

The Explication of Reality: Contiguity in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping.

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Abstract- Realistic fiction can be broadly defined as the faithful representation of reality and the literary technique used by the realistic authors to highlight the real life as fiction. It's a genre to narrate stories, which can happen to any regular folks especially-the bored housewives, petty government officials, poor spinsters or poor teenagers-living ordinary lives. Realism in novels is an aesthetic mode to break the classical demands of art to portray life, "as it should be" and highlight life "as it is". Housekeeping (1981), the novel of contiguity for realism by the American realistic writer, Marilynne Robinson, a nominated debut, for the Pulitzer Prize (2005), represent the ordinary middle class 'life. This novel is the blend of, the strengths and weaknesses of the realistic character, Ruth and not the conflict between good and evil. It is so disciplined and so full of the thoughts and reflections of Ruth who changes the sense of life rather than to concentrate in her own sense, like her younger sister, Lucille. Housekeeping is regarded as a classic among the realistic novels and was made into a film, directed by Bill Forsyth (1987) with which the author Marilynne Robinson was very much pleased. The language of realistic literature is presented in this research paper with reference to the American realistic writer, novelist, and essayist, Marilynne Robinson.

I. INTRODUCTION:

American realistic movement started from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries and accomplished a tremendous growth in industrialization, economy, sociality, and culture. These changes attempted to portray the exhaustion and the cultural abundance of the lives in the ordinary American homes, Writers of this age used the feelings, textures, and sounds of the nation to influence their imaginative fictions. They created new stories about the real ordinary characters, and kept themselves away from the romantic etymology. Introduction of the new term of what it means, to be in the present, came into existence in the world of literature and was cordially baptized as Realistic literature.

Exhibiting life as some people experience it, realistic fiction deals with many convoluted problems and situations dealing with family problems. At its core, a good realistic fiction novel is about people, their problems, and their challenges. The characters in the novel should be believable and their language and actions should be appropriate for the setting of the story and should be a mirror of the culture and social class in which they live. An author writing about the characters of the working class setting has a responsibility to use appropriate words, slang, phrases, and dialects. However, while realism prevails, people are still considered with sensitivity; a good author is always aware of the fine line between categorization and realistic, objective writing. Although readers learn a lesson or a value such as being accountable for one's actions or accepting the cultural, physical, or sexual differences of other people, good realistic fiction novels do not prove it as a lord over the specific moral and ethical beliefs. Rather, they provoke readers to learn the importance of moral and ethical behavior by drawing their

own solutions after they consider the events and facts from their personal perspectives using their own moral and ethical judgments. Some realistic fiction is expected to include violence; in fact, the genre would be failing in its mission if some novels did not mirror the violence that many young people experience. However, violence should be used appropriately and to make a point—never just for sensationalism. To Elliot Aronson (born January 9, 1932) an eminent American psychologist a good book "recognizes[s] the depth of darkness within teenagers and yet also assumes[s] that readers have the intelligence and the imagination to deal with ambiguity" (p. 120). Due to the popularity of contemporary realistic fiction among young adults, many excellent books are published every year.

Housekeeping, Marilynne Robinson's first novel, is a modern classic which won a Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award and was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in fiction. This realistic novel presented a new gateway and a breakthrough introducing modernism, what it means to be in present. Written in an elegant, lyrical and evocative style, Robinson's work had explored the themes of coherence, consciousness, casualty communication among family, home, culture and the natural world. Housekeeping first articulated these themes in a singular memorable voice. It is a novel that elaborates the different lifestyles. Predominant, as represented by Lucille and the residents of Fingerbone, and eccentricity, as represented by Sylvie and Ruth. The dichotomy between steadiness and instability forms the central conflict of the novel. The young Lucille isolate herself from the less respectable family and Ruth along with Sylvie, reject domesticity to favors the freedom of traveling. In Housekeeping, Robinson introduces us to two young adolescent girls: Ruth, the narrator, and her younger sister,

Lucille. Cared for and then left by their mother (who delivered them to her mother's porch before driving off a cliff), to their grandmother and then to their grandmother's sisters-in-law (who, elderly and perpetually frightened, cared for the children anxiously until their aunt arrived to take over), the girls eventually end up in the care of their mother's youngest sister, Sylvie, a drifter. The two girls love Sylvie, and they live in constant fear that one day she, too, might leave them.

As the novel progresses, we watch the three learn to live together in the home Sylvie's father built for her mother during the life they shared before his death, when his children were growing up. He, like his middle child Helen (the girls' mother), died in the nearby lake. The death occurred when the train he was traveling slid into the lake, never to be recovered. Ruth's grandmother, Sylvia, speaks rarely of her children, irritated when they're mentioned, and the girls know little of their father beyond his name and two photos they've seen of him. Even when the girls are finally under Sylvie's care, they would question her about their family, and the answers would be vague and would always fall short to satisfy the curiosity of the children.

Ruth and Lucille are nearly inseparable as children, but as they grow up (in age, and also in the way they respond to their circumstances), two distinctly different young women emerge. Age makes Ruth more introspective and charitable towards her Aunt Sylvie, and for Lucille, life becomes more critical and terribly pained by the mannerisms of Sylvie. Lucille doesn't have the least of Ruth's influence on her. She prefers to leave the family and continue her stay with her Economics teacher. Sylvie is both witness to and catalyst for some of the changes the sisters undergo and loves the girls. Finally, then, after Authorities plan to take Ruth away from her obviously unstable aunt, Ruth and Sylvie burn the house, hop the rails, and leave for a lifetime of wandering, as that she might lose the girls and so decides to leave Fingerbond with Ruth, leaving Lucille to have her own life.

A great deal of scholarly and critical analysis of Marilynne Robinson's, Pulitzer prize nominated debut, *Housekeeping*, highlights the subversion of patriarchal notions of family, special order and gender roles and has been hailed by the reviewers as an emblem of female marginality in society. The novelists often read for feminist ideas within the traditional structure but fail to give due attention to the key concept. So this paper accentuates the nature and the continuity of reality in *Housekeeping*, a novel that holds a unique place among the masterpiece of the twentieth century American fictions.

Robinson proves her concern for the representation of reality in her writings. As a female adventurer, she emphasizes the motivations and imperatives of the classic quest and offers fresh testimony on the implications of its outcome—a survival strategy often taken for granted. The repudiation of the domestic sphere by her female quester enlarges the central tradition of reality the materialistic and patriarchal American society. In *Housekeeping*, the potent of reality is presented as a single definition ripped with probability and possibility,

revealing Robinsons canon of political commentary, of wisdom and strategies for the present world.

The fire of the novel depends on the fluid of the language being poured, to raise the flame of interest and popularity the readers. This adds responsibility to the shoulders of Robinson, who takes it up emotionally to interact with the readers. She explicitly says *Housekeeping* is not a realist novel instead a narrative freed from the standard of literal truth. Also a state of instability spreads through the event of *Housekeeping*, but the writer has proved that, in a cycle, the state of things may change but nothing can be last. The human experience of loss is narrated in the novel with the comparison of the water cycle." It seem[s] to me that what perish[s] need not also be last, Ruth say[s] she imagines a "net"(91) that catches all the "fallen buttons and misplaced spectacles and reclaims lost neighbors and kin"(92), suggesting that no person or thing ever realm of less comprehensible, invisible to the eye. The realistic language clearly narrates that bonds Ruth and her aunt, Sylvie, differentiates from Lucille. Robinson expresses this seemingly paradoxical idea—the "life" of the "perished"—by continually dissolving the natural boundaries between things and playing with their relative scale and perceived values. We understand that the primary characters are deceased but never lose presence in the story. The narrative perspective itself of memory to the stream of consciousness, never distinguishing: between thinking and dreaming".

Domesticity in *Housekeeping* portrays the quiet lives of rural woman in the daily matters of housekeeping. Robinson has used her texts to fulfill the characters psychological and soul needs, and it has been also extended beyond the traditional ideas of home that rely completely on the feelings of personal comfort, security and stability and incorporate the flux that interrupt the conflict of the characters. The role of domesticity is the core of the *Housekeeping* because it relents with the distinctions historical and cultural context and challenges the foundation of domesticity towards the relation to habitability.

Ruth and her sister Lucille are abandoned by their mother in Fingerbone, Idaho. A series of maternal figure case for the girls first, their grandmother, who dies and is replaced briefly by their great aunts Lily and Nona, and finally their mother's sister, Sylvie. She is an unconventional character and a caretaker. As the novel proceeds Lucille leaves her family of less respect and settles down with her economic teacher, after the sheriff threatens to cancel Ruth's custody, these two women leave the house for a life of temporariness. *Housekeeping* negotiates the tensions surrounding the domesticity and favors a habitable ungrounded domesticity. Sylvie is unfit in the domesticity of housekeeping. She allows the house to fill with leaves and crickets and cats. And when the women of the town visit Sylvie and Ruth, they are dismayed at the ignorance of Sylvie's conventional standards of housekeeping.

In the context of *Housekeeping*, Sylvie and Ruth fail to their feminism in the domesticity of housekeeping. Like a train when it leaves its track, it has to ensure tragedy, Ruth, and Sylvie also had to create tragedy to the house in order to

precede their lives together in future. Here Robinson proposes her aspects of domesticity be dismissed and creates a mythic world of the women without the men. Robinson applies ambiguity to the character as well. She is very concerned with how to think, represent and interpret reality. The exploration of the definition of reality proves itself in the characters of Housekeeping, who are not separate entities but can be placed on the cycle of similarities that proceeds and descends. This is clearest with Sylvia and Sylvie, as the similarity in the name itself, though they appear to the opposites in their home-making process; they occupy the same guardianship in the lives of Ruth and Lucille, the mother and caregiver. The lake is centralized in the Housekeeping. Ruth believes that Helen, their biological mother, exists beneath the lake. (Helen commits suicides by driving a car off a cliff into it). Sylvie, the aunt of Ruth, is on land in the house by the lakeside. Sylvia, Ruth's grandmother who shelters the two girls in the novel also lives by the lake. So Robinson closely associates the reality of the novel by the lake-view. The landscape mentioned in the novel is measured in terms of both intimate and universal, domestic and global. The use of scale not only plot with the relative size of things, also comments on their relative value.

Memory plays a vital role in maintaining reality, in the lives of Ruth and Lucille in the novel Housekeeping. Ruth and Lucille argue over their differing memories of their mother, for Ruth, their mother are an "abandoned" widow who died in an accident for Lucille, she is an "abandoner". This scene occurs when the two girls stay out overnight alone by the lake. Ruth discovers that, although her childhood has largely been defined by loss, she cannot be labeled as "unfortunate" but for Lucille, she feels that she is abandoned by the society, that she is deprived of all her wishes and intentions. The co extensiveness of the kind Ruth feels in the darkness, nothing is devalued or lost. But Lucille has just opposite thoughts that she had lost everything, the love, the care and the concern etc. Death is acknowledged because the passing of the girl's grandparents and mother is traumatic in their lives bit loss, is reevaluated for Ruth and this frames the reason to go away from her aunt, Sylvie.

The reality of life blurs the line between the living and the deceased presence. When Ruth experiences the darkness beside the lake, Sylvie "haunt: Ruth in dreams, Helen and Sylvia, as ghosts. Robinson proves such character as deceased. At the same time, Ruth hears the pacing and whistling of Lucille in the darkness, beside her. Ruth becomes happy with her sister's presence and proves that the deceased doesn't matter her much but her experience of presence is what matters. Robinson proves that the physical presence of characters has more value or truth, "presence in absence" than physical presence itself" (when I was a child 20). When Ruth sees her mother everywhere, Robinson displays that Ruth's memory of just "one gesture" is rich enough to evoke "a thousand images" and beckon the presence of her mother without the need for intermediaries like photographs or mementos. The author brings out the reality that nothing can accurately embody the experience of feeling the mother's presence. In detailing Sylvie's and Ruth's ability to stay

together, Robinsons' limitation of observing reality, construct cross-border connectivity in the minds of the characters and the readers. This was possible in Housekeeping, Precisely at the discovery of truth amidst the darkness. The lake within the lake connected to the evaporated water in the sky, which means the deceased mother under the lake and mother, as a caregiver above the lake, makes Ruth understand the reality of life that the presence is more valuable than the memories.

Waters in its many forms flows throughout the Housekeeping. The lake, for example, is the repository of the town's major event-the derailment of the fireball- and of several Foster family, members, including, Edmund, Helen, supposedly, Sylvie and Ruth. Like memory, the lake swallows up whole that which enters it and like the memories, the boundaries of the lake are unreliable. Like the Fosters Orchard and house, water inhabits the house and takes it over. Sylvie and Ruth row across the water to cross the bridge to escape the confines of the Finger bone. Water appears in the forms of snow, ice, rain, mist, and frost though out Housekeeping.

Sylvie and Ruth go beyond the domestic rules and familial relationship when they burn down their house and leave Lucille and Finger bone behind the fact neither Lucille nor Finger bone can understand the reality of their relationship. Sylvia expresses the fact that human nature is replete with nameless possibilities and, by implications, that the world is accessible to new ways of understanding" (when I was a child 92). Ruth shares Sylvie's innate ability to experience the world, so she prefers to stay with Sylvie than to stay with Lucille.

For Robinson, the community is shaped by imagination; the larger images, the more inclusive the community and the more generous the imagination, the more "healthy and humane: the community (when I was a child 21). The author highlights the idea that if one's view of reality is limited, a variety of other possible realities are erased. Robinson insists that "these are thousands of different ways of thinking about things" (Schaub243). This gives some clue as to why Robinson titled the novel Housekeeping when it appears to be a look of domestic duties. The home is the fundamental building block of a community structure. When passions are not taught at home, then the society is endangered.

Housekeeping is the most powerful when read as a study in human potential, a template of reality which is imaginative, compassionate and rich with responsibilities. Marilynne Robinson consciously sets her novels against the American tradition. She examines the various ways, from nationalistic forms to the localized representation of Native American culture, in which Indians have been manipulated by American popular culture. In Housekeeping, a certain level of schematization is partially presented in attitudes of both the American majority and the Indian American minority.

For some time now, Robinson has been our most singular writer, defying contemporary trends and carving out her own distinctive place within American literature. Reading Housekeeping shows just how varied Robinson's achievement

has been. She has written the realities of common life that portray the strengths and weaknesses of the children, who are abandoned by their parents. Marilynne Robinson in her works writes the real state of the United States, where children are left as orphans to live on their likes and dislikes that create an unpleasing atmosphere. But there is a unity to all of Robinson's work, and what makes her so great. Her writing expresses a consistent and compelling vision of the world—a vision that sees the real as revelatory and every day as wondrous.

Fantasy too can open up many different possibilities and writers are able to convey complex ideas on a symbolic level that would be difficult to convey otherwise. Besides that, fantasy works provide a fresh perspective on the real world. The fantasy genre involves a different way of apprehending existence but it is no less true than realism. Fairy stories and other tales of fantasy often get a bad rap. Nowadays, the power of the fantasy tale is still celebrated, thanks to writers and thinkers as diverse as Carl Jung, Bruno Bettelheim, Joseph Campbell, Oscar Wilde, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Fantasy has struck such a chord with modern readers, that it has taken fantasy to dizzying heights. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling are a testament of these phenomena. It was commonly thought that fantasy was a form of escapism. This is far from the truth.

The reality in fantasy is a way of engaging with genuine problems of the real world. The reality lies in the fact that we can identify ourselves with the struggles of good versus evil. We can identify with that drama – that fights to overcome the evil power. So, we all like to see the vanquished and good to come out on top, because we want that to happen to our own lives. The working-out of this epic struggle reminds us the worthiness of good and the perversion of evil.

Works Cited

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