

# Defining the Home from Chopin to McCarthy

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The relationship between home, domesticity and space in American Literature has been the source of much critical debate and discussion. Although the physical space is now settled the ideology of the frontier and the need for continuous expansion still permeates American culture. Additionally, the cultural imperative to traverse new ground, both ideologically and physically, is a resounding American philosophy which pervades the frontier narrative. Viewing the frontier from a gendered perspective, for example as domesticated or active, revises the concept of the frontier which depicts women seizing the masculine role of quester. The emphasis of this study is in the exploration of the construction of home and journeying in select works from authors Kate Chopin to Cormac McCarthy whose writing frames a period of just over one hundred years, in order to discern if the cultural myth of the pastoral shifts or remains static. This is achieved by highlighting the contrast between the expectations and real experience of the West in the groups of pioneers and migrants who are depicted throughout this period. The West in this study is thus portrayed as idealised space sustained by pastoral myths and defines the land as representative of both freedom and confinement. The issues of freedom, confinement and the land are also examined through the expectations and limitations placed on the female through the 'Cult of True Womanhood' and Chopin, Cather, Glaspell and Robinson's non-conformist attitude to this feminine archetype. The main conclusions drawn from the exploration of texts are the interconnectivity between home and the 'unheimlich' and homesickness, the blurred boundaries between the static and the mobile with regards to 'home', and the continuous quest for new frontiers.

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## EPIGRAPH

Facing west from California's shores,  
Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,  
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look  
afar,  
Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled;  
For starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere,  
From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero,  
From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands,  
Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd,  
Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,  
(But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?)

*Facing West from California's Shores*, Walt Whitman

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is focused on the complex matrix of domestic, social, cultural, national and human interaction with spaces that have contributed to the shifting landscape of cultural discourses aimed at defining the home. Within my chosen texts, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913), Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1980) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) the definition of 'home' is questioned by shifting boundaries of the domestic and dismantling the frontier myth.

My exploration of 'home' is predicated on the development of the domestic as a product of white American identities, from the end of the nineteenth century, and the 'closing' of the frontier, to the twenty-first century. The subject of 'home', my thesis thus suggests, is a direct response to Anglo-Saxon colonial imperative of conquest and land acquisition. The explicitly masculine language of conquest is reflected in Theodore Roosevelt's description of the Western Frontiersmen; "Rough, masterful, lawless, they were neither daunted by the prowess of the red warriors whose wrath they braved, nor awed by the displeasure of the Government whose solemn engagements they violated." (Roosevelt, p. 24) Such a statement participates in establishing how intrinsically 'conquest' and masculinity determine the myth. There are two issues which are intertwined here – white writers and gender in the frontier myth. As such, the marginalised groups who are excluded from this frontier myth are the most significant. This study reconsiders the frontier myth from a feminine perspective by complicating gendered stereotypes which have been enforced by masculine ideology. The 'outsiders' who resist these dominant ideologies provide an insight into society's limitations and the need to evoke change.

The limitations placed on women are interlinked with ideology which surrounds gender and the domestic sphere. Amy Kaplan's influential article 'Manifest Domesticity' discusses the emergence of 'separate spheres' which allows an alternative perspective on the correlation between home and nation in America (Kaplan). The awareness of 'home' as a shifting entity,

which can be mobile or static, enables freedom from the boundaries of a set domestic space. Women have destabilised the concept of ‘separate spheres’ by pursuing undomesticated, ‘active’ spaces and usurping the masculine role. The repressive aspects of domesticity have a palpable impact on the characters which the authors portray. Caroline Hellman describes the ‘profound burdens of housekeeping in an oppressive domestic sphere’ (Hellman, p. 1), reiterating the destructive effect of ‘separate spheres’. The complex relationship between ‘home’ and the nation provides an alternate version of home for outsiders in America to flourish.

The pioneer spirit has strong links with the ideal of ‘home’ in Chopin’s writing, and still remains a dominant force in McCarthy’s work. Each author explores new spaces for their characters through notions of pioneering to the West, social pioneering or migration. In particular, the feminine voice, overlooked due to the expectations of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ (Welter), demands to be articulated. Marilynne Robinson asserts, ‘I did think about creating a world that had the feeling of [...] femaleness about it to the extent that my experience did, and it wasn’t because I felt that women had been slighted in the setting but that their presence was ignored in representations of the [West]’ (Schaub, p. 233). Robinson gives a voice to women or ‘femaleness’ in masculine settings and rebels against gendered stereotypes.

The tension between the gendered spheres of home and nation is perceptible in the criticism which surrounds it. The shifting notion of ‘separate spheres’ and the rhetoric of domesticity (Kerber, p. 11) offers an example of the pressures on women, which are based on domestic expectations. Focusing on feminine solidarity in the domestic sphere, Nancy Cott explores the duality of ‘womanhood [binding] women together even as it bound them down’ (Cott, p. 1). This diverges from the domestic ideology of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ and places women in a non-submissive role, allowing the possibility of escape from the boundaries of the domestic sphere and transformation into the role of escaper, adventurer and hobo.

Criticism on the limitations of ‘home’ in American literature details an opportunity for women to transform into ‘active’ characters through the medium of escape. Relocating women in the



literature of quest, Heidi Macpherson's book on escape as transgression highlights women who are 'seen as essentially voiceless and storyless while remaining in their prescribed gender roles' as the 'female characters undergo transformation when they take on the role of escaper' (Macpherson, p. 1). Thus, my thesis explores women who extricate themselves from their prescribed gender roles and the influence of their transgression on society.

The myth of the pastoral is an established concept in American literature, which supplies a recognised perception of America and its landscape. Specifically, the notion that landscapes are gendered creates an impression of dominance and conquest, which my thesis contests. The foundation of these myths, discussed by Annette Kolodny in her criticism on landscape and feminism, is significant as it unearths the true extent of female involvement at the frontier and enables women with unconventional views to be represented.

The exploration of 'home' becomes a search for 'home' itself as my thesis portrays the ceaseless quest for new homes and spaces elsewhere. The 'unhomely' and homelessness play a large part in deciphering the definition of 'home' and the elements that a 'home' should contain in order to represent 'homeliness'. Freud describes the 'unheimlich' as, 'the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning "familiar", "native", "belonging to the home"; and we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted.' (Freud, p. 2) The women, 'outsiders' and hoboes, who reside in stereotypically 'homely' environments in the novels I explore, find these domestic spaces 'unhomely'. This indicates the variable nature of 'home' and the characters' perceptions of the homes with which they are associated. Contrastingly, other more 'unhomely' settings are transformed into homely ones through the introduction of activity and life. The definition of 'home' is complicated by the concepts of the 'unheimlich', the myth of the pastoral and the gendered stereotypes of the 'Cult of True Womanhood'; by contrasting idealised expectations and reality it is possible to extend the archetypal vision of 'home'.

## CHAPTER 1: TRAVERSING BOUNDARIES: PIONEERING WOMEN

In some appearances, the pioneer woman signified a 'real' West as opposed to the West of fantasy and boosterism; the doughty, even grim figure whose presence defined the limitations of and indeed the constraints upon the fantasy of pioneering. (Floyd, p. 20)

The contrast between pioneers' expectations of the West and the reality they encountered is a consequence of the West being depicted as idealised space. By unpicking sustained pastoral myths it is possible to view the home and landscape not only as liberating but also as confining spaces. The 'Cult of True Womanhood' provides a foundation upon which to highlight the revisionary attitudes of the female authors examined in this chapter and their resistance to adhere to this feminine archetype. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* offer alternative perspectives on the 'quest' narrative, illustrating those women who transgress by challenging the orthodox limitations set for women in the early nineteenth century.

### **A Quest for Home: The Awakening of a Pioneer**

Though at first glance not explicitly a pioneering novel, *The Awakening* illustrates a woman's quest into previously uncharted territory. Chopin's protagonist, Edna Pontellier, builds a new social construct and rebels against the accepted notion that women have gender-specific qualities. The ideology of the American pastoral suggests that there are gendered expectations to which one is obliged to conform; women are to remain static in the domestic space whilst men are permitted to traverse foreign spheres in order to attain success. This culture of separation is aptly captured by Lawrence Buell who asserts that, 'in adolescence, female protagonists become socialized away from nature, while the male continues to enjoy freer mobility and the option of questing and conquest within nature that is frequently and revealingly symbolized as female.' (Buell, p. 15) In *The Awakening*, the protagonist cannot endure this lack of mobility and diverges from the social norm. For instance, Edna ignores her domestic duties in order to explore this forbidden foreign sphere and is criticised by her husband for this whilst he is free to leave the home at will. Thus, Edna is duty-bound to remain in the realms of the domestic sphere

simply because she is a woman. This is clearly separated from the foreign sphere that Mr Pontellier inhabits. These 'separate spheres' of occupation for men and women are remapped in Amy Kaplan's prominent article 'Manifest Domesticity'. She observes that in accordance with the 'separate spheres' concept, domesticity is viewed as 'an anchor, a feminine counterforce to the male activity of territorial conquest. [Kaplan argues] to the contrary, that domesticity is more mobile and less stabilizing' (Kaplan, p. 583). This has set a precedent for the future of domestic criticism as Kaplan offers a new perspective on domesticity as a variable concept that is interlinked with the foreign and not solely fixed to a limited space.

Historically, women were expected to obey the principles of the 'Cult of True Womanhood'.

Barbara Welter explores these feminine expectations and also the ideological and physical boundaries of the domestic space for women:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues-piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife - woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (Welter, p. 152)

At the time of Chopin's novel, written in 1899, these attributes, or more accurately constraints, were forced upon the American woman and undermining these roles was considered a transgression. Edna transcends her domestic role in the process of her awakening and shuns each of the cardinal virtues of the 'ideal woman'. Welter continues, 'If she [the American woman] chose to listen to other voices than those of her proper mentors, sought other rooms than those of her home, she lost both her happiness and her power' (Welter, p. 173). In writing plainly of the social politics of the time and subverting the norm *The Awakening* challenges the status quo in order to prompt a change in societal attitude. Contrary to Welter's description of the rewards of submitting to the 'Cult of True Womanhood', Chopin exposes the connection between the social constraints placed on women and their dissatisfaction. Edna, in actuality, forfeits her own sense of happiness and her power by attempting to comply with the 'Cult of True Womanhood' and instead finds fulfilment, albeit briefly, by exploring the unknown spaces

previously forbidden to her. She ‘cast[s...] aside that fictitious self’ (Chopin, p. 108), which society imposed upon her and finally has the opportunity to develop her qualities and re-define herself in her new, unconventional ‘pigeon house’.

As the protagonist develops she becomes more assertive and challenges her husband’s view that she is ‘a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage’ (Chopin, p. 44). Edna refuses to be objectified and redefines her role from that of wife and mother to artist; ‘Chopin insists that the role patriarchy requires of nineteenth-century women – that of the “mother-woman”- is not adequate for Edna, for it requires that she remain an object’ (Gray J. B., p. 60). This role is not tolerable for Edna who fails to emulate the ideal ‘mother-woman’, Adele Ratignolle, and rejects this traditional title in search of a new untethered identity.

Contextualised with the ‘mother-woman’ figure, domesticity is perceived as a fixed entity and a restricted space. However, Chopin claims new territory for her protagonist by allowing her more spatial freedom and mobility, and if viewed in this manner home can be seen as an empire, an idea also examined by Kaplan. This creates a conflict of interests as Mr Pontellier attempts to confine Edna within contracted boundaries. Kaplan discusses the correlation between home and nation in America and determines that ‘the representation of the home as an empire exists in tension with the notion of woman’s sphere as a contracted space...’ (Kaplan, p. 586). Chopin allows her protagonist to forge beyond these boundaries, and in doing so emphasises the conflict existing in the perceived scope of the woman’s sphere. Mr Pontellier, cannot ‘be in two places at once’ (Chopin, p. 48) (both in the domestic sphere and the foreign sphere). Here, the patriarchal subject attempts to maintain the separation between these private and public spheres whilst the protagonist endeavours to liberate herself from this contracted space. Even Robert Lebrun, the source of Edna’s awakening, conforms to the system of ‘separate spheres’. Robert, in his quest for wealth in foreign spheres, follows traditional masculine ambitions. ‘Robert spoke of his intention to go to Mexico in the Autumn, where fortune awaited him’ (Chopin, p. 46). This highlights the disparity between the available choices for Robert and Edna. In a rebellious act which breaks six years of ‘keep[ing] up with the procession’ (Chopin, p. 101)

Edna shuns her duties as a wife and flouts the tradition of receiving callers as she pronounces defiantly, “I found their cards when I got home; I was out” (Chopin, p. 100). Thus, she alienates herself from the society with whom she is expected to associate and fails to preserve the image of the ‘Cult of Domesticity’.

The protagonist pioneers into new in-between spaces and claims them as her own, redefining the boundaries of her domestic sphere. The threshold is a significant space as it becomes an area in-between the two spheres; a no-man’s ground of which neither party can claim full ownership. As such, at their Grand Isle home this space becomes the site where Edna challenges the hegemonic rule of her husband. Kaplan states that, ‘many domestic novels open at physical thresholds, such as windows or doorways, that problematize the relation between interior and exterior’ (Kaplan, p. 600). In this instance, not only does this complicate the relation between spaces, it also complicates the relation between masculine and feminine behavioural expectations. By remaining on the porch against her husband’s will, Edna establishes herself as ‘active’ and expands her domain outside of the home. ‘She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted’ (Chopin, p. 78). This defiance remaps her domestic space; it becomes a place of resistance and rebelliousness rather than meek submission. She is on the threshold between the world of domesticity and the quest for a purpose and social acceptance in her new role.

Several locations aid Edna in her quest for a new social order; it is in Madame Antoine’s ‘cot’ (Chopin, p. 83) that her romance with Lebrun blossoms. The haven-like ‘cot’ creates a comforting space for Edna as she sleeps as deeply as a child for the first time in the novel, whereas previously she is said to sleep ‘but a few [...] troubled and feverish hours’ (Chopin, p. 79). The house that she escapes to by boat with Lebrun becomes a place of refuge. This setting conjures an imaginary fairy tale realm for Edna which offers a vision of an alternate life. Akin to *Sleeping Beauty*, when she awakens Robert jests, “‘You have slept precisely one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book”” (Chopin, p. 85). This mythical break, in which Madame Antoine also

tells of the 'legends of the Baratarians and the sea' (Chopin, p. 87), serves as a peaceful and harmonious moment in time. It represents both an afternoon and an eternity and, as it is not a fairy tale, must come to an end. This comforting and homely space contrasts with her domestic home, the 'scrupulously neat' (Chopin, p. 99) Esplanade Street house, which represents Mr Pontellier's success and Edna's confinement and duty.

The connection between nature and Edna's sense of freedom is emphasised by imagery of the outside landscape. To eradicate the fear of her confining and intimidating home, in which 'a thousand muffled voices bade her begone' (Chopin, p. 140), Edna cultivates the outdoor space. The hostile interior environment is countered by the garden outside as her bond with the landscape liberates her from the constraints of her family house. 'The flowers were like new acquaintances; she approached them in a familiar spirit, and made herself at home among them. [...] Edna plucked all the bright flowers she could find, and went into the house with them' (Chopin, p. 126). The home that Edna shares with her husband is as hostile as the wilderness appeared to the first pioneers. Much like earlier pioneer women, she cultivates a garden that becomes a space of contentment in an unwelcoming place. Annette Kolodny's criticism on American frontier women argues, 'that most women did not become so traumatised by the dislocations of pioneering [...] often appears directly related to their capacity to either create such a garden or at least to project its possibility onto the forested wilderness.' (Kolodny, 1984, p. 37) By bringing these elements into the hostile house she attempts to restore a homely and feminine aspect to an overbearing space. The garden not only enables Edna to generate a world that is pleasant and hospitable to her but also plays a key role in offering her a creative outlet, which is a step towards shaping her own feminine space.

Edna's growth as a character is reliant on founding her own space which is detached from the patriarchal influence of her Esplanade home. The 'pigeon house', the first domestic space she claims as her own, gives her the creative opportunity to progress further into her awakening and self-fulfilment. This requirement for self-expression is recognised by Jo Malin who states that 'women need to claim their own space...to experience their creative process intimately' (Malin,

p. 145). Edna redefines her identity by escaping her domestic responsibilities and creating her own socially constructed space to become an artist. By rejecting social norms and moving into 'a little four-room house around the corner' (Chopin, p. 134) Edna gains inspiration from having 'one passion, and four walls' of her own (Cather, *The Novel D meubl *, p. 51). Edna pioneers into new spaces which she has been prevented from experiencing and in doing so she aims to create a new social space that satisfies her needs. Relocating women in the literature of quest, Heidi Macpherson highlights 'woman's desire for different space' (Macpherson, p. 2). Revising the quest narrative in this manner gives a voice to the protagonist of *The Awakening* who searches, just as the men do, for a different space. For Chopin's character, however, achieving this different space is a transgression as social expectations are too ingrained for Edna to maintain this way of life. The liberating space which Chopin provides for her protagonist comes at a price, as finally, she commits suicide 'reaching out for the unlimited' (Chopin, p. 74), a space which could not be realised in her life. Reaching for the 'unlimited' links to the broader American ideals of freedom and individualism, as Edna has an intrinsic need to create her own distinctive identity. This personal desire reflects the American quest for a new identity that is detached from that of Old World Europe.

Chopin illustrates the impact of the external environment and the inevitability of woman's biological condition upon the protagonist, thus emphasising the novel's naturalistic aspect. Chopin's work applies a 'distinctive kind of naturalism that chronicles the struggles of women against an array of coercive forces' (Emmert, p. 75) and has also been described as '*naturalism as feminism*' (Margraf, p. 112). Chopin depicts the trials of a woman's quest for identity as a struggle against traditional social expectations and emphasises the constraints placed on the freedom of women. Edna's awakening to the inextricable connection between womanhood and motherhood forces her to reject her family in a will to remain unconfined. She 'thought of Leonc  and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul' (Chopin, p. 176). She refuses the 'mother-woman' role permanently and takes her life to preserve her new-found identity.

Again, the importance of the landscape in her life is emphasised at her death. In an idealistic vision she thinks of ‘the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when she was a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end’ (Chopin, p. 176). She relates herself as an individual entity in a vast landscape from the places of her childhood. The limitless nature of the meadow is linked to the limitless nature of the sea where she feels the vast scope of unbounded space. She has become ‘some new-born creature opening its eyes in a familiar world it had never known’ (Chopin, p. 175). By returning to the scene of her first inklings of awakening and realisation, a place which liberated her when she mastered the art of swimming, she frees herself from accepting her submissive domestic role.

Chopin challenges the accepted patriarchal attitudes of the time by liberating her protagonist in this way, and offers an alternate space to that of the limited domestic sphere. Mary Papke states that ‘Chopin [...] offer[s] readers both criticism of what was and implicit visions of what could be, alternative worlds imagined if only through self-annihilation’ (Papke, p. 19). She maintains that as the characters Chopin portrays are marginalised or submissive and attempting to break into another sphere, the denouement is in some ways set to be a ‘fiction of limits [...] and defeat’ (Papke, p. 33). This is certainly a novel of limits though not, I would argue, one of defeat. The protagonist’s ability to imagine an alternative social world is significant. *The Awakening* paves the way for future authors to push the boundaries further; Chopin provides a platform from which it is possible to imagine a world where there is cultural agency for those women who do not follow the four cardinal virtues. Though Edna’s death may be viewed as her downfall to those of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’, to her it allows deliverance from the constraints of her environment into limitless space.

### **Cather on the Divide: Re-building Homes**

Willa Cather’s western pioneer supersedes Chopin’s visionary social pioneer as she provides her protagonist with the authority and resource to thrive in a patriarchal setting. Cather creates an unconventional pioneering hero in the shape of Alexandra Bergson, who builds a home both



sustainable for woman and independent from social intervention. Both Chopin and Cather's work highlight that the source of their protagonists' inspiration is the surrounding vast space as opposed to the limited domestic space. Edna finds comfort in the endless blue-grass meadow of her childhood; similarly, Alexandra yearns to be a part of the landscape in *O Pioneers!*. The concluding moments in *The Awakening* leave Edna's potential as something greater than the 'mother-woman' role assigned to her incomplete as she is only able to truly escape the social limitations that she faces in death. Cather's vision offers a different outcome to that which was available for Edna, as Alexandra is permitted to stray from the limitations of the domestic sphere into the vast Western landscape. She is able to reap the positive rewards of her connection to the liberating space around her.

Writing fourteen years after *The Awakening*, Cather provides an alternative ending for women who strive for independence and freedom. Sharon O'Brien claims that Cather writes 'beyond the ending [...] of *The Awakening* in *O Pioneers!*' (O'Brien, p. 429). *O Pioneers!* expands the possibilities depicted in *The Awakening* as Cather further outlines the trials of a woman in overcoming an oppressive landscape and notably allows woman to flourish in a male-dominated environment. Though Cather extends the scope of the self-reliant woman, *O Pioneers!* still offers a problematic reading; there is no conclusive solution to the issues of woman which have been laid out previously by Chopin, just different problems in different territory.

The need to escape from the idealised archetype that exists between the feminine and the domestic is characterised by Chopin and Cather as their characters struggle for individuality and their own homely space. Cather questions the notion of the West as idealised space, while Chopin questions the idealised expectations of women. Alexandra is able to progress further than her fictional predecessor as she harnesses her creative vision of the frontier landscape and is not engulfed by social tradition. Alexandra is set apart from Edna as she exists in relative independence from a dominant masculine figure; the freedom that Chopin cannot offer her protagonist allows Alexandra to explore her creative and innovative attributes. Though Alexandra sustains an independent existence she still faces opposition from others. Cather puts

her fulfilment and sexual identity into question as her passion for the land becomes a burden which diminishes her options to leave home or find a husband.

The houses built upon the Western landscape are fundamental to Cather's work; 'to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls' (Cather, *The Novel D meubl *, p. 51). This is encapsulated in Alexandra's passion for the land as her most significant trial is preserving her homely existence on the frontier. The resilient western homesteads are described as 'few and far apart... here and there... a sod-house crouching in the hollow' (Cather, p. 14), giving the impression that the houses are anthropomorphic and are oppressed by the strength of the land. Beth Rundstrom suggests in 'Harvesting Willa Cather's Literary Fields' that the crouching figures represent pioneer women in the early stages of inhabitation. Further to this, it seems that the frontier homes are overwhelmed by the wild landscape from the 'crouching' stance which Cather depicts, as is Alexandra's father, the pioneer. Though her oppressed father is unable to overcome the struggles he faces at the frontier, Cather gives Alexandra the tools to become a pioneer heroine. This wild and ruthless land which is dispiriting to many other pioneers holds much potential for Alexandra; 'For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning' (Cather, p. 39). Alexandra's fervent passion for the land is captured here but this sentiment also illustrates the arrogant vision of a victorious conquistador. She is ignorant to the history of the land and looks at the land as a blank canvas with no previous inhabitants. Though Cather represents the relationship between Alexandra and the land as one of 'love and yearning' she also emphasises the darker aspects of the wild landscape and the pioneer experience.

Cather depicts the conflict which exists between the pioneers and the landscape in her portrayal of failed pioneers; Alexandra's father dies before making a success of his farm, Carl Linstrum leaves as he is unable to adjust to life on the frontier and ultimately, Alexandra's persona is engulfed by the land. Carl exposes flaws in the myth of the pastoral when he admits that his family are to return to their previous home in St. Louis. 'Father was never meant for a farmer, you know that. And I hate it.' (Cather, p. 32) He leaves the frontier to gain skills as an engraver

thus contradicting the expectations of new settlers and proving the arduous aspects of the pioneer lifestyle. The land antagonises the new settlers, resisting the new farmers; as John Bergson discovers before his death, the land can be oppressive and unforgiving. ‘Then came the hard times that brought everyone on the Divide to the brink of despair; three years of drouth and failure, the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching plowshare’ (Cather, p. 31). The wild land rages against the hands which try to tame it, refuses to submit to the pioneers and challenges the idealised expectation that the West is bountiful with arms open to greet newcomers.

Cather’s obstinate western landscape links with Edna’s assertiveness in *The Awakening*, as they both rail against the forces which try to mould them. The landscape is feminised as a consequence of the reality of this unknown entity compared with the myth. In an influential discussion on landscape and feminism, Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* (1975)<sup>1</sup> questions if there was ‘perhaps a *need* to experience the land as a nurturing, giving maternal breast because of the threatening, alien and potentially emasculating terror of the unknown?’ (Kolodny, p. 9). Alexandra becomes part of the land as she feminises her surroundings and assimilates herself with her home; it is ‘in the soil that she [Alexandra] expresses herself best’ (Cather, p. 49). Alexandra’s mutual understanding of the land and its capabilities enables her to carve out a successful existence on the frontier. In *The Land Before Her*, Kolodny discusses the overarching use of patriarchal language to describe the New Found Land and the impact of this sexualised imagery on real women; ‘the psychosexual dynamic of a virginal paradise meant [...] that real flesh-and-blood women – at least metaphorically – were dispossessed of paradise’ (Kolodny, 1984, p. 3). Cather harnesses an alternative image of the land to the wild country which Mr Bergson ‘had made but little impression upon’ (Cather, p. 17). The land co-operates with Alexandra as she creates an Edenic garden with ‘fruit trees knee-deep in timothy grass [...] A stranger, approaching it, could not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the out-lying

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<sup>1</sup> Though Annette Kolodny’s work in both *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her* discusses the American frontier pre-1860 I believe it is still relevant as it lays the foundations for the overarching myths which were still prevalent in American society.

fields' (Cather, pp. 48-49). Alexandra is intimately connected with the land and is therefore able to reap the benefits of her new home. She is sympathetic to the land and is not dispossessed of paradise, but claims it for herself.

Alexandra's intimacy with the outdoors dissolves the borders that exist between the domestic and foreign sphere. Cather melds the separate spheres of home and business through Alexandra's livelihood. This achieves the integration of spheres which Chopin was unable to sustain for Edna in *The Awakening*. In doing so, Cather breaks down 'the traditional nineteenth-century distinction between "public" and "private", male and female space' (O'Brien, p. 434) and extends the social paradigm which Chopin had begun to question.

Alexandra's relationship with the domestic and the outdoors develops the dichotomy between the inside and outside in the novel. As she sits on the kitchen doorstep she lies between both spheres; 'while her mother was mixing the bread [...] Alexandra watched the shimmering pool dreamily, but eventually her eyes went back to the sorghum patch [...] where she was planning to make her new pig corral.' (Cather, p. 30) In this in-between space Alexandra is aware of domestic duties whilst her practical nature and imagination offer the opportunity to succeed. Just as Chopin sets her protagonist out on the porch to rebel against the constraints of her domestic role, Alexandra sits on the boundary between two worlds. By seizing the role of farmer she progresses further than Edna could by blending both the domestic and foreign spheres. As Ann Romines states, 'Alexandra, like Willa Cather, make[s] domestic ritual a source for [her] art, but they eschew housekeeping.' (Romines, p. 147) Here, it is clear that Alexandra chooses to be liberated from convention, using her imagination and pragmatism in order to acquire more land.

Domestic objects and the imagination are essential to Cather's vision and definition of the home. The items from the pioneers' previous European homes hold echoes of the past which are vital to rebuild identity on the unknown frontier. Alexandra fulfils her father's wish not only of protecting his 'hard-won land' (Cather, p. 19) but also, due to her resourcefulness, owns 'a big

white house that stood on a hill' (Cather, p. 48). The fragments of furniture from their old log house and 'the few things her mother brought from Sweden' (Cather, p. 49) remain in her 'big white house'. Alexandra's affiliation with her past is not diluted by her success, emphasising the potency of memory when creating new homes. The recollections of their migratory journey from Europe provide a link back to previous homes and previous lives. Eudora Welty describes the significance of the dwelling in Cather's novels:

Set within the land is the dwelling – made by human hands to hold human life. As we know, the intensity of desire for building the house to live in – or worship in – fills the Cather novels. It fills the past for her, it gives the present meaning; it provides for a future: the house is the physical form, the *evidence* that we have lived, are alive now; it will be the evidence someday that we were alive once, evidence against the arguments of time and the tricks of history. (Welty, p. 56)

For Alexandra, the view she sees from the doorstep and the opportunity to enrich her land is more fundamental to her experience on the frontier than the dwelling itself. For instance, Ivar appreciates his natural surroundings as Alexandra does. He lives contently with minimal possessions in a 'wild homestead' (Cather, p. 26), which suggests that his home has amalgamated with nature. 'If one stood in the doorway of his cave, and looked off at the rough land, the smiling sky [...] one understood what Ivar meant.' (Cather, p. 26) The view of the land from the doorways of these dwellings impresses Alexandra with awe at the power and beauty beheld in her natural environment. Ivar challenges gender conventions as he does not seek to conquer the land in the manner of a traditional Western pioneer. Instead, Ivar's connection with the wilderness and his humble lifestyle suggests that he is more akin with the Native Americans who possessed the land prior to the pioneers. Both Alexandra and Ivar's versions of home place greater significance on nature than on the houses they inhabit. Their convergence of lifestyle suggests a more amicable connection between masculine and feminine ideals, a contrast with Edna and Mr Pontellier's drastically opposing attitudes to the domestic sphere. By accumulating property which is advantageous for herself and the men in her family, Alexandra gains a level of respect and recognition in society which Edna could not accomplish in her more restricted position.

Although domestic objects are significant in *O Pioneers!*, when Cather describes her thoughts on the ‘over-furnished’ style of the novel she says, ‘how wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window...’ (Cather, *The Novel D meubl *, p. 51). She imparts this ideal through her protagonist Alexandra whose real home is ‘the big out-of-doors’ (Cather, p. 49). Cather distances herself from the trappings of domesticity by symbolically eradicating these objects from the home space, which stems from the need only for a passion and four walls. The potential to create a home in this harsh environment with only a passion for the land is encapsulated in *O Pioneers!*. Judith Fryer’s *Felicitous Space* (1986) delves into these spaces and explores ‘Willa Cather’s unfurnished rooms and her landscapes that are physical and spiritual correlatives’ (Fryer, p. xiv). Alexandra is able to imprint her mark on the land because of her connection with the vast and simplified landscape that is endless and seemingly without history. This marked physical space becomes a part of the nation, but an emotional space is also created in those who forge it; ‘The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman’ (Cather, p. 39). This rhetoric is romanticised but also has a practical element as the future is founded in the land and also in those who are determined to cultivate it. It is the perseverance of pioneers, such as Alexandra, who help a country to form by believing in the power of the land and the worth of their labour. Beth Rundstrom argues that, ‘cooperative land-human relationships empowered woman to overcome traditional patriarchal structures and effect changes on landscape. Cather’s houses are the source and substance of early-twentieth-century women’s self-awareness and changing roles’ (Rundstrom, p. 227). Cather’s houses (the primitive log or sod houses and her big white house) are symbolic as they illustrate the increasing independence and authority of pioneer women. Alexandra epitomises these self-reliant qualities as before Mr Bergson’s death he gives her his blessing to become the head of the family; she overrules her brothers’ wishes to leave the land and achieves great success and authority by enduring the wild landscape.

Mrs Bergson’s persisting pride in her domestic duties, though the living conditions on the frontier are much humbler than her previous home, emphasises her struggle to ‘reconstruct her own life. [...] She could still take some comfort in the world if she had bacon in the cave, glass

jars on the shelves, and sheets in the press' (Cather, p. 22). These seemingly insignificant practises enable Mrs Bergson to define a homely space in a hostile environment, which aids her in constructing a home on the Divide. Joseph Urgo describes migration and conflict in Cather's work as 'a struggle for spatial definition' (Urgo, p. 16). Chopin and Cather each seek spatial definition for their protagonists; Edna struggles to define a new role for herself and must transgress in order to overcome the restraints which define her limited domestic space.

Alexandra avoids Edna's fate by working with the wild landscape to transform it instead of being submerged in its vastness. Just as Mrs Bergson uses the domestic rituals of her homeland to anchor herself firmly into new ground, her daughter Alexandra integrates with the landscape to create a new home.

Alexandra has an astute awareness of the potential of the land which guides her in her quest at the frontier. She makes progressive decisions and implements new farming methods, procuring extra land from her destitute neighbours. Regardless of how she acquires the land, her ability to claim and cultivate these wild spaces makes them a suitable home for the future. Though Cather presents realistic elements of the struggle that many pioneers faced, her own nostalgia for the pioneering days romanticises Alexandra's view of the landscape in times of hardship. In *Recalling the Wild*, Mary Lawlor states, 'Cather's westernism is not shy about its romantic inclinations. [...] In the end, her Western places image the aspirations for regeneration and self-fashioning that send her expeditionary [...] characters to the West in the first place' (Lawlor, pp. 166-171). In *O Pioneers!* Cather's vision of moving out to the West emphasises the possibility of renewal and making your mark on a blank, new space. It is this blankness which offers Cather more scope to create an alternative role for Alexandra. Conversely, Chopin's characters are anchored in Louisiana and surrounded by pre-established norms, which makes it much more problematic to transcend these boundaries. Cather captures the spirit of the West and the drive to make a success of the land but also challenges the romanticised West in her depiction of the failed pioneers.

It is possible to create a home in the wilderness by engaging with the landscape. Mrs Bergson puts down roots at the frontier by cultivating a garden in the midst of the unknown. Just as Edna tends her garden in an attempt to connect with her unwelcoming home, Mrs Bergson grows fruit and vegetables which allow her to continue her domestic rituals of preserving and pickling. Fryer suggests that 'In the wide, flat, empty landscape it is possible to re-experience, to re-enter another space, another time...' (Fryer, p. 292), which recalls Cather's nostalgia for Nebraska, 'a place which would always "get" her' (Lee, p. 44). The empty landscape is an elegy to the past and offers a way to access American memory and imagination. Joseph Urgo describes American life as 'a moving picture; our sense of community is in transit; the consciousness we share is migratory' (Urgo, p. 13). Home and journey are juxtaposed as these migrants are willing to recreate home again and again, highlighting the aptitude to embrace new opportunities which is ingrained in American culture.

Domestic ritual is a way to recreate home and evade homesickness whether by cultivating a garden or habitually performing domestic tasks. Ann Romines describes domestic ritual as 'a battlefield, claimed or spurned by competing, collaborating male and female voices' (Romines, p. 150). Alexandra effectively fights this battle to escape from the ritual as Cather revises woman's role; she identifies the woman as the strong, successful farm owner and the men, such as her father and Carl, as failed pioneers. Cather depicts Alexandra as a complex character who embodies both masculine and feminine attributes as she has 'Amazonian fierceness' (Cather, p. 11) and yet wears 'a man's long ulster [...] like a young soldier' (Cather, p. 10) in the same chapter. Cather shuns the notion that her female protagonist must have gendered traits and complicates the boundaries of gender, making it impossible to pin Alexandra down into the limited domestic role. Cather, like Chopin before her, reclassifies what it means to be a woman and rejects the feminised expectations of the 'Cult of True Womanhood'. Alexandra does, however, forfeit aspects of her sexuality and femininity to maintain her home. Her brothers proclaim that she 'ain't much like other women-folks' (Cather, p. 93) and that she has 'never been in love [...] She wouldn't know how to go about it.' (Cather, p. 84) In order to be



classified as a pioneer heroine, Alexandra sacrifices elements of her character to maintain this unconventional lifestyle.

Cather and Chopin's fictional worlds challenge feminised orthodoxy and also explore the sacrifices which women who transgress or seek independence face. Their protagonists struggle against the 'Cult of True Womanhood' by attempting to reject domestic tradition in order to pursue their passions. Edna has aspirations to be a woman, artist and lover rather than solely 'mother-woman', whereas Alexandra, a successfully self-reliant woman, rejects feminised characteristics. As Alexandra is able to sustain an independent home, she is anchored in her landscape and is a static character. In contrast, her brother Emil quests to Mexico, in a similar manner to Chopin's Lebrun, in search of his fortune to distance himself from his home and love. Alexandra's fixed position highlights the love she has for her home on the frontier, whereas Edna craves autonomy from her confined domestic space.

Both protagonists, whether content at home or searching for a new home, push boundaries in order to become self-reliant and succeed to some degree in resisting social conventions. When Edna begins to question these conventions she 'read[s] Emerson until she [grows] sleepy' (Chopin, p. 127). Her nonconformist actions reflect the ideas in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on self-reliance, 'I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency' (Emerson, p. 1169). Both heroines establish their own social rules in order to create a space which is not constricting. Edna's quest for an independent space outside the domestic sphere echoes Henry David Thoreau's autonomous home which he creates away from society in *Walden* (1854).

These non-conformist ideals are further illustrated by Susan Glaspell in *Trifles*, as her protagonist takes an extreme form of revenge against the patriarchal bonds which restrain her. As Chopin and Cather did before her, Glaspell also challenges established conventions; 'Glaspell believed in the rebellion of the individual against (and necessary departure from) the limitations of small-town conventionality, and she too portrays a binary of home/travel,

community/isolation, settlement/autonomy' (Carpentier, p. 135). The struggle of the individual against social limitations is at the core of *The Awakening* and *O Pioneers!*. Glaspell's *Trifles* attempts to reveal the oppressive and isolated nature of pioneering and the serious impact that this has on women.

### **The Flawed Frontier: An Unhomely house in Glaspell's *Trifles***

[Glaspell] creates modern 'pioneers', who make for themselves new frontiers of feeling, thinking, and living, often at considerable cost [...] to themselves [...] She wrote about the new woman striving to fulfill her dreams in a hostile and insensitive world [...] and the tragedy of the isolated mid-western farm-wife. (Waterman, p. 1040)

Susan Glaspell's one act play, *Trifles*, links with Cather and Chopin's novels as she writes expressly for the isolated pioneer woman who seeks liberation from the confined domestic sphere. Mrs Wright (Minnie Foster), a mid-western farm-wife, who is segregated from her social community by her husband, is given a voice by Glaspell. In the protagonist's oppressed state she is left with no other alternative than to retaliate and the alleged murderous actions that liberate her from her violent husband are at a substantial cost to her own liberty.

In line with the principles of the 'Cult of True Womanhood', the County Attorney and Mr Hale have an unrealistic view of Mrs Wright's domestic role. They chastise her lack of 'homemaking instinct' (Glaspell, p. 1044), remarking that she is 'not much of a housekeeper' (Glaspell, p. 1043). Mr Pontellier expresses a similar sentiment towards his wife in *The Awakening*; for him, Edna lacks propriety and traditional feminine virtues as she rejects the domestic duties that she has been socially assigned. According to the men in *Trifles*, housekeeping is a fundamental feminine attribute. They are wholly unsympathetic towards Minnie's living conditions and portray her lack of home-making instinct as a defect which suggests her guilt.

Glaspell's absent protagonist, who awaits trial in a prison cell throughout the play, is an excluded figure who is ostracised from her community due to her unfortunate marriage. Minnie is only given access to the limited spaces in her isolated house. Similarly, Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters reside in the domestic sphere for the length of the play and are restricted specifically to

the kitchen space. The 'trifles' that have the power to convict Minnie can be found in this unobtrusive setting. However, as the men follow the established code of 'separate spheres', they traverse outside the domestic space, questing 'upstairs first' (Glaspell, p. 1043) and out to the barn. They wrongly expect that any incriminating evidence will be found outside of the domestic realm. The sheriff actively moves '*away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*' (Glaspell, p. 1041) in order to definitively mark the space between masculine and feminine spheres. The stove is central to the feminine domain, which is unknown to him, and therefore, hinders a logical perspective. He is unable to connect with the evidence and ideas within this domain and seeks it instead from his known environment.

The Sheriff highlights the opposition between the 'male and female realms of meaning and activity' (Kolodny, p. 462) by distinguishing between these two spheres. The ideas of the husbands and wives lose meaning in-between the upstairs and the kitchen as they cannot communicate with each other adequately. The men reject the significance of the confined kitchen space as they simply cannot equate to the concepts that can be found within its bounds. This is reminiscent of the limiting domestic settings and the traditional role of woman which is portrayed in *The Awakening* and *O Pioneers!*. Mrs Peters and Mrs Hale understand the 'female realms' that Minnie lived in and have the capacity to unlock the hidden meanings which can be found in the domestic objects of Minnie's kitchen. As a result of the 'Cult of Domesticity', women are viewed as an appendix to man, as the Sheriff and Attorney believe their wives are incapable of any dangerous or serious thought. They describe Mrs Peters as 'married to the law' (Glaspell, p. 1050), transforming her into a mere extension of her husband's values and principles. In actuality, both Mrs Peters and Mrs Hale uncover the extent of Minnie's suffering through household 'trifles' they find in her kitchen. Rather than submitting to the passive virtues that the men expect of them, they challenge this patriarchal power and destroy the evidence of Minnie's guilt.

The household objects in *Trifles* are imbued with hidden significance. As the title suggests, the trinkets and possessions that Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters examine are mere 'trifles' and though

disregarded by the men, they are carefully unpicked by the women. Consequently, the domestic setting holds a figurative reference to the character and their motives (Keller). The objects which Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters scrutinise are the bird-cage, the preserves and the unfinished quilt and from each of these items the women deduce a great deal about Minnie's troubled life. Annette Kolodny asserts that as, '[the men lack] familiarity with the women's imaginative universe, that universe within which their acts are signs, the men in these stories can neither read nor comprehend the meanings of the women closest to them - and this in spite of the apparent sharing of a common language' (Kolodny, p. 463). The Sheriff and Court Attorney cannot comprehend the 'trifles' which make up the feminine world and thus are unable to find any evidence. Glaspell offers her protagonist liberty from the constraints of her marriage; this unconventional denouement highlights Glaspell's intention of undermining the patriarchal status quo by allowing her protagonist to surmount the established authority.

Minnie's psychological state is reflected in Glaspell's bleak landscapes. Her confining home is set 'down in a hollow and you don't see the road [...] it's a lonesome place and always was' (Glaspell, p. 1047) and inside lies 'a gloomy kitchen' (Glaspell, p. 1041). The remoteness of the house emphasises Minnie's constricted and bounded existence; she is cut off from her childhood community as her husband will not allow her to attend Women's Aid and she no longer sings. The isolation Minnie experiences reinforces the desperation felt by pioneer women and also revisits Cather's houses, which were described 'crouching' in the hollow.

Glaspell, like Chopin, speaks for the exiled voice of an outsider. Domesticity is disrupted in Minnie's absence as the table is half wiped, the preserves are broken from the cold and the canary lies dead with a wrung neck in a box. Glaspell overturns the traditional homely domestic setting by emphasising the isolated woman's perspective, as to Minnie her 'home' is a fearful and unhomely space. Elaine Hedges observes the impact of isolation on rural women; she states that 'Glaspell's story reflects a larger truth about the lives of rural women. Their isolation induced madness in many. The rate of insanity in rural areas, especially for women, was a much discussed subject in the second half of the nineteenth century.' (Hedges, p. 59) I would argue

that there is an issue with defining madness in this way, as much like *The Yellow Wallpaper's* nameless woman, Minnie is isolated and confined to her home. Indeed, Chopin's Edna Pontellier should not be construed as 'mad' for attempting to break free from conventional restricting boundaries. Glaspell highlights the struggle of the individual against society. After she has committed the crime she is found "rockin' back and forth [...] she didn't ask me [Mr Hale] to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there" (Glaspell, p. 1042). Much like Edna's rebellious behaviour in *The Awakening* Minnie rejects the correct manner of accepting guests into her home, which can be perceived as an act of resistance. The murder should be construed, not as an act of madness, but as an attempt to escape the limits of her domestic sphere.

Glaspell emphasises the struggles of the isolated pioneer woman in the sheer lengths Mrs Wright goes to in order to attain her freedom. Mrs Wright does not achieve the idealised image of the West as she passes her time isolated in a remote place sewing a quilt. The design she sews is a 'log cabin pattern' (Glaspell, p. 1046), which is loaded with the expectations pioneers had of the West. Hedges argues that as 'a replication of that most emotionally evocative of American dwelling types, the log cabin quilt came to symbolize both the hardships and heroisms of pioneer life' (Hedges, p. 64). This stresses the prominent role women played in civilising the frontier, a role which Cather's protagonist is most familiar with, and laments the reality of an unsatisfying and lonely home life. Driven to murder to reclaim her identity, like Edna, she makes an extreme choice to gain independence. Sections of the quilt are badly sewn which suggests that after the murder Minnie attempts to return to domestic rituals for comfort. Mrs Hale says, "It's all over the place! Why, it looks as though she didn't know what she was about!" (Glaspell, p. 1046). This implies that Mrs Wright cannot achieve the ideal image of the western pioneer home. Ozzie Mayers asserts in 'The Power of the Pin' that in 'its archetypal nature, sewing can suggest a kind of rootedness, a pinning oneself down' (Mayers, p. 666). Minnie fails to adhere to the log cabin pattern and her erratic stitching suggests that it is not possible for every woman to preserve this traditional American lifestyle. In highlighting the

flaws of the pioneer myth the author gives a voice to women who have pursued the idealised vision of the West and failed to attain it.

Minnie's life is reconstructed by the domestic items which, in her absence, are utilised as vessels for her experience. Glaspell depicts the men as 'trying to get her [Mrs Wright's] own house to turn against her' (Glaspell, p. 1046) in her absence. This reveals that the relationship between woman and the house is one of ownership. It is her empire. In this instance, the house is not described as Mr Wright's but 'her own'. Absent from the play, she is unable to defend herself vocally and so it is the household objects that allow an insight into her character. Karen Alkalay-Gut discusses Mrs Wright's absence and proposes that 'as the emblematic woman, Mrs. Wright's own life becomes, of necessity, trivial. Her absence throughout the play emphasizes this tangentiality to existence.' (Alkalay-Gut, p. 72) I would argue that Mrs Wright's absence makes her more a prominent figure, as each unearthed object provides a clearer picture of her struggle. However, her absence from the play allows an emotional detachment which enables Minnie to represent all isolated women who are trapped within restricting boundaries.

Much like the protagonists of Chopin and Cather's novels, Minnie's behaviour challenges the simplistic notion that women have specific gendered characteristics. Glaspell showcases the complexity of her female protagonist through her refusal to submit to established conventions. Linda Ben-Zvi states that 'women who kill evoke fear because they challenge societal constructs of femininity – passivity, restraint, and nurture – thus the rush to isolate and label the female offender, to cauterize the act' (Ben-Zvi, p. 19). Glaspell creates an alternative feminine construct which does not follow tradition and allows an escape for Minnie. Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters empathise with Minnie's act of desperation enough to unpick the evidence against her. The author challenges the expectations of the 'Cult of Domesticity', which restrained and conditioned these women by allowing the protagonist to get away with murder and representing a section of society that has been ignored and oppressed.

When *The Awakening* was first published, a critic who reviewed it was horrified by the unconventional description of women's behaviour; 'what marked an unacceptable "new departure" [...] was the impropriety of Chopin's focus on material previously edited out of the popular genteel novels by and about women' (Kolodny, Spring, 1980, p. 455). As a result of this, Chopin's novel was cast aside, whereas Glaspell covertly imbues her work with a radical undertone. Glaspell's *Trifles* implicitly exposes the trials which women face, as although on the surface it can be interpreted as a traditional domestic drama, 'its underlying tone is rebellious and visionary' (Mayers, p. 669). As Chopin and Cather did before her, Glaspell's work challenges orthodox conventions and underlines the trials of women; Edna experiences an emotional trial against her husband's imposed boundaries, Alexandra endures a physical trial against hardship and Minnie faces a legal trial for her husband's murder. Glaspell's absent pioneer woman, Minnie, encompasses elements of each of these and portrays a defiant message of noncompliance.

The solitary woman who dares to challenge the imposed strictures of a patriarchal society is at the heart of the works of Chopin, Cather and Glaspell. Each author presents a revisionary tale of women who plot an unconventional course, which is illustrated in the quest for a home without restrictions or boundaries. Minnie is intent on reclaiming her home and her liberty from her husband; in an unpublished piece of work 'On Home', Glaspell illuminates her connection with the home. "Home— more than a house. Home of the spirit. Home is what we want to be. Where we feel at ease with ourselves. Home is faith— purpose. Many are homeless. Must get back home" (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell : Her Life and Times*, p. 146). The desire to return is reflected in Cather's recreation of homes of the past in her fiction and also in the masculine travelling figures in *O Pioneers!* and *The Awakening*. As Glaspell expresses, there are many versions of home which are both physical and emotional; the next chapter explores the displacement from these homely spaces and the longing to go back to these familiar places.

## CHAPTER 2: OUT ON THE MARGINS: AMERICAN MIGRANTS

Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached. (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, & Sheller, p. 1)

The blurred boundaries between the static and the mobile are significant in order to ascertain the connection between home as a specific, rooted place and home as a symbolic concept which is transferrable. The texts which illuminate this are John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and finally, Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*. The nature of home and journeying evolves in these three texts, crossing generations from the late 1930s to the 1950s and 1980s. By exploring the alternate visions of home and journeying and the travellers' impulse or reluctance to cross frontiers, it is possible to discern if the cultural myth of the pastoral shifts or remains static.

### **Crossing Borders: Re-creating homes in *The Grapes of Wrath***

Steinbeck's inhospitable Oklahoman landscape in *The Grapes of Wrath* is reminiscent of the once hostile frontier found in Cather's *O Pioneers!*. The tenant men, once perhaps prosperous landowners like Alexandra, still have the desire to live in harmony with the land; however, for the tenants it remains unforgiving and untameable. 'If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil [...] You know what cotton does to the land; robs it, sucks all the blood out of it' (Steinbeck, p. 34). Due to the mismanagement of the land, the earlier migrants' gruelling toil has gone to dust and the introduction of farming machinery leaves the current tenants homeless.

This cold and detached view of the land, as solely a resource and not a livelihood, collapses the close relationship between the croppers and their land. In this manner, the croppers become alienated from their farms that have been detached from their homes. Their livelihood is undermined and they are no longer capable of farming to make a modest living. Here, Steinbeck highlights the greed that enables businesses to own more than it is possible to maintain manually and in turn, distances people from the land. The migrants who are forced from their homes continually seek their old 'property' elsewhere.



If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him and some way he's bigger because he owns it. [...] But let a man get property he doesn't see or can't take time to get his fingers in, [...] – why, then the property is the man [...] stronger than he is. (Steinbeck, pp. 39-40)

The Okie farmers express an unshakeable love and faith in the land, which is similar to settlers in *O Pioneers!*, as their survival depends on the land complying with them. The Joad family represent a microcosm of society which is experiencing hard times, and when defining their view of home their notion of possession is crucial. In the intercalary chapters, the tenant men angrily contest that '...it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good it's still ours' (Steinbeck, p. 35). For Alexandra, her dream is to own land, to live on it and to die on it. Both Cather and Steinbeck's characters maintain this view that home is the place of your ancestors. Just as Cather's protagonist professes a love for the land which overarches all, 'since that land emerged from the waters of geological ages' (Cather, p. 39), the tenant men in *The Grapes of Wrath* believe that the land is their possession. Grampa acquires his land by aggressive means, which elucidates the sense of ownership the family now feel for the land; 'Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away' (Steinbeck, p. 35). *O Pioneers!* ignores the existence of previous inhabitants on the frontier, while Grampa's violent conquest disregards the Native American right to the land they desire. Steinbeck emphasises the violence and loss involved for the migrants who take this land for their own, and therefore their reluctance to part with it.

Cather's pioneers on the frontier develop their dwellings over time, from primitive sod houses to log cabins and board houses, built from natural resources as shelter the houses on this land remain temporary. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the temporary nature of home is reflected in the unusual manner that their house is created. Tom Joad reveals that his Pa stole their family house; they 'got it a mile an' a half east of here an' drug it [...] They only got part of her. That's why she looks so funny on one end' (Steinbeck, p. 30). The skill of manipulating their surroundings into a home is a useful tool for the Joads. The culture of utilising found objects to

build homely structures reinforces that the nature of home is a shifting and mobile entity rather than a fixed space.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, domestic and personal items play a significant role in the Joad family. Each domestic item is imbued with memories which remind the Joads of the home they have left behind. Jan Goggans asserts that, 'just as earlier, pioneer women attempted to bring their eastern homes with them, Dust Bowl women brought entire domestic structures with them' (Goggans, p. 44). Ma Joad carries such significant objects with her in order to recreate their home out on the road. As their journey leads the family out into the unknown, she takes all she can to aid them in their quest for a new home. Similarly, Alexandra retains items of personal significance from her family's former life in Europe. Some of these precious memories are too painful to carry on the journey as Ma demonstrates when she burns items from her past. Ma's box of secret possessions including the 'letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little gold signet ring' are all symbolic, as are the trinkets in Glaspell's *Trifles*, of a life left behind. It is not possible for Ma to preserve her past as the harsh future ahead leaves them redundant; 'she picked out the ring, the watch charm, the earrings [...] and dropped the trinkets in the envelope. She folded the envelope over and put it in her dress pocket. [...] She lifted the stove lid and laid the box gently among the coals. [...] She replaced the stove lid and instantly the fire sighed up and breathed over the box.' (Steinbeck, p. 113) The fire which turns her past to ashes emphasises the impact of this unexpected movement on her family life. Through Ma's eyes, one gains an insight into the uncertainty and suffering that the Joad family experience in the upheaval from their domestic home onto the road.

The concept of home is built up around domestic clutter and personal possessions as when the family displace themselves and their belongings from the house to the truck, the house is declared 'dead' while the truck becomes 'the active thing, the living principle' (Steinbeck, p. 104). The once homely space has been irrevocably changed, and can now be visualised, not as a home, but as vacant and 'unhomely'. As Freud asserts, '*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.'

(Freud, p. 4) The house which was once familiar has been de-familiarised with the intention of leaving behind as little of themselves as possible. This links with Chopin, Cather and Glaspell's work which also depicts unwelcoming houses, however, the 'unheimlich' atmosphere is found not in the absence of family, but in the oppressive forces which must be eradicated from these spaces. Frank Eugene Cruz discusses the concept of the unhomely in 'In Between a Past and Future Town', focusing on the in-between space when the family are de-housed. Cruz argues that, 'the most prevalent dimension of in-betweenness in *The Grapes of Wrath* is the negotiation throughout the text between home and homelessness, or home and the unhomely, as the Joads are forced into an historical in-between space, with the home behind them destroyed and the home in front of them unclear and uncertain' (Cruz, pp. 60-61). The in-between space is one of hope and fear for the future, which the Joad family will finally confront at the end of the road.

Further to Cruz's argument, I would also consider the unhomely houses that have been left behind. The houses which were once the centre of the family and activity are transformed by human absence. The inside blends with the outside and the house reconfigures itself with nature; 'the doors of empty houses swung open, and drifted back and forth in the wind. [...] When the night came, the bats which had stopped at the doors for fear of light, swooped into the houses and sailed about through the empty rooms [...] And the mice moved in and stored weed seeds in corners, in boxes, in the backs of drawers in the kitchen' (Steinbeck, p. 121). In their absence, nature creates a new order in this unhomely setting and makes it hospitable for other creatures to inhabit. Homi Bhabha argues that 'in the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible' (Bhabha, p. 141). It seems true that another world replaces this previously familiar setting which is not only caused by the introduction of machinery on the land, but also the influence of absence and nature on the house itself.

The definition of home in *The Grapes of Wrath* is manipulated by introducing the concept of change into the static home. The characters struggle to recreate their past version of home on the road; 'highlighting the laborious effort that goes into uprooting and regrounding home, and the energy that is expended in enabling or prohibiting migrations, allows us to challenge the

presumptions that movement involves freedom from grounds, or that grounded homes are not sites of change, relocation or uprooting' (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, & Sheller, p. 1). The boundaries between movement and grounding are indistinct and, as the Joad family illustrate, the definitions of migratory re-routing and reforming are problematic. The Joads' movement is under duress, and thus, the road becomes a site of hardship, as the Okies are unwanted and are received by local communities with violence and negativity. Ma, who represents the heart of the domestic home, becomes the new appointed head of the family. She fights to keep the family together and continually reinforces the notion that they will have a new homely space in California. 'She was the power. She had taken control.' (Steinbeck, p. 177) Steinbeck's perception of the home is clearly centred on feminine control, as home 'relied on the homemaker's role as both domestic keeper and nurturer of the next generation' (Goggans, p. 47). This implies that women play the most important role in maintaining familial stability. Much like Alexandra, Ma takes risks to sustain the concept of home for the family. Expecting this powerful role to be undertaken by women re-evaluates the myth of the western migrant woman as passive, as they had the strength and determination to set up in a new place in demanding conditions and make it homely.

The desire for a new home in *The Grapes of Wrath* is intensified by misconceptions of the West as an idyll. After being forced from their land, this mythical vision of California is a sustaining vision which is repeated throughout the novel. Just as Cather's failed pioneers and Glaspell's imprisoned protagonist retain an image of an idealised West, Ma and Rose of Sharon believe in the romanticised vision of a fruitful and abundant land with its arms outstretched. They continually hope to find an ideal house where they can re-ground themselves in a comfortable environment; the family's expectation of fruit aplenty and perfect conditions is comparative to a new Eden in the West. Just as the earlier pioneers feminised the land in order to combat the unhomely environment, as a survival mechanism the Joad family cling to the mythic version of reality presented to them on pamphlets. Ma ruminates, 'I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place [...] little white houses in among the orange trees [...] maybe we can get one of them little white houses' (Steinbeck, p. 95). These

little white houses, of course, for the Joad family and many other migrants remain an unattainable dream. The temporary houses and tents instead become the centre of their lives, which revolves around the road and setting up their camp each night. Life for these migrants becomes a hand-to-mouth experience where home is the 'family'. Grampa is unable to leave his homeland and does not reach the Californian frontier as his self is intertwined with his Oklahoman home. Forced from his birthplace, Grampa is no longer able to survive. As Casy the Preacher proclaims, 'Grampa an' the old place, they was jus' the same thing' (Steinbeck, p. 152). He describes Grampa's loss of home as an immediate loss of life, as Grampa *was* 'home'. His death seems to represent the dissolution of pre-industrial ideals in the face of capitalist 'progress'. For the migrants, this notion of 'progress' would have been perceived as an economic crisis as they have been displaced from everything they have known.

The highway that aids the migrants' arduous journey is described by Rick Marshall as 'the great equalizer, allowing communities to enjoy some level of domination over the harsh environment in which they live. The highway is also the tool providing a path of escape from oppression at home, leading toward a new future in the west.' (Marshall, p. 60) Opposing this, I would argue that though the road leads towards a new future it is an uncertain one. The road is not one of equality as the highway they travel on contains not only jalopies but cars which 'whished by' (Steinbeck, p. 144), which indicates the ease of travel for those with light loads and fast cars. This provides a stark contrast between those who struggle to reach the next town bartering for bread and gas as they go and those who are able stop in the large yellow service stations to dine. The environment is harsh and they struggle to survive on their journey along the road forced from their home and unsure of their future.

The temporary home which the Joads create from their over-loaded jalopy of possessions highlights their struggle to maintain a sense of domestic normality. Simple domestic rituals, such as cleaning clothes and making coffee or bread, show their need to retain the routine of home life in a hostile and ill-equipped environment. Community and cooperation with other destitute families becomes a valuable source of solace and comfort for the Joads. By building

temporary shelters over and over again on the side of the road they develop a routine of building and tearing down their world every night. ‘And the worlds were built in the evening. The people, moving in from the highways, made them with their tents and their hearts and their brains’ (Steinbeck, p. 204); ‘every night relationships that make a world, [were] established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus’ (Steinbeck, pp. 202-203). These temporary worlds help to establish like-minded communities as they allow the inhabitants to feel at home, surrounded by understanding people. The government camp becomes a safe haven in which the simple commodities of hot water and friendliness transform the fragile tarpaulin which houses the family into a homely environment. This is significant as they offer the exiled outsider a fair opportunity which has been denied by others previously. Home can be found in the comfort of others not just in the place where one stays.

In *The Harvest Gypsies* (1936), Steinbeck is angered by migrants’ suffering and argues that as ‘wanderers [...] they are never allowed to *feel at home* in the communities that demand their services’ [my italics] (Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, p. 20). The migrants are made to feel ill at ease by oppressive land owners in order to prevent these angry and outcast communities from rising up against them. Therefore, home can be established through community spirit and the fellowship of families. Steinbeck illustrates this in the close relationship that develops between the Joads and the Wilsons, whose livelihoods depend on unity and loyalty. This is problematic though as each family has different expectations and needs. Casy the Preacher champions solidarity and community by rejecting formalised religion and journeying West; ‘folks out lonely on the road, folks with no lan’, no home to go to. They got to have some kind of home.’ (Steinbeck, p. 58) The home that Casy offers is a spiritual one which reaches out to those in need. He values human life in the face of adversity and offers hope and a different kind of home for those who are suffering.

The Joad family are a microcosm of migrants and others facing hard times in America, ‘the loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream’ (Steinbeck, p. 202). The movement ‘from “I” to “we”’ (Steinbeck, p. 158) is vital as the quest for the Promised Land

in the West is the dream of all those who follow the migrant route of Highway 66. Robert DeMott asserts that, 'if *The Grapes of Wrath* praises the honorableness of labor and ratifies the obsessive quest for a home, it is because the author himself felt these twin acts called into being the most committed, the most empathetic, the most resourceful qualities of the human psyche' (DeMott, p. xvii). Labour and home are intertwined for these courageous people as their reward for their labour on their own farm was their home, and even in the most inhospitable circumstances they transfer these ideals to sustain the desire for a new home in California.

Throughout *The Grapes of Wrath* the Joads face adversity to seek this new home with a resilient spirit and a willingness to co-operate with others. The next section explores the migratory nature of the characters in *On the Road* and the homes that they leave willingly on a quest for the next frontier. Just as the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath* represent a microcosm of those facing homelessness and poverty, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* again details a microcosm of those in America feeling lost and in a state of rebellious unrest. The distinction is that these youthful characters actively seek adventure and abhor stability. The idea that stability is connected with being fixed down, which is what the uprooted Joad family seeks, contrasts with the suggestion in *On the Road* that liberation can be found in mobility.

### **Moving On: At Home *On the Road***

Steinbeck's naturalistic epic portrays the lives and temporary homes of 'Okies' in 1930s America, exposing the scale of the mistreatment of migrants and the corrupt system which was so heavily reliant on cheap labour. At the time Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in 1957, after the Great Depression, one would imagine that it would be saturated with the hedonistic behaviour of a world boasting of excess. In actual fact, the outsider's search for a home is at the very heart of Kerouac's novel, which he imbues with undertones of 1930s America. The issues that Steinbeck details in *The Grapes of Wrath* have not dissipated, as although America is thriving economically, Kerouac focuses explicitly on the wanderers and outsiders whose quest for home continues; that which is 'yet unfound' (Whitman, p. 141) still propels Sal and Dean across America and beyond in pursuit of their idealised vision.

Kerouac uses narrative comparisons which seem to revisit *The Grapes of Wrath* directly. For instance, on the narrator Sal Paradise's journey for self-knowledge he spends a short amount of time integrated with a migrant family, picking cotton. He describes his neighbours' living conditions thus:

In a larger tent next to ours lived a whole family of Okie cotton-pickers. [...] The grandfather had come from Nebraska during the great plague of the thirties [...] with the entire family in a jalopy truck. [...] And in that time [ten years in California] they had progressed from ragged poverty in Simon Legree fields to a kind of smiling respectability in better tents, and that was all. (Kerouac, p. 86)

In this description, Kerouac continues Steinbeck's narrative of the migrant worker and their quest for home. After arriving in California with high hopes of building a new and better life for themselves, ten years on, they have achieved little more than slightly better accommodation. The cyclical, hand-to-mouth nature of cotton picking work, which the Joads endure, is reiterated in Sal's description of his daily earnings. Every day he earned 'approximately a dollar and a half. It was just enough to buy groceries in the evening on the bicycle.' (Kerouac, p. 88) This imitates the impoverished and unrelenting existence that the Joad family experienced when working in the fields.

By portraying Sal and the Mexican migrants' lives in this manner, Kerouac emphasises that there are still outsiders who are forced into working in exploitative conditions. Jason Spangler explores this developed connection between Kerouac and *The Grapes of Wrath* in 'We're on a Road to Nowhere'; he argues that, 'hoboes and Okies are found throughout *On the Road*. These figures serve a dual purpose for Kerouac: they raise the spectre of the Great Depression in the collective memory, and they help to explain the self-alienating subject position of the modern Beat.' (Spangler, p. 313) Kerouac's spectres haunt the protagonist in *On the Road* as he criss-crosses the country, hearing tales of lost and found hoboes. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty seek out Old Dean Moriarty on their quest across America and find instead many other hobo characters, such as The Ghost of Susquehanna who aims to reach 'Canady' but unwittingly walks in the wrong direction. The quest to find Dean's father is an underlying theme; Dean



searches incessantly for his past, in order to find a permanent home and grounding by gaining knowledge of his family.

Sal and Dean find a 'home' in each other's company, travelling constantly east to west. Tim Cresswell claims that, 'in exuberant resistance to hegemonic ideals of home and family they [Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty] find their meaning in mobility' (Cresswell, p. 254). Further to this, not only do Sal and Dean find home and meaning in mobility, but also by affiliating with a group of likeminded people. Their counter-hegemonic ideals bring them together in their escapades across the country. This is a departure from Steinbeck's novel as the Joads are forced from their home and move out of necessity, whereas Dean and Sal's movement is in the pursuit of a new order and a desire to challenge the status quo.

Kerouac describes in detail the temporary homes which Sal adopts in his travels across America; he stays in hotels, a migrant camp and also sleeps in a barn. In each place he experiences varying degrees of comfort and homeliness. Sal's view of the west represents his evolution as a character, as when he first journeys across America, half way toward the promised land he feels as though he is 'at the dividing line between the East of [his] youth and the West of [his] future' (Kerouac, p. 16). He sees his development in geographical terms of exploration as he gains experience and knowledge from travelling and integration with the Beats' lifestyle. Also, the West of his future holds the expectation of a new life where he will discover different ideals. This is much like the western pioneers who expected to find their fortune on their travels.

Sal's expectations of life in the West are informed by Western B-movies and Hollywood, which do not correlate with reality. When Sal arrives in Hollywood, he marvels at the 'stucco houses and palms and drive-ins, the whole mad thing, the ragged promised land, the fantastic end of America.' (Kerouac, p. 74) Sal's vision is always focused towards the edge of the land. For Sal, the western end of the continent still holds the mythic status that the migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath* cling to through necessity, and the first American settlers feel in *O Pioneers!*. The urge to

move west, and more specifically to traverse new ground, is an urge which has remained a constant in the American psyche. Sal illustrates this as he romanticises about the space and freedom that the journey offers him by 'reading books about the pioneers and savoring names like Platte and Cimarron' (Kerouac, p. 11). By referring back to the pioneer days for inspiration and excitement, Sal attempts to connect with the land and its history; with the same pioneering spirit, he crosses new land and also develops his character.

Sal and Dean take to the road, unsatisfied with what society has to offer them; not in pursuit of the land, as earlier pioneers like Alexandra were, the prized possessions they seek are self-identity and truth. Dean Moriarty is in his element on the road to the unknown elsewhere, as it is in this in-between space that he gains clarity and vision. As Kerouac describes, 'Dean was happy again. All he needed was a wheel in his hand and four on the road.' (Kerouac, p. 191) Dean is in his element when being spontaneous and feels most at home when he is away from the domestic strictures of his wives. In *The Grapes of Wrath* there is also a close relationship between man and automobile; Al Joad says, 'I got this goddamn car on my soul' (Steinbeck, p. 237). Though Al is on the road for different reasons to Sal and Dean, the jalopy that carries the family has become their home and therefore their soul. Al becomes in tune with the car in order to hear its inner workings to detect any sign of weakness. Jason Spangler asserts that 'for Kerouac and the Beats, the highway is an escape route from repressive cultural conditions just as it is for the Depression migrant' (Spangler, p. 320). The highway is indeed an escape route, though equally it is fair to say that it possessed no real joy for the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath*; the road is not a free state for them, but a necessary obstacle that they must overcome in order to reach a stable and comfortable home. In *On the Road*, however, the real root of their escape is founded in the desire to be mobile, not in their destination. The road has different connotations for the Joads as they are impoverished and homeless, whereas Sal has the option to write to his Aunt for money to evade unsavoury situations, such as the migrant camp which he grows tired of within a few weeks.

Dean sees the whole of America as his home as he says, 'furthermore we know America, we're at home; I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it's the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do' (Kerouac, p. 109). He implies that America is homogenous and full of like-minded groups, which can be found in every state. Gerald Nicosia asserts in *Kerouac: Writer Without a Home* that Dean 'is never really a stranger or an outsider; he creates a family around him wherever he is at the moment. He is at home everywhere, whether in a little village in Mexico or in New York City; women love him, men love him, children love him.' (Nicosia, p. 26) Kerouac's portrait of Dean, described here by Nicosia, does not seem credible as Dean romanticises his behaviour and 'knowledge' of America and disregards the opinions and feelings of the women in his life. By contrast, I would argue that Dean cannot fully realise the concept of home until he has found his father. Although women crave to provide a home for Dean, he rejects this way of life and moves between places rapidly in order to feel homely.

Sal's journey around America offers him elements of the unknown at every turn. In Des Moines the un-homely nature of the cheap hotel fills him with a sense that he is an outsider and he loses sight of his identity. When he finally reaches the end of the continent he is unable to cross the ocean, leaving him with no choice but to go back. 'Here I was at the end of America - no more land - and now there was nowhere to go but back.' (Kerouac, p. 70) This is a frontier which he cannot cross, and so Sal returns home to New York City. On his return Sal says, 'I was going home in October. Everybody goes home in October' (Kerouac, p. 93) and yet one wonders where Sal's home truly lies. His physical home is in New York with his Aunt and throughout the novel he relies on her, sending her penny postcards and expecting money. As part of his Italian lineage, she is also 'home' to him as he continually returns to her for support and affection. Sal (whose full name is Salvatore) because of his Italian roots is characterised as an outsider, while Dean personifies the exuberance and spirit of America.

Kerouac shows us America through the first-hand perspective of an outsider. Karen Skinazi describes the Italian outsider that Sal represents; 'through Dean's routes across the nation

(which Sal follows) and Sal's roots beyond the nation, Kerouac constructs a cosmopolitan consciousness and an America that considers its place among the many nations and peoples of the world.' (Skinazi, p. 87) Sal's impulse to exclaim to Dean 'let's go to Italy' shows that he considers his ancestral roots as a way of finding his home in a space beyond the East and West of America. Sal's acknowledgment that 'there was no more land, just the Atlantic Ocean, and we could only go so far' (Kerouac, p. 224) is said with the hope that he will someday cross the ocean to Italy with Dean. Instead, they decide to travel 'no longer east-west, but magic *south*' (Kerouac, p. 241). In search of new frontiers and boundaries to overcome, this time their wandering leads to Mexico City. Described as 'two broken down heroes of the Western night' (Kerouac, p. 173) they are the heroic hobos of the mythical west, always moving on to the next destination. As Spangler asserts, 'their characters are outcasts in the twentieth century who seem better suited to a different cultural moment—to a more open, embracing, and dynamic ideological space' (Spangler, p. 311). They continue to search for this more dynamic ideological space and reach out further and further from their homes in pursuit of the unknown.

The characters in *On the Road* are simplified to fit with masculine and feminine stereotypes. As Chopin, Cather and Glaspell's fiction has previously uncovered, this is problematic as they expose their characters to be much more complex than an Essentialist view would allow. When comparing the feminine and masculine definition of home in *On the Road*, it is clear that the men are depicted as active characters who seek new spaces, whilst the women remain a fixed point of return. Sal's Aunt fits this description as she is solely a static character who awaits his return to the domestic home. As Dean moves around the country he acquires wives on different sides of the continent, treating both women as static objects to travel between. This is an unreliable view as Sal is the narrator of *On the Road* and, for the most part, defines women using stereotypical feminine attributes.

Sal's viewpoint reinforces the notion of 'separate spheres', as it maintains the private/public view of women/men, which Kaplan outlines in *Manifest Domesticity*; 'according to the ideology of separate spheres, domesticity can be viewed as an anchor, a feminine counterforce to the

male activity of territorial conquest.’ (Kaplan, p. 583) Dean Moriarty also perpetuates this ideology by using the women in his life as anchors while he drifts across the country, expecting them to be there when he returns. Dean treats his second wife Camille, who is based in San Francisco, and his third wife Inez, who lives in New York, in the same manner; his nature demands that he constantly moves around from coast to coast, as his ‘battered trunk stuck out from under the bed, ready to fly.’ (Kerouac, p. 228) Dean finds it impossible to sit still in the homely settings that his wives provide for him. His battered suitcase emphasises that he will always have the urge to be on the road as he is much happier on the open plains than in a domestic environment.

Kerouac’s female characters are depicted as two-dimensional figures as their purpose lies in anchoring the wandering protagonists. This contrasts with Ma Joad’s role in *The Grapes of Wrath*, as she develops into a ‘wandering anchor’ of stability for her family when they are out on the road. Sal’s description of Dean uncovers his relationship with the women in his life; his soul is ‘wrapped up in a fast car, a coast to reach and a *woman at the end of the road*’ [my italics] (Kerouac, p. 209). Sal expects women to remain a static and reliable force in Dean’s life, waiting at the end of the road, oblivious to the free and spontaneous lifestyle they have. Even Sal sees his lover Lucille in this way, as he muses, ‘Lucille would never understand me because I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another until I drop.’ (Kerouac, p. 113) He implies that Lucille would not understand his urge to move and travel as he believes her to be happy in a static role in the domestic home. As we will see in *Housekeeping*, this is not always the case; Marilynne Robinson explores the alternate view that women possess diverse characteristics, such as Sal and Dean’s urge to travel.

Kerouac’s unfixated and homeless vision reinforces the need for his characters to search for homes across America and beyond. As Sal sets out on another journey down towards Mexico he sings this song:

Home in Missoula,

Home in Truckee,  
Home in Opelousas,  
Ain't no home for me.  
Home in old Medora,  
Home in Wounded Knee,  
Home in Ogallala,  
Home I'll never be (Kerouac, p. 232)

This song of displacement portrays the spirit of the hoboes, Okies and Beats who are on the move and without a home. Sal seems oblivious to the real meaning of the lyrics as in his abstract movement through these places (the linguistic origin of which is Native American) he is ignorant of the heritage of the land just like Cather's protagonist Alexandra. In a sense he is on a conquest through these spaces much like the earlier imperialists.

Having run out of space in America, Sal becomes a conquistador of Mexico as he continually expands his territory. Also, he proposes an endless search for something which he cannot acquire as he remains an outsider in America. Perhaps though, it is necessary to continue with this hopeful search for home as he does find some degree of homeliness in his circle of friends out on the road. Moving on from the treatment of women as secondary to the hobo wanderers' experience, the next section looks at Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* and her exploration of women as self-sufficient wanderers. In *On the Road*, Dean and Sal advocate the masculine vision of the pioneer, which Roosevelt outlined in *The Winning of the West*; by contrast *Housekeeping* explores the advent of the feminine hero figure as adventurer.

### **The Female Frontier: Hobo Heroines in *Housekeeping***

Kerouac's *On the Road* follows Sal and Dean on their masculine pursuit for the unknown across the continent. Published in 1980, Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* revises this patriarchal tradition and, as Heidi Macpherson argues, puts to rest 'early depictions of female escape as destructive' (Macpherson, p. 10). The novel includes women as active wanderers, countering the descriptions of static and passive women in *On the Road*. It also progresses the moving

mother figure found in *The Grapes of Wrath* and creates a new form of feminised community on the road. Though Robinson's characters are met with suspicion from their home community of Fingerbone when they move away from the domestic sphere, it is still possible for them to escape their social constraints.

Lucille, Sylvie and Ruth offer three differing views on transience within the novel; Lucille represents the traditional domestic figure, while her Aunt Sylvie and her sister Ruth are nomadic and wandering heroines who are intent upon crossing new boundaries. Robinson overturns the patriarchal Adam figure in *Housekeeping*, as she depicts 'nomadic heroines and diverse and unconventional spaces' (Mezei, p. 841). *Housekeeping* is filled with women whose perspectives of domesticity represent alternate attitudes to a woman's mobility in America and her place in society. Ruth and Lucille's mother, Helen, commits suicide leaving behind her children, as Edna does in *The Awakening*. Like Dean in *On the Road*, Aunt Sylvie is a drifting transient figure and 'nomadic heroine', whilst Ruth, similar to Kerouac's Sal Paradise, follows her into this role and yearns to travel. Lucille rejects this transient way of life and in the manner of *The Great Gatsby*'s Jay Gatz she creates a new identity. She converts to a traditional domestic role by eating 'lunch in the Home Economics room' (Robinson, p. 136) and finally, cements her position by moving in with the Home Economics teacher, severing all ties with her transient relatives.

Progressing from *The Awakening*, *O Pioneers!* and *On the Road*, Robinson re-works the traditional feminine stereotypes of passivity and obedience. Sylvie takes Ruth on a journey of self-discovery to a secluded cabin in the woods. This introduces traditional imagery which alludes to the pioneering frontier. As Martha Ravits argues:

The abandoned homestead [...] represents a crucial American topos (in the Greek sense for both place and literary topic). In our arts and letters the settler's cabin in the wilderness has long represented the idealized dream of solitary refuge and American self-reliance. The secluded cabin in modern texts therefore becomes an image of cultural inheritance, for it is no longer possible for contemporary writers-or readers-to arrive at this place and know it for the first time. (Ravits, p. 655)

This cultural inheritance is implicit in the American psyche and the significance of Sylvie and Ruth's quest to this setting is amplified by the understood importance of the cabin. Robinson seeks to revise the failed pioneer vision which women have endured (as in *Trifles*) by imagining a new myth that does not fall into the same pattern as the traditional masculine myths. 'I did think about creating a world that had the feeling of [...] femaleness about it to the extent that my experience did, and it wasn't because I felt that women had been slighted in the setting but that their presence was ignored in representations of the [West]' (Schaub, p. 233). Indeed, in *On the Road*, it is clear that the women are not fully represented as mobile and adventurous. Robinson's acknowledgement of this absence emphasises the need to redefine the woman or 'femaleness' in masculine settings in order to offer alternative ways of living.

The tension between the inside and outside revealed in *The Awakening*, *O Pioneers!* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, is also present in the home depicted in *Housekeeping*. Although the inside is very much the centre of the woman's domain, it also signifies a place of domestic entrapment and confinement. In *The Awakening* the porch becomes a place of resistance and functions as a mediating space between the outside and the inside, making it a space where women can transgress. Similarly, in *Housekeeping*, the inside and outside become blurred and the tension forms from the merging of these boundaries. '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. We had crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic.' (Robinson, p. 99) This is comparable to the houses 'left vacant on the land' (Steinbeck, p. 120) in *The Grapes of Wrath* that invite the natural entanglement of the outdoors within the domestic space. In *Housekeeping*, the house emulates Sylvie's transient character and begins to take on a new fluid identity, unexpected for an initially static form. 'Lucille and I stepped through the door from sheer night to sheer night.' (Robinson, p. 99) In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard asserts that 'the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being' (Bachelard, p. xxxvi). The house replicates Sylvie's inner landscape as nature takes over the house; leaves collect in the corners of rooms and true darkness pervades the inside. She adapts to her unconventional environment, allowing the distinct homely and natural spaces to combine.



Further to this, the novel is brimming with flooding imagery; as water seeps into the house Sylvie plays solitaire, only wading through the water to replenish heated bricks. After it becomes 'Sylvie's house' (Robinson, p. 124) 'it seemed that if the house were not to founder, it must soon begin to float' (Robinson, p. 125). The house is reanimated as a ship with its own life-force. Ruth says that 'the house flowed around us' (Robinson, p. 64) and in its re-embodiment it becomes a mobile entity. Christine Wilson argues that by turning the house into a ship-like form, Robinson creates an 'ungrounded domesticity, a domesticity that is not situated in one particular location or site' (Wilson, p. 299). In *The Awakening* and *Trifles*, the protagonists are unable to fully realise their desire to reject their traditional domestic role. Perhaps the alternative version of domesticity that Robinson offers, an ungrounded domesticity that breaks free from the home, will be successful. Steinbeck creates a different kind of ungrounded domesticity in *The Grapes of Wrath* as Ma Joad is a 'wandering anchor' for her family on their journey to California. Ultimately, it is not possible for her to reproduce her traditional domestic home in the harsh environment on the road.

Robinson tackles the concept of movement and stasis with relation to the home; Ruth imagines travelling with Sylvie and Lucille by train and sees 'the three of us posed in all the open doors of an endless train of freight cars – innumerable, rapid, identical images that produced a flickering illusion of both movement and stasis as the pictures in a kinoscope do' (Robinson, p. 50). This image highlights the possibility of endless wandering, showing migrants and hobos in continual movement towards an unknown destination. Sylvie illustrates the unstable relationship between movement and stasis, as she stays within the domestic sphere and yet maintains the expectation of movement. She is described as,

'An itinerant'

'A migrant worker'

'A drifter' (Robinson, p. 31)

These labels imply that she is unwilling to put down roots, and they also emphasise the community's negative view of her unfixed lifestyle. The elderly great-aunts (who look after Lucille and Ruth briefly) wrongly assume that Sylvie will want to settle down, rather than continue in this transient manner. Sylvie constantly overturns the societal rules of proper behaviour by indulging in her assimilation with the outdoors. She 'took her quilt and her pillow outside, to sleep on the lawn [...] she always slept clothed, at first with her shoes on, and then, after a month or two, with her shoes under her pillow' (Robinson, p. 103). She is unable to comply with normal domestic regulations and her transient spirit is reconciled by these unusual practices; there are many instances where she is found wandering inside with her coat on or submerged in complete darkness. This behaviour is similar to Dean Moriarty's when he is in the domestic home as his battered suitcase always sticks out from underneath the bed, 'ready to fly' (Kerouac, p. 228). She is permanently ready to move on as she is unable to acclimatise to the limiting domestic sphere.

Lucille attempts to control Sylvie's and the house's transient natures. After finding Sylvie asleep on a park bench, she returns home to 'the kitchen, in a tumult of cleaning, with the lights on, although it was not evening yet' (Robinson, p. 50). Returning to the centre of the domestic sphere, Lucille endeavours to suppress the chaos within the home. The lights seem to represent the watchful eyes of society, as the disorder in the house is now unable to hide under the cover of darkness. Just as Chopin and Glaspell's protagonists are judged for their lack of 'homemaking instinct' and socially improper behaviour, Lucille and the society of Fingerbone judge Sylvie's lifestyle and cast her as an outsider.

Lucille and Ruth are opposing sides to the same coin; Lucille is ordered and practical and after forcing herself into a traditional domestic role, she attempts to do the same with Ruth. Ruth however, thinks that, 'Lucille would busy herself forever, nudging, pushing, coaxing [...] 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.' (Robinson, p. 123) The 'other world' that Lucille succumbs to is much like the sphere which Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters submit to in *Trifles*

and also, the space that Sal and Dean attempt to escape in *On the Road*. In *Housekeeping*, Robinson creates a new frontier for Sylvie and Ruth to cross where a space awaits them that is free from the judgement of others. Martha Ravits discusses this movement in 'Extending the American Range':

The frontier in this contemporary novel is not a geographic or historic construct but the urge to move beyond conventional social patterns, beyond the dichotomy of urban and rural experience, beyond domestic concerns and physical boundaries into metaphysics. Ruth and Sylvia cross the modern frontier of *Housekeeping* into the un-settling, austere condition of transiency, perhaps the ultimate metaphor for female transition. (Ravits, p. 666)

Ruth and Sylvie's movement towards transiency and drifting is a new shift away from domesticity. After Lucille symbolically departs into domestic order with her Home Economics teacher, Sylvie tries to adhere to society's rules in order to salvage her transient home. Although she understands the concept of the domestic role, she is unable to recreate it correctly. Sylvie 'hum[s] domestically' (Robinson, p. 99), yet hoards masses of newspapers and jars, mistaking this for domestic behaviour, and sets fire to curtains with birthday candles then beats the flames out with 'a back issue of *Good Housekeeping*' (Robinson, p. 101). Ironically, in doing so she is the antithesis of 'Good Housekeeping'. She is unable to handle a typical social occasion and though she tries to assimilate with her neighbours, Sylvie's disordered housekeeping is not tolerated by the surrounding community. Jacqui Smyth argues that 'as much as this novel is about the homeless condition, it is also about coming to a new understanding of shelter and the ideology of home. [...] If they [Ruth and Sylvie] want to keep their household intact, they must leave the home they have created.' (Smyth, p. 281) The new home they have formed is socially unacceptable as it is a fluid entity that does not conform to traditional conventions.

Cather and Chopin's characters advocate a life of self-reliance; Edna Pontellier's decision to read Emerson in *The Awakening* demonstrates the non-conformist path that Ruth and Sylvie will also tread. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* also emphasises the importance of independence and the need to create a way of life that has a closer intimacy with the natural world. Thoreau says that in his time at Walden Pond 'nature itself [became] the housekeeper' (Kirkby, p. 102). His

vision, which he achieves by retreating to Walden Pond, is much like Ivar's outlook in *O Pioneers!* as he also sees the importance of natural influences on the home. Thoreau's memorable claim, 'I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately' (Thoreau, p. 1920), implies that in order to gain knowledge one must experience it first-hand. Ruth echoes this in her truant trips to the woods; '*I went to the wood for the woods' own sake*' (Robinson, p. 99) [my italics]. By hearkening back to the Transcendentalist Movement Ruth places herself in line with those who seek self-reliance and have the ability to access the innate wisdom and truth from within. She becomes at home in the outdoors whilst Lucille begins to see that their behaviour is unacceptable to society and moves into the more conventional spaces in Fingerbone. As Heidi Macpherson argues, 'to escape is to transgress, and contemporary feminist fiction explores escape as an act of resistance to the status quo.' (Macpherson, p. 1) Ruth is the escaper but Lucille is unwilling to transgress, which is problematic as it resists the binary. In their last transgression together Lucille and Ruth walk to the lake, a place of 'distinctly domestic disorder' (Robinson, p. 113), and make a temporary home for the night from driftwood and fir limbs. Ruth merges with the darkness and becomes at one with the surroundings, while Lucille refuses to interact with them. On Lucille's return she curls her hair and dresses neatly attempting to fix Ruth in the same manner. Lucille is no longer able to follow Sylvie's new transient definition of home and refuses to merge with nature and the outside. She now wishes for the definite separation of the domestic and the foreign, just as those in Fingerbone do.

Sylvie burns down their house as she realises that her attempt at housekeeping will not prevent the community from destroying her home with Ruth; 'the culminating scenes of destruction in these novels [*Housekeeping*] demonstrate active choice to reappropriate community through the literal and figurative dismantling of Home – the universal construction that is loaded with social and political expectations of gendered behavior.' (Walker, p. 57) Burning the heart of the domestic blurs the boundaries of home as the restrictive boundaries dissolve into the atmosphere along with the traditions within, while Sylvie and Ruth take their 'home' with them. Though

they are unsuccessful in turning the house to ashes, thus not eradicating domesticity completely, Robinson does offer them an escape from these restrictive conventions.

These two pioneering drifters dismantle the traditional vision of home and go on to occupy ‘the space of the disappeared, a space which is easily transformed into the mythical or utopic’ (Macpherson, p. 3). The community’s conclusive response to their disappearance is that they are dead, emphasising their unwillingness to believe in another outcome for those who transgress. The town of Fingerbone announces that the ‘LAKE CLAIMS TWO’ (Robinson, p. 213) though in fact Ruth and Sylvie cross the bridge over the lake and escape to their freedom. Maureen Ryan argues that ‘Marilynne Robinson revises the traditional American myth of freedom and transience, endorsing not independence over commitment, autonomy over family, but both; affirming, finally, female difference. [...] [She] writes beyond the ending and presents a new narrative for a new American Eve’ (Ryan, p. 86). Robinson rejects the traditional feminine story and though the ending remains ambiguous, she provides an alternate space for those who search for it. Finally, it seems that the alternate space which Chopin, Cather and Glaspell endeavoured to provide for their protagonists has now been achieved in *Housekeeping*.

The open road becomes a place where new feminine myths can be forged and new text printed; ‘women’s literary texts rewrite the mythical “open road” as a *textual space* in which powerful regimes of gender, cultural and social difference are destabilized’ [my italics] (Ganser, p. 14). In *Housekeeping* the patriarchal image of man as adventurer is destabilised through the feminine exploration of this textual space. Robinson characterises women in the role of active heroine rather than escapee, thus creating a space for women to traverse freely. As Joanna Russ asserts, ‘the myths that serve [women] are fatal. Women cannot write – using the old myths. But using new ones -?’ (Russ, p. 20). Robinson challenges these ‘old myths’ and Russ’s open ended question is finally answered, in part, by the revisionary novel *Housekeeping*. It is clear that, as Amy Kaplan argues, the domestic sphere is indeed ‘more mobile and less stabilizing’ than originally described in the confined notion of home versus nation. The two are interlinked and it

is possible to gain a deeper insight into the boundaries of home and their relationship with the foreign when they are viewed in this destabilised way.

The hoboes, migrants and wanderers in *The Grapes of Wrath*, *On the Road* and *Housekeeping* are all on a quest for 'home'. Each author explores the unknown and how this shapes their characters on their journey in-between homely spaces. In 'Drifting Decision and the Decision to Drift' Stefan Mattessich argues that *Housekeeping* is 'only incidentally about outsiders who escape the inside, or insiders who do not. In the first instance it is about the space of this *unknowing* and the risk that goes with living there: a splitting of the self felt in its displaced boundary' (Mattessich, p. 60). The space of 'unknowing' and the perils which lie outside of this boundary are present in all of the texts which have been discussed in this chapter, and run through the entire thesis. The unknown idealised destination in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the boundaries to be crossed in *On the Road* and the unfamiliar other side of the bridge in Robinson's *Housekeeping* all have the outsider in the perilous unknown at their core. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* acts as an epilogue to this discussion as it relates directly to my previously analysed texts, representing an extreme vision of the American future of home and homelessness. *The Road* contains allusions to earlier preconceptions in American fiction, which McCarthy uses as a springboard to propel his dystopian vision and continue the incessant quest for home. Written in 2005, over 100 years after *The Awakening*, *The Road* still contains elements of American myth and culture that have been carried forward through each text. McCarthy extends the paradigm by utilising American cultural inheritance to further establish the non-conformist views of the myth of the pastoral and the changing notion of home and homelessness in *The Road*.

## EPILOGUE

### **‘The Final Frontier’: Post-apocalyptic Visions of the Future**

Cormac McCarthy’s work succeeds those which I have previously analysed as he writes ‘the voices of the excluded into his discourse of America’ (Cant, p. 6). *The Road*’s epic quest narrative continues the incessant search for home as the nameless father and son create temporary homes to provide shelter from the harsh environment. McCarthy leads the reader into a post-apocalyptic landscape which is no longer compatible with human life, and yet he retains the narratives and myths that have permeated American fiction from Chopin to Robinson.

The novel’s bleak outlook has a silver lining as McCarthy places the world’s hope for rejuvenation in the hands of a small child. Lydia Cooper describes *The Road* as a ‘grail myth’ (Cooper, p. 234) with the son as grail bearer. The son in the novel is symbolic not only as keeper of the future but as a symbol of home for the father. They become each other’s worlds; ‘so, he whispered to the sleeping boy. I have you.’ (McCarthy, p. 56). McCarthy’s homeless characters are comparable to the migrants who struggle to stay alive out on the highway in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Family becomes the core of ‘home’ in McCarthy’s devastated landscape as they have no space of their own, surviving from day to day by recycling found objects for shelter. These once commonplace objects that reference a forgotten world are now broken down and used as implements for survival, becoming ‘vestiges of written and spoken words whose referents no longer exist.’ (Woodson, p. 92) New meanings are forged in the absence of convention and reference to obsolete meanings. In this new space, the man and boy remain nameless out of necessity. Their identity is no longer an important part of their existence and their anonymity helps them to survive on the road.

McCarthy’s prophetic and despairing vision of humanity’s future dwells on the issues of home and homelessness, following a man and his boy along the well-trodden mythic American symbol of the road. Although the known world has ended, the road is still a constant feature of the American landscape. The roads, though now ungoverned, still retain the symbolism of hope

and freedom, and the man and boy can still tread these pathways in their quest for a new home, just as Steinbeck, Kerouac and Robinson's characters did before them. The man still reaches out for new frontiers and boundaries even in a state of hopelessness, 'he said that everything depended on reaching the coast, yet waking in the night he knew that all of this was empty and no substance to it.' (McCarthy, p. 29) This echoes Sal and Dean's movements as they are also drawn to the coast in search of answers in *On the Road*. Following the path of pioneers before him, he sustains the frontier myth for his boy in order to survive and continue on into the unknown. They still have hope that by reaching the edge of the continent they will be provided with a solution to their plight.

The old world is lost, yet the man has an innate compulsion to return to the house where he grew up. The memories that his old house conjures of a domestic family space are at the root of his desire to establish an idea of home, and a better way of life within the boy. He roams inside the house, feeling 'with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago.' (McCarthy, p. 25) Though the stockings are no longer there, the subtle imprint of holes in the mantle brings back a part of his past experience. The nature of home is intrinsically linked to childhood memory and to a past that, in the man's case, is no longer relevant; he can no longer experience Christmases at home by the fire with family. Comparatively, for the boy, who was born after the disaster, this past home represents the unknowable and irrelevant. The man's memories of home force him to return to verify his history despite the potential dangers. The man says, 'we shouldn't have come' (McCarthy, p. 27) as he perceives that the boy is scared by this alien past in which he has no place. By constantly referring to his weathered and torn map to orientate them he attempts to provide grounding and an identity for the boy. McCarthy describes that the man had 'pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory.' (McCarthy, p. 194) He justifies his place in the world by locating homely spaces and though he strays from home, he is always tied to his past. Contrasted with his father's attachment to home, the boy lacks an understanding of the concept, which creates a conflict in



his understanding of the world. He does not have his own unique knowledge of home and instead relies on his father's memories and stories.

The nostalgia that urges the man to return home is a recurrent theme in American fiction as in *The Grapes of Wrath*, *On the Road* and *O Pioneers!*, there is also a sense that the propelling movement away from home instils a need to return. In *Homesickness: An American History* (2011) Susan Matt describes Western pioneers' nostalgia for their previous homes; 'although the pioneers themselves had often been homesick, they were mythologized as brave men and women who set forth and never looked back...' (Matt, p. 169) The man's homesickness is illustrated in his return to his previous home, just as Alexandra's mother in *O Pioneers!* retains her old world domestic traditions and Ma Joad attempts to look back to the past she is leaving behind, weary at the sight of the road ahead. The rugged individualist vision of the American pioneer is challenged by the nostalgia and homesickness they feel for their previous homes and families. The contents of the man's wallet emphasise the importance of objects which are filled with memories.

He'd carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers. Then one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on. (McCarthy, pp. 52-53)

Though obsolete, these objects possess a significance which reaches beyond functionality. The importance of these credit cards and photographs can be traced back to the memories they hold and the father's desire to remember his past. By leaving these items behind on the road the man makes an active attempt to move on and free himself from their memories. This is comparable to *The Grapes of Wrath* as Ma Joad burns some of her prized possessions; both she and the man are unable to keep these cherished memories due to their painful reminders.

In *The Road* the man and boy continually recreate temporary homes on roadsides and in abandoned houses, resonating with the struggle that western pioneers faced when building new homes in an unwelcoming landscape. Like refugees they carry everything they possess in an old shopping cart, which echoes the migrants in *The Grapes of Wrath* who crowd Route 66 in their jalopies. In *The Road*, McCarthy describes the migrants towing ‘wagons or carts [...] Creedless shells of men tottering down the causeways like migrants in a feverland.’ (McCarthy, p. 28) The migrants move hopelessly on the road, caught in an in-between state. The father places real importance on the cart functioning properly as without it he has no way of keeping their world in tow, much like the Joads’ reliance on their jalopy to deliver them to California. Kenneth Lincoln reiterates McCarthy’s questions to the reader, asking ‘what would you live for, die for, abandon, salvage, save, or carry?’ (Lincoln, p. 166). The man chooses essential items to help him to survive; his ingenuity to transform these domestic objects elucidates how far he will go to keep his son alive, in the hope that one day he too will experience a normal existence without suffering.

McCarthy expresses a vision of the future which challenges the idyllic myths of the American landscape. He shows the world as it could be, overturning the idea that the land is bountiful and abundant; ‘McCarthy implicitly and consistently attacks the myth of the pastoral in all its forms, Southern, American, Western.’ (Cant, p. 6) Just as Cather, Glaspell, Steinbeck and Kerouac attack the myth of the pastoral, McCarthy dispels this fruitful bucolic image in his obliteration of society and despairing portrayal of the deadly landscape. There is, however, a grain of hope in McCarthy’s writing, as the man salvages ‘packets of seed. Begonia. Morning Glory. He stuck them in his pocket. For what?’ (McCarthy, p. 140). Nothing grows in this barren land and yet his impulse to hold fast to the seeds of new life remains. In *O Pioneers!*, though John Bergson finds the land oppressive and unyielding, his will to plant seeds and create a fertile space does not leave him until his death when he imparts his daughter to continue his quest. This idea of inheritance is important to the nameless man. Though the seeds are unlikely to flourish in this new and harsh environment that has been ‘looted, ransacked, ravaged. Rifled of every crumb’ (McCarthy, pp. 136-137), after the man’s death, the boy will have to carry the fire, continuing

the quest for survival and the man hopes his son will witness a rejuvenation of the land as Alexandra did.

There are few instances when the characters find themselves in a place of safety or comfort; these are short-lived bubbles which are expected to burst at any moment. In one instance, an unused underground bunker becomes a temporary haven for the pair, and is depicted as a 'tiny paradise trembling in the light from the orange heater' (McCarthy, p. 159). They gain small pleasures from tinned goods and a hot bath. As in *The Grapes of Wrath* at the government camp, the small things such as hot water and a little food create a sense of homeliness. This homeliness emphasises 'the richness of a vanished world' (McCarthy, p. 147) as they find comfort in the ghostly presence of a past life which is displayed in rows of tinned food and bedding. Their homely experience is only a brief respite from the outside world, which has been irrevocably changed in the face of the disaster. The man and boy are homeless, reconstructing shadows of a past home of which the boy has had no part. The boy's concept of home is far removed from his father's view. By not fully explaining the world which has been lost, *The Road* questions if home can exist for the son in this future space if he does not recognize its importance. 'He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well...' (McCarthy, p. 163). The man faces an impossible dilemma, as pleasure and loss are intrinsically bound; the old world is gone, and though the man returns to his 'home' it is no longer the same. Written over a hundred years on from *The Awakening*, *The Road* empathises with this complex nostalgia for a lost past. The man still wishes to return home, and as some western pioneers felt before him, 'homesickness sometimes became subsumed under this new longing [nostalgia], as many wondered if the homes they had left behind even existed anymore. Perhaps home had become lost in time as well as space.' (Matt, p. 103) The notion of home is lost forever in this new barren landscape except in the hearts and memories of those who experienced the past world. Therefore, there is no choice but to start anew, as their memories are tainted with grief and absence.

Homelessness runs through McCarthy's works but can be seen most explicitly in *The Road*. The man and boy are homeless migrants who are on a quest for a new viable world out on the road.

As Richard Gray discusses,

McCarthy has marked all of his work with an indelible sense, not so much of evil (although that is certainly there) as of homelessness. [...] Another [critic] [...] has called McCarthy's novels a series of meditations on the unhomelike nature of our environment, the 'scary disconnection of the human from the not-human that both Freud and Heidegger called the *unheimlich*.' (Gray R. , pp. 442-443)

The notion of the *unheimlich* that runs through *The Road* is also prevalent in *The Awakening*, *O Pioneers!*, *Trifles*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Housekeeping*. The characters' migratory nature, confined domestic boundaries and the abandoned buildings create a sense of unhomeliness. The man takes his son into a house in search of sustenance though he is aware of the dangers involved. 'The house was tall and stately with white doric columns across the front [...] Fine Morris paper on the walls, water stained and sagging' (McCarthy, pp. 111-113). This once grand home becomes 'unhomely', not only in the disrepair of the building, but horrifically, through the naked and huddled men and women padlocked in the basement which is now a larder for cannibals. This inverts the ideals of home and transforms it from a traditional domestic setting into a place of terror and monstrosities. Similarly, in the pharmacy there is 'a human head beneath a cakebell at the end of the counter.' (McCarthy, p. 195) As with Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, everyday objects are given new meaning in the light of sinister actions. By utilising old forms of comfort, homeliness and domesticity with a horrifying modification, the traditional version of the homely is transformed into something utterly grotesque. This is comparable to the 'unhomely' transformation that occurs in the Joad home after their departure. In *The Road*, the father and son's presence within a long abandoned house gives it meaning as a home; 'the warming house creaked and groaned. Like a thing being called out of long hibernation.' (McCarthy, p. 224) They are welcomed into the home and it becomes a homely space because they restore its purpose. After hibernating in wait of civilisation, it becomes home again and, if only for a brief time, a positive force against the hostile outside world.

The spaces that the father and son inhabit are principally ‘unhomely’, as they are confined to their shopping cart on the road and stuck in-between their past and future. McCarthy exposes the myth of the pastoral by destroying the surroundings in *The Road*, uncovering the romanticised ideal as an oppressive and unforgiving space. Chris Walsh argues that ‘much of McCarthy’s fiction details this transformation of American physical and imaginative terrain from boundless space to confining place, a crucial distinction. Somewhat ironically perhaps, *The Road* actually reverses this process, going from a distant, settled sense of place to a new mythically terrifying sense of space following the global disaster that has occurred.’ (Walsh, p. 48) I would argue, however, that place is still confining in *The Road* as the man and boy follow the map in search of the known and are constricted by the limitations of the landscape. When the father and son reach the coast they are confronted with a barrier and are confined to their ash-coated country. They have no way of knowing the state of the rest of the world and no means of escape. After walking for months to reach their romanticised coastal destination the sea is dismal and grey. ‘I’m sorry it’s not blue, he said.’ (McCarthy, p. 230). In this moment of clarity the boy realises the depressing truth behind the myths. Just as the father fantasises about the past, ‘the child had his own fantasies. How things would be in the South. Other children.’ (McCarthy, p. 55) Similarly in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joad family maintain their idealised vision of California, believing that one day they would live in ‘one of them little white houses [...] an’ pick oranges right off the tree’ (Steinbeck, p. 95). This myth is needed to give the family strength to keep moving into the unknown, and also for the pioneers to remain out on the frontier awaiting the fruitful land they were promised in *O Pioneers!*. Though the real outcome is terrible, they are able to continue on their journey because they have faith in the possibilities of the next frontier and hopeful expectations of the future. McCarthy throws this faith into question by highlighting the characters’ wishes and then contrasting this with the harsh reality. Megan McGilchrist asserts that the subtext to McCarthy’s work is ‘a deep questioning of widely accepted western mythic imagery and a re-imagining [...] of these images and myths.’ (McGilchrist, p. 2) By re-imagining these myths, McCarthy dispels them and reduces their potency as it becomes brutally clear that there is only uncertainty on the road ahead.

The boy's continual search for other children and their sustained absence emphasises the lack of women, and therefore, a lack of fruitfulness and fertility in this new setting. This links back to Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her* as the land is gendered and directly related to woman. Motherhood and the depiction of women in *The Road* is a complex matter; the land is barren and the boy is left motherless. The boy's mother in committing suicide emphasises that nature is no longer viable in this setting and the man grieves her loss as he does the disappearance of his past world. All the mother hopes for is 'eternal nothingness [...] with all [her] heart' (McCarthy, p. 59) as the act of bearing a child in such an environment leaves her unable to go on. She hopes for nothingness and finds a home in death just as Chopin's Edna Pontellier and Robinson's Helen do.

Edna's death is a wilful reaction to the constricting expectations of society in an effort to conserve her identity, whilst Helen's suicide seems an act of freedom in joining those who had perished in the lake. Sylvie and Ruth's mother Helen 'sailed off the edge of the cliff' (Robinson, p. 23) into a new frontier and space. The mother's suicide in *The Road* seems to be an extension of this as she believes that all must return to nothingness in order for a new world to form. Grief and loss are intrinsic to *The Road* as, 'a persistent McCarthy chord laments a world without women, Orphic grief, the eternal loss of the feminine, the surviving male sorrow of endless blues, canticles of abandonment and widowed anguish.' (Lincoln, p. 168) McCarthy depicts a barren world without women, and therefore without a future, however, at the denouement he implies that the community of 'good guys', among whom is a woman with two children, will attempt to create a new and fruitful home. This community offers a fragment of hope for the future as the 'maps and mazes' (McCarthy, p. 307) that are reflected in the patterns on the brook trout confirm that as the world existed long before man, it can be created again. New beginnings are established at the end of the world in the community that the boy joins at the denouement of the novel. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie cross the bridge into the unknown space where new rules can be founded; similarly, the boy is offered the possibility of a new home and civilization somewhere 'down the road' (McCarthy, p. 92) with the 'good guys'.

The definition of home shifts in the works from Chopin to McCarthy; each author develops the concept differently, be it Chopin's, and more recently Robinson's, pioneering characters' quest for a new feminine space, the political endeavours of Steinbeck for homeless dust-bowl migrants, or McCarthy's vision of migrants dispossessed of both home and future. Though the circumstances and times change and different ideas are reflected in their work, the new frontiers on the horizon remain a central issue for all. In all of these works the protagonists challenge the myths ingrained in American culture, and attempt to uncover a true version of America, one which re-examines the myth of the pastoral and highlights issues such as domestic dissatisfaction, homesickness and the 'unhomely', which have been traditionally ignored and overlooked. Especially in *The Road*, the myth has been truly obliterated by the description of the landscape and only memories remain of the man's history. Memory is also significant to the American definition of home and the creation of new homes out on the frontier as it forms a base upon which to build. Walt Whitman's poem *Facing West from California's Shores* depicts a person who is, 'Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound' (Whitman, p. 141) and yet in his intuitive final line asks '(But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?)' (Whitman, p. 142). This concept is still significant with regards to the 'home' in America as culturally, no matter where the American quest takes its followers, the place they search for so desperately remains at a distance. Throughout the novels I have interrogated, 'home' is a shifting concept which cannot be pinned down and the quest will continue ceaselessly in order to find a new homely space.

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