



People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry Of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Mohamed Boudiaf –M'sila
Faculty of Letters and English Language
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**Home Space, Feminine Subjectivity, and Unhousing in
Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*.**

**Thesis Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Home Space, Feminine Subjectivity, and Unhousing in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*,” is my own work and all the sources I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

Signature

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Master journey has been tempestuous, with many crises and many lessons. But I admit that I have learned so much and I see things differently now. I thank all who in one way or another contributed in the completion of this thesis. My thanks, first and foremost, go to Allah for giving me the strength and ability to embark on this journey and to see it to fruition.

I extend my special thanks to my supervisor, Ms. BENIA Amel. Her consistent support, guidance, and overall insights in this research have made this an inspiring experience for me.

Furthermore, I'm deeply grateful to my friends and classmates who supported me throughout my career. I will always appreciate all what they have done. I also would like to express my deepest gratitude to my teachers of the English Department at the University of M'sila whom I have learnt much from.

Last but not least, my heartily thanks to my family and my soul mate Sirine B. They have never left my side. Likewise, many heartfelt thanks to my supporter, Sabri, whose words of encouragement and push to tenacity ring in my ears during the running of this journey.

May Allah bless all of you.

DEDICATION

This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my loving mother. Her constant love, support, and encouragement have sustained me throughout my life. And, to my source of strength, my father, who took the lead to heaven before reaching this degree.

Abstract

The study of space was for a long time considered irrelevant to literary analysis. Nevertheless, in the Contemporary period, the relationship between Home Space, Women, and Domesticity has been the source of much critical debate in literary criticism. This thesis, therefore, aims to examine the ways in which occupied spaces define concepts of domesticity, housekeeping, feminine subjectivity, and unhousing in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1980). Additionally, it explores on the one side 'housekeeping concepts' such as home, houses, and domesticity, and on the other side 'unhousing's concepts' like transience, homelessness, and border crossing. It also examines how female characters construct their identities and subjectivity through the different spaces they occupy. Such an examination leads the way to a deeper understanding of the two models of female subjectivity Robinson offers in her novel: One is the settled, domestic female who makes sense of her oneness through the inside occupied social space of a house, and the other is the vagrant and transient female constructing an identity by crossing the borders towards an open and natural space. To achieve this, the research is carried out by relying on important concepts of Space Theories and Feminism.

Keywords: Home, space, Women, Domesticity, Transience, feminine subjectivity, housekeeping, unhousing.

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Introduction:

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of writing on the importance of the concept of “home” among the interdisciplinary fields of social sciences, psychology, human geography, history, design, and philosophy. Although several researchers currently perceive home as a multidimensional idea and acknowledge the presence of and requirement for multidisciplinary research within the field, there has been minimal sustained reflection and criticism on the multidisciplinary field of home research and also the various, even contradictory meanings of this term. Many questions were raised in the theoretical and empirical literature such as whether home is a place(s), a space(s), feeling(s), practices, and/ or an active state of being in the world. Home is differently depicted in literature and it is often conflated with or identified with house, family, shelter, self, gender, etc.

In 1985, European philosopher, writer, and social thinker Gaston Bachelard introduced his theoretical book *The Poetics of Space*, in which he introduces the house as the quintessential phenomenological object. This means that house is the place in which the personal experience reaches its epitome. He considers the house as a sort of initial universe, asserting that “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5). Bachelard proceeds to examine the home as the manifestation of the soul through the poetic image and literary images which are found in poetry. He examines locations in the house as places of intimacy and memory which are manifested in poetry.

The house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space, provided ... its unity and complexity, and endeavor to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value [...] A sort of attraction for images concentrates them about the house. Transcending our

memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all houses we have dreamed we live in. (3)

Bachelard determines that the house has both unity and complexity. It is made out of memories and experiences. Its different parts evoke different sensations and brings up a unitary, intimate experience of living.

The concept of “home” is intrinsically tied to the concept of “femininity” (Schriell). Similarly, feminist geographers have challenged ideas related to how the different genders relate to the space around them. As in the Victorian understanding of separate spheres, a proper woman should internalize domesticity. This in turn, as Linda McDowell further points out in her book *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*, has resulted in “women being associated more closely with nature and home and the domestic space”, while “men are seen as civilized, rational and superior” (44). In addition, she points out that “a woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life”, while “men lacking natural creative functions assert their creativity externally, ‘artificially’, through the medium of technology and symbols” (75). This has also tended to restrict women’s social movement, and to imprison them universally to certain social contexts, that is, the domestic context which is seen as closer to nature, even when the domestic space is most often created by men (77). There is thus the idea that women are somehow spatially more restrained than men because of the physical limitations brought about by female embodiment during pregnancy.

Feminists have challenged the ideology of domesticity since the early 1970s, at the same time as the family changed into “a unit of consumption rather than one of production” (81). Namely, there are cultural, social and economic forces that have increasingly tried to define what domesticity means from the outside rather than having the family unit define domesticity in their own terms. Concurrently, women have also started to face homelessness

and having a roof over one's head has stopped meaning that one has a home, as many women who live in temporary accommodation can also be considered homeless (90).

Female novelists and first and second wave feminists attempt to voice the woman's need to free herself from the domestic space. Woman must use that space—but she must somehow own it or exert influence over it, otherwise she will be unable to write (Schrier 8). One of the authors who voiced this need is Marilynne Robinson. She is arguably one of the most remarkable and distinctive voices in contemporary American literature, who has written four highly acclaimed fictional novels: *Housekeeping* (1980), *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014). She is best known for her novels *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*. Robinson is also the author of many non-fictional works. Numerous researchers center around recurrent themes in her writing, such as grace, nature, compassion, family, or expressions of femininity.

Housekeeping was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was awarded the PEN/Hemingway Award for best first novel. It was named by *The Guardian Unlimited* one of the 100 greatest novels of all time, describing the book as “Haunting, poetic story, drowned in water and light, about three generations of women. The story is told by the protagonist Ruth and chronicles her experiences with her younger sister, Lucille. Together, they have been put under the care of different relatives in the town of Fingerbone, Idaho. The two children are sent to live with their grandmother Sylvia after their mother committed suicide. Few years later their grandmother died. After that, they were under Nona and Lily's care. Eventually, their aunt Sylvie comes to take care of them. Initially, Ruth and Lucille, are shocked by Sylvie's chaotic and disorganized world. Ruth quickly adjusts to her aunt's lifestyle. However, Lucille is unhappy with the eccentric lifestyle, which Ruth and aunt Sylvie live, and decided to move out. The novel treats the subject of housekeeping, not only in the domestic sense of cleaning, but also in the larger face of keeping a spiritual oneself and family in the sense of loss. Likewise, it

is filled with a philosophic discussion of the role of family, memory, and loss as Ruth attempts to make sense of a new female-oriented view of reality.

From the onset, *Housekeeping* is a story of boundaries, that is, the separations between what belongs inside and what should stay outside the house. More specifically, it is a story of broken boundaries and the trauma that occurs when these boundaries erode. *Housekeeping* highlights a domestic space that has the ability to scare, fragment, and even pulverize its inhabitants except if something is done to capture it and reestablish order. It represents significant issues about the meaning of home and the house in terms of the conventional binary of inside versus outside, which preserves the house's stability and regularity.

The choice of this novel as the corpus of the present study is supported by the area of the research "female's relationship to the household and domestic sphere, along with the traditional modes of domesticity." Robinson provides a meaningful portrayal of spatial and domestic constraints that women face throughout their lives. This offers an interesting outlook on how women are related to space and how subjects make space their own. Therefore, the present study attempts to provide answers to the following main question: How does space define concepts of housekeeping, unhousing, and feminine subjectivity? Additionally, it attempts to answer the following sub-questions: How do characters construct their identities through the space they occupy? How does Robinson relate femininity with transience? Put differently, the study explores the ways in which space defines concepts of housekeeping and unhousing, investigates the phenomenological significance and roles of space and place in the context of *Housekeeping*. It also examines how characters construct their identities through the space they occupy.

Literature Review:

Housekeeping is an open-ended novel. Therefore, it is obvious that there is a wide range of interpretations ranging from the metaphysical to the psychoanalytical and the feminist. Numerous critics extravagantly praise the novel for its attempts to incorporate and venture beyond great American texts to a view that women's reality is fluid, ever-changing, and constantly revised. *The Chicago Tribune* states that "*Housekeeping* is a resounding achievement." *The New York Times Books Review*, says *Housekeeping* is "so precise, so distilled, so beautiful that one doesn't want to miss any pleasure it might yield." *The Washington Lost Book World* says *Housekeeping* is "Extraordinary." Elizabeth Jane Howard states:

The novel is a winner [...] like most works of art, it can be savored in layers [...]. Mrs. Robinson uses language so fresh, so direct, so accurate and essential that particularly every sentence is worth close attention. Her humor is of the kind that makes you smile from its truth, and she reflects and sifts her perceptions like a poet. This is a novel to prize and reread. (Howard)

The book has been praised, particularly by Feminist critics. They find in it an attempt to write the great American Novel of Women. While Robinson begins in the contexts of other American novelists, she moves "beyond them to attempt to create a view of reality that relies on change, loss, memory, and fluidity as more valid than concrete reality" (Symposium).

The very nature of such an unusual story, departing from the traditional text, demands the reader's attention, says Elizabeth A. Meese in her chapter "A World of Women: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." The lack of men in Robinson's book allows her to characterize the experience of women in literature separate from their traditional role in affiliation with or in relation to men. Care giving and housekeeping, the essence of female reality, are handled by

Robinson in unique and innovative new ways. Meese notes that Robinson gets rid of the biological mother “Helen” early in the novel in order to deal with “mothering” in a new way. Sylvie, surrogate mother, represents an alternate model as mother. She explains that Robinson “goes beyond woman’s affiliative existence as wife and mother” her “construction of a world without men [...] permits her to explore the idea of ‘Woman’ and gender roles in essentially female terms” (59). Robinson shatters current perceptions of motherhood and the nuclear family and shows that existence without men and mother radically changes the role of women and family life. Sylvie, the transient, is the only one able to “mother” and have a developed autonomous female identity. It is through her character that Robinson “calls into question the cultural construction of housekeeping and mothering” (59). Sylvie’s unconventional housekeeping tends more to the outside than the inside.

The novel becomes a “tending to and a nurturing of the exterior world, an opening up of the inside to the outside” (59). Although Sylvie’s housekeeping practices are unorthodox, she fills for Ruth the most elemental role of mothering. As Meese shows “we sense the importance of this gift because Sylvie is an inveterate drifter who feels the tug of every train that comes through the town of Fingerbone. Sylvie is ‘love’ an elusive essence [...] she is that which can only be desired but never possessed” (60). She asserts that Lucille opts for the conventional gender role which women have been stereotyped into and that the sentiments of feminist readers, are against her for conforming to traditional gender roles of women. Also, she discusses Robinson’s attempt to answer life’s most basic questions: “what was, what is, what matters, and why [...] Robinson seems implicitly to challenge the tradition of the novel of manner, and particularly manners as windows to morals, to value. Hers is the feminist’s most pressing axiological concern [...] what is valued and why?” (63). It is the emphasis on value that gives rise to the function of memory in the text. Meese acknowledges that; “through the narrative record of memory are the dead at once dead and alive” (65). It is through memory that

the dead are resurrected and kept alive while still being dead. This reality becomes truer than the normal concrete construct of reality.

In his article “History, Critical Theory, and Women’s Social Practices: ‘Women’s Time’ and *Housekeeping*”, Thomas Foster contends that the author tries to get the reader to choose between the conventional female role Lucille chooses and the unconventional role of Ruth. According to him, choosing is a political act of endorsing or rejecting societal norms. Foster examines a more political agenda in his review of Robinson’s book; public versus private domain, Sylvie as model for the incorporation of male privilege or the freedom to wander, and women’s ability to feel comfortable outside conventional space allotted to them. He points out that early in the novel the grandmother’s relation to the town is defined “in terms of the exclusion from access to the public domain” (86). Also, he points out that “the grandmother’s house is a text in which it is possible to read traces of the creation of a boundary between public and private fields of endeavor, within which women are confined” (92). The town of Fingerbone, as represented by most conventional society, is not ready for the altered social structure that Sylvie represents.

Jacqui Smyth, in his article “Sheltered Vagrancy in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*,” believes the novel’s storyline to be one of “a psychoanalytical reversal [...] to the pre-oedipal phase, as the grandfather passes away and the symbolic order is cut free” (289). An important point that Smyth makes is also the fact that “Ruth’s subjectivity is contingent upon that which is not” and “in this negativity the self paradoxically expands” (289). In another essay entitled, “Is there Life after Art? The Metaphysics in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*”, Joan Kirkby understands *Housekeeping* as beginning “The re-examination of the very categories of nature and culture so necessary to our developing concepts of who we are and our relationship to the world” (91). She suggests that the novel’s central theme is “a return to values and modes of being that have been associated in myth and imagery with the

province of the female” (92). She understands housekeeping itself as “a metaphor of Art” or “all the various human contrivances and construct” used to “contain the unregulated energies of nature” (93).

In her dissertation “Slipping into the Dark Death as a Means of Discovery in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro pàramo* and Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*,” Sarah Hansen analyzes Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro pàramo* and Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping* to investigate how Mexican and American societies see death. By looking at the considerations and activities of the youthful protagonist through the perspective of the uncanny, it ends up clear that they are searching for a history that has been quelled by society. Furthermore, Kristin Lowe inspects in her thesis “Redefining Self in the Midst of Things: Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*” the role of material culture in Robinson’s *Housekeeping* to see how the noticeable nearness of material culture presents complex inquiries regarding the connections among objects, reality, and oneself by perceiving objects’ smoothness of importance.

Research Design and Methodology:

In interpreting Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping* the appropriate theory that can be used is the Feminist theory hand in hand with Space theories since the novel is concerned with the subjects of domestic and home space, and community of females. This study will highlight the American contemporary literature depiction, the feminist, and the domestic and home space perspectives. In order to develop a better understanding of the topic, this work relies on the close reading of *Housekeeping*, and major theoretical works so as to understand the spatial and feministic behaviors and important interactions in the primary text.

The work will be divided into an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter is devoted for the Theoretical framework. First of all, space theories are rigorously tackled in this section along with the book *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard in order

to explore main concepts such as Home, Domestic space, House and universe, and explorations of inside and outside dialectics. Additionally, other theoretical books will be of great relevance to this research such as: *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel de Certeau, *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre, and *Home Territories* by David Morley, since they will help in conceptualizing and analyzing the work from different aspects. Secondly, this section deals with the Feminist Theory in order to explore how traditional gender roles are deconstructed and subverted. Moreover, Ecofeminism will be used to explore the relationship between female characters and their environment and the spaces they occupy.

The second chapter entitled “Home Space and Unhousing in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*”, opens its first section with a discussion about the author and the novel. Next, the second section of this chapter deals with the concept of Home, Domestic space, and Feminine subjectivity within the context of the novel. Moreover, this part sheds light on feminine subjectivity and how it is linked with the domestic and the outer realms. Then, the third section explores concepts of “Housekeeping” and “Unhousing”; namely, depicting how Robinson has presented these two opposed concepts in her novel. Furthermore, the fourth section of this chapter tackles different spaces and places in the novel. And, it explores how characters construct their identities through the spaces they occupy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of feminine vagrancy through border crossing and transience.

CHAPTER ONE

Towards Domesticity and Femininity.

This chapter is invested in explaining the theoretical background of this thesis. The first part of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of theories of space and how space is used as a critical theory. Additionally, it tackles phenomenological concepts of home space along with the exploration of the distinction between space and place. Thereafter, it proceeds with exploring concepts like Home, Domestic space, House and Universe, inside and outside dialectics using Space theories. Next, the second part of the chapter encloses discussions about the common trope of ‘woman trapped in the house’, thus, going into the relationship between domestic space and feminism. Also, this part deals with explorations of how traditional gender roles are deconstructed and subverted, that leads to the understandings of feminist geographies in terms of Gender, Identity, and Place using Feminist theory. The last part of the chapter delves into Eco-feminism theory, in order to explore the relationship between females and the environment and the spaces they occupy. Setting a firm theoretical background in this chapter can help us understand how such perspectives and theories are employed in Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, which will be discussed in the second chapter.

1- Phenomenological Studies of Home:

When dealing with phenomenological studies, one is dealing with the study of human experience and space. Broadly, it is a much more universal and expansive view of what it is for humans to exist in space, and how the dwelling itself exists within the sphere of being. Thus, space is inescapable from our experience of it and existence within it. The study of space was for a long time regarded as being somehow irrelevant to literary analysis. Nevertheless, contemporary literature, in particular, portrays an unprecedented interest in the

phenomenological relation of space and individuals. That is why, the current era had been identified with the “Spatial Turn.”

The predominance of time over space in literary analysis traces back to Aristotle who pointed out the higher relevance of events in time, in detriment to the setting (Lothe 03). In 1766, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, poet, and critic, in his study *Laocoon*, sided with Aristotle and drew a division between spatial and temporal arts. In *Space and Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void* (2015), Patricia García points out that from Lessing’s perspective, “the literary text is conceived of as a succession of words, sounds, and events while, for example, sculpture or painting instead offers objects juxtaposed in space and simultaneously apprehended”(5). For a long time, this approach somehow ruled literary studies, leading scholars to consider space as a secondary element, merely providing background to the action. Despite being cast to the background of academic interest, the setting was always a relevant part of narratives:

Setting is a key feature of almost all stories, as events take place in a given place, after all [...] Whole genres may be defined by such spatial or geographical characteristics, such as the pastoral poem, the travel narrative, utopia, or the urban exposé [...] we find literature to be thoroughly bound up in a network of relations with space. (Tally 1)

Hence, alongside the changes in narratives over the decades, the approach to spatial descriptions and the descriptive use of background also faced modifications. During the period of Romanticism, the most common technique used to describe the spatial background was based on landscape painting. As D. S. Bland points out, “the appreciation of *natural* nature is to be a characteristic of the Romantic Movement” (318). In that context, the background description should be comprehensive to spur the reader into a cathartic feeling due to nature contemplation.

However, this technique suffered criticisms because the emotional response was not unanimous and some readers considered these descriptive passages to be superfluous (318).

Critiques regarding this use of space came through because the nineteenth century was marked as the age of scientific development. Therefore, the Romantic literary representation of the world could no longer fit the demands of society. The greatest scientific name of the period was Isaac Newton, whose theory consisted in the fact that “reality is observable and verifiable by sense-perception” (qtd. in Gomel 12). Society was becoming empirical, less focused on idealism, which affected the aesthetics. According to Gomel, “it was Newton’s absolute space and time that became foundational in the development of the realistic novel” (10). As a consequence, Realism came as a reaction and an alternative to Romanticism. According to Bland, the ideal literary space became one of “mimesis”, therefore, the more authentic the better. It is important to remark that in Realism “the novelist’s characters are contemporary figures, moving in a solid world of everyday life” (316). This “mimetic space” of everyday life in realistic novels aimed to make easier for the reader to ascribe a real place and social status to each character. The purpose of using space was clearly different in both movements; however, in their majority, they fit the same category in Bland’s theory: the utilitarian description of space.

By observing such patterns in novels, in his article *Endangering the Reader’s Neck: Background Description in the Novel* (1967), Bland categorized the different facets of spatial descriptions in three distinct types. The most common in earlier novels is the *utilitarian description*. This kind of description is “required by the novel to localise its characters and their actions” (326). The descriptive passages only set the scene; they add no deeper meaning to the text. In case the reader decides to skip them, there is no alteration in the experience of reading or in the understanding of the story. Yet, Realism was far from being homogeneous, according to Gomel,

If the nineteenth century was the age of realism, it was also the age of revolutions, both conceptual and social. These revolutions were first articulated through realism's rebellious sibling—the Gothic. In the Gothic, space is not Newtonian: it is twisted into claustrophobic mazes, inescapable dungeons, and haunted castles where the past collides with the present. The brooding landscapes of the Gothic express the fears, foreboding, and insights that have no voice in realism (11).

Alongside the Gothic and the enthusiasm of horror stories, in the nineteenth century setting attained another relevance and use. The *atmospheric description*, or mood landscape, aimed to “place the character in his social setting, as well as within a geographical one, and then followed the manipulation of landscape in the novel of terror to suit the emotions and situations of the characters” (326). These words were used to bring the reader closer to the characters. When the mood is determined, the reader feels like a character in the story, which caters perfectly to the Horror and Gothic genre. But the functional or metaphorical use of setting is not restricted to the Gothic. In Jane Austen's novels, the setting allows the reader not only to feel the confinement of women but also to understand the existing state of that specific society. Whenever one tries to skip these spatial descriptions, some information gets missed or they cannot connect properly with the characters.

Spatial descriptions can still be *symbolic* “and so stand for more than the writer expresses directly, or else express in succinct form what otherwise might have been more laborious” (Bland 331). The meaning is implied in the text and the reader's interaction with the passages reaches another level. Bland's argument states the relevance of spatial descriptions: “the descriptive passages take their place in the texture of the novel, and cannot be detached and enjoyed for their own sake, nor wished away from the novel without damaging its fabric” (331). In a way, the author is inviting the reader to be co-author and draw his own conclusions from the text.

Although space was a literary element that constantly presented changes, the value of space only took a turn academically in the twentieth century. Geography in literary works was not strange to English Modernism. There is no denial of the importance of space in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*; nevertheless, space was not an element recognized by earlier critics. As Andrew Thacker states, "earlier literary critics often read these texts by subjugating their spatiality to that of an aesthetic theme or trope" (28), therefore, critics acknowledged the influence of space in specific works, only as a metaphor or as "incidental details" (28). However, in the second half of the 20th Century, space turned from a neglected issue to one of academic interest. This process is known as 'The Spatial Turn', which affected all areas of the humanities.

As a process, the Spatial Turn requires a temporal origin. For García, it was set in motion by the Second World War; he explains that "The Second World War triggered large volumes of immigration across geopolitical borders, while the Cold War was to see the rapid emergence of a succession of states as well as further geopolitical restructuring, boosted by the fall of the Iron Curtain and the enlargement of the European Union" (4). The high rate of immigration during and after the war provoked a new focus for the Human Sciences. Territoriality, identity, and culture were at the center of all academic discussions. The course of action through time did not respond to the complexities of narratives; therefore, it was highly relevant to consider where and in which spatial contexts the actions took place. As a consequence, attention was turned to the concept of space and "the importance of spatiality in understanding the history of the human being and of its artistic products" (5). The study of space by Social and Humanity Sciences aimed to understand the new relations favored by the imminent globalization, as well as contribute to unveil different cultural identities and traditions worldwide.

According to Jakob Lothe, it was impossible for critics to overlook the issue of space due to the "crucially important function which space has for the formation of human identity –

including the representation of human identity in and through narrative” (3). Moreover, this change in the narrative perspective was also important for readers. Again, Tally states that “[it] becomes a way for readers to understand and think their own social spaces” (6). Once the readers could visualize through literary models the context they were inserted in, they could start building their identities in ways that were more concrete. Hence, this interest in space accompanied a new aesthetics, called Postmodernism. He observed that a critical and theoretical adaptation was in order since the previous theories were not able to provide a proper analysis. Consequently, “critics and theorists had to develop novel interpretive and critical models to address that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern” (2). That is, it was also responsible for broadening the understanding of space in modern and postmodern literary theory and criticism.

Lothe highlights the concept of ‘lived space’ as an essential point in understanding the Spatial Turn. “Lived space is deictically oriented space as perceived and talked about in everyday life” (Buchholz and Jahn 553). Some of the most important writings for this interest in space have come from the phenomenological studies such as Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958). He states that for Bachelard, “our experience of space is associated with identity and identity formation” (3). Thus, this lived space provides the room where individuals have experiences determined by their own living conditions, which will end up shaping their identities. In this regard, Gaston Bachelard’s theory of space consists of the analysis of people’s interactions with places and objects as a way of shaping, but also as a reflection of, their inner selves. According to his theory, experiences build analogous meanings to images and archetypes. He believed these images to be the precursors of our expressions as human beings and that every part of our production (social, cultural, artistic, political and even linguistic) comes from that source (Bachelard xxxvi). These images are represented through symbols that hold different meanings for different people; these meanings are built according to our own experiences and memories.

His famous work *The Poetics of Space*, provides an important discussion about the theory of space, as it has an important role in that ‘Spatial Turn,’ or what Michel Foucault named ‘Epoch of Space.’ Foucault explains that in his lecture “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” as follow:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (01).

This search for an understanding of human identities and new relations ended up promoting a change in literary studies. According to Foucault, we owe to the phenomenologists such as Gaston Bachelard this awareness that “we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space” (2). Relations pervade every space inhabited or occupied by a human being; the specific set of relations define a site (3). Lothe agrees that the phenomenological studies were one of the first forces responsible for charging the wave of the Spatial Turn, and Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* is certainly amongst them.

Bachelard’s book has proven to be a defining and influential text in the phenomenological study of Domestic space and Home. Describing the interior space of dwelling as “intimate”, Bachelard states that it is the imagination that increases the very real value of inside space. Inhabited space owns effective value due to its capacity to accommodate and preserve its inhabitants, but the inhabitants of a house encounter that importance out of their imagination. He explains that

The house [...] is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space, provided [...] that we take it in both its unity and complexity

and endeavor to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value. [...] I shall prove that imagination augments the values of reality. (Bachelard 3)

Therefore, the experience of shelter and protection in the home is for the dweller based in reality and created in the mind. Throughout the lives of those who have inhabited a family home, dreams of security and intimacy form and return, and resulting in a harmony of recalled experience and imagined experience.

Thus, Bachelard suggests a creative engagement with occupied spaces that is later echoed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life (1984)*, in which De Certeau explores the process by which people can reimagine, and thus reclaim, public spaces and objects whose meanings have always been decided and outlined. Everyday practices are about spaces, more specifically, inhabited spaces. De Certeau investigates the spatial logics and dimensions of everyday life and cultural consumption, as he explores in “Walking in the City,” the use of urban space as an example of the ways in which consumers, as bricoleurs, actively re-use culture and “re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production” (De Certeau xviii). The somatic act of walking recognizes the probabilities of space arranged by the spatial order, in line, the act of speaking realizes a language, its subject, and writes a text. This process “affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc.,” which is walking, “the trajectories it ‘speaks’” (99). Walking is conceived as an initial and manifested form of examining urban space. walking and other spatial practices are subjective ways of allotment in contrast to common ways of administration (96). They are tactical in quality, rather than strategic. This distinction between strategies and tactics is closely organized with the distinction that De Certeau makes between place and space in ‘Spatial Stories’, another volume in his book.

His use of place refers to a stable ahistorical configuration of positions ruled by the law of the ‘proper’, that is, defined by the distinction of elements in relationships of coexistence, “A place is the order [...] in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of

coexistence”, thus, “is an instantaneous configuration of positions”(117). Place capacitates a home to delineate itself and its others and to practice strategies of power utilizing this distinction. Whilst space is a “practiced place”, taking vectors of direction, velocities and time variables into account “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers. [...] an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs” (117), Space is induced by “the ensemble of movements developed within it” (117), and situated by the actions of historical subjects. Thus, de Certeau understands ‘space’ and ‘place’ as a set of concrete embodied and intertwining practices of daily life. Spaces and places are produced through our daily practices (eating, sleeping, and walking).

‘Space’ can be explained as a location that has no social links for a human being where no significance has been added. According to the philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan, it is an open space, but it may be “marked off and defended against intruders” (4). It does not encourage people to fill the space by being creative and no meaning has been described to it; it is more abstract (6). ‘Place,’ in contrast, is more than just a location and can be described as a location produced by human experiences. The size of this location does not matter and is unbounded. It can be a city, neighborhood, region, or even a classroom, etc. In fact ‘place’ exists of ‘space’ that is full of meanings and objectives by human experiences in this particular space. Places are centers where people can fulfill their living needs such as food, water, etc. (4). For Tuan a ‘place’ does not exist of noticeable borders and is besides a visible expression of a specific time period; examples are arts, monuments, and architecture (6). He contends that people understand meaning from the world’s geography and arrange the world around themselves (qtd. in Cloke et al 76 -77). This as well explains that the meaning we give to ‘space’ correlates with the distance from the human to this ‘place’ (79). As Tuan asserts, “space is freedom, place is security” (3). Thus, space and place are interchangeably structured in human environmental

experience, since the understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context.

Another significant work in theorizing space and establishing it as field of criticism is Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974). In this work, he attempts to articulate the more social connection between our mental and practical experience of space. Lefebvre contends that it is necessary to look at space in three various ways: as spatial practice, as representations of space, and as representational space (33). The use of this 'triple conceptualization' facilitates understanding of how 'space' itself is produced. Spatial practice alludes to how space is grasped by the society that constructs it, and the 'specific locations and spatial sets' constructed by a particular 'social formation'. He asserts that there is a degree of cohesion and continuity to spatial practice, which itself is produced by performance. This means that this is the 'space' that occurs between the everyday routine and the substructure that arranges that routine (33).

Furthermore, representations of space are attached to the relations of production and the order applied by those relations and, as such, are related to 'knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to "frontal" relations' (33). This is the idea of 'conceptualized' space: the space created and represented by urban engineers, social planners, architects, etc.—the mental space that is separate from concrete, 'reified' space (38). Lastly, Lefebvre considers representational spaces as the product of the controversy link between spatial practice and representations of space; shortly, representational spaces are 'lived' space. they are where meaning is produced from the 'complex symbolisms' depicted from the experience of the everyday 'lived' physical space and the meaning one makes of it, through the 'conceptualizations' one assigns to that 'lived' space. As Lefebvre puts it, representational spaces are 'lived through associated images and symbols and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"'. Space can be changed or appropriated by the imagination.

Lefebvre begins his study by detailing the existing division that he sees between mental space and real space as we experience it in our practical everyday lives. Rather than simply accepting these as separate realms of experience, he suggests that a spatial theory can be developed that encompasses both and bridges the divide: namely, a theory based on Marxist concepts of production. He explains that capitalism is based on an opposition between conceived, planned space that is categorized as abstract space, and the lived spaces of everyday life. He mentions that due to this opposition, “lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is “conceived of” (51). Abstract space is the organization of abstract labor (49), and exchange (57). It is considered as “the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism” (57) as well as, “the location and source of abstractions” (348). If space is fundamentally a social product, as Lefebvre argues, that social space is a product of the existing social relations at that particular point in time. Space itself will, therefore, render to conserve the predominant material pattern of production.

Lefebvre often describes urban space in terms of codes that can be read, “Codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a message, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a reading” (7). The form of the space itself is as a pattern of signifiers that ultimately point to the underlying content of social relations, or that which is signified. According to Lefebvre, it is the transformation of this signified that inevitably results in the evolution of social space (7). Any enquiry on the social dimension of occupied spaces and a recognition of space as a social construct almost immediately leads to an enquiry on domestic space, which is a primary site where social relations unfold. Such an understanding suggests the fundamental essence of being and belonging that is attached to the idea of home; that is, any discussion of domestic spaces naturally invokes two of its central components, home, and house.

In Western literature, the idea of home has traditionally been seen as comprising of the safety of the domestic sphere. As Bachelard puts it, “Our house is our corner of the planet [...] it’s our first universe, a true cosmos in every sense of the word” (4). Moreover, “The house’s situation in the world” is often understood as “a variation of the metaphysically summarized situation of man within the world” (27-28). Joan Kirkby further explains, “The house image is additionally related to the boundaries and perimeters of the self, with identity” (106). Bachelard associates the interaction between the individual and therefore the world to require place first and foremost on the extent of the imagination. He also regards one’s identity to be as wide as one’s imagination: “space, vast space, is the friend of being” (208). Therefore, the home space is seen as dwelling and shelter for the members of the family, as a place of accommodation and social reproduction whose domestic activities are intended for the maintenance of the family’s members and as well as the family group.

To understand how a home functions as a place of sheltered space for the family members, firstly we have to understand how it is conceived and organized. Based on phenomenological understanding, nearly all the dwellings, whether erected on a temporary or permanent basis, finished or unfinished, have closed interior spaces whose subdivision follows structural patterns based on the classification of the partitions into bedrooms, kitchens, visitor rooms, living rooms, and bathrooms (29-30). The ways in which home space is used and managed as a place of shelter and accommodation depends on the composition of the family, the dimensions of the house and the nature of the relationships existing between the different members of the family. These dimensions of the house reflect not only the aspirations of the family in terms of its ideal house and the needs of the family, but also the state of evolution in which the house currently finds itself. Hence, dwellings grow over time in accordance with the needs of the family and the availability of resources; as the house takes shape, temporary dwellings are occupied.

According to Bachelard, the home represents the “protected intimacy” of the houses of our dreams as well those of our reality. He explains it simply as “inhabited space”, as “the non-I that protects the I” (5). He acknowledges that the dwelling place of home is intimately linked to memory. He perceives the home as retaining our past and opening up an immemorial domain. He associates this retention of the past with daydreaming, insisting that daydreaming makes possible the memories of prior dwellings. As he comments, “the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling - places of the past remain in us for all time” (6). The significance of the house for Bachelard does not stop there, but he credits the house with the preservation of the identity of a human being. Because it is the first world that a child experiences, the hostility of the “external” world is something that is experienced secondarily. For him, the house contains childhood memories especially, in its many “nooks and crannies” (8).

In his work, Bachelard draws attention to the dialectics of the inside and outside of a house and how they affect a person’s experience within and outside a house. He explains that “Inside [...], the house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, muffles every sound, conceals all colors [...], and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity” (40-41). Namely, the immensity of the outside world makes the diminished inside space of a home more intimate. The inside of a house offers security, privacy, and warmth, whilst ‘The Outside’ is the vast world around, strange and even hostile.

Bachelard sees, in the depths of western metaphysical thinking, space as dualistic, where everyday life is influenced by a myth of the spatial metaphor of inside and outside. Behind the metaphor lies an alienation and hostility between the two by which we spatialize our world and cut it out into pieces without understanding what it really means to dwell in space. This myth governs all space: when one speaks about this side, that side or here and there. As he puts it;

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. (211)

Meaning that, focusing on the ‘the dialectics of inside and outside’, by which he sets out to define the two, and looking at the various problems of trying to do so. Additionally, he discusses whether one can even differentiate between the two. He asserts that the term ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ create a forced-choice form of geometric reasoning that obscures the issue when used metaphorically. Poetically, when speaking about dialectics of inside and outside, means that speaking about ‘Being’ and ‘Imagination’ through which people make their place of existence a home.

David Morley is another theorist who has elaborated and established meanings attached to the concept of ‘home’. In his book *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity* (2000), he offers a discussion into the cultural geographies of the concept of ‘home’ and the changing coordinates upon which it is now lived, from front rooms to global politics. He relates the idea of home to the idea of physical mobility, stating that the concept of the home regularly stays as the uninterrogated shelter or “alter ego” of the hyper-mobility (3). That is, it is generally acknowledged that traditional ideas about home and homeland have been greatly destabilized by the new patterns of mobility and migration and by the new communication technologies. Within the newer settings of ‘hyper-mobility’, Morley asks some questions about the kinds of values and criteria that homes and homelands can still generate. As he puts it,

[...] traditional ideas of home, homeland and nation have been destabilized, both by new patterns of physical mobility and migration and by new communication technologies which routinely transgress the symbolic boundaries around both the

private household and the nation state. The electronic landscapes in which we now dwell are haunted by all manner of cultural anxieties that arise from this destabilizing flux. (3)

As this might suggest, home is a real space physically bounded by rooms and houses in a way that shapes the relationships possible within it. However, a part is about the way in which media, old and new, have permeated and reconfigured home relations.

Such extension of the terms of home brings enhancement to ordinary living about which one can feel positive. Morley states that there are many narratives of home and belonging. He defines the home as “[...] a place, region or state to which one properly belongs, on which one’s affections center, or where one finds refuge, rest or satisfaction” (16). Thereby, the concept of ‘home’ holds within itself a compacted significance of cultural meanings and values that can link self to family, to locality, region, or nation.

Home is often described in the literary domain as a haven or refuge. It is depicted as a place or space where people can feel peace and can relax. In *Homes and Homelessness* (1985) Kimberly Dovey asserts that the inside or enclosed domain of the home represents a comfortable, secure, and safe space. This confined space, she asserts, is often a female space. (03). In contrast, the outside is perceived as an imposing, threatening, or dangerous space. In this regard homes and houses have largely figured in the writings by and about women. This utilization is articulated particularly at the end of the nineteenth century, as the historical constraint of women to the domestic space was about to change. Indeed, domestic space often becomes representative of the function of females in the place called home, thus, the notion of femininity is intrinsically linked to the domestic sphere.

2- Women and Home Space:

Feminist geographies are viewed in terms of 'gender,' 'identity,' and 'place,' which draws overt parallels of female relationships to the domestic sphere and traditional modes of domesticity. There is definitely a focus on sacred geography to theorize spaces and places and their relation to gender, thereby featuring how feminists attempt at dismantling the system of separate spheres and traditional conventions. Additionally, there is a concern with the explorations of women's role in the domestic space, either as the wife, the mother, the daughter, or the housekeeper, and their implications for the construction and naturalization of a feminine identity.

Many researchers and scholars explain the term "Feminism" differently. Some of them use it to refer to some historical political movements in the USA and Europe. Whereas others refer to it to bring to light the injustices and oppressive practices against women in patriarchal societies. Zara Huda Farris explains that: "[...] women need feminism because there are women who suffer injustice [...]" (01). The term feminism features a history in English tied with women's activism from the late 19th century to the present day. It is rather necessary to differentiate feminist thoughts or opinions from feminist political movements, even in times where there has been no important political activism concerning women's dependence, individuals are concerned with theorizing justice for ladies.

In the 19th century, most women occupied the positions of 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 disrespect even if they enjoy material comforts. That is, other family members did not respect women, and thus, some of those women sometimes felt depressed and lost their own individuality since they needed to live up to other family members' expectations. The literary connection between women and houses is reflected rigorously, particularly from the late Nineteenth Century. John Ruskin places this connection

at his essay “*Of Queen’s Gardens*,” in which he defines women as passive and belonging to the private sphere of the domestic home, stating it as follow:

[By a woman’s] office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation.

The man, in his rough work in an open world, must encounter all peril and trial: to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offense, the inevitable error...But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need to enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense. This is the true nature of home - it is the place of Peace; the shelter...from all terror, doubt, and division. (147-148)

Thus, his description of the different offices of men and women typifies the Victorian understanding of separate spheres. The man belongs to the ‘open-world,’ which is dangerous and cruel. Whilst, the woman is sheltered inside the house and protected from the treacherous outside world.

From the 19th century to the early 20th century, domestic and feminist theorists and American women writers including Linda McDowell, Glenna Mathews, Kate Chopin, Catherine E. Beecher, all mentioned how the traditional social norms 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’s spiritual satisfaction. Theorist Catherine 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, ‘personal finance; family resource management and planning; textiles and clothing; shelter and housing; consumerism and consumer science; household management; design and technology; food science and hospitality; human development and family studies.’ She founded the first female seminary, Hartford Female Seminary, as the nation’s foundation.

Catherine is no other than the sibling of Harriet Beecher Stowe who wrote the famous work *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The former shared domestic tasks and decorated their warm and comfortable house with necessary articles of furniture such as stove, a carpet and so on. Harriet, thus, could be released from heavy domestic space, and she could make use of scientifically modern ways of housekeeping in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), making women gain confidence in housekeeping especially in the kitchen.

These two sisters collaborated to publish *The American Woman's Home*, four years after the Civil War had ended. Basing on issues such as housekeeping, food preparation, and child-rearing, Catherine and Harriet wrote whether the wife felt that other family members treated her with respect and how single women could build a religious home through child's adoption. In the introduction to the *American Woman's Home*, Beecher's mission is to help wives feel respected through domestic work. The sisters wrote this book because they feared, "the honor and duties of the family are not duly appreciated" (Beecher 19). Their mission was 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" (19). 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 and time-consuming those domestic tasks are.

Through writing, feminists and social thinkers found one of the few available avenues to public life, and many used this public platform to discuss the common trope of 'a woman trapped in the house.' The Gothic novel references and borrows from the same concept of domesticity that John Ruskin discusses in his discourse: "The private sphere in conventional Gothic fictions [...] is tantamount to the limitations of freedom and agency to the female subject as she is confined to the house apparently in order to protect her innocence but is, in truth, fundamentally meant to subordinate her to male dominance and control" (Ng 4). The woman

could not simply leave this unfortunate situation because by 18th Century definitions, “women belonged to the domestic sphere” (Saggini and Soccio 41), and the only control a woman exercised in that sphere was over the housekeeping duties that would make her husband’s house a domestic paradise; As a result, the house was only a paradise for him.-Saggini and Soccio point out in *The House of Fiction as the House of Life: Representation of the House from Richardson to Woolf*, that “domestic sphere both in fiction and in reality, was also one where women experienced restriction, disappointment, even assault, and cruelty,” (41). Even though the woman inhabits this seemingly feminized safe space, it is never hers, it continues to be the husband’s house, and in this way, it subordinates her to her husband. (Emilia Schrier 1).

Likewise, feminists have stimulated ideas associated with how the disparate genders associate with the space around them. In the way that Doreen Massey demonstrates, there is a long-held convention of relating transcendence “with the temporal and immanence with the spatial” (57). This echoes Simone de Beauvoir’s argument of how women are perceived to be “restricted to their bodies”, whilst, men are perceived to be “non-corporal or disembodied, mind to women’s body” (qtd.in McDowell 44). This in turn, as Linda McDowell further points out, has resulted in women being associated more closely with nature; however, men are viewed as cultured, superior, and reasonable. Historically speaking, there is the Western conception of “two-sex” which came to be through societal and cultural changes, changing perceptions on the self, and the increasing distinction, “between domestic and non-domestic life” (46). This has resulted in gender embodiment being deeply entangled with a geographical place. This, in turn, is rather ironic considering the female experience of pregnancy which “radically alters the notion of an individual as a bounded body, separated by space from another” (58). Therefore, pregnancy destabilizes the boundary between what is within, the self, and what is outside, separate.

Feminists have thus challenged the ideology of domesticity since the early 1970s; simultaneously, the family changed unto “a unit of consumption rather than one of production” (81). Namely, there are cultural, social, and economic forces that have increasingly tried to define what domesticity means from the outside rather than having the family unit define domesticity in their own terms. At the same time, women have also started to face homelessness and “having a roof over one’s head” has stopped meaning that one has a home, as many women who live in temporary accommodation can also be considered homeless (90). There are thus many ways to challenge the spatial conception of gender and women’s place as being either in the domestic sphere or in nature alone.

Traveling is another challenge to the limited ways of viewing space and gender. Although travel has previously been seen as a typically masculine activity that denies fixed structures, more and more women have started to travel as well, whether out of pleasure or necessity. As McDowell points out “travel, even the idea of traveling” disputes the western “spatial association between home and women” (206). She further explains that travel destabilizes “a singular history” (208). It also has an effect on one’s identity, but despite the potential experience of in-betweenness it does not have to result in an experience of marginality “but rather the transcendence of identities” (212). Thus, to put it simply, the metaphors of “travel, movement, and boundaries” permit women to transcend fixed identities that are defined as different from the “singular bourgeois masculinity against which all the other ‘others’ are defined and measured as lacking in different ways” (215). This, as she explains can also lead to the realization that; “all identities are a fluid amalgam of memories of places and origins, constructed by and through fragments and nuances, journeys and rests, of movements between. Thus, the ‘in-between’ is itself a process or a dynamic, not just a stage on the way to a more final identity” (215). Traveling can thus be understood to be a potentially revolutionary act as

in terms of one's identity and for women, specifically, coming from the domestic sphere with its limitations can be a very liberating experience.

3- Women, Nature, and Eco-Feminism:

As has been mentioned earlier, women are often associated with Nature. This association brought about new ways to view both nature and women. Nature leads us to decisions that ultimately rob us of the very interconnection between the natural world and ourselves that may make life worth living. This interconnection is, in essence, the basis of Ecofeminism, which had become a full force by the 1970s. The movement, which contains many branches such as activism, ideology, and theory, does, in essence, have no fundamental tent. Seminal eco-feminist scholar and activist Greta Gaard explains it as follows,

Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology that sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women [...] will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and other non-dominant groups – a self that is interconnected with all life (qtd. in Savi 949-950).

Such an understanding of how the oppression of women and the earth are connected considers whether there is, in fact, some fundamental link between the earth and subjugated people.

Eco-feminism helps one look at the self and the world from a holistic and interrelated point of view. It offers a singular way to check out the present environmental challenges by bridging together all aspects of domination, and the way they affect the entire planet. As Mary E. Gomes and Allen D.Kanner point out, "in patriarchal cultures, it is common to find patterns of domination and control aimed toward both women and land", which Ecofeminists see as the

source of current ecological and social problems (112). According to Catherine Keller's theory of the "separative self", which means the interrelatedness of all subjective life and self-understanding, the natural present crisis is the immediate effect of a patriarchal culture that results in shaping a separatist identity, particularly men, versus the world described by "an ego armored against the outer world and the inner depths" (8-9). The fact that masculinity is defined in terms of "radical autonomy" in an individualistic Western culture has resulted in patterns of interacting with nature that can be called parasitic due to a denial of dependence (Gomes and Kanner 114-5). As Gomes and Kanner further point out, humans depend on the hospitality of the earth in total, and this is extremely threatening to the separative self.

By dominating the biosphere and attempting to control natural processes, we will maintain the illusion of being radically autonomous. As long as, this denial exists there's also a parasitic pattern of interacting with nature because in the process humans essentially are "killing off our host" (115). This successively might be called an insane way of relating the earth whose well-being is directly linked with our own well-being. There is also an associated pattern of blaming nature for being cruel rather than being conscious of where it makes sense to place human culture: "rather than respecting these difficult nature features[...] people blame the cruelty of nature when the inevitable tragedies occur" (116). This is obviously not a very mature way of relating to one's surroundings and rather indicates an entire disregard for nature additionally to a scarcity of foresight.

Ecofeminism thus is useful for thinking in terms of what Gaard has called "a feminist relational identity" that is connected "not just to humans but also to put planets, and species alike" (653). As Janet Surrey explains, the relational theory is meant to describe "healthy relationships" that happen as we mature. She maintains that "the sense of connection and participation in something larger than oneself does not diminish but rather heightens the sense of private power and understanding" (qtd. in Gomes and Kanner 117). It naturally also helps to

understand the necessity to take responsibility for one's actions toward both the natural and social world. Eco-feminism, thus, is useful for trying to understand the world from an interdependent point of view. Ecofeminism as a movement is thus founded upon the idea of the necessity of challenging the nature-culture dualism and renewing the "understanding of our relationship to nature, of our own bodily nature, and of nonhuman nature around us" (Gaard and Murphy 4).

Furthermore, according to Gaard, the ecofeminist redefinition of the concept of the home leads to an understanding of home as "a place of connection where one lives physically, where one is emotionally connected, and where one is part of a community of beings" (656). Ecofeminism deals not only with female's relationship to nature, but also tends to address paradoxical areas to the natural world. Amongst them, the domestic realm, or the trope of 'woman's "natural" place inside the home" (Kammer 469). The basis of this perspective determines two different approaches: the body, the land, and the notions of belonging and home; that is to say, woman is nature, and nature is home. These connections dictate that woman's place in the natural and domestic world brings into light the link between home space and ecofeminism. Thus, this theory elucidates both interior and exterior landscapes as Edward Ralph in his *Place and Placeness* (1976), has called "Insiderness and Outsiderness". For him, insiderness demonstrates a lived situation where one feels "safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed" (03). In opposition, he expounds the second term as existential outsidership—a lived situation where one feels alienated or out of place (03).

To heal the alienation from a place, in her book, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2002), Val Plumwood suggests that we need to "belong to the land as much as the land belongs to [us]" and to communicate the story of the land "in ways that show a deep and loving acquaintance with it and a history of dialogical interaction" (230). In this way, the narrative can start to become the glue that ties identity and place together, helping to widen

one's sense of self. In order to renew our ties with the land, we also need to understand that "nothing has an unchangeable essence that it can maintain in isolation, and no one can change in isolation merely through the effort of a transcendental ego" (McDowell 371). Furthermore, as Mary Field Belenky explains, an integral part of healing is taking back the wider sense of self by "weaving the strands of rational and emotive thought and of integrating objective and subjective knowing [...] to confront the pieces of the self that may be experienced as fragmented and contradictory" (qtd in Wilentz 4). Probably, the most important aspect of this healing becomes healing the mind-body divide. An integral part of bringing this type of cultural healing into existence is the acceptance that feminine embodied knowledge is just as valid as the more abstract masculine knowledge.

Another level of healing has to do with healing the language that is used about both nature and women. As Gay Wilentz further suggests in *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease*, the author's goal typically is the recovery of "the health of the cultural self and community, at least on a metaphorical level" (16). An integral part of this healing, at least in a non-Western context, often is "the power of words" and "especially the concept of a healing discourse of magic and the spiritual world" (18). In fact, "oral medicine" stands for "the fullest the power of words", which in the West is most often approached with the Freudian concept of a "talking cure" used in psychoanalysis (19). Furthermore, this understanding of words as healing is connected with the "concept of healing with images and symbols, relating back to the ancient Egyptian, early Judaic, and other Semitic concepts of imagining health" and "sacred words and incantations" used in, for example, Native American traditions (19).

Gomes and Kanner suggest that, in the West, an enormous part of the healing process may have to do with moving toward a conception of "the dynamic feminine" as created by Jungian theorist Gareth Hill, and meaning "the set of qualities that are systematically devalued

in patriarchy”, understood as the “undirected movement toward the new, the non-rational, the playful [...] the disorienting and transforming experience of new awareness” (qtd. in Gomes and Kanner 119). This also means moving beyond “the usual nurturing and motherly images” of “static femininity” toward “the realm of wild imagination, of chaos erupting out of predictability” (119). Ultimately, as Gomes and Kanner point out, this means “facing nature on its own terms” and making known “its chaotic, strange, and frightening aspects as well as the familiar and comfortable” (120). From an Eco-psychological perspective, this is able to be a more sane way of relating not only to nature but also to our own bodies as well as part of the larger whole that is sometimes unpredictable.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework, thus, consists of Phenomenological emphasis with Feminist and Eco feminist analysis. The perspectives presented in this chapter explore the assumption that there is a relationship between attitudes to the domesticity, attitudes to women, and attitudes to the environment via the concept of domination. All the concepts discussed above, will be of significant importance in understanding *Housekeeping*.

CHAPTER TWO

Home Space, Feminine Subjectivity, and Unhousing in *Housekeeping*.

This chapter analyzes Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, with the help of insights and concepts from space and feminist theories. First, it starts with an explanatory section about the author and the novel. The second part introduces an analysis about the narratives of 'home', 'houses', and 'domestic space'. Additionally, it deals with the issue of 'female subjectivity', and how this issue is linked to the domestic space both in favor and opposition. Then, the third part of this chapter examines the different implications of spaces and places in the novel while focusing on 'natural' and 'social' spaces. Also, this part deals with explorations of how these landscapes help characters develop their identities, or even form new ones. The following part of this chapter examines the attitudes of the different female characters towards two contradictory concepts, 'Housekeeping' and 'Unhousing'. Lastly, it depicts an analysis about transience and border crossing in relation with femininity, presenting how transiency helps liberating females from the traditional conventions.

1- About the author and the novel :

Born on November 26, 1943, American author Marilynne Robinson is a Pulitzer Prize-winner, sometimes referred to as 'America's George Eliot.' She attended college at Pembroke and graduated school at the University of Washington, from which she received her Ph.D. in English in 1977. She taught writing at many universities, including the University of Kent, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Amherst' MFA Program for Poets and Writers, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She has sometimes lectured and has spent time researching and writing on the teachings and life of John Calvin in addition to other notable philosophers and thinkers. Robinson's reputation is built on four novels, *Housekeeping*, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*.

Her first novel, *Housekeeping*, was published in 1980. It was a finalist for the 1982 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and won the Hemingway Foundation/ PEN Award (US). “It’s as if, in writing it, she broke through the ordinary human condition with all its dissatisfactions, and achieved a kind of transfiguration”, Anatole Broyard enthused (n.p). Her second novel, *Gilead* (2004) was awarded the 2005 Pulitzer and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Then, in 2008 she published her third novel, *Home*, which received the 2009 Orange Prize for Fiction (UK) and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. *Lila*, published in 2014, won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Robinson is also the writer of several non-fiction works: *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution* (1989), *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (1998), *When I Was a Child I Read Books: Essays* (2012), *The Givenness of Things: Essays* (2015), and *What Are We Doing Here?* (2018). Also, she has written many works (articles, essays, and reviews) for *Harper’s*, *The Paris Review*, and *The New York Review of Books*. Her fictional works are famed for their thematic representation of family ties and the rural life mainly depicting themes like Home Space, Nature, Femininity, Family, and Self. Furthermore, her non-fictional works have included several subjects, including the relationship between science and religion, nuclear pollution, US history, John Calvin, and Contemporary American Politics.

Robinson is well-known for her most mature and achieved debut novel, *Housekeeping*, in Contemporary American fiction. This novel received numerous reviews at the time of its original publication. Le Anne Schreiber described it in the *New York Times Book Review* as follow, “Marilynne Robinson has written a first novel that one reads as slowly as poetry - and for the same reason: The language is so precise, so distilled, so beautiful that one does not want to miss any pleasure it might yield up to patience” (14). Additionally, Anatole Broyard wrote an observation about the novel in the *New York Times*:

Here's a first novel that sounds if the author has been treasuring it up all her life, waiting for it, she broke through the ordinary human condition with all its dissatisfactions and achieved a kind of transfiguration. You can feel in the book a gathering voluptuous release of confidence, delighted surprise at the unexpected capacities of language, a close, careful fondness for people that we thought only saints felt. (n.p.)

Subsequent critics have echoed this praise but broadened its reach to concentrate on the novel's rich and allusive texture and its resonant reference to a diversified spectrum of classic and contemporary American fiction. Moreover, *Housekeeping* is taught in universities and colleges across the English-Speaking world not only in courses on American literature and Contemporary fiction but also in Women's Studies, Psychology, Philosophy, and Phenomenology as well.

In recent years, it has been twice named one among the best novels of the 20th century. Thusly, *Housekeeping* has been the subject of more than seventy scholarly articles, published in Academic journals and monographs, launching from American Literature and Modern Fiction Studies to Feminism and Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Literature, Religion and Literature and therefore the Journal of the superb within the Arts. *The Time Magazine* also included the novel in its TIME 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005. One of Robinson's primary influences in the composition of *Housekeeping* seems to be Henry David Thoreau, also she takes inspiration in both her fiction and non-fiction works from the Sixteenth century religious thinker and reformer John Calvin besides her interest in the metaphoric language of Nineteenth century American writers, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson. This led to her work privately on a series of extended metaphors as an exercise during her Ph.D. program at the University of Washington, which would become the framework for *Housekeeping* (*The Paris Review* n.p).

Set in the fictional town of Fingerbone in northern Idaho in the 1950s, *Housekeeping* narrates the story of two young sisters, who are orphaned at an early age, Ruth and Lucille Stone. The story is told by the protagonist Ruth where she narrates the experiences of her and her sister Lucille, who moved from one relative's house to another. After their mother, Helen Foster, committed suicide they are left under their grandmother's care, Sylvia. A few years later their grandmother died. After that, they are briefly cared for by their elderly great aunts Lily and Nona Foster. However, the two aunts quickly left because they felt overwhelmed by the isolation of the small town and the difficulty of taking responsibility for two young girls. So, they write a letter to Helen's sister, Sylvie, requesting that she comes home to look after the girls. Eventually, their aunt Sylvie comes to take care of them. At first, both Ruth and Lucille were grateful to have someone to look after them after having experienced so many losses in their young lives. Soon after, they become upset because of Sylvie's chaotic and eccentric lifestyle. Ruth quickly adjusts to her aunt's lifestyle but, Lucille is unhappy with this disorganized life, which Ruth and aunt Sylvie live, and she decides to move out. This difference in opinion separates the two sisters, who were once so close. Consequently, the two sisters drift apart and construct opposing identities; Ruth resides in the eccentric world of her aunt, and Lucille occupies the domestic space and order.

Housekeeping is not, on its surface, involved with environmental degradation. It seems primarily concerned with themes like domestic space and family ties, memory, tragedy, women and sisterhood, Nature and transience. And yet, within the novel, the spaces, and landscapes surrounding the family are always present, evolving, shaping their interactions. This draws attention to the significant yet neglected role of space's role in attributing qualities and identities to the people who occupy them. This role gains a greater significance when considered from the perspective of women who often identify with closed and confined spaces more often than their male counterparts.

2- Home, Domestic Space, and Feminine Subjectivity:

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* features the conventional bonds of domesticity and highlights important narratives about the meaning of home and houses where female subjectivity is seen in relation to the domestic sphere. For most children, a specific house is the main locus of life before gaining enough independence to venture outdoors by oneself. The metaphor of a home is a way to make the unfamiliar seem more familiar and thus easier to relate to. Robinson relates the concept of home and the concrete structure of the house to depict domesticity. As the novel starts with houses and homes as metaphors that capture women to conventional social roles. Thereby, the house in Robinson's novel is built with a set of guidelines in mind. As it is meant to be in the Gothic Novel, the house, is a safe haven for the family. When Ruth's grandfather, Mr. Foster, decides to settle down in Fingerbone, he does so "trailing us after him unborn"—even before the existence of his family, he guides the creation of the house (*Housekeeping* 149). This focus on family does not disappear over time, as Ruth starts the novel by presenting herself and her relatives through their connection to the house:

My name is Ruth. I grew up with my younger sister, Lucille, under the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster, and when she died, of her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster, and when they fled, of her daughter, Mrs. Sylvie Fisher. Through all these generations of elders we lived in one house, my grandmother's house, built for her by her husband (3).

Ruth's introductory narrative shows that the house is implied, more specifically, as a place of refuge for the women of the family. Hence, the structure is so attached to the Foster family history and identity that Ruth can neither start her story nor present herself without first setting herself and her family heredity in the house. And, this is quite clear from the very beginning of the narration when Ruth declares that "All these generations of elders" lived in the house (3).

Though, the house was built by her grandfather, it remains her “grandmother’s house” because he built it for her; through all the generations listed, the house does not change hands.

In this regard, the significance of the house is profoundly linked to the girls’ grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster. After the death of her daughter, Helen, she is given the chance to recreate a domestic atmosphere. With open arms, she welcomes Ruth and Lucille into her home. Ruth explains that “For five years my grandmother cared for us very well. [...] like someone reliving a long day in a dream. [...]. She whited shoes and braided hair and fried chicken and turned back bedclothes,” (24-25). Obviously, Ruth elaborates intimate details about her grandmother’s domesticity and significance in the house. Moreover, in a particularly persuasive passage, in which Ruth reminisces the experiences of her grandmother in her garden, she narrates that

One evening one summer she went out to the garden. [...]. As she knelt in the rows she heard the hollyhocks thump against the shed wall. She felt the hair lifted from her neck by a swift, watery wind, and she saw the trees fill with wind and heard their trunks creak like masts. She burrowed her hand under a potato plant and felt smooth as eggs. She put them in her apron and walked back to the house. (19)

Hence, this narrative proves Ruth’s close connection to her grandmother. When she recalls the maternal figure of her grandmother working the garden, she expresses the value of caring for home-space as a tradition. This habit of domesticity maintains the view that Sylvia is embedded in the domestic milieu. In regards to this, in his article “History, Critical Theory, and Women’s Social Practices: ‘Women’s Time’ and *Housekeeping*”, Thomas Foster declares that Sylvia’s “house is a text in which it is possible to read traces of the creation of a boundary between public and private fields of endeavor, within which women are confined” (92). Then, it is obvious that Robinson has explored different points about feminine issues, most importantly,

female associations to the house and traditional modes of domesticity, mainly through the grandmother's figure.

Domesticity, thereby, is a concept embraced by the grandmother but constantly rejected by Ruth and Sylvie, and it is this rejection that supports Ruth's development. Esther Labovitz argues that a rejection of the domestic space is one of the most typical and significant aspects of the feminine Bildungsroman. She writes that the female hero should "recoil from the domestic image of womanhood" (252), and that the feminine Bildungsroman itself is defined by "the overt and subtle presence of patriarchy" and a rejection of it; she explains that "a dominant factor, the role of patriarchy and its rejection in the heroines' quest for self, is decisive" (249). In *Housekeeping*, the rejection of traditional feminine domestic roles is bound up with gender politics and the two are inseparable. For instance, the central setting for most of the novel is the family home, constructed years ago by Ruth's grandfather, the absent patriarch, and the expectation is that Sylvie, and to a lesser extent the girls, will work at housekeeping in order to hold back the natural and outside world that threatens to intrude.

Sylvie's kitchen and living room are examples of how the natural world intrudes within the internal and social world of the house. In Sylvie's living room, there are piles of newspapers put in order, yet they occupy a lot of domestic space. The neighboring religious women visit Sylvie and Ruth's home, and they 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 such as tin cans and newspapers 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 views Sylvie as a hobo and worries that she will make Ruth into a hobo too. Meanwhile, the neighboring women think that Ruth has already suffered from many sad experiences, so she should live a regular lifestyle from now on. Contrarily, Sylvie believes that it will be even more sorrowful to lose intimate family members and that a

family should live together. Because of Sylvie's unstable lifestyle, the whole town is going to hold a hearing in order to take Ruth out of Sylvie's home. Hence Sylvie's issue of transiency calls for the reassessment of 'female subjectivity' which means how a woman (the subject) sees herself and her roles in life, as contributing or not to her identity and subjectivity.

In fact, the novel traces female subjectivity both in opposition and favor to the spaces of the 'home' or the 'house.' That is, the novel presents a combination of two strains of contemporary fiction by women. The first strain represents the settled domestic female, whereas the second presents women who do not only revolt against the traditional and sentimental domestic settings but also choose a life of wandering free of domineering male presence that determines the essence and survival of a woman. Sylvie is the avatar of the second strain; she a transient who, due to her dispositions, does not fit with the strict and traditional fabric of Fingerbone. She is a woman who has deliberately chosen a transient life instead of a regular, stable, and conventional one that has been charted out for females in general. As the critic Chandler explains in her essay about *Housekeeping*, Sylvie's fluidity and adaptability are heroic and liberating. She regards her as a "footloose heroine" with a "transcendent point of view" (300). She is not like usual matriarchs who are regulated by the values of social order. Sylvie is the kind of person who sleeps on the bed covers with her clothes on and one who never unpacks. She has unorganized ways of managing and maintaining a house that are unconventional relying on the dissolution rather than preservation of indoor and outdoor boundaries emblematic of her transient life. Sylvie is a type of person who fits in with the world of transients and stands with those who move on the perimeters of the spheres of family and society to be their real selves.

Paula E. Geyh considers Sylvie as a liminal character; "she [Sylvie] crosses back and forth between worlds, and her transgressions make all boundaries visible, exposing their vulnerability and ultimate untenability" (115). Sylvie presents an outlook where one is free to leave home and depart again. She is the one for whom marriage and an advantageous and stable

life hardly matter. We see Sylvie growing up and then leaving home and then returning to get married and leaving again. We see that she again returns to look after Ruth and Lucille but departs again. Actually, Sylvie feels home in the woods as her name suggests which in Latin means 'sylva' meaning 'wood' (114). She identifies herself with the woods where her real self and her beingness are represented, which takes her outside the borders of house and society making her at odds with the townspeople and authorities.

Sylvie's notions of running a house are in stark contrast with the society which includes intrusion instead of exclusion that is embracing the invasion of nature- allowing the lake to enter into the house, keeping lights off at supper, permitting animals and other insects to live in their house. Sylvie's house stands in opposition to the very concept of the house which is believed to be stable both physically and symbolically. Ruth reports that the first spring with Sylvie in the house brought water pouring all over the threshold "the house flowed around us" (*Housekeeping* 64), Sylvie's housekeeping blurred the boundaries between the house and the lake, house and woods making the house "attuned to the orchard and to the particularities of weather" (85). As for Sylvie, constancy lies not in preserving a balance between inside and outside but in the dissolution of such differences altogether.

Hence, it becomes obvious that the novel presents a strict separation between the public and private sphere of the house by the townspeople which Sylvie fails to maintain. She does not maintain the parlor which is a public space in private. When the ladies of the town were "obliged to come by their notions of piety and good breeding" (182), they found out that the house was in utter chaos because Sylvie has not maintained the parlor as a public, social space. On account of the dissolution of the borders between inside 'domestic space' and outside 'natural space', there were "crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic" (99). The church ladies were taken aback to see Sylvie's living room and commented: "[A] young girl needs an orderly life" (185), thus, demanding a predictable life. Sylvie believes in accumulation of

property instead of arranging and excluding things. Therefore the living room is blocked with newspapers, magazines, cans, remains of birds brought by thirteen or fourteen cats lying on floor and couch indicating the confusion of boundaries between the outside and inside world, between the natural and social space. As in Ruth's narration: "Sylvie only kept them, [...] because she considered accumulation to be the essence of housekeeping, and [...] the hoarding of worthless things to be proof of a particularly scrupulous thrift" (180).

Sylvie's non-traditional style of living is deliberate, based on her personal choice because during her childhood she followed the social norms as she let her sisters brush her long hair (11). She "crossed her legs at the ankles and read magazines. [And] she took her coffee with two lumps of sugar" (11-15). Robison suggests that by not conforming to the traditional structures of meaning placed on items like curtains, utensils, etc. Sylvie creates her own framework of meaning. By the same token, Thomas Foster says: "Sylvie works against the binary logic of 'counterpoising' an inside and an outside" (89). As it is theorized in Gaston Bachelard's *The poetics of Space*; the terms of inside and outside form a dialectics of division hostile in their opposition and polarized in their attributes;

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. (211)

Then, he argues that both inside and outside depend upon one another for the sake of preserving their identities and that aesthetic experiences and "escapades of imagination" prompts a revision of the boundaries of inside and outside (215). Consequently, Sylvie is not acting out of ignorance or insanity when she turns objects into things and uses them in unconventional ways, but she is working with her own understanding of domesticity.

Female subjectivity has also been exemplified in two types through the behavior of Ruth and Lucille. Ruth, just like her aunt, becomes a transient female taking refuge in nature, whilst Lucille gets well occupied with the social rules. Lucille accepts womanhood as a challenge to be attained because she does not wish to go through a journey into the abyss, stepping outside the protective and restful sphere of patriarchy risking her life like Sylvie. Therefore, she takes all measures to fit properly into society as she sews her own clothes and attends social events like dances. She even starts maintaining a diary like the self-made protagonist of *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby, where a list of all the rules of good social behavior were penned down by her. She tries to understand and also believe in the socially constructed connections, between property and propriety, abiding and respecting social niceties, learning manners, and etiquette like “PASS TO THE LEFT. REMOVE FROM THE RIGHT” (133). Ruth’s sister and playmate Lucille got lost somewhere in this diary, becoming a member of a world which banishes her sister. Ruth, after the night Lucille leaves to settle with her Home Economics teacher, acknowledges the fact that Lucille is lost to her and says: “I had no sister after that night” (140).

Also, Lucille’s burgeoning interest in beauty and fashion is written in direct opposition to Ruth’s attitude. Paula E. Geyh states that Lucille “is a master of the distinctions of housekeeping” (108), and that “Lucille is painfully conscious of [...] self-observation and judgment, which she seems to have constructed by internalizing not so much the prohibitions and demands of her parents [...], but those of her friends and their parents” (108). This disparity highlights the girls’ contrastive attitudes toward domesticity, which comes to fulfillment by the end of the novel, where Ruth visualizes herself visiting Lucille as a sort of apparition. Ruth imagines herself looking through the window of their childhood home and seeing Lucille “in the kitchen, snuggling pretty daughters in her lap” (*Housekeeping* 218), a vision of perfect domestic comfort, juxtaposed with Sylvie and Ruth, whose “trail was intricate [...] because we had no particular reason to go to one town rather than another, and no particular reason to stay

anywhere, or to leave” (216). This is as if Ruth is saying that no lifestyle is painted in a more positive light than the other, which, Geyh further explains: “the feminine subject might be constituted at present, at least in part, by an interaction between the two” (120). Nevertheless, Ruth’s coming-of-age forces her to make a distinct choice and it is the domestic space that she rejects. This choice is exemplified by the scene where Lucille tries to cajole Ruth into helping her sew a jacket for a new outfit she has planned. The pattern features some unusual vocabulary and Ruth becomes distracted by the pressed flowers she finds inside a dictionary. Ruth’s focus on the natural more than the domestic leads to the blowing of the two pairs, and further drives them apart.

Lucille is greatly critical about her eccentric aunt Sylvie and her transient habits. As soon as Sylvie came to care about the two sisters Lucille began questioning her about her gloves and boots. When she comes across Sylvie taking a nap on a public park bench, she gets very angry and becomes “white with chagrin” (105), and she shouts in a criticizing tone like the townspeople “Now we find you asleep on a bench!” (107). Ruth explains that “Lucille hated everything that had to do with transience” (103), and that she “saw in everything its potential for invidious change” (93). She, unlike Sylvie, desires for all constancy and stability. Her desperation for permanence is seen even in her demand of “worsted mittens” and “red rubber boots” instead of cheap satin ballet slipper which Sylvie bought for her (93). However, in contrast with Sylvie, “deteriorations of things were always a fresh surprise, a disappointment not to be dwelt upon” (94). As Maggie Galehouse, in her article entitled “Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*,” observes that Lucille wants stability in her life and protection from the “ravages of time” (133). Therefore, she goes for places and things that will endure time. Lucille is a good housekeeper hence “never accepting that all our human boundaries were overrun” (*Housekeeping* 115). She is so accurate in

preserving the house's bounds and opposes Sylvie's transgressions of social belongings by engaging herself in extremely fierce house cleaning.

As the scholar Elizabeth Meese notes in "A World of Women: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*", Lucille has a drive to change to a character of a materialistic person who has no identity of her own and wants to just fit in the society by any means. That is, Lucille gets obsessed with traditional social conventions making many efforts to improve herself and fit in traditional society. Ruth notes:

Every morning in August Lucille in her nightgown touched her toes by our open window, because she had read somewhere that good health is a form of beauty. She brushed her hair a hundred strokes, till it crackled and flew after the brush. She groomed her nails. This was all in preparation for school, since Lucille was determined now to make something of herself. (132)

Lucille, right from the beginning, willingly conforms to the societal norms making herself acceptable to Fingerbone society while Ruth, a dreamer and lonely soul like her mother, does not have any impulse to improve herself in order to fit in the society. Ruth declares, "In spring I had began to sense that Lucille's loyalties were with the otherworld. With fall began her tense and passionate campaign to naturalize herself to it" (95). Thereafter, Lucille tells Ruth "We have to improve ourselves! Starting right now!" (123). When Lucille takes Ruth to the shop to buy some suitable clothes, Ruth realizes that they no longer think alike and, hence, cannot be involved in a joint action anymore. By looking at their reflection in the shop Ruth understands the different aspirations of her sister and herself. At that very moment, Ruth realizes that her allegiance does not lie in this 'other world' into which Lucille slips leaving her sister alone, "indifferent to my clothes and comfortable in my skin, unimproved and without the prospect of improvement" (123). Ruth says:

It seemed to me then that Lucille would busy herself forever nudging, pushing, coaxing, as if she could supply the will I lacked, to pull myself into some seemly shape and slip across the wide frontiers into that other world, where it seemed to me then I could never wish to go. For it seemed to me that nothing I had lost, or might lose, could be found there, or, to put it another way, it seemed that something I had lost might be found in Sylvie's house. (123-124)

Thus, Lucille's and Ruth's value of life are located in different places. By this, Ruth is claiming her subjectivity which lies far from the yokes of society that put chains to restrain her. After being abandoned by Lucille, she shifts her worldview embracing fusion and ambiguity. She places herself into a mutual consciousness with Sylvie. Ruth starts introspecting about her life that she shared with Sylvie which was vividly filled with visions of transitory nature of the civilization and the pervasiveness of the natural world. On the other hand, Lucille frightened by the erratic and instability of Sylvie's house-hold shifts to the house of Home Economics teacher, and this is suggestive of her movement into the predictable world of traditional feminine roles.

Robinson has presented a new form of female subjectivity by the two models of female subjectivity. Lucille and Ruth are examples of the settled one constituted within the structure of the patriarchal home and the other transient one constituted in resistance to that structure. For Ruth, the town's behavior is from the 'othered' position, and she challenges the town's set standards. These oppositions denote that the transient possesses the power to get over rigid social bounds. The transient subjectivity presented by Sylvie and Ruth brings to light a new empowered female subjectivity affirming their female self and being themselves, which has the power to deconstruct the conceptual framework of patriarchy in order to liberate themselves. These two different types of female subjectivity represented by Ruth and Lucille emphasize the fact that for some women the house and its assigned cultural roles generate security and

protection, whereas for others it is inadequate and inappropriate as it curtails their freedom of choice, stopping them from being themselves.

3- Housekeeping and Unhousing:

In Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, the idea of housekeeping is dominant with all its stark realities. The concept often refers to keeping the house clean, as well as a keeping a stable and secure place. Yet, the novel depicts also a contradictory process to housekeeping which is 'unhousing' - moving from a stable domestic space into a fluid space of transience (Madison Koenig 1). *Housekeeping* discusses Robinson's formation of two processes throughout her novel, 'housekeeping' and 'unhousing', which might be thought of in terms of the two models of 'Feminine Subjectivity' that have been discussed previously: 'the settled' and 'the transient' female. This embodiment is quite obvious in the novel's plot, which starts in the static household then ends with the burning of this household.

Housekeeping in this novel is the creation and maintenance of the physical and spiritual boundaries. In other words, it is keeping the walls and the domestic space of the house, as well as keeping a well-spirited self and family. Thus, the act of housekeeping can be thought of as a convention or process of preserving a separation from nature, something that the grandmother, for instance, is a good avatar in doing it. She represents a real traditional sense of housekeeping; keeping both the house and the people inside it safe. This connection between the house and the woman also appears in such works as Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. The house and house imagery are often associated with the body of the nurturing mother: "Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (7). In the novel, *the* love, warmth, protection and comfort associated with the mother taking care of her children is personified by the grandmother Sylvia:

She had always known a thousand ways to circle them all around with what must have seemed like grace. She knew a thousand songs. Her bread was tender and her jelly was tart, and on rainy days she made cookies and applesauce. In the summer she kept roses in a vase on the piano, huge, pungent roses, and when the blooms ripened and the petals fell, she put them in a tall Chinese jar, with cloves and thyme and sticks of cinnamon. Her children slept on starched sheets under layers of quilts, and in the morning her curtains filled with light the way sails fill with wind.
(Housekeeping 11-12)

Thusly, her actions are so artfully adapted to the needs of its inhabitants that her presence as a physical person blends in with the functioning of the house until one cannot be told from the other: “She was constant as daylight, and she would be unremarked as daylight” (19). She and the house form the essence of home, its soul. They are indistinguishable from each other. Lucille seems to have a desire just like her grandmother in maintaining the house. As Paula Geyh points out “In many ways, Lucille is the avatar of the good housekeeper” (109). Lucille embraces housekeeping both in a ‘sense of cleaning’ and ‘sense of maintenance of self.’

From the onset, housekeeping in *Fingerbone* seems to be an injunction as well as a mask to cover the illusion that home exists only in our imagination but not in reality. It is quite clear that *Fingerbone* rejects transience and so they reject Sylvie, to maintain itself and the orphaned girls, from the instability and uprootedness. As Ruth narrates “*Fingerbone* lived always among the dispossessed” (179). Hence, *Fingerbone* imposes the choice between settlement and transience, more specifically a choice between ‘housekeeping’ and ‘unhousing’ that breaks up the chaotic space of a kind of transience at home, the one that Sylvie occupies. On the one side, housekeeping is portrayed by the central housekeeper Sylvia, who approached housekeeping and every day chores as a sacred and religious journey. It is clearly indicated in Ruth’s narration: “she [Sylvia] is a religious woman. That is to say that she conceived of life as a road down

which one traveled,” (9). Furthermore, she adds; “[...] my grandmother must have carried out a basket of sheets to hang in the spring sunlight, wearing her widow’s black, performing the rituals of the ordinary as an act of faith.” (16). Thereby, Robinson articulates a vision that indicates domesticity as an act of faith; through her depiction of the sacred nature of the ‘ordinary rituals’.

Another model of housekeepers in the novel is Lily and Nona, the girls’ maiden aunts, who come to look after them when their grandmother passed away. Both Lily and Nona dislike the disarrangement of their routine and instability while caring for Ruth and Lucille. They have a yen for a stable and a calm home space: “Lily and Nona, I think, enjoyed nothing, except habit and familiarity, the precise replication of one day in the next” (32). But when looking after the girls becomes tiresome, they get in touch with Sylvie asking her to take care of the girls; they leave when Sylvie arrives. Lucille also becomes greatly aligned with the bounds of regularity and the traditional ideology of home. Ruth explains that “In spring I had begun to sense that Lucille’s loyalties were with the other world. With fall began her tense and passionate campaign to naturalize herself to it” (95). She portrays the process of housekeeping and domesticity as ‘the other world’, which shows that the process does not do any favor to this world.

On the other side, there is the new caretaker, aunt Sylvie, who is described by the maiden aunts, Lily and Nona, in the following terms: “An itinerant,” “A migrant,” and “A drifter” (31). Sylvie is a transient woman, who rides the rails. She is extremely the opposite of housekeepers such as Lily and Nona in every way, favoring neither regularity of home space nor the measures of using domesticity and the housekeeping of a house. Regardless of Sylvie’s constant transience, she does make itinerant efforts at housekeeping, such an eccentric one but still an interesting kind. For example, if it is frosty outside, she always sets a fire inside and heats the soup for the girls on top of the blaze. Also, she plays with cards and Monopoly, and the most delightful thing in Sylvie’s housekeeping is that she brushes their hair and tells them stories.

Additionally, she brings Ruth and Lucille gifts from the five and dime store, “treasures” that are totally impractical such as velvet bows and plastic belts (94). Ruth recounts how Sylvie feeds them and sets the table:

The table would be set with watermelon pickles and canned meats, apples and jelly doughnuts and shoestring potatoes, a block of pre-sliced cheese, a bottle of milk, a bottle of catsup, and raisin bread in a stack. Sylvie liked cold food, sardines aswim in oil, little fruit pies in paper envelopes. She ate with her fingers and talked to us softly about [...], her friends, while we swung our legs and ate buttered bread. (87)

Thus, the way that Sylvie sets the table, likes and eats her food shows that the housekeeping of the house seems to be symbolizing the keeping of one’s own identity, which is less controlled by any kind of boundaries.

Sylvie is an unconventional housekeeper. Ruth elucidates that Sylvie did not know how to keep the house away from the intrusion of nature, “Sylvie in a house was more or less like a mermaid in a ship’s cabin. She preferred it sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude” (99). As a result, the house became one with the outside world- light during the day, dark at night, and full of water when the lake was flooded Sylvie’s stabs at housekeeping appear to be aimed mostly toward lessening the divergences between inside and outside, toward merging the outdoors with indoors. As Ruth states;

I remember Sylvie walking through the house with a scarf tied around her hair, carrying a broom. [...] Thus finely did our house become attuned to the orchard and the particularities of weather, even in the first days of Sylvie’s housekeeping. [...]. Sylvie talked a great deal about housekeeping. She soaked all the tea towels for a number of weeks in a tub of a water and bleach. She emptied several cupboards and left them open to air, and once she washed half the kitchen ceiling and a door. Sylvie

believed [...] in air. It was for the sake of air that she opened doors and windows, through it was probably through forgetfulness that she left them open. (84-85)

Simply Sylvie has an unorthodox perspective about what is called 'housekeeping'. As Ruth portrays Sylvie's unconventional behaviors and beliefs as 'habits': "she always slept clothed, at first with her shoes on, and then, after a month or two, with her shoes under her pillow [...] Once, because it was warm, Sylvie took her quilt and her pillow outside, to sleep on the lawn" (103). Sylvie's way of housekeeping is also more of the ecological than typically domestic kind.

As for Ruth, living in this way with Sylvie satiates a void inside her. In contrast, Lucille does not coincide with Sylvie's eccentric habits. Rather, she has been always trying to amend herself, learning the habits of the traditional world, hanging around at the drugstore, she insists on self-improvement. Whereas for Ruth, living with Sylvie is fulfilling, as if the house becomes less arranged with the traditional home space:

it seemed that something I had lost might be found in Sylvie's house. [...] as I approached the house I was newly aware of the changes that had overtaken it. The lawn was knee high, an oily, dank green, and the wind sent ripples across it. It had swamped the smaller bushes and the walk and the first step of the front porch and had height of the foundation. And it seemed that if the house were not to founder, it must soon begin to float. (124-125)

Thereby, in the house, Sylvie is only able to practice housekeeping of homelessness, where Ruth discovers something she thought she had lost: 'her identity'. For Lucille, Sylvie's unconventional house is absolutely not a home.

Lucille rejects the imbalance of Sylvie's process of housekeeping, so she leaves the house forever and settles down with her Home Economics teacher. Her departure raises the attention of the people of the town. As Ruth says: "Miss Royce gave her the spare room. In

effect, she adopted her, and I had no sister after that night” (140). Hence, the town intervenes when Sylvie’s failure in housekeeping becomes a public issue, fearing for Ruth’s upbringing and the stability of the household. Joanne Hall argues that the family Sylvie and Ruth have formed will be accepted socially only if they succeed to preserve stability. She elucidates “Robinson’s *Housekeeping* also concerns how family and stasis are linked to community acceptance” (38). As the women of the town discuss with Sylvie, Ruth immediately reveals their true purpose: “Their motives in coming were complex and unsearchable, but all of one general kind. They were obliged to come by their notions of piety and good breeding, and by a desire, a determination, to keep me, so to speak, safely within doors” (*Housekeeping* 183). All they want is that Ruth should be raised in a socially well-structured house. They fear that Ruth will fall through the cracks if Sylvie cannot provide and preserve such social structures.

Therefore, these visits confirm that Sylvie is inadequate in keeping the house and preserving borders between inside and outside. As a result, she and Ruth decide to leave their semi-domestic life. At the beginning, they just burn the house’s embellishments, the magazines, and newspapers that Sylvie has collected. Yet Sylvie and Ruth recognize that this attempt was not enough to please the requirement of the town. So, they burn down the house declaring their expulsion from the house: “Now truly we were cast out to wander, and there was an end to housekeeping” (209). Ruth and Sylvie have finally liberated themselves from the patriarchal conventions of the house. That is, they put an end to housekeeping, and achieved the process of unhousing. As Paula Geyh discusses, Ruth and Sylvie’s leaving occurs due to their rejection of the conventions ordered by the town:

Unhousing must be understood as the going across—transiens, to use the Latin—of boundaries. The processes of unhousing are all expressions of transience, a concept which encompasses not just the movement across boundaries but an apparent denial of them altogether. In *Housekeeping*, unhousing is the physical and

symbolic dissolution of the house through the actions of the transient subject in conjunction with the natural forces of fire and water. In a sense, this process can be understood as a refusal of interpellation as settled, stable subject: because the transient subject does not recognize either the boundaries which secure the structure of the house or her place within that structure, the structure disintegrates. (112)

Geyh in this passage uses a negation between, housekeeping and unhousing, in which the concept of 'unhousing' is created in opposition to the idea of the home, the house, as a stable place. As Ruth and Sylvie leave home, they move from static, restricted roles and social construction of a home to fluid and eccentric lifestyle. The structure of the conventional household is no longer available to them, yet they manage to create spaces within the presence of each other in which they may be at home.

4- Spaces and Identity Construction:

Spaces and landscapes in the novel are not simply empty areas in which particular actions occur, but rather they provide a critical context for understanding material objects and the different interactions that unfold within those spaces. Because materiality in the novel is connected to spatial contexts, spatiality affects identity formation. Spatial connections influences the identity construction of the characters to a great extent. Space and place determine how characters empower themselves despite cultural norms that seek to limit identity formation to certain acceptable norms. In this regard, the novel helps define what is at stake in a contemporary world, where individuals must negotiate subjectivity and identity in particular configurations of space and landscapes. In the novel, particular spaces are conflated with control and freedom and social and natural spaces are encoded with certain meanings so that

social spaces control the individual while isolated, while natural ones grant characters some control over their own subjectivity.

The depictions of places throughout the novel can be thought of as a typical or holistic way relating the characters to the spaces they occupy to show how the external landscape is a reflection of the inner one. Lawrence Buell explains that Ruth's depictions of landscapes is reflecting "the relativity of all visions of place [...] which activates and validates [...] both 'subjective' and 'objective' modes of knowing otherness" (278). Furthermore, the same idea of landscape's interiority and exteriority is theorized by Barry Lopez. He asserts that "The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual is affected by land as it is by genes" (qtd.in Buell 83). It becomes, thus, clear why Robinson has chosen for both Sylvie and Ruth to be mightily associated with the element of 'water', since water is constantly moving, like the transient lifestyle they both chose. By the novel's end, Ruth possesses the freedom to wander through natural space, a space liberated from social control and subject to continual change, but one denied consistency, reliability, and security. However Lucille, deals with "this type of far-ranging spatial freedom as one more localized and politically circumscribed, and with it, she derives the freedom to move through social and cultural spaces, a space of safety, security, and accountability." (Stottlemyer 44).

Therefore, one can differentiate between 'social' and 'natural' spaces through Ruth's and Lucille's spatial connection. Yet, the orchard in the novel is depicted as a space that cannot be determined either as domestic or as wild and is actually an amalgam of nature and cultivation. (Wilson 304). It is also a space that connects Ruth to childhood and to the past, in the form of fairy tale and myth. She envisages herself as a girl in a story:

Once there was a young girl strolling at night in an orchard. She came to a house she had never seen before, all alight so that through any window she could see curious ornaments and marvelous comforts. [...] She would be transformed by the

gross light into a mortal child. And when she stood at the bright window, she would find that the world was gone, the orchard was gone, her mother and grandmother and aunts were gone. (*Housekeeping* 203-204)

The orchard is a safe space between her past and her future, a place where to hide that is neither wild nor domestic. But then she realizes while she was hiding in the orchard that the house is less a space of shelter and tranquility but more of an outlandish object that she no longer belongs to it; “The house stood beyond the orchard with every one of its windows lighted. It looked large, and foreign, and contained, like a moored ship—a fantastic thing to find in a garden. I could not imagine going into it” (203). Then again, she adds “I learned an important thing in the orchard [...], which was that if you do not resist the cold, [...] you no longer feel the cold as discomfort. I felt giddily free and eager” (204). The orchard is the liminal space that most clearly represents Ruth’s feelings about abandoning housekeeping and beginning a wandering life. She knows the house is a threatening space for her; it holds sorrow, memory, and proof of her aunt’s neglect of housekeeping.

From the beginning, it is accurate to state that Ruth creates a sense of a meaningful place while narrating; it consists of the spatial, ecological, emotional, and temporal connections she has with the spaces she occupies. As she puts it,

I dreamed that I was walking across the ice on the lake, which was breaking up as it does in the spring, softening and shifting and pulling itself apart. But in the dream the surface that I walked on proved to be knit up of hands and arms and upturned faces that shifted and quickened as I stepped, sinking only for a moment into lower relief under my weight. (41)

From this, one can perceive that Ruth’s physical connections to landscapes are remarkably explicit in her dream. All the more, it is clear that she is not only talking about the physical

landscapes but also emotional one. That is to say, her emotional connections lie with all people who have lived before her and now inhabit the lake as memories and bodies.

Ruth realizes that “memories are by their nature fragmented, isolated, and arbitrary”, though she is still up to hold her own version of truth, even if she cannot distinguish between real and imagined memories (53). That is precisely the point of her story, because she is able to ‘imagine’ a more holistic place with the help of her aunt Sylvie. This, as a result, makes her feel more at home in the landscape; “I dreamed that Sylvie was teaching me to walk under water. To move so slowly needed patience and grace, but she pulled me after her in slowest waltz, and our clothes flew like the robes of painted angels” (175). In this regard, relationships with space and place help her develop and explore her identity as something constructed in relation to her family members, both living and dead. This role of spatiality helps her and other characters as well, recover identity or even form a new one.

The spatial relationships affect both Ruth’s and Lucille’s decision; Ruth adopts a transient identity whereas, Lucille desires a domestic one. At the beginning, Lucille, Ruth, and Sylvie agree to live together harmoniously. Ruth progressively starts to adopt Sylvie’s transient lifestyle. However, Lucille voluntarily adheres to the social norms that encourage her to adapt to society’s gender expectations. The social world for Ruth becomes a space, a domestic one, where the social conventions and gender normativity solidify her transiency (Geyh 115). Both Lucille and Ruth develop radically different identities because of Sylvie’s way of housekeeping. Lucille quickly realizes that Sylvie’s habits of transience threaten her social space and private sphere, and Ruth realizes this when Lucille “had begun to regard other people with the calm, horizontal look of settled purpose with which, from a slowly sinking boat, she might have regarded a not too distant shore” (92). On the contrary, Ruth is “content with Sylvie” (92). While Lucille moves to occupy a social space, Ruth finds shelter in the natural space where she obtains a relief from social norms.

Thus, Ruth spends more time in the natural world employing her imagination to seek for alternative spaces. An example of this is when she mentions Noah's ark; "Imagine that Noah knocked his house apart and used the planks to build an ark, [...] his neighbors looked on, full of doubt. A house, he must have told them, should be daubed with pitch and built to float cloud high, if need be. [...] A house should have a compass and a keel" (184). According to Christine Wilson, the depiction of Noah's ark in the novel seems to be as an effect of the development of the idea previously described 'the ship' and 'Sylvie's eccentric housekeeping'. The ark, constructed from materials which Noah's house was made up from, asserts the possibility of reconstructing the domestic space, but not destroying it:

The invocation of Noah's ark implies the possibility of rebuilding domesticity and functions as a logical conclusion to Sylvie's unconventional, boundary-breaking housekeeping. Ruth's reverie proposes a transformation, not an annihilation, of domestic space. With the pieces of his house, Noah builds his new living space; he does not begin from scratch. The alternative domestic space is governed by its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. (305)

Thus, through the use of the metaphor of the ship, which later becomes Noah's ark, Robinson indicates a possibility of restructuring the traditional model of stability but not rejecting domesticity. This metaphor exemplifies the character's excursion in a quest for 'habitability'. In other words, domesticating the landscape and opening the site of the house to the landscape.

Ruth states that it is inconceivable to get in a house which appears to be a 'moored ship'. She narrates it as follows: "The house stood out beyond the orchard with every one of its windows lighted. It looked large, and foreign, and contained, like a moored ship — a fantastic thing to find in a garden. I could not imagine going into it" (*Housekeeping* 203). Hence, Robinson uses ship's features of flexibility, mobility, and freedom to confirm the potential of attaining habitability within domesticity. Though habitability does not have to be

associated with domesticity it might be the function of other spaces, not necessarily domestic ones. As Wilson argues on this point, habitability “is not tied to a particular kind of space or location, but rather to a relationship between the subject and space” (299-300). It is possible when “subjects make space their own” (299). Taking Ruth as an example, she makes landscapes her own by giving it home-like features. This is quite clear in her narratives as she depicts nature during her wandering to the lake and forested mountains. She repeatedly juxtaposes natural spaces to social household spaces, or activities such as cooking and cleaning: “The clouds soak [...] up the light a stain” (*Housekeeping* 7), “the lake [the water] brims inside this circle of mountains” (9), “the woods are as dark and stiff and as full of their own odors as the parlor of an old house” (98).

Furthermore, another narrative which merges the natural space and domestic one is when Ruth assimilates the mountains to household utensils. In her own words, the mountains looked like “the broken lip of an iron pot, just at simmer” (112). Again, the water of the bay “seem [s] almost viscous, membranous, and here things mass [...] and accumulate [...], as they do in cobwebs or in the eaves and unswept corners of a house. It [is] a place of distinctly domestic disorder” (213), and “the sky glow [s] like a candled egg” (161). All these descriptions show how Ruth merges between two spaces, landscapes from the natural world with object ‘spaces’ from the domestic sphere. On the other hand, Sylvie domesticates the outside as she furnishes the garden; “She wrestled [...] plum-colored davenport into the front yard, where it remained until it weathered pink” (86). As Laura Barrett discusses in her critical work about the novel, “Sylvie treats the outside as if it were her living room, and the inside as if it were her garden” (18). Therefore, both Ruth and Sylvie expand the space of the house outside and call nature inside.

Another mode of transportation that appears in the novel, signifies the opposite of adaptability and hence cannot bring the characters to “invigorated” habitability. Rather, it leads

them towards death, the death of a family member. The train and its rails constitute a mobile space. It is thus more connected to the sphere of strict impermeable boundaries and permanent structures, the ones described by the disillusioned Ruth as “worse than useless” (*Housekeeping* 184). Wilson describes the train in the following way:

Like a ship, a train is a vehicle of travel and movement. But the train is more closely bound to a set path—if it leaves its tracks, disaster and tragedy ensue. It is also an implicitly masculine space, at least partly responsible for and symbolic of the mastery and settlement of the land. As spaces, the train and the house are equally dictated by patriarchy. (306)

The train epitomizes a masculine space, and a symbol of masculinity. So, when it comes to link this vagrant space, ‘the train’, to masculine character in the novel, the link directly accords with the grandfather Edmund Foster. Despite the fact that he died long before Ruth and Lucille are born, yet, in the girls’ eyes he is the responsible for settling them in such space and for putting them “down in this unlikely place” (3). Then again, both Ruth and Lucille merge with the space they are placed in, individually. Thus, the function of this spatiality in the novel, ‘spaces’ and ‘places’, enables the characters shape their identities.

5- Transience and Border Crossing:

Housekeeping presents a focal emphasis on the idea of home, a stable place where roles and boundaries are both physical and related to gender roles. Yet, the novel traces a clear “motif of escape and return,” typical of a wilderness in which a character leaves civilization to explore the outdoors (Garrard 59). That is, *Housekeeping* depicts a long process of moving from a stable and static home space into a vagrant space of transience and border crossing. This long process towards vagrancy means that the characters are looking for self-discovery and healing through

nature, especially Ruth, as she is trying to find a healing between the cultural and the natural directions of herself. When the self becomes connected with nature it starts healing and remapping its external and internal terrains. Hence, the two nights that Ruth spent in wilderness are a journey of affirmation of her own sense of self which she was able to discover in connection with nature. Through continuous deep explorations and purging, one can find one's element and better understand who one is and where does one belong. Nature always gives one a promise of hope and regeneration capabilities, a place where one can be at ease with one's sense of self and place. From this point of view, the acts of border crossing and transience, can be approached as a metaphor of healing one's own selfhood in an ecological sense.

The very concept of transience rejects domesticity and stability, thus, Fingerbone finds even the hints of Ruth and Sylvie's freedom of movement deeply troubling. The reason behind the sheriff's visit is not really because of Ruth's escape from school, but because Ruth and Sylvie return from their outing to the ghost valley "in a freight car. Sylvie. [...] was making a transient out of me. Fingerbone was moved to solemn pity," and a constant flow of the town's wives cycle in through the house, alternately attempting to convince Ruth and Sylvie that Ruth should stay with someone else (*Housekeeping* 177). It is no wonder then that the vocabulary of wilderness in the novel was always linked to Sylvie who is described by the aunts Nona and Lily as a "drifter," a "transient," and a "migrant worker" (31). Drifter denotes someone without direction. Transient means 'to cross', or 'to pass' a place with only a short sojourn. And migrant worker indicates an individual without a fixed home who moves irregularly. All of these words are defined in relation to Sylvie, that is to say, she is a person without a direction, without a home, and with no fixed path.

Sylvie is a transient woman, who rides the trains. She is the opposite of her mother in every way, Mrs. Sylvia, who is a central figure of housekeeping and an example of a matriarch in the novel. As Ruth and Lucille observe, "she seldom removed her coat, and every story she

told had to do with a train or a bus station” (68). Sylvie retains her things “in a cardboard box under the bed”, instead of a dresser (103). She sleeps atop the covers with her clothes on; “at first with her shoes on, and then, after a month or two, with her shoes under her pillow” (103). Sylvie is an eccentric person, however, she is never careless or abusive in any way. Rather she is nice, kind, and heartily enjoys the girls. She is just very different, not quite a housekeeper.

Furthermore, in his article “Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*,” William Burke talks about Ruth’s and Sylvie’s transience in the sense of border crossing, both perceptual and spiritual. (718). He perceives the novel’s ending as hinting at a border crossing:

At the least we are invited to understand the journey across the lake as a description of that ultimate border crossing from life to death. The story that Ruth narrates may be coming from and may constitute a verification of the mysterious realm of ghosts, spirits, and the place of the perished of the earth. If such speculation is too romantic or unscientifically realistic, we can still read this deliberate ambiguity as an attempt to convey a perception that Ruth acquires in her transience. It affirms a consciousness that accounts for the past and the present, the living and the dead, in a vision of wholeness and harmony. (724)

In this regard, in her novel Robinson hints at a final border crossing between life and death. She first links the lake to connotations of death (the death of Edmund Foster and his daughter Helen in the lake) and the crossing of the lake, as a significant border crossing. That is, life is a border and the grandfather and the girls’ mother crossed it across the lake. Otherwise, Robinson portrays another way of border crossing which is ‘Crossing the Bridge,’ which may be read as a metaphor of crossing over to the afterlife.

When their wandering began after crossing the bridge, Ruth finds herself in entire darkness feeling “the house burning. [...] It was so dark there might have been no Sylvie ahead of me, and the bridge might have created itself under my foot as I walked, and vanished again

behind me” (*Housekeeping* 212). At this very moment all the spatial borders between here and there, before and after, this and that vanishes so Ruth joins the sphere of spiritual transience. She believes that her entry to the transiency world changed her to her real self: “I believe it was the crossing of the bridge that changed me finally.” Furthermore, she adds: “Something happened, something so memorable that when I think back to the crossing of the bridge, one moment bulges like the belly of a lens and all [...] the peripheries [...] diminished” (215). Crossing the bridge thus is a liberation both for Ruth and Sylvie from the traditional norms that the society imposes.

Sylvie’s letting go of humanity and breaking the tethers of need might, in fact, have ominous connotations. These connotations are consolidated with the image of the lake as purificator, which can bring the reader to the conclusion that Ruth, rather than undergoing transfiguration, has indeed died. Probably she feels no space between herself and ghosts because she has become one. If the lake is a purificator, and this purificator ascends through transfiguration. Presumably Ruth has convened again with her mother in heaven. In an interview, Robinson has confessed to intentionally making the possibility: “for all that people know at the end of the book, the worst might have happened” (3-4). However, Ruth expressly declares that she does not desire heaven: “dawn and its excesses always reminded me of heaven, a place where I have always known I would not be comfortable” (149). People of the town see Ruth as dead as a ghost, in which they see transients as one might see ghosts: “they were like the people in old photographs—we did not see them through a veil of knowledge and habit, but simply and plainly [...] Like the dead, we [the town] could consider their histories complete, and we wondered only what had brought them to transiency” (179). At the end of the novel, Ruth has joined their ranks; she is “like the dead,” but only in the sense that the town no longer sees her as a person. The town chooses to view these individuals as “simple, plain” beings that pass through Fingerbone and then perish—in doing so, they willfully ignore any ‘knowledge’

or 'habit' or any other markings of an individual. Since the transients do not belong to the town and have no home to maintain, the town has no interest in them because their stories are not controlled by the town. Therefore, Fingerbone determines that "their histories are complete" (179).

The possibility that Ruth has not died but has become a spirit suggests that she is occupying a liminal space between life and death. In this liminal space "what perished need not also be lost" (124). So Ruth can cross back and forth between both, having finally broken the boundary between life and death. Ruth and Sylvie are both alive, traveling through "Fingerbone on the way to Butte or Billings or Deer Lodge," to see friends, and dead, questioning "what if I [Ruth] should walk to the house one night and find Lucille there? It is possible. Since we are dead, the house would be hers now" (216-218). Lucille, on the other hand, has not been transfigured and has not escaped the house. Ruth imagines her there, "stalemating the forces of ruin," still clinging to order and boundaries and finding no comfort in either (216). Because she has not achieved transience, she still suffers greatly from the pain of loss. If she is not in the house, she might be in Boston sitting at a table in a restaurant:

Her water glass has left two-thirds of a ring on the table, and she works at completing the circle with her thumbnail. Sylvie and I do not flounce in through the door, [...]. My mother, likewise, is not there, and my grandmother in her house slippers with her pigtail wagging, and my grandfather, with his hair combed flat against his brow, [...]. However Lucille may look, she will never find us there, or any trace or sign. [...] No one watching this woman [Lucille] smear her initials in the steam on her water glass with her first finger, [...] could know how her thoughts are thronged by our absence, or know how she does not watch, does not listen, does not wait, does not hope, and always for me and Sylvie. (218-219)

Lucille is engrossed by the incomplete circle of moisture on the table because it reflects a circle that she can never complete. She has not bridged the gap between life and death, so she is forever thronged by the absence of those who've gone. She "does not watch," listen, wait, or hope, however, surely she does, that is all she does. In pushing away her memories and thoughts of her absent family members, she suffers all the more. Like the cold, the only way to neutralize the pain is to let it overcome you. Lucille, of course, is too much a lover of order to ever allow for such chaos and lack of control, and so she is condemned to suffer the pain of the house, even though she does not live in it. She has not deconstructed the 'internal house,' and is therefore still tied to domesticity regardless of where she physically goes.

Lucille is not free of the house even in Boston, but Ruth, no longer belonging to the house, is free to return as she wishes. She physically returns to Fingerbone when passing through to other locations, but she also visits Lucille's house in spirit: "If Lucille is there, Sylvie and I have stood outside her window a thousand times, [...] and we have brought in leaves, and flung the curtains and tipped the bud vase, and somehow left the house again before she could run downstairs, leaving behind us a strong smell of lake water. She would sigh and think, 'They never change'" (218). As Sylvie recognized that borders must be broken to resist the loss in the house, Ruth takes it upon herself to introduce a bit of chaos and a bit of the outdoors into Lucille's static, pristine one where she has been "waiting there in a fury of righteousness, cleansing and polishing, all these years" (217). Because Ruth is free to go, she is also free to return, finally putting an end to expulsion.

Ruth is free from the town as well, and her story does not belong to them because it would probably have continued the cycle of sadness since *Housekeeping* is full of stories about women and loss. She remembers her grandmother feeling "that sharp loneliness that she had felt every long evening since she was a child [...]" Old women she had known, first her grandmother and then her mother, rocked on their porches in the evenings and sang sad songs,

and did not wish to be spoken to” (18). This unspoken loneliness relocates through time, affecting each woman in her lineage; from her grandmother’s grandmother to her mother. The loneliness comes from permanent impermanence; from expulsion, and the fact that children are forever leaving. Nevertheless Sylvie is not herself a mother, she also tells stories like this because the pain from permanent impermanence remains in the house, so it pertains generally to women in the house. Sylvie remembers a friend who is so scared of losing her daughter to the extent that she “couldn’t take her eyes off her. She wouldn’t let her [the little girl] go outside, or play with other children [...] and if the little girl cried she [the woman] cried, too” (67). In the end, however, her efforts fail and she loses her daughter anyway.

Transience, in fact, transforms Ruth to a spirit, however, the silence that coexists with her leaves her “invisible, incomplete, and minimally existent” (105). As this silence menaces to make Ruth a ghost, she finally notices that “words, too, must be salvaged [...] it seemed obvious [...] things were held in place, are held in place, by a web of words” (200). Ruth herself needs words to guarantee her existence, to hold her life in a place so that she does not disappear. Anne Marie Mallon believes that Ruth surrenders to the elements of her environment which allows her to be “freed from the confines of immediate space and time.” this confers on Ruth a “transcendent vision of resurrected, reconciled humanity” (98). Furthermore, a metaphysical point of view has been presented by William Burke, who considers Ruth’s transience as most likely the act of pilgrimage and “necessary spiritual conditions for the valued crossing from the experience of a world of loss and fragmentation to the perception of a world that is whole and complete” (717). Thereby, Robinson’s *Housekeeping* examines transience and explores how it is necessary for women to achieve transcendence.

Conclusion

By reading Marilynne Robinson's classic novel, *Housekeeping*, one can begin to see how ideas can be translated across different mediums. This novel mirrors much of the messages surrounding the relationship between home, women, and nature. Home then appears to be conceptually defined as a women's sphere serving the predominant order in terms of society and gender. Overall, the current thesis has presented and combined two linked corners. The first one focused on the representation of home space and other different spaces in the novel. The second corner contends with femininity; mainly with the construction of identity and subjectivity.

This thesis has supplied insights and representation about the subject matter. The first chapter, entitled 'Towards Domesticity and Femininity' has tackled the theoretical background of this work. It is split into three interconnected parts: Phenomenological Studies of Home, Women and Home Space, Nature, and Eco-Feminism. Thereby, the first part has attempted to examine the theorization of spaces and its scope as a critical theory in order to understand the shift of time/ space paradigms. Whereas time was previously dominant in the field of literary criticism, the recent decades have witnessed the notion of the so-called 'Spatial Turn'. It additionally explored the phenomenological relations of space and individuals.

Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* has been a significant and influential text in this research's examination of the domestic space and home while focusing on the exploration of inhabited and occupied spaces which naturally leads to a fundamental distinction between space and place. Space as a location has no social links for human beings. On the other hand, place is more than a location produced by human experiences. This section, moreover, has provided a discussion about domestic spaces by examining its central components, home, houses, in addition to the inside and outside dialectics. Secondly, this chapter has enclosed

discussions about the relationship between the domestic sphere and women. Women are intrinsically linked to the domestic space where they are often assigned the roles of the wife, the mother, the housekeeper, or the daughter. Also, it has focused on traditional roles' implications for the construction and naturalization of feminine identity. Moreover, it has theorized several perspectives of feminist geographers, who have pointed out that women are trapped in the house. Later, those feminists have challenged this ideology by exemplifying the issue of 'Travel' as a challenge to the spatial conception of women and houses. This challenge empowered and has liberated women from the domestic sphere.

The third part tackled the association between women and nature. This interconnection conceptually leads to Eco-Feminist perspectives. Hence, it has focused on the basics of this theory, explaining that Eco-Feminism helps one to understand the necessity to take responsibility for one's actions toward both the natural and social world. Also, it has clearly indicated its linkage with the idea of home, referring to home as a place of connections; where one is emotionally connected, lives physically, and is part of a community. In addition, it has explored the idea of nature as a source of healing for women, as well as a kind of liberation from the social conventions.

The second chapter has analyzed Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* within the chosen corpus. Thus, by putting the selected corpus under scrutiny, the current research has approached novel perspectives and presented them in the work. Robinson has portrayed home space as a site where ideologies are contested and where identities are constructed. From the onset of the novel, Robinson has shown that housekeeping is a sort of social process of sustaining the very structure of the household and family which is a type of extension of conventional society facilitating the construction of a settled and confined subjectivity within these structures. Thusly, the notion of the house is truly a patriarchal social shell to capture women inside it.

Furthermore, this chapter has highlighted how the author has broken the long silence of women living within the walls of domesticity. She has provided readers with characters of emancipated women instead of limiting or chastising her with entrapped female models by offering two paradoxical models of feminine subjectivity. The first model is the settled female who has accepted and occupied the traditional roles of housekeeping. The other one is the transient who rejected the conventional bounds of society. These two oppositions indicate that the transient owns the power to overcome strict social boundaries. The transient subjectivity presented by Sylvie and Ruth brings to light a new empowered female subjectivity, affirming their female self and being themselves, which has the power to deconstruct the conceptual framework of patriarchy. Yet, this is not to say that the author is privileging one model or the other. Withal, two different spaces have been explored within this analysis, 'Social' and 'Natural' spaces. In particular, these two spaces are tied with freedom and control. The analysis of the novel has shown that the social space controls the characters; whereas the natural frees them from social control and conventions.

Through this novel, Robinson has suggested that we have to continually cross and re-cross the bridge in both directions because we cannot really stay at home forever and neither can we depart to some utopian sphere apart from all patriarchal structure. Hence, Robinson has presented the theme of transiency which has been explored as a quest for evolution towards selfhood. She has shown us the path of transiency as a means to a spiritual quest that transcends one leading to a mystical union of the Self with the Absolute. Simultaneously, she has highlighted homelessness to give importance to home space as an ideal place for living. Also, she has dramatized homelessness to acknowledge that a domestic place should be properly inhabited.

All in all, Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* has many layers that lead to multiple, and often conflicting interpretations. As a reader of this novel, one can observe that Robinson

has shown how the lives of women can be confined within the walls of domesticity. Women in the novel who were very good at the conventional art of housekeeping were solidly linked to the community, but their lives were hollow and circumscribed from within and lacked any purpose or goal. Also, *Housekeeping* manifests the results of absolute acceptance or absolute rejection of conventional roles assigned to women. The novel is a satire on the impermanence of nature and social construction of family because nothing is stable and controllable in the world. Moreover, Robinson is critical about the application of traditional roles and stereotyping of women as the novel depicts the collapse of several female categories like wife, mother, orphan, daughter, and of a drifter too. Robinson has presented a new form of female subjectivity by the two models of female subjectivity in the novel Lucille and Ruth, the settled one constituted within the structure of the patriarchal home and the other transient one constituted in resistance to that structure. It is not really a call leave housekeeping, but rather, it might liberating for some, while it is suffocating for others.

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ملخص

تعتبر دراسة الفضاء المكاني منذ فترة طويلة مجال ليس له صلة بالتحليل الأدبي. لكن في فترة المعاصرة أصبحت العلاقة بين مساحة المنزل، المرأة، و الحياة المنزلية مصدر للكثير من النقاش في النقد الأدبي. و منه تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى دراسة طرق تعريف الأماكن المأهولة بالسكان لمفاهيم " الحياة المنزلية، التدبير المنزلي، ذاتية الأنثى و أيضا unhousing" في رواية التدبير المنزلي (1980) لمارلين روبنسون. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتطرق هذا البحث لدراسة جانبيين، أولاً: جانب التدبير المنزلي و الذي يعالج مفاهيم مثل البيت، الحياة المنزلية، و المعنى المجازي للمنزل. أما الجانب الثاني و المتعلق بـ "unhousing" يناقش مفاهيم مثل: الانتقال، التشرّد، و عبور الحدود. أيضا يناقش هذا البحث كيف تقوم الشخصيات الأنثى ببناء شخصيتها و ذاتيتها من خلال الأماكن المختلفة التي تسكنها . و تؤدي هذه الدراسة إلى فهم نموذجي ذاتية الأنثى اللتين قدمتهما الكاتبة في روايتها. النموذج الأول هو الأنثى المستقرة و المحبة للحياة المنزلية و التي ترى انسجامها من خلال المساحة الإجتماعية، الداخلية و المأهولة للمنزل. أما النموذج الثاني، يشمل الأنثى المتنقلة و الجوّالة، و التي تبني شخصيتها عن طريق عبور الحدود نحو المساحة المفتوحة و الطبيعية. و لتحقيق هذا تم إنجاز هذه الأطروحة اعتمادا على مفاهيم مهمة لنظريات المكان و الفضاء بالإضافة إلى نظريات الأنثوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنزل، المكان، المرأة، الحياة المنزلية، الانتقال (الترحال)، ذاتية الأنثى، التدبير المنزلي، unhousing.