the following research question: How do female characters undergo spiritual growth in different spaces in Marilynne Robinson's works? Robinson's female characters are unique if we read firstly, in terms of spaces inside the house and outside

the house, and secondly, referring to background histories of American women's literary history since the 19th century, and Unitarian Universalist traditions. Several studies reveal that Robinson's female characters, in vulnerable families, seem to create different family relationships and gain new spiritual strength. I aim to categorize these ideas here to establish women's roles in the literary history in domestic space, and the functions of religious meditations for women's spiritual transformation.

Literature Review

Following the trend in American women's literary history, Marilynne Robinson emphasizes women's spiritual space in her novels. In the late 19th century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" described women's living situations at that time, indicating that a housewife-like character in the middle-class American family may suffer from hysteria and depression. People often thought women who had those syndromes were too tired and needed a lot of rest. However, in her short story, Gilman showed that those women were not sick but lived a restrictive and boring life. They seemed to have leisure time –wealthier women did not have to do housework, and they had other people help them take care of their children, but they had to stay at home. Though they did not worry about their material life, they dared not say that their spiritual life was dull. Those women, like Gilman's protagonist, may have felt that their spiritual life was empty and incomplete.

The woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" who behaves hysterically may actually have felt oppression in her domestic life, and lack of spiritual space. The doctor husband believes that the woman is sick so he forces her to take a rest cure within the room. The woman wants to write her thoughts but she can only do this secretly. Afraid of being discovered by others especially her husband, she is under serious spiritual pressure. Besides, men of the time may have considered the process of raising children easy. That is, men may have tended to neglect

the aspect of spiritual growth when they thought of the family life. After their babies were born and raised, women may have been tortured with spiritual anxiety. But an emphasis on spiritual growth especially in the parent-child relationship might have reduced the sense of tension. Furthermore, Gilman argued that the patriarchal society oppressed women. The public force did not appreciate the woman who possessed the writing potential. Gilman's character was asked to give up reading and writing, and was deprived of space of imagine. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the woman, thus, pays attention to the yellow wallpaper in the room.

Gilman's short fiction describes the relation between the woman and the yellow wallpaper. Many hidden metaphors showed women's complicated psychological situations. In the story, the woman feels that her husband does not respect her in terms of having the chance to choose her own spiritual space and material space. If she has freedom of spiritual space, she can record her feelings in essays as an interest. She also can do what she likes in the room, where she controls the material space inside the room at any moment without interference. Her husband's authority makes the woman afraid and suffering. "What she wishes for is an escape, through fantasy, into a symbolic version of her own plight" (Delamotte 1988: 6). No wonder the woman expects to escape reality, especially when she does not have any space to think, including which relatives she would like to see, and what kind of enclosed experience she is undergoing.

The woman cannot feel write down her thoughts to express herself. Consequently, she, "forced to 'read' her wallpaper passively as a substitute for writing actively, has transformed her reading into an act of imagination and thus an act of freedom" (Delamotte 1988: 12). The woman is compelled by her husband, a doctor, to give up her interest in intelligent activities, including that she cannot freely read books, newspapers, and magazines; not to mention that she cannot write anything, all because that she is in a rest cure. Gilman's personal answer and

critique on women's lack of freedom could also be seen through her arrangement of the woman's transferring her attention, from passiveness to activeness. The woman seems to accept the fact that she cannot walk out of the room, go downstairs or even visit her relatives. Although she seems to accept the fact that she cannot go out of the room, by simply going downstairs, or even visiting her cousins, she becomes more frequently observing the wallpaper, with free imagination. In such fantasy of freedom, it seems that she starts to have her spiritual space, generating her later insane act, by which she claims that no one else can deprive her of the basic freedom.

The important concept of female madness in Gilman's short fiction is related to the pursuit of space of freedom. It can be argued that in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the case of the woman corresponds to the plot of Robinson's *Housekeeping* and *Lila*. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Lucille seek additional space near the lake, from the teacher's authority in the school from the daytime until the evening. When Ruth and Lucille go to school, they are usually quiet. No one particularly asks too much on them because they have ordinary academic achievements, which satisfy their teachers. However, one of her teachers in the school misunderstands that Lucille has cheated in an examination just because there were only two students in the class write the same answers. Lucille's teacher does not examine but she questions Lucille as to why she cheated in the test. For a week, Lucille and Ruth do not want to go to school and go home, and instead they go to the lake. Ruth feels that the social authority forces them to leave where they do not want to stay, and they cannot go back there following their own mind. Rather, they are able to go back only when they are forced to by the norm. In *Lila*, when Lila lives the vagrant life with Doll who makes Lila call her "mother" by stealing Lila from Lila's original family, Lila likes to go to the riverside in very early morning when one can hardly see anything. "[A good sting of cold in the water from the river] made her take gasping breaths that left the taste of air in her throat" (Robinson, *Lila*

2014: 37). By bathing in the river by herself alone, Lila cleans her body and refreshes herself. Lila thus finds her own order again. Robinson's female characters such as Lucille, Ruth and Lila are all similar to the woman in Gilman's short fiction

Similarly, in *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin writes that Edna lives a traditional life as those women did, at that time in the late 19th century. Women's center of life was on the family. Women selflessly lived the life, had no spiritual space, and owned no self-consciousness. In contrast, Robinson in *Lila* shows that Lila wakes up as early as she used to do in her vagrant life and "slips out of the house [where Ames and she live]" when the next day is a Sunday. "[Lila] walked away past the edge of town and followed the river to a place where the water ran over rocks and dropped down to a pool with a sandy bottom. [...] She sat on the bank, damp and chilly, smelling the river and barely hearing the sound of it, hidden in the dark, not because she thought no one would be there, but because she always liked the feeling that no one could see her even when she knew she was alone" (Robinson, *Lila* 2014: 20). Robinson mentions that Lila sits on bank in the wild nature because she likes the feeling of anyone not seeing her. She likes to be in solitude, a status that can help her gain spiritual growth. When she meditates alone in the wild, the act frees her from anxiety caused by the social gaze. She can listen to her inner voice. She can also communicate with Nature or the Maker. As she finds that she is so small in the wild, she becomes humble and returns to herself.

In the early 20th century, in the *House of Mirth* Edith Wharton depicts how Lily struggles with bad luck. Lily hopes to stick to her principles. First, she does not want to achieve her goals by entering a marriage with a rich husband, who she does not really love. She is not married successfully. It appears Lily refuses to marry possible candidates for ideal husbands, who belong to the leisure-class. If her future life were to be constrained by a lack of independence, she would not confirm the marriage proposal. She could not envision that she

spends the long days of boredom in marriage life, by functioning in the role of the “ornamental” (Ammons 1980: 351) wife. She is sure to evaluate her marital life condition, in terms of having spiritual in privacy. Considering the leisure-class norm, she is used to noticing dress details, with exaggerated hats and fans. After she marries a husband, Lily desires to live independently, in terms of appearance. She can be dressed in the way she likes, not following the leisure-class norm. That is, she can have her own unique beauty judgment.

Second, Lily does not ask for money from others but she finds jobs on her own, working as a secretary and seamstress. She tries hard to pursue her spiritual space, but her life is so stressful that she does not have a method to release her spiritual pressure. She is proud and does not want to bother other people. She usually does not explain too much so other people tend to misunderstand her. Those misunderstanding causes her lonely to death. Lily’s case reveals how important spiritual space is. Furthermore, Lily cannot participate in the leisure-class because of many love affairs. Ammons regards women as powerless,” (1980: 352). This explains, “In a symbolic level, Lily somehow is murdered by the leisure culture” (357). In my opinion, this shows that women in the period between the end of the 19th century and the First World War still saw marriage as the best option for them to rise in status. Wharton’s tragic heroine Lily fights back with her last breath on the basis that she listens to her inner voice; she knows who she loves and what the spiritual and independent lifestyle she longs for.

The three women writers from the late 19th century to the early 20th century excavate a history of women’s suffering—lacking spiritual space. All of the three main female characters had tragic ends. To observe women’s spiritual progress and find more hopes for women’s spiritual life, I will note how Robinson, for instance, in the late 20th century came up with her first novel *Housekeeping*, in which she tries to expound more possibilities for women to imagine when they hope to acquire ownership, privacy and independence. In the late 20th

century, in *Housekeeping*, Robinson creates the wanderer Sylvie, who does not wear pajamas but rather daytime clothes, when she goes to bed. She even wears shoes to bed or puts them under her pillow, indicating that she has the habits of one who is used to go drifting. Ruth considers that if Sylvie can live freely in a wandering style, she actually does not need to leave home again. Contrarily, Lucille here, representing the perspective of the social norm, questions Sylvie why Sylvie does not behave decently at home. It is shown from Robinson's novel that both Sylvie and Ruth care about sufficient spiritual space.

Among all caregivers, Ruth feels that Sylvie will not abandon her: for one thing, Sylvie is her relative; for another thing, Sylvie seems to understand the motives of her unexplained acts. Sylvie knows that she needs a great deal of individual space, like Ruth and Lucille need. Not only women need space, but also young girls sometimes need space for solitude. For instance, Sylvie knows Ruth's truancy as well as Lucille's (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 110). Sylvie chooses not to continuously force the sisters to go to school; or rather, she realizes what the sisters are doing in their small scale wandering in the wild in their trancies. Ruth believes that she and Lucille cannot be able to go to a place where Sylvie had not been. That is, Sylvie has the ability to understand Ruth and Lucille's feelings and problems because she has wandered in the wild before she returns to the town of Fingerbone to take care of the sisters. When she stays with the sisters, she spends time strolling along the lake in the daytime mostly. I agree that the extent where Ruth and Lucille have paid a visit would not beyond Sylvie's tracks. This observation shows that Sylvie needs private space a lot, so is she considerate of Ruth and Lucille. As women need space inside and outside home, teenager girls sometimes need their private space alone, too. That is that "Sylvie needs no explanation for the things Ruth and Lucille cannot explain" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 110).

The three women writers paid attention to women's roles in domestic space, but discussed little about women's participation in public space. By using Robinson's novels, I

reflect on the possible reasons for the absence of women's social activities in public space in literary history from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. I will also try to mention women's improving spiritual reality, in Robinson's novels. In addition, I aim to deepen the discussion on women's religious meditations in outside spaces especially in Robinson's works because Robinson combs out the hidden literary history of women's religious and spiritual strength in her interviews, essays and novels.

Methodology

This paper will examine how Marilynne Robinson's female characters change themselves, how their family life influences them, and how they spiritually develop in different spaces. I analyze Robinson's fictional characters that have life wisdom from daily details in Robinson's works such as *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*. I will further link the above reflective points from Robinson's primary novels in *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*, to Robinson's primary nonfiction and essays. Achieving this goal of explaining how Robinson's female characters change throughout their lives, how their family life and meditative practices influence them, I refer to reflective points on Robinson's primary texts, secondary criticisms and multiple relevant theoretical resources. Inspired by secondary criticism on Robinson, I aim to identify and make use of some trends in related background academic resources such as American literary history, family studies, feminine theories, and religious discussions.

Sylvie and Ruth in *Housekeeping* decide finally to burn down their house and then cross the bridge to the outside, away from their town, into a new transient life. Their choice of burning their house affects their new living pattern, since they will be giving up their safe and secure house and then living in the natural world as vagrants. They can meditate and seek salvation in the wild nature. Only by burning down their house can they prevent further

intervention from neighboring community. In *Nature*, the intimate core family stays together as the supportive power, as Ruth and Sylvie form a unit to travel around the public sphere. Because they situate themselves in the wild land, they access the chance to meditate transcendently on life and death.

Coming to Gilead from a mysterious remote place, Lila in *Gilead* marries Ames to found a new family. Lila's decision changes not only her living location from "the mysterious accustomed hometown" to a new land, but also her family relationship from individual to marital. She has to get used to the new community, and deal with housework and new responsibilities, for she now has a family. Lila marries Ames because both of them are interested in religious faith and spiritual growth. In their home, Lila still has to confront the neighboring community's intrusions because she is not so talented in cooking and housekeeping. Before Ames tells their neighbors not to come into their kitchen to help with their domestic work, Lila hides in the corner of the kitchen, crying out of helpless and stressful feelings. Lila has been a strong mother figure but she still experiences this kind of stressful frustrations. Her way of living beyond that challenge includes reading religious books to gain spiritual energy as well as family support.

In *Home*, Glory returns home to take care of her father and brother; then when she regains confidence, she also plans to return to school to teach. Glory's final status indicates mobility between domestic space and public space, bringing her life more energy. By taking care of the family and students, she gains spiritual reliance on them. As we pay attention to her housekeeping, she tries getting rid of unnecessary domestic rules and décor. Because many of those trifling unnecessary items such as gifts from her parents' old friends are no use for her and the rest of the family now, she wants to make her house simpler so she can focus more on family members and religious gathering.

Employing a close reading of Robinson's novels, this study records Robinson's female

characters' thoughts and feelings about family relationships within American literary tradition, revealing their significant transformations as well as individual uniqueness. Then, I refer to Robinson's interviews, nonfiction essays as the bridge between life observed in reality, and the imaginary lands in the novels. Interviewed by Sarah Fay, Robinson in 2008 talked about her ideas of religion on *the Paris Review*. Robinson reveals the definition of religion because she uses the pastor John Ames to be the protagonist in *Gilead* and daughter Glory of another minister Ames' neighbor, in *Home*. During the interview, Robinson mentions that anything written meets the religious definition if people discuss it compassionately and perceptively. For instance, in *Home*, marital failure frustrates Glory. When she is going to marry her fiancé, she finds that her fiancé is already married. Being able to go through this frustration, Glory gradually gains this perception: it is not the end of the world if a woman breaks up with her boyfriend or even fiancé. The next one could be better! Life as an individual could be more important for a woman! If a woman experiences a heart-breaking relationship and then confines herself in her own room, that would be miserable. A woman can gain spiritual growth and more energy that is positive when she tries to look on the bright side. If she hurts herself out of a relationship with a man, suffering a kind of torture that prevents her from managing a career or caring on her study, she might sin in ignoring other miserable lives in the rest of the world. That would be worthless for her. Therefore, I think, in Glory's case, she overcomes her pain because she observes her relationship with detailed perception and then she forgives her fiancé maybe out of a kind of compassionate emotions. She understands that her fiancé is also a poor man or he would not commit this error. She tries thinking in his shoe so she gets the chance to live beyond this confinement.

My research method relies on many descriptions of real events in literary life in the novels. I use mostly a Historical Approach to make comparisons between Robinson's works and American literary history and social history. In this way, I hope to point out the reasons

why Robinson's characters are unique and innovative within American women writers' literary history. In addition, my thesis will cover major theories applied including family studies, feminine criticism, and religious discussions. Together with other women writers and feminist scholars' ideas in their works, my thesis will contemplate feminine issues that American social history also highlights. Relevant sociological theories of family, women's roles in the home, as well as religion, politics, and economics contribute to the clarification and concreteness of my thesis.

I will arrange my theoretical discussions from home discussions, feminine criticism, to religious studies. First, in *The American Woman's Home*, Catharine E. Beecher points out those women's important responsibilities are taking good care of others especially at home. Corresponding to the female growing needs in the time background, *Godey's Magazine* presents a transition of women's roles from motherhood to New Woman. Second, through the lens of feminist theory regarding women's roles, Elizabeth Nolan's "The Women's Novel beyond Sentimentalism," demonstrates how the genre beyond sentimental novels reveals how women characters can develop an understanding of their worth as they conduct spiritual searching in family life. Feminist scholar Griselda Pollock's observation on women's inability to wander around on the street alone inspires me to explore the possibility of women's artists in reality and the fictional world. Third, in light of Jane Elliott's "Feminist Fiction," I would like to explore women's spiritual strength and new acts especially in Robinson's *Housekeeping* in terms of inside space and outside space.

Outline of Chapters

I will divide this thesis into three chapters and a conclusion. In Chapter One, I hope to study American women writers' domestic history, in preparation for later comparing it with Marilynne Robinson's domestic discussions on themes of home and feminism. For example,

in the 19th century, Catherine E. Beecher in her book *The American Woman's Home* promotes professional academic research on household management. The domestic subject might help women gain more respect at home but women were still unable to go out of the house to have jobs. However, male social members had better career chances. Having received good educations and profession training, male social members unquestionably could work in public space. The discrepancies between female and male social members were largely the result of an inflexible ideological education. Moreover, in the late 19th century American women writers represented the tragic domestic reality that women did not lead a life with a sense of spiritual satisfaction because the social norm confines them in the house.

As one of women's important domestic roles, mother figures affect women's value in life a lot. To illustrate details of maternity and household management in the early 19th century, I have analyzed criticism of *Godey's Magazine*. This women's magazine reflects American women's concerns, indicating a transition from imagining becoming a religious moral mother one who has social meaning/value rather than one who simply serves as a visual decoration to her husband, to attempting to pursue New Woman's values, women's rights, and individuality. In the early 19th century, women's center of marital life was domestic family life. Though women had multiple potentials, the social gaze expected them to develop no public life and to stay at home. Furthermore, in the late 19th century Charlotte Perkins Gilman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" constructs the woman's madness that is based on individual, personal experience and the literary Gothic tradition. Gilman unfolds how miserable and humble women's position was at home because of the tension between the husband, and the wife and mother. Women's intellectual ability actually can aid spiritual marital life, if men respect women's need of knowledge in reading and writing.

Chapter Two studies Robinson's unique insight into family relationships. My thesis discusses emotional elements in the household and social elements in the neighborhood.

Women in these novels still are unable to control their own domestic personal space, not to mention domestic working places such as the living room in Sylvie's case, and the kitchen in Lila's instance. Considering that her husband may pass away much earlier than she will, the mother has to self-educate so she can set a good example for her child, as a model of a good learner. Specifically, in *Gilead*, Lila actively reads to make herself the model of an active and lifelong learner for her child.

I hope to establish that Robinson's redefinitions of "home" help women characters in her works pursue their own life-style. In *Housekeeping*, how Sylvie and Ruth experience the flood (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 64) explains why they can choose to live a transient life to enjoy self-reliant solitude with the most intimate family unit's acceptance. While Lucille considers how to contact with the neighbors, Sylvie and Ruth seem to form a close unit by dancing together in the water. In *Gilead*, Lila and Ames's common interest in religious faith (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 67) magnifies the subtle details of family formation and continuous development that are taken for granted by most of us. Subsequently, physical domestic space provides us with a clue to detect women's voices in their family life. In *Home*, Glory shows how she transforms herself because her father and brother trust her deeply. My further interpretation will foreground her domestic space revolution in terms of housekeeping and décor. Glory's design of her new home space mirrors her spiritual growth.

Chapter Three pays attention to women's solitude in the wild, religious traditions, and religious background and family. In her novels, Robinson breaks the boundary between inside and outside. Robinson's female characters have unique lifestyle. In the wild, outside force does not intervene in them and they reduce their material desire. Women characters do not destroy social framework just because they go outside into the wild to seek rest and peace. Robinson uses the water metaphor in her works. In her pioneering novel, Chopin chooses the sea metaphor while Robinson uses the lake one in her *Housekeeping* (Robinson, introduction

1989: ix-x). Both Edna in *The Awakening* and Ruth in *Housekeeping* seek rebirth, though Edna goes to death (Robinson, introduction 1989: xix-xx) while Ruth merely leaves her home to become a vagrant; whether she is alive or actually dead is unknown. Chopin emphasizes women's independence, when Robinson demonstrates women's new mobility in the wide wild, where Nature relieves women's domestic anxiety. By leaving home, which social study views as an epitome of the social structure, women possess both natural space and spiritual space, decreasing vulgar monetary desire.

In *Lila*, Robinson seems to compare the water in the river in Gilead to the water in the premier sacrament in the ancient time. Ames baptizes Lila in the wild near the river because Lila as a drifter says that she cannot really be married to Ames though she said Ames should marry her in a sense. As Ames is a preacher, Lila who once lived a vagrant life has never been baptized for she did not go to church as Doll who was her "surrogate" mother did. "I can't marry you [Ames]. I cannot even stand up in front of them people and get baptized. I hate it when they're looking at me," says Lila (Robinson, *Lila* 2014: 87). Yet, Ames responds that he can baptize Lila not in the church but under the sunshine with sunflowers aside in the wild by the water from the river. When he rests his hands three times on her hair, the touch of his hand makes her "cry" (2014: 88). I think Lila at this moment believes that Ames is the one who she can truly trust and depend on so she feels sincerely moved. Robinson in *Gilead* has mentioned the characteristics of water that is so pure that it is meaningful and can express the holy notion. By Ames conducting the sacrament of baptizing, Lila gets rebirth from her being abandoned past and almost orphan-like life. Lila increases confidence in herself and future life, uses a new perspective to live, and deals with the interrelationship between humans with new values. Situated in the wild, Lila frees from the social gaze and gets rebirth inside by the outside water sacrament. She feels moved and she cries which deeply impresses and influences Ames. In *Gilead*, Ames talks to Glory's father, his preacher friend, and he

mentions that through the act of baptizing Lila he sees holy rebirth. He witnesses how Lila is deeply touched and enters her new life gradually.

Influenced by Emerson's revolutionary naturalism, Robinson also mentions the idea of returning to Nature, where one learns to reduce physical need to seek possible salvation. Inspired by Thoreau, Robinson considers that being an outsider can one make judgments. One thus has one's own opinions, different from the community. Robinson's women characters change themselves as they confront difficulties in family life by going back to themselves spiritually in *Housekeeping*, and religiously in *Gilead* and *Home* meditating on family relationships, women's roles and life. In Robinson's opinion, she suggests how one can maintain "one's greatest dignity and privilege" ("My Western Roots" 1993) by the surprising experience of solitude. In this way, one can thus really live one's unique life-style. She, moreover, agrees with the disobedience and revolutionary energy in Henry David Thoreau's essays. The most valuable thing is that Thoreau gains this power of reforming the society by starting from fundamentally changing one's domestic life in the wild, which is full of potentiality without confinement. I argue that Robinson's women characters, taking Sylvie in *Housekeeping* for exemplification, not only have critical judgment, but also claim their own mobility by traveling and benefit from supportive family relationships. In the following part of the chapter, I will further refer to Jane Elliott's criticism on Robinson's first published work *Housekeeping*, a pioneering novel in the late 20th century American women's literary history as well as a foreseeing of what Robinson is interested in academic areas such as domesticity, social order, nature and salvation.

Lastly, in terms of religious background and family, Robinson, following Calvin, mentions that the function of family is for family members to help and take care of each other, especially spiritual help. Robinson considers that one can become independent by serious self-learning spiritually. One therefore can learn to reduce one's material desire, and meditate

peacefully, opening a broader worldview.

Expected Findings

The first objective is to show how Marilynne Robinson redefines family relationships in domestic space in her novels. In Robinson's *Housekeeping*, family members unite to live a better life. Ruth chooses to follow Sylvie in living a transient life whereas the residents in the town of Fingerbone want Ruth to live a normal life with neat and tidy housekeeping. Take Chapter Four for instance. The town of Fingerbone is flooded when Sylvie just arrives home. Sylvie, Ruth, and Lucille together experience this natural disaster. They have "great quantities of canned goods" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1981: 64) in their pantry so they will not starve. While Lucille wants to go out of their home to seek other people and observe the others' situations, Sylvie takes Ruth by hand and pulls Ruth after her "through six grand waltz steps" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1981: 64). I think Sylvie and Ruth do live an independent way of life although they are suffering difficulty in the floods. Their house is ruined. They are isolated but Sylvie and Ruth dance in the water in order to find hope and happiness in the hard situation. This explains their later choice of living a vagrant life because they enjoy their independent solitude.

Sharing similar values, family members would be able to communicate with each other on a profound level. Take Lila and Ames in *Gilead* for instance. Both of them share the same interest in Christianity. When they educate their child, they will have similar values. For example, Ames agrees with Lila's act of teaching their son the Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, Psalm 100, and Beatitudes (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 67). Actually, the interaction between Lila and their son reminds Ames of the way he learned religious verses when he was a child—learning interactively with his father. I think this is a wonderful experience for Ames, Lila and their son because Ames and Lila share the same religious faith

and passion. In this way, they can also cooperate well when they bring up their son. Since they will not quarrel about what they should teach their son, their family life would work in harmony.

Family is composed of members who want to stay together, who value each other, including their sayings and ideas, and who experience common everyday events together. In *Home*, Glory returns home to live with her old father and take care of him, representing an act of taking responsibility in their family. In my opinion, when Glory goes back to the home of her childhood memory, she strongly feels that her family needs her. To begin with, her old father has lived alone after Glory's mother expired, and Glory and her other siblings all left home for their career or new independent family life. Then, her brother Jack surprisingly comes back after being away for twenty years of sorrow and strangeness. Because of her old father and her brother Jack, Glory works even harder in order to build a new home with familiar tastes of their common memories but without unnecessary limitations to the old routines. She hopes the three of them can live together with hope and happiness.

The second objective is to describe how Robinson's characters Sylvie, Ruth, and Lila seek spiritual meditation in outside space. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie go to the lake in the wild and relax their mind. Feeling free and peaceful, they think how small they are in the Nature. They thus meditate, gaining spiritual growth. In *Gilead* series, Lila in her neighbor Glory's home expresses that if one changes oneself, everything else may change as well. If one does not change, the future salvation seems unnecessary.

Chapter One

19th Century Women's Roles in Domestic Space

In the 19th century, many women mainly functioned as the wife, the mother, and the housekeeper at home. They dealt with many mechanic domestic tasks, which required their time, mind, and physical strength. They might suffer from a lack of respect. Though they had good material comforts, they needed to live up to other family members' expectations. That is, other family members did not respect women, and thus some of those women sometimes felt depressed. Women lost their own individuality. From the 19th century to the early 20th century, domestic theorists and American women writers including Catharine E. Beecher, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton all mentioned how the traditional social norm judged women; how domestic rituals confined women in details; and how women only had limited chances to enter public space. The physical and material satisfaction could only sustain the existence of one's body or make one's life continue, but could not guarantee women spiritual satisfaction.

Using the 19th century and the early 20th century American women's literature and domestic criticism, I hope to explore firstly women's roles in domestic space such as the wife, the mother, and the housekeeper; and secondly women's limited access to public space. Such historical and literary resources are relevant to my thesis because of these observations in Marilynne Robinson's novels. Robinson considers and emphasizes humans' life existence. Out of love, Robinson's female characters have concepts of forgiveness and salvation in mind so they have new hopes of the new lifestyle. Female characters take care of their children with ultimate conscience and love, hoping that their children feel protected and have more strength to seek their own living ways. Female characters find methods of healing their children's mental wound. Female characters hope that their children grow up confidently.

Catharine E. Beecher's criticism particularly offered an ideal view of women's domestic

profession in the early 19th century. Religious faith and institutions were regarded as women's reliance at home no matter they were married or remained single. According to Beecher, unmarried women could adopt children from the church and then build their own family. In the late 19th century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Kate Chopin depicted how women worked hard to become the perfect wife, mother, and housekeeper at home but their family life could not satisfy their need to live with individuality, freedom, and life interest. Women characters in their novels struggled for women's independence from the traditional family pattern. Later, this background is useful and important so that I will later compare these novels with Marilynne Robinson's works in the late 20th century because her characters struggle in conflict between freedom and tradition.

I. The Wife, the Mother and the Housekeeper in Domestic Space

Catharine E. Beecher promoted women's Home Economics as a science and a field of study in the early 19th century. She was a predecessor of women's education. It was full of the social meaning that she founded the first female seminary, Hartford Female Seminary, as the nation's foundation. Catharine E. Beecher's sibling Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the famous work *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Catharine E. Beecher shared domestic tasks, and decorated their warm and comfortable house with necessary articles of furniture such as a stove, a carpet and so on. Harriet Beecher Stowe thus could be released from heavy domestic rituals and concentrate her attention on writing. Stowe incorporates management of domestic space, use of scientifically modern ways of housekeeping in the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), making women gain confidence in housekeeping especially in the kitchen. These two sisters cooperated to publish *The American Woman's Home* in 1869, four years after the Civil War had ended. Basing on issues such as housekeeping, food preparing, and child rearing, Beecher and Stow wrote whether the wife felt that other family members treated her with

respect, and how single women could build a religious home through adoption.

In the introduction to *The American Woman's Home*, Beecher's mission is to help wives feel respected through domestic work. Beecher writes this book because she fears, "the honor and duties of the family are not duly appreciated" (Beecher 1869: 19). Beecher's answer is to raise the status of women's profession in the home, with expertise similar to that of other existing professions such as "law, medicine, or dignity" (Beecher 1869: 19). I think Beecher points out how the wife in the home confronts the pressure from her husband, representing the society's judgment. The wife works at home under pressure because her husband has no idea of how difficult those domestic tasks are.

In 2002, Nicole Tenkovich in her introduction to *The American Woman's Home* mentions that not only wives and mothers but also single women can benefit from Beecher and Stowe's book. "A generation earlier, [the unmarried woman] might have lived [her adult life] at home, ministering to [her] aging parents" (Tenkovich 2002: xix). However, within the Beecher sisters' lifetimes, many unmarried educated women redefined the traditional family structure. "Such a family need no longer be constituted by heterosexual marriage and promulgated by childbearing" (Tenkovich 2002: xx). Inspired by Chapter One of *The American Woman's Home*, titled "The Christian Family," Tenkovich comments that any women can build a home by motherly caring for the orphan and helping them follow the self-denial example of Christ (Tenkovich 2002: xx). In my opinion, Beecher offered women another life choice. Without male social norms, women could still devote themselves to caring for children as their own family by possibly adopting an orphan from a religious organization.

Godey's Magazine focused on American women's issues from July 1830 to August 1898. In *Godey's Magazine*, brave women face challenges of caring for children, treasuring family values, and gaining support from the intimate family unit. In "A Wonderful Duty: A Study of

Motherhood in *Godey's Magazine*,” Sarah Mitchell shows motherhood, and how these women deserved their own private space at home in the mid-19th century. Later, *Godey's Magazine* discussed the idea of “New Woman,” focused on the female education, and invited successful women to write columns. “The new focus on the burgeoning women’s rights movement and a new emphasis on individuality” (Mitchell 2009: 177) replaced motherhood. Marilynne Robinson’s mother characters and mother-like caregivers correspond to meaningful mothers in *Godey's Magazine*.

In the early 19th century, Beecher and Stowe’s book reflected social standards of their home: American females considered that being a mother meant they should patiently bring up and educate their own child. In the mid-19th century, American mothers thought that they played “the most fulfilling and respected role” as women (Mitchell 2009: 171). In the mid-19th century an American woman established a home with her husband, and having child, they could be partly responsible to the society by “raising another moral and pious member” (Mitchell 2009: 172). Owing to those mothers’ efforts, the next generation would have more possibility to contribute to the society and less chances to cause social problems. Furthermore, in terms of social value, a pious maternal figure was probably able to “guide the moral and religious behavior of her husband and children” (Mitchell 2009: 173-174). The American society determined the social worth of women by how well they performed their maternal duties. Women were not just accessories to their husbands because they had social importance. Women could have a voice at home when their husbands interacted with them in family life and as their children gradually grew up.

There exists a gap, in terms of women’s domestic issues, between the early 19th century, and the late 19th century in American literary history. Social statistics show that there is a change after Beecher, and Stowe. First, in “Women in 19th century,” Kathleen Steele and Jessica Brislen demonstrate that American women applied for professional jobs though they

lacked higher educations. Those women, therefore, could not get professional work chances. Before the civil war lasting about from 1861 to 1865, women only could continue their studies at “three colleges.” After the civil war, “nearly 40% of college students were women,” a fact that indicates women gradually could receive higher educations. In “The ‘Superior Instruction of Women’ 1836-1890,” Roger L. Geiger says, “In 1836, Georgia Female College was chartered in Macon, and the next year Mary Lyon opened Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. At Oberlin Collegiate Institute, male and female students were taught together in the same collegiate classrooms beginning in 1834 and in 1837 four women enrolled in the classical course” (Geiger 2000: 183).

Second, in “Women and Work in Early America,” Jone Johnson Lewis discusses the relation between the Industrial Revolution and the growth of women’s work outside the home. “By 1840, ten percent of women held jobs outside the household; ten years later [by 1850], this had risen to fifteen percent,” Lewis points out. In “Good Men and ‘Working Girls’: The Bureau of Statistics of Labor, 1870-1900,” Henry F. Bedford collects Horace Wadlin’s archive, showing that women labor outside in the marketplace increased, in the later period of the 19th century. Wadlin shows, “in 1875, women constituted less than one quarter of the labor force, a proportion that grew to over one third ten years later” (Bedford 1996: 90).

Besides, in the late 19th century, more women could work outside the home but generally worked as factory workers, says Lewis. Considering Boston women’s types of jobs in the 1880, Bedford analyzes relevant social statistics from Carrol Wright’s detailed survey of “The Working Girls of Boston.” In the 1880, 20 percent Boston women had work. Wright calculated, “of those forty thousand women, about six percent were teachers, artists, musicians, and physicians, [...] half of the remainder [were] domestic workers; [...] the remaining twenty thousand women [mostly] were engaged in trade and manufacturing” (Bedford 1996: 91). I notice that this historical contrast suggests why Marilynne Robinson in

her works aims to make a balance between staying at home and going outside the home. Most of Robinson's female characters hope to pursue outside space and only one of her main female characters work as a teacher and the rest of those female characters work as domestic workers or servants.

In the 19th century, American women mostly stayed at home and did domestic work. American women in middle-class or upper class families, usually would not worry about financial problems or household work. Their only duty was taking good care of the whole family. They often lacked independent economic resources. In order to maintain family peace, women could not express their opinions and served like subordinates, when they communicated with their husbands. In "the Yellow Wallpaper," Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote about a woman who has a rich material life but lives a dull spiritual life. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin depicted Edna who is not fully satisfied when she plays roles of the wife and mother, but who thinks she may find the new meaning in public life as an artist with dignity. When Edna lives at home, her center of life is all her family. She does not have freedom, individuality and self-consciousness.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was descended from the well-known family who had outstanding performances in various areas such as literature, art, and law. "[Gilman] was the great-granddaughter of the Reverend Lyman Beecher, the great-niece of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher, Isabella Beecher, and the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher" (Allen 1988: 30). When Gilman considered getting a chance to receive a good education, her ancestors' professional achievements inspired her a lot. "[Several aunts, uncles, and acquaintances offered [her] rather extraordinary intellectual stimulation. Growing up in the bosom of the Beecher family, she decided at a tender age to dedicate herself to a life of 'world improvement,'" (Allen 1988: 31). She thus worked hard enough to be an occupational writer and an amateur painter. "As a young woman she determined to attend the newly

opened Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) despite her mother's objections" (Allen 1988: 33). Having a talent for art, young Gilman began art creation.

When Gilman gave birth to her daughter, she did not feel peaceful in her new family, suffering from serious depression after childbirth. "The young bride [Gilman] became pregnant within two months and gave birth to Katharine Beecher Stetson, on March 23, 1885. During the nine months she was carrying the baby, she had experienced periods of seriously debilitating depression, a condition she and [her husband Charles Walter Stetson] expected to subside after the baby's arrival. [...] Despite her determination to rise above her personal misery, to be a good wife and a good mother, she could not escape the fact that she had become a 'mental wreck,'" (Allen 1988: 38). In order to recover herself and get better health and spiritual conditions, she took rest cure and in the meanwhile, she wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" because of her suffering personal experience. She believed that women lived breathlessly in domestic space and that the society had traditional expectations for the role of the mother made women's mental and physical health broke down.

In her lifetime, Gilman hoped not to become a feminist but a humanist so she could seek equality. She faced early life difficulties, when she got divorced, such a decision that was not very common at her time. She sensed that it was challenging to raise a child; it was hard to let her husband really understand her pressure; and thus she was in the miserable situation. After divorce, she enthusiastically engaged in writing and publishing her works. "Gilman dedicated herself to the advancement of women and the cultivation of socialist consciousness in the United States and throughout the world," (Allen 1988: 29). She paid attention to women's domestic environment and women's oppressed situations. She also stressed women's labor issues. Her works included *Herland* in which she introduces her ideals of feminist utopia, *Women and Economic* that she argues that and that "there is no female mind," and women's maternal roles are artificial. "Published first in 1898, *Women and Economics* is a treatise, in

fifteen chapters, on the injustice and adverse consequences to both women and the society of women's financial dependence upon men," (Allen 1988: 44). It was not until the 1960s that were her works reviewed more frequently so her contribution to women's domestic suffering was highly noticed then.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman's wife feels depressed because her husband hardly understands her situation in marital life. Gilman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" mentions that the woman gives birth to her child, and then inevitably feels depressed. The mother feels strengthened but challenged in raising children. The protagonist loses her individual will. In "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" Eugenia C. Delamotte mentions, "the perils of the Gothic heroine defined in the 1790s were oblique reflections of the fear and despair in real women's lives" (1988: 3). It actually was an even miserable situation that some women gave birth to their children and then inevitably felt depressed, because raising children was an endless challenging task and because their husbands just could not understand their pressure.

In the late 19th century, Gilman challenged the traditional view of taking care of children limited in domestic space. She agreed that the society is a big environment where all the people coexist together. In the initial stage, when the mother took care of her child, it helped a lot if she could also receive some social information. For instance, the woman in "The Yellow Wallpaper" suffers from the severe pressure, for she is lacking privacy inside room, and fails to communicate successfully with her husband on the issue of her uncomfortable feeling. She gives birth to her child and then she suffers from depression. With her family, she moves to the countryside, and undergoes the rest cure in the room. She is supposed to take the rest cure within her room. She thus stays within domestic space. At the end of the story, the woman still just has a humble position because she becomes insane and creeps around, rather than standing up and leaving the enclosed space. She creeps out from the wall, and onto the floor

in the room, as if enjoying freedom.

In this story, the narrator's marriage and family life is characteristic of women's Gothic traditions. The confined woman can observe nothing but just the wallpaper within the domestic setting. The enclosed woman cannot go out of the room, which is a tradition of Gothic, as well as failing going out of the room (Delamotte 1988: 6) and shockingly revealing her true self (Delamotte 1988: 8), indicating that space she owns is simply limited and is within the room in the household. "Critics of 'The Yellow [Wallpaper]' have long argued that the confessional narrator of Gilman's most famous work is 'insane' at the end of the story. [...] [Such interpretation has] been widely accepted. [It invites] a host of theoretical readings from feminist criticism to psychoanalytical examinations of the narrator and text. [Critics] ignore subtle indications that the narrator's behavior at the end of the story may not be a form of insanity but rather a deliberate act of rebellion—an expression of the tremendous rage she feels toward her husband, John" (Knight 2006: 73). The oppressed woman can only stay in domestic space.

Second, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the unexpected visits of others intrude on the woman's domestic space, causing a situation that exacerbates the woman's mental pressure. When her husband and other family members can just open the door and go into her room without her further permission, they catch her doing the forbidden writing. Her husband and other family members take the right of entering the woman's room for granted because they are her caregivers. Lack of privacy causes the narrator to be pressured in a desperate way. "[The narrator in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' must also make [her observation on the wallpaper] a mystery to her husband, concealing her writing from other members of the household, who may enter her room at any time," states Delamotte (1988: 8). Gilman seems to show that the woman thus does not have a sense of security.

Third, her doctor husband John does not allow his wife to do anything related to the

brain, especially writing. That is, the narrator's husband's medical authority makes her powerless to question the practice of rest cure. He forces her to follow his medical authoritative decisions. She even cannot do what she likes to do freely. Gradually, she cannot help but start to immerse herself in perceiving the patterns on the wallpaper. In addition to lacking privacy and ownership in her enclosed room, the woman fails to communicate with her husband successfully and suffers from the mental pressure. Finally, she seems to go insane—she becomes the imagined woman on the wallpaper, and tragically achieving a triumph, she suppresses her husband by “getting out at last” (Gilman 1892: 1681). Her position is still a humble one because she gets mad and creeps, but stands and walks through or out domestic space. By the Gothic tradition, the woman reveals her true self, and finds her own space, out of the repressed wallpaper by means of exaggeratedly creeping out of the wall, a place that represents repressed domestic space, built by her husband's authority and domination. This scene represents that her husband's authority can no longer have suppressed the woman, within domestic space.

In the late 19th century, Gilman saw women's need for space in the society. In Gilman's short fiction, the woman narrator longs for social stimulation because men typically work outside but women stay at home. In this short story, Gilman displays that men were responsible to supporting the whole family and making decisions, whereas women dealt with domestic work and took care of the whole family, in a peaceful manner. This ideal family mode could not allow educated women to have fair professional right; that is, women could not work in public space, but paid all their attention to their “normal” focus, the family.

Viewed as a feminist predecessor in the late 19th century American women's literary history, Kate Chopin was the author of short stories including “*Désirée's Baby*” (1893), and “*The Story of an Hour*” (1894). As a pioneer, she demonstrated issues of race and women. In 1995, Neal Wyatt points out, “[after her father was killed in a train accident,] Kate Chopin

[who was born Kate O'Flaherty] grew up and was surrounded by smart, independent, single women such as her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, all of them widows." Like Chopin, Chopin's husband Oscar Chopin came from the background of "French catholic." Oscar Chopin offered Kate Chopin space and freedom to use her intelligence and live independently. They had their family in Louisiana. After her husband died of swamp fever, she began her writing career in order to raise six children. She was intelligent so she wrote rather rapidly and she did not need to spend too much time on revision. She did not work outside home but she usually worked at home with her children around by her side. She wrote *The Awakening* (1899), in which her female character Edna Pontellier seeks freedom from the society.

Chopin in *The Awakening* creates Edna, raised to become a perfect wife and mother. Edna idolizes her husband and children because most women around her do so. Her life thus is fine but dull. Therefore, she hopes to listen to her inner voice. That is, she does not want the society to regard her just as Mrs. Pontellier and her son's mother. As for the literary method in *The Awakening*, "Chopin was working in a mode of mingled naturalism and symbolism," comments Gilbert (1987: 92). I want to argue that Chopin's *The Awakening* is naturalistic because it describes believable everyday reality: how "fictitious" selves that we assume like garments (Gilbert 1987: 102), replace women's "true" selves. Between traditional maternal duties and women's own happiness, Edna wishes to listen to her interior voice. She considers what to do can she show her true self: developing her own ideas and artistic interest. Caring husbands and children has already occupied most of her life. She does not so much want the society to view her just as the wife and the mother. "The situation in the Pontellier household recalls views on marriage articulated by Margaret Fuller and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who perceived that a woman's financial dependence on a man resulted in her subordinate position. Edna perceives the inevitable link between money and independence

when she moves out of her home and into the small ‘pigeon house’ that she buys with her own funds” (Shapiro 1987: 108). Instead, Edna imagines the happiness she would feel if the society regarded her as an artist who lives independently.

In addition, in the late 19th century Chopin’s *The Awakening* discusses that there is no public space for women to develop their professions, so women only can become the sacrificing wife and mother in domestic space. Women mechanically manage housework at home. Women cannot find their values, except that they help male family members not worry about domestic work so men can put all their effort to accomplish public affairs. Women’s professions are nothing in social space so women just need to become thoroughly devoting wives and mothers in domestic space. It will be a waste of women’s energy and talents to try becoming an unknown and penniless female artist, who immerses herself in artistic activities just for interest. However, women sometimes in a marriage life need to be alone. “[Edna hears her husband] moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request,” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 1899: 40). Husbands take women’s contribution for granted, treating women with little respect. Women work mechanically at home. Women cannot figure out the worth of her except helping their men be free from domestic work and have a better chance to be successful in the social arena. “Edna suffers more than her husband because he can always lose himself in the world of business. After a weekend with his family, he looks forward to returning to a lively week in Carondelet Street, but she has to remain in an alien world of mothers and children” (Shapiro 1987: 108).

Chopin in “The Story of an Hour” depicts how a late 19th century wife feels an overwhelming and complicated freedom when she finds out that her husband has been killed. When she seems to recover herself, she goes downstairs, and then finds out that her husband is in fact still alive. She suddenly dies of heart attack. This case shows that women’s status

was low in the society at that time, and that the marital relationship brought women bondage in life. Having a husband in a good family, Mrs. Mallard does not worry about her financial life but she feels part of her heart is dead because her life is all the same from day to day. The story also reveals how heavily a woman puts emphasis on her husband. In “The Story of an Hour,” Chopin ends the story with the statement, “they said she had died of heart disease—of the joy that kills” (1984: 1611). This very statement suggests that Mrs. Mallard’s psychological state includes the unspeakable marital pressure. There are two explanations to explain “joy.” First, the joy suggests that Mrs. Mallard still loves her husband and she is too happy to see him alive so she dies. In the fiction, she knows that she will weep again when she sees her husband’s body and she has loved him-sometimes. This indicates that she loves her husband in her subconscious. Second, the joy is a sarcastic reference to Mrs. Mallard’s lack of freedom in her marriage while her husband is alive. In the fiction, she whispers, “Free! Body and soul free!” and she describes the feeling in her mind as a monstrous joy at her husband’s death.

Josephine Donovan points out the fact that women were confined to domestic space in the 19th century. Women could not voice out their arguments; therefore, their material space and spiritual space shrank. In domestic space was dead air. I refer to Josephine Donovan’s “Toward a Women’s Poetics” because I want to demonstrate the American literary tradition of domesticity. “[One of the structures] of experience that seems nearly universal is that women have been confined/consigned to the domestic or private sphere. [...] An essential component of the practice of domestic labor or housework is that it is non-progressive, repetitive and static,” Donovan mentions (1987: 101). It seems that confined women stay in the domestic sphere, in which their material space and spiritual space shrink. In the domestic sphere is a deathly stilled motion. Women have to do basic housework such as cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning and so on, every day, and take care of family members. Yet these family

members tend to think that it is not so hard for women to do all housework. Therefore, sometimes family members will forget to respect their housekeepers, and ignore their devotion of time and energy to the family. Without respect or acceptance, women are not able to do housework, which does not have progressive development, which does not offer them fresh feelings, and which has mechanical and dull characteristics. Naturally, women will feel frustrated in this case.

II. The Social Gaze and Women's Limited Exposure to Public Space

Marilynne Robinson's female characters mostly stay in domestic space, which tends to make them nervous. They are domestically unstable. Here I discuss the relationship between women and public space in the 19th century and the early 20th century. I also seek the possibility of women artists in the history background in order to compare with Marilynne Robinson's later female characters.

In the 19th century, Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe both were public figures who advocated traditional domestic science. "Prior to the 1830s (and long afterward as well) academies provided the chief with means for girls to attain educations beyond the primary or common-school level. [Educators established] 'Female seminaries' (or 'institutes') with the belief that women should be instructed in at least some of the collegiate curriculum in order to prepare them to become teachers as well as good wives and mothers. [...] While holding that the women's course should be distinctively female, [Catharine E. Beecher] strenuously urged that [educators gave] women's institutions the resources and consequent advantages of men's colleges. Women had even less incentive than men to finish an entire course, so completion rates were exceeding low" (Geiger 2000: 184-185). Catharine E. Beecher believed that women's roles were housekeepers at home, or furthermore teachers in the classroom. She was opposed to women public speakers, who proposed ideas of

anti-slavery. “[Harriet Beecher Stowe’s] sister Catharine believing that women’s place was in the home or in the classroom as a teacher, came out strongly against women lecturers like the abolitionist,” (Reynolds 2011: 46). Catharine invited Harriet to write *The American Woman’s Home*, hoping that men regarded women’s domestic work as a profession, and thus, women won respect at home. Catharine and Harriet contributed many concepts of family cooperation at home. In the 19th century, American women had limited public space. In the 19th century, confined American women were in domestic space and did house work at home, so they seldom had chances of working in public space. If they could work, they did not have many career options.

In addition, *The Awakening* (1899) is one of Chopin’s important novels. Her protagonist, Edna, wants a public role but she does not know how to do it. The sad result is that finally Edna drowns herself, suggesting a radical escape from the family bond. In “The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin’s Fantasy of Desire,” Sandra M. Gilbert reveals women’s spiritual death, physical death and spiritual rebirth in Chopin’s *The Awakening*. In “Rebellion and Death: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899),” Ann R. Shapiro notes, “Freedom is achieved only through total renunciation” (Shapiro 1987: 107). Edna lives in a family of Louisiana Creole heritage, has a businessperson husband, and takes care of two sons. Keeping her duties in mind, at home she is both the wife, and the mother, that she can just be encouraged to play, especially by her close friend Adèle Ratignolle. She unconsciously lives under the domestic pressure in her marriage life. It is not until she meets her lover does she know that her domestic life has no social freedom and individual space. Learning swimming suggests Edna’s triumph in being able to manage her own body and spirit. She can swim farther out than other women, resulting in her early awakening. Once she used to be afraid of the water like other mother-women in the Creole society. Learning how to swim is experience for Edna to overcome social fear and gain additional space in the creole society. As a bird

trying to fly freely in the sky, Edna makes efforts to get her individual space in the society. Analyzing Edna's case, I sense that it was almost impossible for women at that time to go from their domestic family life out into outside social space. If a woman could not function well as a selfless devoted mother, the society regarded her as an abnormal existence. A woman could not spend a lot of time painting when she was married and had to bring up children. A woman who played roles of a wife and mother could not become a real artist. However, Edna's lover does not have enough courage to confirm their relationship. These two frustrations—suffering the pressure of the Creole society and being abandoned by her fatal lover—cause awakened Edna to swim into physical death but spiritual rebirth. I, moreover, observe that Chopin romanticized Edna's last swim as “a death associated with resurrection” (Gilbert 1987: 104). The bird with a broken wing symbolizing Edna's lack of strong wings, Edna swims “not into death but back into her own life, back into her own vision, back into the imaginative openness of her childhood” (1987: 104). I think the symbol of a broken-winged bird indicates how strongly Edna desires social freedom and how powerlessly she is in reality.

In the early 20th century, Edith Wharton wrote about how women seek their social places via marriage life, in the marriage market, in *The House of Mirth*. Before the law and social norm could thoroughly protect women's right, women who hoped to live a better life, mostly depended on an ideal marital relationship to raise their vulnerable economic and social status. I would like to demonstrate why Lily in *The House of Mirth* declines to enter a marriage life, and how the social group of the leisure class excludes her. In the 20th century, in “Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market,” Elizabeth Ammons describes how women seek their positions in the society, by means of marriage. From Ammons's perspective, “because marriage is the vocation expected of all young women in her class, Lily's refusal to marry inevitably leads to ostracism” (1980: 352). It is not until

1920 that American women could vote, take part in public issues and preserve their basic rights. However, a hopeful marriage possibly had hidden crises. In *The House of Mirth*, the leisure class views wives as decorations belonged to their husbands without their free wills. As far as I am concerned, marriage may be a solution to her financial problem but Lily does not have strong inner desire to marry, although she has to face external pressures to get married. Lily does not marry a rich husband in the leisure class, but loves a man who decides not to marry in his lifetime. Her sad love causes her to face suicide alone at the end of the story.

The relationship between women's roles and the issue of the social community suggests how women learn to become social members in the group life, in the family and in the society. In order to discuss how women learned to socialize at home and in the society, in American literary history, I refer to Wharton's Lily in *The House of Mirth*, in which Wharton's Lily as a new woman faces the pressure from the community. Jennifer Fleissner applies Darwinism Theory to study how the complicated New York social community, also an intensely competitive system, crumbles the female hero Lily. In other words, Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, "discussed by Fleissner in the context of the figure of the New Woman, serves as an illustration of how Wharton draws on Darwinian theories, in this case to offer a sophisticated study of New York social groupings as a competitive system that slowly crushes the heroine, Lily" (Nolan 2011: 582-583). Lily struggles not to marry a husband who comes from the leisure-class. Lily hopes to be independent when she decides whether to marry or not. She works for a disreputable woman as a personal secretary to earn her living. She does not want to be married to someone she does not love. It is not her life goal to enter a boring family life. However, her family background makes her almost yield to reality. In addition, Wharton allows us to experience the New York society, one hundred years ago. The social gaze classified people in different classes, in terms of financial and social status. The leisure-class

people cared about details a lot. When people met each other, they observed others' behaviors and clothing and then classified them. As the female hero Lily has less money, we even witness different people's living ways, in working class, and thus knowing how people found balanced lifestyles, in various perspectives.

After that, feminist scholar Griselda Pollock inspires me to infer that women cannot wander in public space, even when they feel homeless at home. That is, confined women, who cannot freely go around on streets alone, are in private space. Take modernist women thinkers in Paris for example. First, we can deduce that women's space only include the dining room, the drawing room, the bedroom, the balcony, and the private garden. Second, women have longed for freedom of walking around on the street alone. Such freedom can make one can become a true artist. From Pollock's "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," I infer that women are incapable of wandering in the public sphere if they find out that they are homeless at their home. In other words, women are confined to "private areas or domestic spaces" (Pollock 1988: 56), not free to wander in the streets alone (Pollock 1988: 70). To demonstrate, firstly, based on paintings made in Paris by Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, we can include female spaces or locations such as dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, bedrooms, balconies/verandas and private gardens. Secondly, in the diaries of the artist Marie Bashkirsteff, who lived and worked in Paris during the same period as Morisot and Cassatt, she reveals that she longs for the freedom of wandering alone on the streets, the freedom that makes one become a true artist.

In conclusion, Marilynne Robinson, creating many domestic descriptions of her female characters at home, belongs to this tradition of domestic criticism and women's literary history of the 19th century and the early 20th century. I will talk about in Robinson's works female characters' domestic situations in the next chapter. Many of her female characters spend a lot of time in domestic space except for Glory, who teaches English in high school

and whom Robinson regards as the one who can manage between domestic and public space. The social gaze also judges Robinson's female characters following the literary tradition but those Robinson's female characters do not end their physical life at the end. Robinson is different because she creates female drifters and outsiders. In Robinson's works, her female characters have trouble when they try to function as the good wife, mother, and housekeeper. But as they treasure the family life and hope to live with their intimate family unit, they pursue spiritual growth and create unique family lifestyles.



Chapter Two

Women's Changing Domestic Roles in Marilynne Robinson's Works

In Chapter One, I looked at issues of women's roles in domestic space, and women's limited access to public space to demonstrate how American women in the 19th century and early 20th century depended on their husband, playing domestic roles of the perfect wife, mother, and housekeeper. Most of time, they stayed at home dealing with domestic tasks, because they had few chances to enter public space. In the family and society, no particular law protects their life. Lacking their own space even in the home, women struggled to find a way out. Married women in the middle or upper class usually followed family norms, such as dealing with domestic tasks and treating visitors in a good manner. Meanwhile, those women needed to know the fashion movement, or participate in benevolent societies and charitable organizations in order to promote their husbands' social images. Furthermore, women in the working class did not have the high financial or social background, so they often thought that marriage was their only way to end poor living.

In Chapter Two, I will discuss that Robinson's works such as *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, and *Home* present American women's domestic reality in the mid-20th century. Robinson reexamines how traditional female domestic roles are changing in the home, how unconventional female caregivers suffer at home, and how women have a chance of managing between home and occupation. Robinson is unique because she seems to make it possible that having their individuality, women can live through difficulties with their intimate family unit. Robinson notices that housekeeping is not the only method for linking family members together. For Robinson, marital failure does not mean the end of the world, a situation that provides women with chances to reevaluate their independent value.

Robinson redefines the notion of family including responsibility, identity, and common daily details in her article "Family." In Robinson's opinion, she refers to family as "those

toward whom one feels loyalty and [obligations], and/or from whom one derives identity, and/or to whom one gives identity, and/or with whom one shares habits, tastes, stories, customs, and memories” (Robinson, *The Death of Adam* 1998: 87). This article contributes to the discussion in the study about not only family relationships but also women’s roles. I agree with that Robinson redefines home emphasizing more on spiritual acceptance and common memories. In Robinson’s redefinition of family, family members volunteer to follow and take care of each other, and gain a sense of belonging from their family, and they reinforce their intimate relationships with common interests. Robinson’s new definitions enable a new description of family relationships with more freedom and independence compared to characters in works by other American women writers such as Catharine E. Beecher, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton. Through Robinson’s family relationship definitions, I hope to study the unique life-style in her novels *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, and *Home*.

I. Changes of Traditional Female Domestic Roles in the Home

In her novels, Marilynne Robinson rewrites traditions of female domestic roles. She changes the traditional family structure, the mother’s traditional attention focus, and traditional arrangement of housekeeping. Robinson alters the traditional family structure by stressing that a sense of belonging is an important factor for family development. In *Housekeeping*, the narrator Ruth lives in an unconventional family rather than a nuclear family. She has never seen her father, and her mother commits suicide. After her mother’s tragedy, Ruth’s grandmother, grandaunts, and aunt have all taken care of Ruth and Lucille. Ruth’s grandmother provides the children with warm protection. Ruth’s aunt Sylvie offers Ruth and Lucille space and freedom so it is possible for family members to live together. In *Gilead*, independent Lila goes to Gilead alone. She tells the old preacher Ames that he should

marry her, so Lila is married to Ames. She does not officially go to school and receive the enough education to learn vocabulary. She knows little about theology but she works hard to study in her marital life in order to become her son's learning model. Lila and Ames's marriage is unique because firstly, Lila is so young and Ames is so old and secondly, Lila does not have high academic, social or financial backgrounds while Ames has studied the Bible and other books all his life. In *Gilead* and *Home*, Glory fails to be married to her fiancé, after she quits her job as a teacher in the high school. She returns home and lives with her old father. She cooks following the way her mother did, when her mother was alive. Her elder brother Jack in the meantime also returns home as she does, after he has left home for twenty years. Children will grow up and leave home, but daughters and sons are always welcomed home, whenever they feel frustrated and tired.

Besides, Robinson observes that the focus on raising children switches from an emphasis on health to one on intellectual and spiritual development. In the 19th century, mothers emphasized cultivating their children as moral citizens. In the 20th century, Robinson discusses how mothers focus on their children's health, reading habit, and intellectual and spiritual developments. In *Housekeeping*, though Ruth's mother seems to be indifferent to Ruth and Lucille, she cleans the house often, cares for the domestic environment, and prepares vitamins for her children. Ruth's mother also reads relevant magazines to improve her family's diet. Next, Ruth's grandmother considers that it will be harmful if she keeps asking Ruth and Lucille about their living details when their mother was alive. Noticing such spiritual detail, Ruth's grandmother does not ask them anything about their past life but warmly takes care of them. Then, Sylvie prepares food for Ruth and Lucille. Sylvie also finds chances to talk to Ruth in order to understand Ruth's ideas. In *Gilead*, Lila leads her son to read the Bible. She reads books diligently in her leisure, her act resulting in the fact that she becomes her son's good learning leader.

Furthermore, Robinson highlights how, by saving time doing domestic tasks women can spend more time on developing spiritual growth and caring for family members' spiritual conditions. In *Home*, Glory uses the washing machine, a modern product of high technology, to wash all family members' clothing. She thus can have more time to help her father conduct daily routines and reduce the tension between her father and her brother Jack. By doing so, she gains acceptance and regains confidence. In *Gilead*, Ames wants Lila to save time in ironing clothes but to spend more time on reading in order to enhancing her intellectual and spiritual growth.

In *Housekeeping*, Robinson shows how an unconventional family structure influences children when the husband and father is unknown, the mother commits suicide, and the female caregiver takes care of children alone, without male family members. Those female caregivers take the biological mother's role. In the late 20th century, feminist criticism reveals that the norm of the perfect wife and mother still has its influence. Robinson in *Housekeeping* (1980) considers that the husband's part is absent, and the mother-like caregivers care for their children in their unique ways, indicating that Ruth's family in Fingerbone is not a nuclear family. Robinson reminds us of an important issue—mother-like care givers' influence on the child (Ruth), responding to the effect of the mother's (Edna's) death on her children, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), as Robinson mentions in her introduction to *The Awakening* (1989: vii). Besides, Robinson's female teenagers in *Housekeeping* (Ruth and Lucille) receive care from additional mother-like caregivers because their mother is dead. After their mother's death, Ruth and Lucille live in an extended family. More specifically, those "caregivers" take care of Ruth and her younger sister Lucille because of Ruth and Lucille's mother is dead. Mrs. Sylvia Foster takes care of them, and when she dies, her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster take the responsibility of caring for Ruth and Lucille. Moreover, when Lily and Nona flee, Ruth's Aunt Mrs. Sylvia Fish becomes their

caregiver (1980: 3).

Robinson considers how Lila, a woman who does not have traditional domestic life experiences, functions in her family. Lila is a unique domestic character because she has the experience of drifting in her childhood. Ames helps Lila in the kitchen, reducing Lila's domestic pressure. Unlike the traditional domestic character, who often engages all her lifetime dealing with domestic tasks, Lila thus has more time to do other meaningful things in her own space. In the early 21st century, Robinson in *Gilead* (2004) creates another fictional character Lila, who serves as an independent new woman because she comes from a remote place, alone. She comes to Gilead and then marries Ames. She is not good at cooking and housekeeping so she has to face the social gaze from the neighborhood of traditional religious women's community in terms of cooking and housekeeping. I hope to emphasize that Lila suffers a lot from the stressful gaze of the neighboring community. Considering Ames has his second marriage life with Lila at his old age after a long time since his former marriage, those neighboring women volunteer to bring him food. Even after Ames and Lila are married, these neighbors doubt Lila's domestic skills so they keep coming over. Their kindness help however causes Lila tension. Lila feels helpless when she finds out that she is not good at cooking. Ames finds Lila cry sadly in the kitchen alone, and then tells those neighbors to stop coming over.

The unconventional family structure exists because there is a large gap between Lila and Ames's educational background. Robinson demonstrates how an almost uneducated woman wins her husband's respect. In *Lila*, Lila mentions that Ames prepares a study room for her so she can read books rather than only is responsible to housework. In "Burial, Baptism, and Baseball," Hobbs says that Lila's "subject and verbs do not always agree" (2010: 248). That is, Lila speaks English with grammatical errors such as disagreement between subject and verbs, but her husband Ames does not look down on her unique language. Ames thinks her

language has healing power when she says it “Don’t matter!” She seems to forgive all of the people around her. However, Ames regards Lila as his important and beloved family member so he can accept with Lila’s unique language and he respects her. This novel shows how family members can communicate regardless of differences, an issue that is particularly meaningful in *Gilead* and *Home*.

In *Gilead*, the old father becomes the daughter Glory’s charge, after the mother dies and Glory returns home. Like her mother, Glory not only looks after her old father, but also does all the housework. Their neighboring minister and friend Ames observes, “[their house] really [does] need to be put right, and there [is] much more to do than Glory [can do] alone” (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 148). I discover that Ames, designed by Robinson, is different from other neighboring women in the religious community. Here, Ames notices that Glory cannot finish all the housekeeping alone, when she also is responsible to her old father in terms of care. It is a thankful thing that the elder brother Jack also returns home, after his twenty-year absence. Ames thinks, with Jack’s opinion and physical strength, Glory is able to deal with cooking, washing clothes, gardening, and taking good care of the old father. Family cooperation makes housekeeping easier and reduces the housekeeper’s stress.

In *Housekeeping*, Helen, Ruth’s biological mother who later commits suicide, plays the mother role in a family without a husband and father. She receives a lot of health information from magazines so she prepares vitamins for her children and emphasizes regularity and a balanced diet. In Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, Ruth recalls that her mother Helen stresses the details of healthy food, when Helen takes care of her and Lucille. Ruth notices that Helen has a slightly indifferent attitude towards her and Lucille. In other words, Ruth observes her mother’s “gentle indifference” (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 109) towards the needs of her and Lucille. Helen does not easily and evidently to express her concerns for the sisters, on the surface. Helen seems to have a relatively inward personality when it comes to showing her

love towards her children. That is to say, Helen seems to have an inner personality when she wants to show her love to her children. Considering that she does not immediately sense Helen actually is concerned her and Lucille's health very much, Ruth supposes Helen "would have liked to have been more alone" (1980: 109). Thus, Ruth cannot help but wonder whether Helen planned to commit suicide beforehand. Ruth sometimes feels that her mother abandoned her, after her mother succeeded in killing herself in the lake. Later as Ruth reviews the old days, accompanying her mother, she finds her mother spending time reading magazines, in which "responsible opinion about discipline and balanced meals" (1980: 110) are included. Accordingly, Helen remembers feeding the sisters vitamins, before she brings Ruth and Lucille to their grandmother's house in the town of Fingerbone, where the sisters had never heard. This is Helen's way of loving her children, Helen hoping that her children grow up healthily. In terms of the healthy diet, Ruth is aware of her mother's love towards her and Lucille.

After Ruth's mother commits suicide, Ruth's grandmother takes care of Ruth and Lucille. She is considerate and respects children's privacy so she does not ask Ruth and Lucille about their mother. The habit of silence lingers as Ruth's grandmother begins taking care of them (1980: 20). Just like the way Ruth's mother and aunts stayed with her grandmother years ago, as a traditional woman figure Ruth's grandmother comforts Ruth and Lucille with silence and warmth. I hope to conclude that Ruth's grandmother takes care of and stays with Ruth and Lucille just as years ago Ruth's mother and her aunts played the daughter's role accompanying their mother silently and warmly. True family members as they are, they do not have to keep asking, "What has happened?" or "How do you feel?" but they offer each other family warmth and supportive elements. In this way, the caregiver's silent warmth could heal the trauma of losing a beloved family member.

In *Housekeeping*, Robinson as a 20th century American woman writer designs another

unique maternal figure, Sylvie, to take care of her sister Helen's two daughters Ruth and Lucille. As a maternal caregiver at home, Sylvie prepares food for the sisters and pays attention to their spiritual growth. First, as Lucille regards the woman Sylvie met at the train station as a "trashy" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 104) person, Sylvie takes a chance to inspire her to appreciate different people with respect, when these transient people possibly do not run a considerable business, do not live a materially rich life, and do not receive a good education. Especially, the woman met by Sylvie at the train station even tries forgiving the murderer, her cousin who has strangled her father. Second, Sylvie is glade to have a chance to talk to "quiet" Ruth and knows what she thinks (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 105). When Ruth answers that she imagines she does not know her own thinking, Sylvie philosophically provides her with a sense of confidence by valuing Ruth's own uniqueness. Sylvie, furthermore, encourages Ruth to keep attending school. "Childhood doesn't last forever. You will be sorry someday. Pretty soon you'll be as tall as I am," Sylvie says (1980: 106). The conversation between Sylvie and Ruth shows how Sylvie helps Ruth to speak out without the pressure, to enhance personal characteristics and to have the motive of continuously learning by going to school.

In terms of spiritual and intellectual development which is not the traditional domestic focus of women's, the wife and mother Lila starts reading books she likes, though she did not receive a good education in her childhood, compared to her husband Ames and her son. Firstly, Ames notices that Lila reads a romance novel, *The Trial of the Lonesome Pine*, in which a girl marries an old husband and "loves him only and forever" as the old husband in the story gets old physically and poor (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 132). I consider that for Ames, the romance novel works like a mirror, reflecting his inner fear and showing his wife's love. By this novel Lila reads, Ames confirms their faithful love for he reads what she likes, (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 133). The novel helps Ames perceive what Lila could not tell him.

Secondly, Ames describes how Lila loves their son just because of the “being” of the child (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 136). That Lila is caring for her son belongs to an unconditional love. Ames writes in the letter to his son that he hopes his son will respect Lila’s “courage and pride” (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 137). Lila had a hard time in her youth but she does not talk too much about it to Ames, who shows considerable acceptance of her. I infer that Ames in his seventies knows Lila has courage so as not to convey her mysterious past. Ames respects such courage in Lila, “who hasn’t needed it” only if one situates oneself in a fatal situation. This is Lila’s last breath, self-support, and dignity. Ames now and the son in the future hope to let Lila own and enjoy space at home.

Lila seems to replace her husband’s duty of educating their son in terms of reading the Bible. Traditionally, fathers lead their sons to read the Bible in a preacher’s family, take Ames’s father as example. Lila makes efforts to become her son’s good model. She considers reading her daily routine because she has in mind this idea that her husband Ames may leave the world much earlier than she can predict. I think Lila fulfills mother’s duties through reading diligently. She did not read many books in her young age but now she reads many works, recommended by her husband. She makes herself a disciplined learner and expects her son to acquire knowledge from books just as she and Ames do in the future under their influence. There is a gap of background knowledge between Lila and Ames. That is why Lila hopes to be used to reading from now on, according to Ames’s letters for his son in *Gilead*. She practices taking notes of “poems and phrases she likes” (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 77). I think Lila in *Gilead* reveals her way of maternity via trying to become a good model as a hard-working reader.

Robinson also introduces changes in housekeeping technology. In *Home*, Glory washes family’s clothes using a product of high technology, the washing machine so she can save time in dealing with mechanic domestic tasks. As the daughter, she cares about her old

father's daily details. Like her mother, she even serves as the bridge helping her old father communicate with her brother Jack well. Glory in *Home* can take charge of the task—washing the whole family's clothes by the washing machine. When she sees Jack wash his clothes alone by his own hands rather than the washing machine, she talks to Jack that he can either ask her how to use the washing machine, or put his clothes into the laundry basket with all the family's clothes. The reasons why Jack can endure washing his own clothes with his own hands may be that he just washes his own clothes, and that he does not frequently need to do this task. In order to save time and energy, Glory relies on the washing machine to wash the whole family's laundry.

II. Outside Influence on Domestic Space

Besides showing changes in traditional female domestic roles, Robinson presents the surrounding neighborhood community and the influence of those neighbors on protagonists in *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*. The neighboring religious women visit Sylvie and Ruth's home, questioning Sylvie about her collection of bottles and cans in the living room. Like Beecher and Stowe's *The American Woman's Home*, Robinson's *Housekeeping* emphasizes methods of management in domestic space, taking Sylvie's kitchen and living room as examples. In Sylvie's living room, she piles newspapers in order but those newspapers occupy a lot of domestic space. Those women wonder why Sylvie has collected so many items in the living room. They do not agree with Sylvie's unique economical principle of placing many useless things in domestic space. Furthermore, the police officer goes to Sylvie and Ruth's home because Sylvie leads Ruth to climb up on the cargo train back to the town of Fingerbone from the lake. He considers Sylvie a hobo, and worries that she will make Ruth into a hobo. Meanwhile, the neighboring women think that Ruth has already suffered from many sad experiences, so she should live a regular lifestyle from now on. Sylvie, contrarily, believes

that it will be even more sorrowful to lose intimate family members and that a family should live together. Due to Sylvie's vagrant lifestyle, the whole neighborhood is going to hold a hearing in order to get Ruth out of Sylvie's home.

In *Gilead*, Robinson stresses women's domestic spiritual space. The neighboring women do not think Lila is good at cooking so they keep bringing Ames dinner dishes even after Ames marries Lila. It is not until Ames finds out about Lila's discomfort that he talks to those women and tells them to stop bringing food. In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie's vagrant lifestyle cannot meet the norms of the neighborhood. In *Gilead*, Lila is incapable of cooking well so her neighbors pay attention to her domestic skills rather than to her innate characteristics. Robinson's ideas of outside influence on domestic space reveal the tension between norms of traditional majority and individual freedom in each unique family.

In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie's kitchen is the target of criticism because the society cannot accept her ways of housekeeping. Robinson in *Housekeeping* describes the housekeeper Sylvie's kitchen, an example that we can perceive how the décor in the kitchen affects the domestic atmosphere. The narrator Ruth mentions that Sylvie personally is accustomed to "sitting in the dark" and "enjoying the evening" at suppertime (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 99). Sylvie seems to break the family tradition of eating in the lighted kitchen. She prefers a dark place in order to calm down. It is not until one day Lucille "pulls the chain of the overhead light" that the narrator Ruth realizes that their kitchen is in terrible order. "The window [goes] black and the cluttered kitchen leaps....We [see] that we [drink] from jelly glasses. ... [There are] heaps of pots and dishes. ... A great shadow of soot looms up the wall and across the ceiling above the stove, and the stove pipe and the cupboard tops [are] thickly felted with dust" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 100-101).

In the living room, Sylvie has collected a lot of bottles and cans. Visitors witness cans and newspapers that fill the living room. Representing the outside force of the neighborhood,

these visitors doubt Sylvie's housekeeping ability and question Sylvie's domestic principle. They disagree that Sylvie knows what items are necessary in the living room. From Ruth's narration, we can perceive that Sylvie and Ruth actually do not manage their living room with a traditional point of view. No one visited Sylvie and Ruth's home, before those women come to their house. Their living room looks like a storehouse, full of valueless stuff including cans and newspapers and causing spiders spin webs everywhere. Ruth explains that Sylvie keeps those useless items because she has an economical personality—saving and storing many things. Sylvie differs from typical women in the neighborhood, when it comes to how she selects material things she wants to collect and keep in domestic space. When most women treat empty cans and old newspapers like garbage, Sylvie treasures them very much.

In *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie have to give up their domestic space (their home) within their community. The whole neighborhood considers Ruth a teenage girl who should live a life of regularity. The police officer has come to Sylvie and Ruth's house two times. After a period of observation, Sylvie and Ruth still receive the warning message from the town people, via the police officer. The residents decide to arrange a public hearing in order to deal with Ruth's future family life. Ruth knows that she can no longer stay with Sylvie's side, even though Sylvie struggles hard to meet the neighborhood's norm. Sylvie obviously does not want to lose Ruth. Sylvie understands that she has a high possibility to fail to secure her living with Ruth together as she initially planned, and therefore, she only imagines a tiny slim hope of success in the public hearing. Though she is disappointed, she continuously conducts her housekeeping plan. She cleans windows, and covers broken windows with adhesive tapes and brown Kraft paper. She also burns outdated magazines and newspapers. Ruth thinks what Sylvie has done deserves positive praise. Ruth highly praises Sylvie's determination to transform their original living style. Sylvie works so hard not because she temporarily wants to pretend to become normal during the judging time, but because she

enthusiastically hopes to change the fate of becoming a broken family again. At that time, she forsakes her original uniqueness and dreams to live up to other people's expectations.

That night Sylvie and Ruth burn their house, after the police officer insists that Ruth go to his well-organized home for the night. The police officer informs Sylvie the whole town is going to arrange a hearing because of the situation in her home. The hearing will decide whether Ruth should move to another home. Ruth says that she wants to stay at home with Sylvie so Sylvie rejects the police officer's proposal. Sylvie understands that her original wish to live with Ruth has failed. It is not until the police officer's last insistence that Sylvie and Ruth come up with the idea of burning their house and leaving the town of Fingerbone to go drifting. The social norms force them to give up their own domestic space and go drifting in the wild. After Sylvie leads Ruth to go boating on the lake, they take the cargo train home. The police officer therefore visits Sylvie for Sylvie takes the cargo train rather than the passenger train as her way home. The police officer questions Sylvie whether she intends to lead her teenage girl (Ruth) to go drifting, which is not a responsible way of taking care of teenage children, according to the social norm. The town people consider that teenagers should live a regular life at home; if the caregiver cannot fulfill the responsibility of caring for teenage children at home, the authority has the power to assign the teenager to an appropriate home.

At that moment of burning their house, Sylvie and Ruth have a strong consensus—they cannot just leave their house and let other people come to their house to grab anything including their forgotten sad memories. In their house, they left sentimental and useless items such as grandmother's hair and Helen's purse. Those items are not meaningful to others. As they burn the house, all the items are in flames. Their house and possession seem to go up to heaven, in the form of their souls. Robinson's *Housekeeping* offers an in-depth insight into this kind of family relationship in domestic space: Sylvie and Ruth remember their family

members through their family members' possessions, because their family members physically faded away. First, Sylvie remembers how her mother (the grandmother) educates her sisters, including Sylvie and Helen. Sylvie's mother respects Sylvie and Helen's spiritual space. When guests come to their house, Sylvie and Helen sometimes say something not that polite or not suitable to the situation, or behave impolitely. Sylvie's mother does not directly ask them to stop what they are doing right away. Sylvie's mother hopes they can keep their own natural characteristics. Second, Ruth and Lucille miss those relatives who passed away. They imagine someday their grandfather might have a rebirth from the bottom of the lake, returning home by the accident train. They even dream of their grandmother and mother's rebirth. Seeing the purse, they seem to feel their mother Helen's cold hand touching their back, neck and hair, and then giving them strawberries from the purse. Neither Sylvie nor Ruth has a nuclear family; Sylvie's mother alone takes care of her, while Sylvie as the final caregiver is responsible for Ruth and Lucille. They live together, no matter at home or in the wild, because they trust and rely on each other, like a pair of intimate companions.

In *Gilead*, the narrator Ames describes how Lila experiences social gaze from neighboring women community, when she deals with domestic work. Lila's experience in *Gilead* offers us an impressive resource for exploring the home issue. I would like to refer to the wider social and historical contexts within which she lives. In my opinion, in general situations women at home usually deal with cooking and housekeeping but no one pays them a salary. Still, they do housework because they want to take care of their family members. Based on Elizabeth Nolan's discussion (2011), I think women at home deal with domestic work such as cooking and housekeeping, so they also need to own their independent domestic space in order to take care of their family without intervention.

In *Home*, people in the town worry over Glory's marital suffering and conjecture what she will do next. Glory feels their care and compassion. People think, "It is a pity that Glory

is a clever girl and she does not have enough good luck.” Because of this kind of sentimental consideration, Glory feels pressured. Specifically, the social intervention does not really influence her mood. She greets those people, and talks with them when she meets them on the street. Gradually, Glory conquers difficulties, and plans to go back to work in public space.

III. Women’s Chances of Breaking Boundaries

In Robinson’s novels, women are both homeless and imprisoned in the domestic sphere. In *Housekeeping*, by means of turning off lights and burning down the house, Sylvie breaks the boundary between inside and outside. Sylvie and Ruth needs to leave their home after the townspeople arrange a hearing aiming to help Ruth find a new home away from Sylvie. Though they seem to lose their home, they actually regain a sense of home by staying together. In *Gilead*, Glory, who is well educated, can reorganize her domestic decorations, manage domestic tasks well and positively face her society.

I also think why Sylvie simplifies the procedure for managing the kitchen and cooking meals. Sylvie may not want to spend too much time on housekeeping because she prefers seeking spiritual growth in Nature. The narrator Ruth says, “[Sylvie seems] to dislike the disequilibrium of counterpoising a roomful of light against a worldful of darkness. [...] She [prefers] it [sinks] in the very element it [is] meant to exclude. We [have crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic]” (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 99). That is, Sylvie likes the light in domestic space to be relatively darker so lights between the outside and the inside are not that different. In addition, Ruth points out, “For herself Sylvie [stashes] saltines in her pockets, which she [eats] as she [walks] in the evening” (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 102). In other words, as Lucille insists they eat meat and vegetables with the light on in the kitchen, Sylvie still wants to follow her instinct staying with nature.

Like Kate Chopin’s Edna, Robinson’s female characters, Sylvie and Ruth, seek

additional space in which to live; at the same time, the social norm oppresses, and demonizes them. Sylvie, Ruth and Lucille have an untypical family structure, so they will confront the social pressure in the school. Sylvie, therefore, offers the two sisters some space and time to go through this challenge. To begin with, Ruth and Lucille are silent and clever students in school, having average performance so no teachers provide them with special instruction. Going to school every day, Ruth and Lucille feel that their school hours are so long that they do not feel lively or awakened in their academic life. Occasionally, some slight embarrassing occasions wake them up such as checking whether one's nails are trimmed, or reciting onomatopoeia words in poems. For Ruth, staying in the school, she feels spiritually cold and uneasy.

The misunderstanding over Lucille seeming to cheat in the history exam pushes Ruth and Lucille to skip classes. Under the psychological pressure, Lucille does not think she can go back to school, so she and Ruth together go for drifting near the lake, when they should be in school, until they go home in the evening. As they stop going to school for a week, they feel cold and bored, wandering at the lake. They are also lonely and scared, knowing that they are lying and skipping classes. Then, they see Sylvie also is at the lake. On seeing Sylvie, they expect someone to come to the lake to find them so they can go back to school. However, they find out that Sylvie does not come to the lake for seeking them but for her own wandering and thus she does not even notice them, who now feel a bit angry. The adult Sylvie does not go after them; rather Ruth and Lucille follow Sylvie and stare at Sylvie until Sylvie finds them from her own world of meditation.

In her own spiritual search, Sylvie seems to have offered Ruth and Lucille time and space to find their spiritual peace at the lake and at home. First, Sylvie does not scold Ruth and Lucille when she sees them at the lake. She greets them with a smile, saying that she believes there is still one hour for the teachers in school to end the classes. Second, Sylvie

lives downstairs in the grandmother's room, whereas Ruth and Lucille live on the second floor in their own room. Sylvie and the sisters live in the same house but on different floors. By doing so, Sylvie gives the sisters space, reducing pressure.

The ambiguous ending of Ruth's narration indicates the fact that Robinson offers a positive and unique view of women's mobility—readers are not sure whether Ruth is dead or stays alive, and this design shows that Robinson leaves readers a sense of surreal impression. As Gilbert has pointed out, both Chopin and Robinson romanticize those female characters' stories of realistic everyday domestic tragedies from a woman's perspective: Edna commits suicide in the end, and she is described as the broken-winged bird; Ruth, following Sylvie, burns their house, crosses the bridge, and lives a vagrant life. Close to Chopin's characters, Robinson's female characters face the tension that the society intervenes in their domestic life. Instead of death, Sylvie and Ruth choose to run away assuming that they are already dead. Those female characters pursue exceptional space to live in while at the same time social norms pressure and demonize them.

Meanwhile, Glory in *Gilead* receives a higher education, and supports herself independently without social intervention. On breaking up with her fiancé, Glory cannot immediately return to school, for she feels uncertain whether she is in possession of good personal characteristics. Returning home, she receives her old papa's wholehearted love. Then, Jack (her brother) gradually changes his attitudes towards Glory from strangeness to acceptance. She understands that she will be capable of maintaining a family and teaching a class. With such positive energy and hope, she dares to deal with the future challenges in social space in which uncertainty exists. Glory is unique because she considers being a housekeeper as well as a high school English teacher after she regains her confidence from Jack's special reliance and trust.

Petit's "Field of Deferred Dreams" shows that "returning home" is always the theme in

baseball fiction. As an illustration, Glory is the one who succeeds in returning home, “Glory’s home is life” (2012: 132). By developing Glory’s examples, I hope to explain how Petit criticizes Robinson’s metaphor of “returning home” in *Home*. Let me stress that Glory returns home and then regains life energy during the process of caring for her old father and her elder brother Jack with love and consideration.

Glory experiences many life transformations in the novel. At the first stage, deciding to quit her teaching job for marriage, she then finds out that she will not get married. Yet she still leaves the school and goes home. At the second stage, as she arrives at home, her old father immediately welcomes and whole-heartedly accepts her. She does not feel that she is under any pressure at home. Her old father supports her decision to come home to stay. Considering that her old father lives alone then, she takes care of her father and they rely on each other warmly. At the third stage, her elder brother Jack unexpectedly comes home after he was out of communication for twenty years. In the beginning, he interacts with Glory and their old father tentatively. Staying alone in his room, he does not live as he is like at his own home but rather at a boarding house. Glory keeps her brother’s uneasiness in mind, so she makes a welcome dinner for Jack. Like Jack, Glory also leaves home and then returns home. She hopes to comfort her brother’s tired and broken heart so Jack feels her sincere warmth as his family and biggest support will not enclose him and deny further communication.

These three stages describe how Glory returns to the home and then becomes energetic and confident again. In conclusion, I think Petit wants to point out that home is tremendously vital for people because they will experience critical moments of life such as death and life at home. The characteristics of warm homes include family relationships with good communication and common memories at home. Such relationships are important for people so people can face the challenge of death and regain a new life. In Glory’s case, she regains the courage to teach because she understands that she is able to help her family communicate

with each other.

Robinson's redefinition of family describes how family members stay together in their founded homes, and their unique life-styles. Robinson gives women more hopes and support by managing between domestic space and outside space with intimate family unit as companions. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie rely on each other and are independent from their town people and living like vagrants. In *Home*, Glory, who takes care of her old father and her brother Jack from daily details to spiritual gatherings, tries breaking the existing routines and changing the decoration in their home. In *Gilead*, Lila and Ames both bestow upon their son Christian life principles in the event that their son has to face the death of his family members one day.



Chapter Three

Spiritual Meditations in Outside Spaces

In Chapter One, I have mentioned women's roles in the 19th century American literary history. In the early 19th century, Beecher promoted Domestic Science as an academic science and study field. In the introduction of *The American Woman's Home*, Beecher reveals that family members do not respect domestic labor so she aims to make it a profession, which has the characteristics of authority. While men gain respect in public space, women who professionally accomplish domestic work can receive appreciation, too. Then, in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," the woman seeks domestic privacy and spiritual space at home, expecting her husband respects her own will. In *The Awakening*, Chopin emphasizes how the woman living in the environment rich in material need has dull spiritual life, so the woman finally chooses to pursue her independence, free from social confinement, listening to her inner voice. In *The House of Mirth*, Wharton stresses how the woman pursues individuality, and her protagonist does not get married when she suffers from the social and financial pressure. Responding to the 19th century literary tradition, Robinson's works create various female characters, playing roles of caregivers mostly at home in limited social space.

In Chapter Two, I have discussed how Robinson reflected American women's lives in the mid-20th century in her novels such as *Housekeeping*, *Gilead* and *Home*. Robinson reexamines how traditional female roles change at home, how unconventional female caregivers suffer from the domestic pressure, and how women use modern invention of machines to replace labor. Saving time and physical strength, women pay attention to spiritual communication among family members and offer each other sufficient spiritual space. Robinson proposes how women have a chance to manage between home and public work. In her works, Robinson's female characters are unique because they can live through the social pressure and form an intimate family unit. Robinson's female characters may not

be capable of doing perfect housework but Robinson notices that housekeeping is not the only method for connecting family members. Robinson shows how it is important for family members to understand and care about each other. This warm attitude makes family members stay together.

In this chapter, I will deal with three points, as follows: wild solitude, religious traditions, and religion and family. Robinson's characters tend to gravitate toward outdoor spaces. Robinson points out two kinds of outside spaces: natural space and social space. Natural environments such as the lake and the river offer women characters chances to meditate in their solitude. Natural space is broad when social space is full of interpersonal interaction. Some of Robinson's women characters express their spiritual reflections in the neighboring gathering. Robinson's women characters strive to break boundaries between inside and outside space through unique independent solitude in the wild. Robinson provides her women characters with a new mobility that they wander in the wild with their intimate family members. In the meanwhile, Robinson reveals how her women characters spiritually learn by themselves, so they reduce their desire and gradually feel peaceful and gain a broader worldview.

I. Solitude in the Wild for Robinson's Female Characters

Robinson's female characters are unique because they seem to invite Nature to come into their house, or they go drifting in the wild. Robinson demonstrates the unique lifestyle by gradually breaking the boundary between inside and outside. Women can decorate their home following their personal characteristics. Women can possibly decorate the space of the living room and the kitchen without order, and can naturally arrange domestic space. By opening the windows, women not only make their houses full of fresh air but also allow wild animals to come into domestic space. When women and animals stay within the same domestic space,

the boundary between inside and outside seems to be broken. If there is a flood, the location of the house and the foods stored beforehand enable women, who live in the house to be free from the outside world. Such isolated and self-sufficient characteristics make one tend to be overly polite when one meets residents in the town. Robinson also mentions that living in the special family structure and the isolated home location, teenage girls go to the lake, feeling the broad environment and reflecting on their school life. Adult women, who once lived a vagrant life, also enjoy wandering around the lake, finding a place without others' intrusions.

Jane Elliott's criticism helps me analyze how women manage their own unique life-style, inside and outside domestic space. According to Jane Elliott, Robinson in her works explores relations between inside and outside, community and individual, rest and motion, and pattern and chaos (2012: 148) in *Housekeeping*. Elliott's argument inspires me to reflect on family relationships in Robinson's *Housekeeping* among the American literary tradition. I would like to propose examples of Sylvie's housekeeping in *Housekeeping* to elaborate women's new life principles considering the supportive power from their family. First, I see, hinted in the extract from Elliott's criticism on *Housekeeping*, how Robinson designs Sylvie, a character who lives in a rather natural and seemingly chaotic environment. In contrast to traditional housekeeping, Sylvie leaves her house open to the natural world. Within her domestic space, she lets newspapers and magazines spread everywhere in the living room.

Second, I notice in *Housekeeping* Sylvie intends to break the ideological border between inside and outside space by her way of housekeeping. For instance, she believes in the importance of air so she opened doors and windows, though it was probably through forgetfulness that she left them open (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 85). By doing so, it looks as if she allows wild animals such as wasps and bats and barn swallows to come into her house (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 85). General traditional perfect women will not let wild animals go into domestic space and then live inside the house; however, careless Sylvie

likes to allow those wild animals to enter the house and live with them. Thus, I think Sylvie's housekeeping eliminates the border between domestic space and natural space.

Third, I agree with Elliott in thinking that Sylvie is inclined to seek an individual lifestyle rather than lives under the pressure from the community. According to Ruth's narration, her family members have been rather isolated since the grandmother's time (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 74). When the town of Fingerbone is flooded, Sylvie helps Ruth and Lucille to stay in their house self-sufficiently, relying on the canned food stored by Lily and Nona. Their house is so safe that they do not need to hide from the flood by escaping outdoors. They can just rest in their house and wait for the water to subside. During the flood, the narrator Ruth reflects that their house reminds them always: they are self-sufficient (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 74). Therefore, Sylvie, Ruth, and Lucille can choose to live on their own if they all hope so, due to the location of their house. They live on the hill isolated from their neighbors. In the meantime they plan beforehand to store food and build their house's location as well as the structure stronger. Based on their advanced living plans, I would like to point out that they are able to live self-sufficiently without relying on their neighbors too much. In fact, they have left other people the impression of wishing "to stay a little apart" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 75) in terms of "[their] slightly formal manner and [their] quiet tastes as a sign" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 75). I consider that Sylvie among her siblings inherits this "politeness" and "quietness" the most so she can wander around freely and listen to other people's stories on the road, accomplishing her ideal individual way of living.

Fourth, I stress how Robinson builds the development of Sylvie's final choice between rest and motion in Elliott's criticism of *Housekeeping*. That is, Sylvie, under the pressure of the neighboring religious community, decides not to force herself to give up her original way of living but to pursue the transient life again. Whenever Sylvie mentions what she heard on

the road, she tells stories “[having] to do with a train or a bus station” (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 68). I think she wants to stress the advantage of motion and travel. She recounts to Ruth and Lucille those anecdotes about loneliness, indicating that wandering around with the family support may be the best solution for one to enjoy one’s ultimate individuality.

In conclusion, Elliott comes up with four relations in Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, saying that women do not have to confine themselves within their houses in order to follow the community’s order. Instead, women can open their domestic space to the natural world to seek comfort or they can even choose to go out to the wild nature to receive spiritual salvation as Sylvie does at the shore (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 80) or Ruth and Lucille do down by the lake (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 78). By releasing one’s tensions in Mother Nature, women can escape the deathly domestic area and claim their own true individuality.

Considering women’s spatial issue as those women’s writers have cared in the American literary history, Robinson discusses women’s additional space in the wild. In the early 19th century, women played the role of the caregiver no matter they were at home or in the classroom. There were no additional spaces for women at that time. In the late 19th century, American domestic novelists concentrated on women’s spiritual anxiety in domestic space about details of housekeeping. In the late 20th century, Robinson designs fictional female characters that have more mobility and additional space in the broader wild. She defines the characteristics of the wild as having less outside interference and less material desire.

In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie, who is the wanderer, thinks that the experience of wandering in the wild is wonderful. In the wild, women can find their own real space without intervention from the outside force. Women, who are in the wild, do activities that are not harmful to other people’s life. Actually, no one else knows where women are located when

women are in the wild. In additional space in the wild, women are released from the domestic pressure. Walking out from domestic space and going to the outside natural world, women do not destroy the social norm. Furthermore, leaving the social framework, women can thus have their own spiritual freedom and independence in the wild.

Besides, in the late 20th century, Robinson, through the wanderer Sylvie, provides women with additional space in the wild, where women are released from the domestic pressure. To illustrate, in *Housekeeping*, Sylvie describes the feeling of wandering in a thoughtful way, “You just find yourself an empty place, out of everyone’s way—no harm done. No one even knows you’re there” (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 168-169). Women performed their duties to take care of their family members at home or their students in the classroom, in the 19th century. Women had no other space. However, women are set free in Robinson’s *Housekeeping*. By wandering in the wild, women can find their own space without social intervention. Women will not ruin the social norm simply because women go out of the framework of the society. In the wild, women have their own spiritual freedom and independence.

In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie chooses to go drifting in the wild; therefore, she has two kinds of spaces: natural space and spiritual space. In the natural environment, she seeks spiritual rest and peace. The natural surrounding makes Sylvie free from monetary desire and social community’s interference. Whenever she wants to refresh herself and hopes to feel peaceful again, she can return to the natural environment, in the form of drifting. If women only have shrinking spiritual space, they are likely to own even smaller real space. However, if women in the natural world can reduce their material desire, they will have a broader mind and share increasing space, in the wild. Robinson suggests in *Housekeeping* that women can change their spiritual reality when they go out of enclosed domestic space and move out into the natural environment.

In other words, Sylvie chooses to wander in the wild, and thus she can have both kinds of spaces: material space and spiritual space. In the environment of the forests, she can pursue the goal of soul rest and peace, free from the lure of money and the fetters of the neighborhood, which interfere in domestic sphere of her spiritual space. Living by wandering in the wild can help her thoroughly concentrate her attention on the natural environment. Various forms of lives coexist. When she observes these forms, she is capable of understanding the cooperation in Nature. She is possible to gain a broad mind. It is unnecessary for her to feel wretched, simply because she is not that rich. In the natural situation in the forests, she can not only gain positive spiritual support but also get energetic physical strength. Whenever she needs to refresh herself and hopes to feel peaceful in mind, she can always return to natural space, through the form of vagrancy.

Marilynne Robinson's introduction to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* shows a focus on women's independence in the late 20th century. Robinson wrote an introduction to Chopin's *The Awakening* after she had published *Housekeeping*. The American author Chopin, particularly in the concept that women's independence is both a positive goal and a problematic one, personally inspired Robinson. This contributes why Robinson, in the introduction, builds her new standard for the awakening of women's innate rights. Therefore, I discover how Robinson creates a new mobility for women, with the intimate family unit's support, in the case of Sylvie and Ruth, in *Housekeeping*.

First, for Robinson, Chopin's sea metaphor is potent, gorgeous, and abysmal (introduction 1989: ix-x). I propose the reason why Robinson can respond to Chopin's sea metaphor with this in-depth thought is that she has employed a similar metaphor in her descriptions of the lake in Fingerbone, which are everywhere in *Housekeeping*. Residents in Fingerbone cannot ignore the existence of the lake: "how deep the lake is, how dark and airless if one sinks" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 9). In my opinion, it is a remarkable fact

that residents are so aware of the lake, for living with the lake would seem to be the most ordinary thing for the residents. That is, the lake is influential. As I pay attention to this habitual evidence, I notice that Ruth and her younger sister Lucille are so absorbed in skating on the frozen silence that they are the last to leave (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 1980: 34). From Ruth's engagement in the activity of skating, we can perceive how deep the relationship between the lake and the residents' life is.

That is, in Robinson's perspective, Chopin's female character Edna yearns to embrace the sea because Edna gains a meaningful strength from the sea. Edna tries swimming as far as she can, where no other women have done before. According to Robinson, Chopin's sea metaphor is so influential that Robinson responds to Chopin, by the lake metaphor in her first novel *Housekeeping*, in which residents in the town of Fingerbone cannot neglect the existence of the lake. Without the lake, no one will notice the existence of the town of Fingerbone due to its small scale and isolated location. The relation between the lake and residents is close. To demonstrate, residents enjoy skating on the lake, bringing in people's sounds and laughter that make the isolated town energetic. Ruth and Lucille are often the last to leave the lake that is frozen, and go home because they enjoy doing entertaining and relaxing activities at the lake so much. As a skating place, the frozen lake becomes the entertaining location for residents and the young to have fun. As an illustration, residents also rely on the lake for food. Sylvie often stays at the lake. When she goes home, she catches some fishes in her pockets. She will wash the fish under the faucet, deal with the fish out of the gill and viscera, cook it, and eat it with catchup.

Second, Edna "embraces death in the sea like a newborn child" (Robinson, introduction 1989: xix-xx). Here, I want to emphasize the similarity between Edna's rebirth in the sea, and Ruth's rebirth: Ruth's meditations by the lake, and her crossing the bridge to go drifting afterwards. I find that Ruth experiences two tremendous and unexpected departures from her

beloved family—her mother is committing suicide and her younger sister Lucille is leaving for another adoptive mother. When Ruth's mother leaves the living world, Ruth at least is with her sister, moving together to her grandmother's house. They share the memory of their mother. They go to school together, play after school with each other, and live with their caregivers. They know each other so well. No wonder, as Lucille leaves home without informing Ruth or asking her advice, Ruth feels lost. Then, here comes the moment when Sylvie comforts Ruth during the boating on the lake, when Ruth reflects on coexistence of birth and death by supposing the situation under the water. Then, she trusts in Sylvie even more because of their spiritual intimacy, so she decides to become a transient like Sylvie. In the late 20th century, Robinson revises women's restricted historical space, additional space that she designs her women's characters with mobility, in the broader wild. In other words, in *The Awakening*, Chopin's fictional character Edna embraces death in the sea, like a newborn baby. That Edna gets rebirth in the sea is as Ruth receives rebirth by the lake. First, when Ruth's grandmother passes away, in the dream Ruth finds that she walks on the frozen lake. She believes that her grandmother enters another world, where the living beings are floating above, without gravity, just like the inverted image on the lake. Second, Ruth walks to the lake, with Sylvie. Everything is peaceful. Ruth imagines that her mother Helen and her aunt Sylvie are the same person.

Robinson's female characters undergo spiritual meditations when they cross the bridge in *Housekeeping*. Sarah D. Hartshorne's essay (1990) makes an interesting link between Robinson's literary work and the American heritage passed on by Thoreau in *Walden*. Take Sylvie and Ruth for example. "The crossing is a crucial moment of revelation and change," (Hartshorne 1990: 56). From my perspective, Sylvie and Ruth cross the bridge because of accumulated repression and melancholy. They seek spiritual freedom and a peaceful lifestyle; that is, they search for spiritual space. When they are crossing the bridge, Sylvie tells Ruth

that dogs dare not follow them to cross the bridge. Sylvie's statement explains how unbelievable their decision to cross the bridge is. Living in the town of Fingerbone, no one has done this before. Nobody imagines that it is a road from the isolated town to the outside world especially by walking. In Sylvie's mind, they must keep walking through the bridge. The act of crossing the bridge is not the worst thing. Sylvie encourages Ruth to wander around outside in the wild. That night is dark and cloudy but the railroad through the lake seems to be a route from the wasteland to the Promised Land. Furthermore, Sylvie collects a newspaper clipping, with the title "The Lake deprives of two lives," in which the report describes how they attempt to burn the house and how a public hearing is going to be held because their behavior becomes even stranger. The later description reveals the fact that Sylvie and Ruth are in lack of spiritual space in their domestic space—they do not have basic freedom at home and they cannot choose their own living style. Dogs follow the trail of Sylvie and Ruth from the burned house to the bridge. In the morning, residents, therefore, try to salvage Sylvie and Ruth's bodies but fail. As residents stop searching for them, Sylvie and Ruth are set free.

After seven years, Sylvie and Ruth still have misgivings about other people's perspective because other people often find fault with their unusual behavior. Sylvie and Ruth go drifting. Once one chooses to go drifting, it would be hard to imagine another lifestyle. Ruth reflects that she becomes different from other people, when she decides to follow Sylvie to go across the bridge, and when her mother commits suicide leaving her alone forever. Ruth's decision of crossing the bridge makes people in the town consider her dead. Her mother's early death forces her to keep waiting and expecting. The act of crossing the bridge has changed Ruth. Whenever she recalls this act, she regains confidence because she accomplishes a challenging task that no one else in the town has done. When she feels confident again, the present outside difficulty (she confronts) changes into being less

important. Residents in the town of Fingerbone think Sylvie and Ruth died because they tried to crossing the bridge. Other people in the town will not interfere in Sylvie and Ruth's life, so Sylvie and Ruth can live freely and peacefully. In the wild, they, thus, can possess real physical space, and spiritual space.

That is to say, Sylvie is not only her aunt but also her mother. That is why she sleeps by Sylvie's side like an unborn baby. Ruth drinks some water from the lake, where she is reminded of her grandfather, and the place which her mother ceased breathing. When they are boating, Sylvie comforts Ruth. At that time, Ruth reflects on coexistence of death and birth, because of the situation beneath the lake. Ruth meditates at the lake, before she decides to cross the bridge to go drifting with Sylvie. Ruth compares her mother Helen to the characteristics of the lake water. Helen's personality is as deep as the water under the lake surface, but her mother is also as thin weak as the water surface, which is easily losing peaceful surface by the outside force.

II. Religious Traditions

Robinson provides women with new mobility, and the experience of wandering in the wild. Take the lake for instance. As a tourist attraction, the lake influences its residents a lot both for recreation and for reflection. If one's family members die in the lake, one feels sorrow, when passing by the lake. One may recall memories of family members and expect to see them again. For women, drifting needs courage, and offers women chances to be reborn and then live new lives. Robinson's women and men like to go to the wild and keep away from people so they become outsiders. They can meditate and then gain spiritual growth. Robinson makes it possible for women to own solitude in the wild. Like Emerson or Thoreau, women similarly observe Nature and meditate in Nature so they gain spiritual growth.

Inspired by secondary criticisms of Robinson's works, I conclude that another central

concern in Robinson's works is spiritual reflection. In Christine Caver's "Nothing left to Lose: *Housekeeping's* Strange Freedoms," birth-death captures the contradictions of Ruth's life (1996: 128). The "water darkness" frightens Ruth because it has taken away her grandfather and mother. I am convinced that Ruth has to face the fear to accomplish her own "flight" in life by crossing the bridge to the outside world. I, moreover, am concerned over whether Ruth becomes independent as she chooses to drift following Sylvie. Ruth's choice could attract individual thinkers, authors, and meditators who reduce dependence on social groups and decrease physical and worldly desires (Caver 1996: 118). I infer that one can live on one's own by spiritual, religious, and transcendental meditation in solitude, without others' intervention. I think Ruth decides to be the outsider from the community. She has to be accustomed to less human need, as she feels cold or hungry.

According to Martha Ravits's "Extending the American Range" (1989), in *Housekeeping*, Robinson creates a restless female wanderer Sylvie, with a tendency to seek healing and salvation in the remote wildness. I would like to point out that Ravits's criticism evokes American Transcendentalism, a notion of God or the divine that is immanent in the manifested world. In this criticism, "Sylvie tries to console Ruth into the remote wilderness where she will undergo the struggle for autonomy" (1989: 654). Ravits's discussion on autonomy refers to the plot in *Housekeeping* that Sylvie invites Ruth to sail a boat on the lake; I suggest that by situating the scene in the nature, the characters, Sylvie together with Ruth, can be cured of depression or bad feelings.

Maggie Galehouse's criticism (2000) reminds me of three correlated and impressive themes in Robinson's *Housekeeping*: feminism messages, Emersonian transcendentalism, and the comparison between Melville's sailors and Robinson's transients. In other words, Galehouse's criticism examines how Emerson, who is among the American prophets of religious Liberalism, inspires Robinson in writing *Housekeeping*, set in the Northwest.

“Robinson’s vision of vagrancy is Romantic, engaged with elements of Emersonian transcendentalism,” (Galehouse 2000: 118). “[By] the time of the Depression, hoboes had become folk heroes, [...] who refused factory work in favor of seasonal, agricultural jobs,” (Galehouse 2000: 118). As we can see, the characteristic of temporal, seasonal work style also echoes Robinson’s perspective on scientism. Now, those three relevant themes in Robinson’s *Housekeeping* are as follows, considering Robinson’s versions of Romantic and naturalistic transience. First, “Ruth loses her mother, becomes estranged from her only sibling, and finally, drifts into vagrancy under the tutelage of Sylvie. Because *Housekeeping* challenges traditional notions motherhood and domesticity, it is most often analyzed through a feminist lens” (Galehouse 2000: 17). Second, as “a pupil of transience, Ruth must acquaint herself with the physical world in new ways, learning to sleep and eat outdoors. For Ruth, Mother Nature is yet another surrogate mother” (Galehouse 2000: 123), I infer that this evokes Emerson’s revolutionary naturalism, that is, return to and embrace nature. Third, the difference between Robinson’s and Melville’s adventurers is that Robinson’s characters wander with their intimate or core family members such as the unit of Sylvie and Ruth, while Melville’s characters sail in groups of more friendship or fellowship.

I hope to trace how Unitarian Universalist traditions shape Robinson’s theological ideas. Related important American religious value can be traced back to John Calvin’s beliefs and religious community founded in Geneva, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s new style of spiritual guidance, and Thoreau’s essays discussing religious tolerance in American history. In her essay “My Western Roots” (1993), Robinson vividly describes her own experience of solitude, by referring to Thoreau’s idea of “the outsider.” Take Sylvie in *Housekeeping* for example. Her way of life follows her inner voice, a kind of realization that she lives in her own way and individual consciousness. I will reinforce Robinson’s motif in Sylvie’s case using Thoreau’s viewpoint of simplification and disobedience from his essay from *Walden*.

Robinson demonstrates firstly that she experiences the electricity of solitude, which “passes her body with a jolt.” I think she seems to sense a sacred atmosphere in solitude in Nature. The method for us to understand “this sort of radical singularity” is to reflect on “one’s greatest dignity and privilege.” In other words, we have to discuss how one is respected and how one owns one’s rights. We may consider the two elements of dignity and privilege in order to understand Robinson’s strangeness in her solitude in the woods. That is to say, I think that being alone in a sense allows one to free oneself from the community’s unnecessary expectations so one can have the greatest dignity. Take Sylvie in *Housekeeping* for instance, the traditional community interrupts her way of life. The police officer has come to her house two times because he thinks that Sylvie intends to make Ruth into a drifter. In addition, neighboring women visit Sylvie’s house with the same notion that the police officer has warned Sylvie. Besides, those women question the chaotic housekeeping in Sylvie’s domestic space. Sylvie is accused of terrible housekeeping, making her house a mess with newspapers and magazines spread everywhere in the living room, and eliminating the border between domestic space and the dangerous wild natural world so that animals intrude in her house. The neighborhood’s intervention prevents Sylvie from having her greatest dignity. Sylvie cannot live the lifestyle she likes within her domestic space, ruining her greatest privilege. She thus has to go out into the natural world, living a transient life.

Secondly, she mentions in this essay, “In Thoreau’s essay [the outsider] is a critic.’ She explains that the Thoreauvian’s outsider “expresses discontent with [the] society.” The outsider, created out of the need of the generation, “accomplishes more radical reforms of society,” which no one anywhere has done before. To make the idea of Thoreau’s outsider clearer, we may add, for instance, Robinson’s character Sylvie in *Housekeeping* to concretize Thoreau’s archetype of the outsider. I think Robinson uses Sylvie to break through the domestic tradition of living in the house by pursuing a transient lifestyle in the wild. The

union of families in the town of Fingerbone belongs to a small scale of the society. Sylvie is dissatisfied with her neighbors' or the conservative community's intervention. She cannot freely decide the way she wants to keep order in her house. Considering that Sylvie travels or lives like a vagrant before she returns home to take over her house and give Ruth and Lucille care, she does have different perspectives on housekeeping or traditional domestic order from general women in the town of Fingerbone who typically do not have their own opinions on domestic routines. Sylvie will compare and contrast what she confronts in Fingerbone with what she has observed in the outside world, thus sensing that her privilege within her own domestic space is invaded. She wants to become an outsider once again in vagrancy, listening to her inner voice and living spiritually.

Thirdly, Robinson explains why she creates the female heroine Sylvie to represent Thoreau's outsider. Robinson says, "Sylvie has her own history" ("My Western Roots" 1993). Due to Sylvie's own experiences as a transient, she does not confine herself to "the impress of [the] society" or, I think, conventional ideology of the domestic area. Rather, she can adopt new ways of thinking. The most important addition to be made to what we have said about Robinson's female stranger includes two viewpoints: Robinson values the worth of women, and in the meantime, she inherits Thoreau's idea of outsider. That is why, instead of traditional male heroes, Sylvie originates with Robinson. Robinson makes Sylvie walk out of Sylvie's domestic space, and wander in the wild. Therefore, Sylvie is immersed in an atmosphere of solitude, obtaining spiritual salvation or liberation.

In *Gilead*, the narrator Ames, who is in his 70s and near death, predicts that he may not see his seven-year-old son grow up, writing letters in a series of memories dealing with his attitudes toward death for his young son. When I read Robinson's *Gilead*, I observe the following details. Ames really returns home when he ends breathing the last breath, indicating that he returns to the Heavenly Father's side. He keeps for his son a record of what

he feels and experiences as he faces death. In his 70s, he sometimes suffers physical pain, which reminds him that he is old and sick. Yet, most of the time, he is brave to face his coming retired life. Another factor that causes Ames to feel old is the physical environment of his work place. The church he serves becomes old as he is. Residents plan to rebuild it after he leaves. Ames is thankful for people's consideration. He does not shirk his situation of being old; rather he faces the advance of death peacefully, due partly to his dedication to his church, and partly to his family's support (Robinson, *Gilead* 2004: 71). I think the reason why he can feel peace and comfort is that he dedicates his life to his religious career. He often prays for people who go to his church at night when he passes their home. Sometimes, he feels like stopping to help people but he reminds himself that he should not intrude upon other people's privacy so he just goes on. This does not mean he gives up helping or comforting people around his church. In fact, Ames will keep walking into his church at night and then pray for those families until dawn. Then, I hope to reinforce the connection between Ames's writing and his family. The reason he writes letters for his son is to build common memories in the future time, as his son becomes an adult. In my opinion, Lila's act of teaching their son the Bible impresses Ames because Ames recalls that he also learned the Bible from his father. This is the example of the shared memory of studying the Bible for Ames and his son in their childhood. Therefore, Ames writes down his memoirs in letters to communicate with his son in the future time. As his son becomes mature enough, his son can read what Ames has left him. His son can understand Ames's feelings and ideas so there will be no distance between them. Concluding from both factors of the church and the family in Ames's life, I think he prepares to return to the home of death by endless prayers and communication.

Inheriting Ralph Waldo Emerson's views, Robinson uses the archetype of the outsider as a philosopher. Indicating a transition from Emerson to Thoreau, James Wood's writing (2012)

discusses Emerson's religious exercise and the theory of naturalism. Besides, Wood mentions how Robinson's characters aim to find a spiritual home in the wild when they have sufferings. The genre of novels vividly expresses beliefs in life. Getting inspiration on the road from his house to the church, the narrator Ames writes letters and demonstrates his thought the way Emerson did, covering the religious reflections and the family experiences. "Very beautifully *Gilead* becomes a novel rather than a species of religious writing, and Reverend Ames' entries a recognizable American form, the Emersonian essay, poised between homily and home, religious exercise and naturalism" (2012: 163). My investigation includes the exploration of Emerson's ideas in Robinson's design in *Gilead*.

Emerson tends to observe Nature, instead of simply reading religious works in the church. In *Gilead*, Ames likewise observes the natural sight and comes up with reflections. He notices the philosophy of light: moonlight is as beautiful as the candlelight in the early morning. Both scenes show that the light always exists inside the range of a grander light. Such metaphor of light comes from daily observation of Nature and is a method that Emerson frequently uses to create his own rationales of the world. From Ames's perspective, this metaphor of light can also explain language: the scope of experiences creates most words of wisdom.

Similarly, Ames examines his religious occupational life in detail. Ames finds out that people may have many perspectives, and they usually hide their loneliness inside. On seeing Ames, people usually walk away, or change their original topic if they are talking. However, the same people sometimes enter his church and share with Ames their secrets that contain many kinds of feelings: regret, pain, guilt, and loneliness. Gradually, Ames gets used to being alone in order to help people in his church. It is not a deliberate thing that Ames because of his religious duty seems to become a spiritual outsider. Based on Emerson's notion of observation, Robinson reveals how Ames concretizes what he has read from religious books

(how to help people). Ames does not feel frustrated when he is alone because he can enjoy the act of observing Nature and regain fresh religious meditations.

III. Religious background and Family

Families can become a neighborhood. The religious philosopher John Calvin thinks that it is the Maker's doctrine, which suggests that people take care of their close members, helping each other. In *Home*, Ames and Lila go to their neighbor Glory's home, entering a small scale of the religious family gathering, in which Jack mentions the issue of salvation of the soul. Lila firstly responds to Jack's question that if one cannot change one's self, the salvation will be not sufficient. Having a long time considering the coexistence of predestination and salvation, Glory's father appreciates Lila's opinion and mentions that how to come up with an acceptable conclusion has never been as interesting as the instant of questioning. Thus, Lila reinforces her ideas that one can change oneself so things will be transformed. Witnessing Lila's religious expressions in the neighboring gathering, Ames feels much moved, because her unique spiritual reflections from her solitude and self-study impress him.

Marilynne Robinson encouraged people to read John Calvin when the Church Times interviewed her in 2012. She is interested in Calvin, expressing that interest not only in her nonfiction but also in her fiction *Gilead*. For instance, Robinson expresses her ideas about Calvin's revolution of the church system in her Foreword of *Calvin* (2006), claiming that Calvin established a nonhierarchical church (2006: vi). In my interpretation, though Calvin has a strict view of religious morals such as predestination, he suggests that everyone still has a chance to access salvation in next life. I think the following scene in Robinson's *Gilead* and *Home* responds well to both Calvin's idea of the community of church system and his theological thinking about salvation. The important and reemphasized scene in Robinson's

Gilead and Home occurs when Lila is invited to have a talk with the gathering in Glory's house with the two ministers' whole families: Glory, Glory's father the minister, her brother Jack, and Ames the minister. Considering that Robinson proposes that Calvin creates a nonhierarchical church, I would further explain my opinion on the church's position within the religious works and then I will refer to other criticism written by Robinson, *Steward of God's Covenant*, to examine how Robinson reflects on Calvin's theologies through her character Lila about the individual's meditation. Next, I want to draw back to the function of church by referring to Robinson's insights in the Foreword of *Calvin*. I think that, like Calvin, who deals with his religious faith seriously through research in the Bible with a group of religious meditators' cooperation, Robinson also believes in the power of the groups so she puts such emphasis on the union of the two ministers' family gatherings. Robinson stresses the support from family members as individuals form their belief in situations ranging from the daily eating table to random gatherings for talk in religion with neighbors and family members. Thanks to this kind of gathering of the family and neighborhood, members can reveal their life bewilderments so people on the spot can join in, discuss their problems, and then solve their puzzles, with inspiration and religious reflections from each other. In this way, the family and their neighbors can all together live a better life.

Steward of God's Covenant (2006) is Robinson's criticism of Calvin's theological contributions. According to *Steward of God's Covenant*, "each one is trained to genuine self-denial, so that one's will being brought into obedience to God, one bids farewell to one's own desire" (2006: 8). In other words, one should lower one's own desire. If people can treasure what they already have, they can more easily feel content, and be happier. For example, in the gathering combining the two ministers' families in *Gilead and Home*, Jack mentions whether one is destined to suffer difficultly in this life. After a series of discussions, what makes Jack impressed is Lila's comment that if one does not change one's way of

thinking, the salvation is not effective enough. Yes, I agree to Lila's saying. She shows the importance of confessing one's sin. In the meantime, she points out that the method of confession includes deep meditation and reflection. I think Lila's interpretation of salvation resides in getting release from spiritual burdens, avoiding committing the same mistakes or errors, and stopping a bad situation from becoming even worse. Even if it seems hard to see the painless near future, one can accumulate good deeds for the next life. God helps those who help themselves. I would like to conclude that the gathering contains both the family and religious characteristics. Members in the group help Jack go through his past and ongoing bitter experiences. According to Glory in *Home*, Jack has left home without further news "for twenty years" (2008: 31) because he once had a child before marriage. He did not marry the girl even when his minister father knew the fact of the child. At that time, he just fled. Now, Jack is confronting another difficulty in his life: having a secret black lover. This forbidden interracial love takes place against the background of the 1950s, just before the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Therefore, I believe that Lila's words comfort Jack whether for the past wounds or for the present anxiety. This is the power of the mixture of the religious and family community.

After Robinson published *Home*, Ramona Koval interviewed her in 2008. Robinson mentions that the parable of the prodigal son is a parable less about forgiveness than about grace or love. I would like to focus attention on the analysis of Jack's spiritual transformation in *Home*. Jack wants to receive salvation in this life so he asks in a religious gathering of the family and neighbors whether someone is destined to suffer hard in this life. Maybe he hopes to get relief from his bitter experiences. I think this kind of the religious and family gathering offers him spiritual supporting systems with elements of grace and love. Members conduct such gatherings in the form of study groups. They talk to each other and express their opinions on members' questions. This is an expression of language's strength. According to

Robinson's talks in the interview, "[Glory's] father runs to embrace [Glory's brother Jack] as a son simply when he sees him at a distance." The father's hug shows how body language reveals grace and love. I would like to infer with the following observation how grace and love appear: The father does not say any words but concretely confesses his love toward his son by a natural and sincere embrace. This conveys a sense of acceptance. I think grace and love are voiced out either by physical touches in Jack's case of returning home or by greeting words in Glory's case of returning home. On seeing Glory come home, the father greets her whole-heartedly, "Home to stay, Glory! Yes!" Then, as Jack finally comes home after twenty years, the father embraces his son with all his enthusiasm, which is beyond the expression of language. Robinson further defines these "prosaic gestures," including "small gestures, little courtesies towards one another, and little provisions for one another's comfort." Robinson frequently uses those observations in her imagination of the characters' interactions. Let me elaborate on how Robinson has taken on the concreteness of love through prosaic gestures and her specific definition of them: those prosaic gestures show one's goodness toward others, comfort other people sometimes even beyond the communication of language, and shorten the distance between people. I think the concrete messages of grace and love through a warm embrace may sustain one's strength to continue in life or to pursue one's dream. I want to emphasize that the prosaic gesture is really Robinson's strategy of writing her domestic novels, including *Housekeeping*. The grandmother did not ask much about the life Ruth lived with her mother, but in other ways, she did express her love and warmth by daily care for Ruth and Lucille.

The secondary source about *Gilead*, Siefker Bailey's criticism (2010) studies transient joy and religious sensation as depicted in this work. That is to say, "Robinson's novel asks readers to seek that kind of transcendent joy, to look through a lens of love and acceptance and communion to strive to see the good, the beauty, and the love, with whatever it takes to

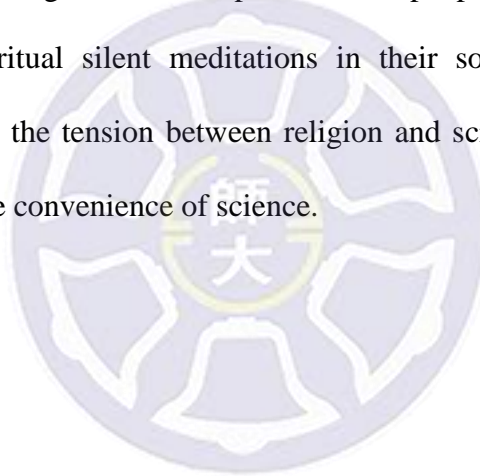
see that, be it forgiveness, camaraderie, solidarity, anything that allows a harmonious community to transcend enmity between people, the iniquities that cause community to transcend enmity between people,” (2010: 276). We can immediately associate Robinson’s religious utopia with Siefker Bailey’s criticism.

As Robinson is a biblical scholar, I refer to her ideas in *Absence of Mind* (2010), where she mentions that self-discipline and solitude are important for exercising spiritual meditations. I think Robinson’s women characters often meditate when they confront difficulty in the family life. Ruth and Sylvie in *Housekeeping*, Lila in *Gilead*, and Glory in *Home* all meditate in order to change themselves. Robinson’s religion in *Absence of Mind* leaves at least two traces: First, the importance of self-discipline or self-criticism when she examines science as comparative figure with religion; second, the “feeling, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude” (7).

In the first place, Robinson considers that one should let one’s self live an independent life based on serious spiritual self-learning. To start with, I think in a religious family group, if each member does not control his or her desire, everybody will inevitably claim right excessively. The community, therefore, cannot be sure whether everyone in the big religious family still has his or her original freedom. It is a serious disciplined lifestyle that one has infinite freedom but within the religious restrictions. Next, we can glance at some reasons why we have to criticize ourselves. In order to reflect on one’s acts, one has to practice spiritual meditations. In this way, one is able to confess his or her sin, and then has the possibility to receive salvation in next life. An example of this is Robinson’s character Lila in *Gilead* and *Home*. Lila suggests to prodigal Jack that he should actively try changing himself in this life rather than passively waiting for salvation in next life.

In the second place, Robinson says that each one becomes silent and afterward calms down to meditate, feeling peacefully, acting wisely and gaining experience of the broader

worldview (*Absence of Mind* 7). I want to develop this statement above. One should not just keep complaining when she confronts difficulty in life. Thus, one will not be controlled by her negative emotions. It would be more likely for someone to get through hardship wisely, as she can stop furiously cursing her miserable fate. An individual should not lose her head in harsh circumstances so she will not do regrettable things. Instead, one can reflect thoroughly on her present state, thus standing outside the worry over the problem, conducting another direction of thought to deal with the issue, then accumulating relevant experiences, finally coping with the dilemma successfully. In conclusion, Robinson has chosen two perspectives that I feel to be reasonably central in a sense that religion helps people live liberally by moderate self-control, and religion makes it possible that people live through their difficult positions by religious spiritual silent meditations in their solitude. I think that though Robinson mainly discusses the tension between religion and science in this book, she does not fundamentally reject the convenience of science.



Conclusion

Marilynne Robinson cares about how women spiritually transform themselves, in their homes and in public environments. In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie and Ruth leave their house for the wild outside world. Robinson ends up by writing about their new life away from the town of Fingerbone with an open-ended description. We are not sure if Sylvie and Ruth are ghosts or still alive when the narrator Ruth mentions that she saw Lucille's daily activities. In *Gilead*, Lila takes care of her child with Ames when Ames gradually moves toward death, the next spiritual form of existence. In *Home*, Glory attempts to live independently between domestic space and public space. This thesis contributes a new perspective to Taiwan scholarship on American women's writers and Robinson's works, in particular in reference to discussions of the home, women's roles and religious meditations in terms of inside space and outside space.

Robinson structures her first novel with this concern of the literary tradition in mind that women are almost excluded in *Moby Dick*. She then designs men's exclusion in *Housekeeping*. "While I first started writing *Housekeeping*, [...] I did think of creating a world that had the feeling of femaleness," (Robinson, *An Interview Conducted by Thomas Schaub*, 1994: 233). I conclude that Robinson wants to create a world that seems to exclude men because she finds that women are seldom mentioned in *Moby Dick*, except for the fact that the inn-keeper is a woman, who is treated "gently and respectfully" (1994: 234). Robinson says, "I thought if I could write a book in which there were no male characters that men could read—comfortably—then I get *Moby Dick*" (1994: 234). I also find out that from Robinson's perspective if men experience adventure and learn lessons on the sea, women similarly can go drifting and gain spiritual rebirth in the wild. This indicates why Robinson starts building Ruth's home of thorough femaleness after her grandfather's death in the beginning of *Housekeeping*. Ruth never met her grandfather but she describes his anecdotes vividly by his traces left in the house. Her grandfather constructs the house for her

grandmother in an isolated place where the family will probably stay for life. Her grandfather likely discovers the fact that his house actually is located in at an isolated place that is almost without travelers so he collects all sorts of travel magazines. He makes paintings of mountains with snow-covered peaks. Ruth's Grandmother Mrs. Sylvia Foster does not inherit her grandfather's travel dream, but Ruth's mother Helen and Ruth's aunts all leave the town of Fingerbone as they grow up. Sylvie, who is responsible for Ruth after Ruth's grandmother dies, even leads a transient life. Therefore, I want to comment that through Ruth's narration, the grandfather's death and his influence on his daughters and granddaughters in the beginning of *Housekeeping* has the following influence: the grandfather's travel mags are a substitute for the *Moby Dick* adventure enjoyed by men.

As Robinson claims her favorite book is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, I also intend to look into Robinson's inspiration from books in criticism of Melville in Hester Blum's "Melville and the Novel of the Sea" (2011). Blum proposes that in the criticism, the character Dana in *Two Years before the Mast* (1984) influences Melville because Dana regards "the sea as a palace for labor" (2011: 154) and "a place for contemplation." Besides, in the early puritan age, American writers also relate the world to philosophy or religion by life and meditation. For example, Edward Taylor similarly interpreted the world by lines, whereas Ann Bradstreet observed the world in order to understand the Bible. Therefore, Blum's criticism is useful of approaching the elements of traveling and transport in Robinson's novels. In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie invites Ruth to the boating trip and then inspired by the water body, Ruth reflects upon the death-birth passage. I think, first, that the water claims Helen's life, and causes natural disasters such as floods, so it represents destruction and death; second, that the image of water evokes danger as well as rebirth because it relates the mother womb of fluid and the plot crossing the bridge to gain new life. In *Gilead*, Lila is actually a traveler from somewhere with a different background compared with her husband Ames in

terms of religion, and her perspective that impresses Ames by her different usage of grammar, and philosophy of salvation. Her misuse of plural form of single person subject makes her language generous in forgiving. In *Home*, Glory returns home from the high school as an English teacher with perception of women's independence. She can drive the car that means she owns mobility; can teach as a high school teacher and therefore she has occupational experience and ability; and lastly has her own opinions on domestic decorations.

In Karen Kaivola's "The Pleasures and Perils of Merging" (1993), Sylvie's housekeeping does not keep the house separate from the outside, from nature, and has a tendency toward chaos; therefore, the house/home is redefined. If a woman's place is in the home, one way to make the home *less* confining is to remove the boundaries that both separate it from nature and define female roles and behaviors (680). Considering this fact, I argue that the domestic boundaries become looser in Robinson's novel. Similarly, based on Geyh's criticism (1993), "While subjects constitute themselves through the creation of spaces, these same spaces also elicit the structure subjectivity" (104), we inevitably discern that there is no frame, thus there is all freedom. This is useful for me to further expound Robinson's observation in *Housekeeping*, Sylvie's way of keeping house appearing to result in a state of chaos to the community, showing that women's own subjectivity in terms of housekeeping, in her home and her own private space, is invaded by the norm, the invisible frames.

Based on Wood's criticism (2012), I infer that in *Home* the mental pressure is reflected in physical pressures in the home: "The very furniture is oppressive, immovable. The numerous knickknacks were displayed only 'as courtesy to their giver, most of whom by now would have gone to their reward'" (2012: 166). In my opinion, the decoration in the house reveals how social rules are like unnecessary surface layers of the family's core.

Robinson in *Home* writes about women's religious meditations through Lila's, and Glory's cases. First, Lila grows many flowers in both Ames's and Glory's family graveyard,

out of kindness, love, and passion for life. By taking care of the family graveyard, Lila seems to become a member of those past lives just as she presently lives as a family member in both Ames's home and an intimate neighbor near Glory's home. Second, Glory reads the Bible every day in the morning and at night when she lives alone away from home. Feeling that her old father will be happy to know her effort to read the Bible, Glory studies the Bible so she always remembers who she is and where she comes from.

Women characters in Marilynne Robinson's novels have radical possibility, against traditions. In Marilynne Robinson's works, Glory and Lila radically change traditions with their revolutionary opinions. Having received higher education, Glory functions like the woman Calvinist Anne Bradstreet in the mid-20th century. In the *Gilead* series, Lila carries on Sylvie's drifting in Robinson's earlier novel, *Housekeeping*.

In the family religious gatherings, whenever Jack and Ames argue about the religious concepts such as predestination, Glory will pitch in with her radical view: "Excuse me, this defense I have heard thousands of times, which I hate very much." Out of the habit of being a high school teacher, Glory then suggests all the people on the spot rest for five minutes so they can later keep discussing other topics. By doing so, Glory enthusiastically seeks to improve the communication in the family in a better and positive way.

In addition, when Lila firstly talks about her religious ideas of salvation to Jack, she does not look back to Jack but just stares at her hands. In this way, she is able to finish her statement though Jack shows his frustration after he hears Lila's comments. Such interaction between Lila and Jack indicates Lila's radical response to educated male authority. Having graduated from university, Jack often confidently speaks out his revolutionary religious argument. Lila who did not go to school at this time strives to gain her chance to voice out her religious reflection from her vagrant childhood and solitude in the wild.

Robinson is concerned about how women enhance their own spiritual growth in the

home or in outside spaces. Considering that women face the pressure of social norms, Robinson in her novels describes how female characters have the courage to overcome social challenges, and then gain strength and get freedom. In *Moby Dick*, one of Robinson's favorite literary traditions, women's roles are almost unnecessary. This finding indicates that women in the traditional patriarchal society have no important place. Robinson rewrites the literary tradition dominated by men's perspective by creating her first novel *Housekeeping*, providing readers with a new literary world where women can own their own unique family story without depending on male family members. In *Housekeeping*, Sylvie breaks the boundary between domestic space and outside space by letting the domestic order naturally chaotic. Sylvie redefines the traditional home: there is no frame, so there is thorough freedom. Inheriting the spirit of persistence in *Moby Dick*, Robinson in *Housekeeping* through Sylvie's perspective emphasizes how important it is that family members stay together with each other no matter how difficult; how critical it is that women maintain their spiritual space in the home and in outside spaces. Women's roles in the home and women's meditations in outside spaces are two points worth observing in Marilynne Robinson's novels. Robinson constructs a sense of belonging in these families, and argues that women deserve their own existence especially in terms of spiritual reality. Glory, having received higher education, tends to challenge the system. Lila, though from orphan-like vagrancy, she has the courage to get married and express her reflective religious thoughts. With rich spiritual space, women characters in Robinson's novels create their own histories.

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