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Nineteenth-Century Female Protagonists Resisting Architectural Confinement

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Nineteenth-Century Female Protagonists Resisting Architectural Confinement

Summary of Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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Summary

Nineteenth century homes, especially those of middle and upper-class families, were designed with gender segregation in mind: rooms for men on one side of the home and rooms for women on the other. The act of limiting a person to a certain area within a building is called architectural confinement. Women were limited to certain rooms like the kitchen, bedrooms, and dining room, thus limiting the domestic sphere that was supposedly theirs. It was common for women to remain in the domestic sphere, only leaving the home to visit friends within their social class. This study analyzes three novels in which two women leave domesticity to explore a multitude of spaces, and one who remains in the domestic sphere due to social expectations.

Persuasion by Jane Austen, *The Morgesons* by Elizabeth Stoddard, and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë are three novels that place a female protagonist in at least two domestic spaces. Anne from *Persuasion* and Cassandra from *The Morgesons* both navigate through multiple domestic and open spaces, which provides them with a new perspective and the agency to make decisions regarding positions within their own space. They achieve self-growth and achieve their desires with the men they love. On the other hand, Catherine from *Wuthering Heights* makes choices based on societal expectations, and instead of navigating multiple domestic spaces to obtain agency, she obtains freedom from domesticity only in death. Austen, Stoddard, and Brontë demonstrate the importance of women navigating multiple spaces, domestic and open, in order to obtain the agency to make choices based on personal desire.

Please contact me at ta1033@wildcats.unh.edu with any questions.