Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping: A Collection of Critical Essays

Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping: A Collection of Critical Essays

A Casebook and Critical Essays

PAUL TYNDALL

KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
SURREY, B.C

Contents

Marilynne Robinson (nèe Summers) was born on November 26, 1943 in Sandpoint, Idaho. The town, located on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille and surrounded by the Bitterroot mountain range and the Kaniska and Coeur d'Alene National Forests, is the geographical inspiration for the fictional town of Fingerbone, the setting of Robinson's first novel, *Housekeeping* (1980). After graduating from high school in nearby Coeur d'Alene in 1962, she attended Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where she studied literature, religion and creative writing, including a course in fiction writing taught by the novelist John Hawkes. Upon completion of her B.A. in 1966, she enrolled in the graduate program in English at the University of Washington in Seattle, completing a Ph.D. in 1977, with a dissertation on Shakespeare's early history plays. Over the years, she has taught and/or served as writer- in-residence at a variety of universities, including the Universitè de Haute Bretagne in France, the University of Kent in England, Amherst College, and the Universities of Alabama and Massachusetts. From 1991 until her retirement in 2016, she was a regular faculty member in the prestigious Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa. In addition to *Housekeeping*, Robinson has published three other critically acclaimed novels that together form a trilogy: the Pulitzer-prize winning *Gilead*, first published in 2004, followed by *Home* in 2008, and *Lila* in 2014. She has also published several works of non-fiction, including a book-length critique of the nuclear power industry in England entitled *Mother Country* (1989) and five collections of essays focused on her readings in literature, theology and American intellectual history: *The Death of Adam: Essays On Modern Thought* (1998), *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (2010), *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (2012), *The Givenness of Things* (2016), and, most recently, *What Are We Doing Here?* (2018).

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the recipient of the Pen/Hemingway Award for best first novel, *Housekeeping* remains one

of the most mature and accomplished debuts in contemporary American fiction. Those reviewing the novel at the time of its original publication praised its then unknown author for her command of language. As Le Anne Schreiber wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*, "Marilynne Robinson has written a first novel that one reads as slowly as poetry—and for the same reason: The language is so precise, so distilled, so beautiful that one does not want to miss any pleasure it might yield up to patience" (14). Anatole Broyard, also writing in the *New York Times*, observed:

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

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/housekeeping/?p=17#oembed-1

Subsequent critics have echoed this praise but broadened its reach to focus on the novel's rich and allusive texture and its resonant relation to a wide range of classic and contemporary works of American fiction. Thus, *Housekeeping* has been likened to novels as diverse as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, as well as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, E. Annie Proulx' *The Shipping News* and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. The novel is taught regularly

in colleges and universities across the English-speaking world not only in courses on American literature and contemporary fiction but also in Women's Studies, Psychology, Philosophy and Religion programs. In recent years, it has twice been named one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, and it has served as the inspiration for a highly praised film adaptation by the Scottish director Bill Forsyth.[1] Finally, *Housekeeping* has been the subject of more than seventy scholarly articles, published in academic journals and monographs, ranging from *American Literature* and *Modern Fiction Studies* to *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Religion and Literature* and the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, as well as numerous Master's and doctoral dissertations, and this number continues to grow.

Set in the fictional town of Fingerbone in northern Idaho in the 1950s, *Housekeeping* tells the story of two young girls, Ruth and Lucille Stone, who are orphaned at an early age after their mother deposits them on their grandmother's doorstep and then drives her borrowed car into the same lake that had claimed the life of her father and the girls' grandfather years earlier. As Ruth, the narrator of the novel, informs us early on in her narrative, she and her sister are raised by their grandmother until "one winter morning [she] eschewed awakening" (29). They are then briefly cared for by their elderly great aunts Lily and Nona Foster, who within weeks of arriving feel overwhelmed by the isolation of the small town and by the responsibility of looking after two young girls, and soon write to the girls' itinerant aunt Sylvie requesting that she return to Fingerbone to look after her young nieces. The novel focuses on the relationship that forms between Sylvie, Ruth and Lucille, and on the growing differences between the two girls. At first, they are simply grateful to have someone to look after them after having experienced so many losses in their young lives. Gradually, however, Sylvie's eccentricities and her unconventional behaviour drive a wedge between the two girls. Lucille, the more conservative and conventional of the two sisters, longs for a normal childhood, and is frustrated and embarrassed by her aunt, especially after

discovering her asleep on a park bench in broad daylight in the middle of town. Ruth is less concerned with appearances and less attracted to the proprieties of middle-class life. She is also more dependent on her aunt, whom she comes to see as a surrogate mother. When Lucille leaves home to live with the local home economics teacher, Sylvie and Ruth are left alone until the townspeople become aware that Sylvie is initiating her impressionable niece into a life of transience, at which time they threaten to take Ruth away from her aunt. The two respond by setting fire to the family home and crossing the bridge over the lake and disappearing into legend. In fact, the townspeople believe that Sylvie and Ruth have perished in trying to make this dangerous crossing, and more than one commentator on the novel has come to the same conclusion, suggesting that Ruth is a ghost narrating her story from the grave, while others believe the novel describes the social death of the young girl.

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* has been described as a coming of age story, a trauma narrative, an "extended prose poem in the form of a novel," and a "primer on the mystical life." [2] Whatever the differences among these diverse interpretations, virtually all commentators agree it is a rich and challenging novel that both requires and rewards our careful attention. In an interview with Thomas Schaub, Robinson states that she wrote *Housekeeping* as an experiment, with no idea of ever seeing the book published. "What I was doing . . . was writing little bits of narrative because I was working on a dissertation and wanted to still see what I could write (233). Specifically, she claims to have wanted to write a novel that would "galvanize all the resources that novels have, the first being language, what language sounds like and how it's able to create simulations of experience in the reader... (235). Robinson's love and command of language are evident on virtually every page of the novel.

In fact, it is this aspect of *Housekeeping* that has led many readers to liken it to poetry. The comments of the English novelist Doris Lessing in her review of the novel are typical of the response of

many readers. “I found myself reading slowly and then more slowly—This is not a novel to be hurried through for every sentence is a delight.”[3] But this attention to language is not without its challenges for the reader. To begin with, Robinson often seems more interested in language and the various ways it may be used to convey the subtle movements of Ruth’s mind than she is in plot or the more mundane expository details of setting or characterization. This is not to suggest that the novel lacks a clear plot or a strong sense of character or place. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The characters of Ruth, Lucille and Sylvie are clearly drawn, as is the town of Fingerbone. Furthermore, there is a clear straightforward plot that runs throughout the novel. But this plot is frequently subordinated to long lyrical, philosophical passages that may on a first reading seem to have little direct connection to the forward movement of Ruth’s narrative. Yet a more careful reading of the novel reveals that even the tiniest detail in these digressions is integral to our understanding of Ruth’s character and to the emotional, psychological and spiritual growth that she experiences over the course of the novel.

For example, in a chapter recounting the first days after Aunt Sylvie’s return to Fingerbone to look after the girls, Ruth describes her and Lucille’s futile efforts to build a snow man that would survive “the three days of brilliant sunshine and four of balmy rain” that announced the arrival of spring:

> We put one big ball of snow on top of another, and carved them down with kitchen spoons till we made a figure of a woman in long dress, her arms folded. It was Lucille’s idea that she should look to the side, and while I knelt and whittled folds into her skirt, Lucille stood on the kitchen stool and molded her chin and nose and her hair. It happened that I swept her skirt a little back from her hip, and that her arms were folded on her breasts. It was mere accident—the snow was firmer here and softer there, and in some places we had to pat clean snow over old black

> leaves that had been rolled up into the snowballs we made her from—but her shape became a posture. And while in any particular she seemed crude and lopsided, altogether her figure suggested a woman standing in a cold wind. It seemed that we had conjured a presence… (60-1).

Eventually, as the days grow milder, Ruth describes the collapse of this figure one feature at a time, until finally "she was a dog-yellowed stump in which neither of us would admit any interest" (61).

Having taught *Housekeeping* many times over the years, both to first-year students and to more experienced readers in upper-level courses, I can attest to the fact that those reading the novel for the first time often experience frustration at the slow pace of Ruth's narrative precisely because of this sort of digression. Conditioned by more conventional, plot-driven novels, they are anxious to find out what happens next and puzzled or annoyed that Robinson has Ruth devote so much attention to such seemingly inconsequential details. Yet, as becomes evident on a more careful reading of Ruth's narrative, there is a point to this detour or digression that has little to do with the plot per se or even with the establishment of verisimilitude. In fact, the passage quoted above is one of many in which Ruth unconsciously reveals her and her sister's desire for a maternal presence in their lives. It is significant therefore that the snow man becomes a snow woman and then "a shape" that assumes "a posture" before it is described as a "a woman standing in the wind" and finally "a presence." Like their mother Helen, their grandmother Sylvia Foster, and their great aunts Lily and Nona Foster, this maternal presence is destined to disappear, leaving them alone with their thoughts and their fears of abandonment. Moreover, the image of the snow woman appears later in the novel as well in a passage in which Ruth describes her thoughts and feelings after she is left alone in the woods by her aunt Sylvie. Reflecting on her loneliness and the remoteness of her surroundings, Ruth muses, "If there had been snow I would have

made a statue, a woman to stand along the path, among the trees (153). In other words, there are few if any accidental details in Robinson's novel; each word or image is carefully chosen for its emotional effect and its insight into the characters of Ruth, Lucille and Sylvie.

Housekeeping challenges readers in other ways as well. As many critics have pointed out, Robinson's prose style is rich in echoes of and allusions to other books and other writers. For instance, even the first sentence in the novel– the simple declaration "My name is Ruth"–contains two significant allusions: the first to the *Book of Ruth* from the Hebrew Bible; the second to Melville's *Moby Dick*, which begins with an equally resonant first sentence —"Call me Ishmael." Just as Melville has deliberately chosen to identify the narrator and protagonist of his novel with the wayward son of Abraham and Hagar, both the name of Robinson's narrator /protagonist and the basic structure of her narrative deliberately call to mind the Biblical story of Ruth and Naomi. Like her Biblical namesake, Ruth Stone chooses exile with a surrogate mother over the security of a settled life in her homeland; and like the Ruth of the Hebrew Bible, she is unwavering in her commitment to this figure. Indeed, the Biblical figure's words to her mother-in-law are embodied in Ruth's attachment to Sylvie: "Whither thou goest, I shall go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge" (*The Book of Ruth* 1: 16). In fact, Biblical allusions and echoes recur throughout *Housekeeping*, ranging from the flood that occurs in Fingerbone shortly after Sylvie's arrival to Ruth's references to Lot's wife, Barabbas, Lazarus, and to the theme of resurrection that runs like an ostinato pattern throughout the novel. Once again, these echoes are far from accidental. As Robinson has stated repeatedly in interviews over the years, she grew up reading the Bible and nineteenth century American literature, and both her prose style and her formal and thematic preoccupations have been profoundly influenced by these two literary traditions.

Finally, *Housekeeping* challenges its readers not only through its reliance on lengthy poetic and philosophical passages that demand

us to attend to metaphor and imagery as carefully as we do plot and characterization, or even through its extensive use of allusion and intertextuality to develop many of its central themes; it also challenges us by encouraging us to re-think some of our most basic assumptions about the relation of the individual to society, and about the relationship between the world of appearances and an alternate reality that lies beneath the material or phenomenal world. Indeed, Ruth's narrative forces us to reconsider our most basic assumptions about the institutions of family and home, and about their opposites, solitude and homelessness. Most of us are brought up to seek the former and to fear the latter. As Sylvia Foster, the girls' grandmother and the voice of conventional wisdom in the novel, tells her granddaughters shortly before she dies, "So long as you look after your health, and own the roof over your head, you're as safe as anyone can be… " (27). In *Housekeeping*, however, Robinson turns this idea on its head, suggesting in a variety of ways, and through a variety of metaphors, that homelessness is the essential condition of being human. As Anne-Marie Mallon notes, "homelessness is not only the primary condition of the novel, but also becomes Robinson's metaphor for transcendence" (96).

In fact, for Ruth, and for Sylvie, who is her teacher or spiritual guide throughout the novel, transcendence entails not only the abandonment of home and the material and emotional comforts associated with it, but also the abnegation of the self and of the concept of an embodied identity. In one of the most memorable passages in the novel, Ruth voices this desire as she sits alone in the woods on a cold, winter morning reflecting on loss and loneliness: "Let them unhouse me of this flesh, and pry this house apart. It was no shelter now, it only kept me here alone, and I would rather be with them, if only to see them, even if they turned away from me… (159). Here the body is regarded as the soul's material shelter, but like the material world itself, it is less real than the ideal world of dreams and desire. What Ruth longs for at this moment is a shaking off of this corporeal shelter so that she might be reunited with her

mother, her grandmother and even her grandfather in a life after death.

The essays in this casebook have been chosen to introduce students and general readers to the critical commentary that Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* has inspired since it was first published almost forty years ago, and to provide a wide variety of contexts for reading this rich and challenging novel. While there is a clear consensus that it is one of the most brilliant debut novel's in contemporary fiction, this selection highlights that *Housekeeping* may be read in many different ways and from a variety of critical and theoretical perspectives. I have limited the selections to what I believe are the most interesting, insightful and accessible interpretations of the novel, reflecting the diverse critical and theoretical perspectives that have been brought to bear on the book. For those readers interested in learning more about the growing body of criticism devoted to *Housekeeping*, I have included a list of further readings at the end of this volume.

Paul Tyndall, Ph.D.
Department of English
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Surrey, B.C. Canada

Works Cited

Broyard, Anatole. "Review of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." Books of the Times. *New York Times*. Jan. 7, 1981: sec. C.

Lessing, Doris. "Review of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *The Observer*. Dec. 6, 1981. p. 25.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. Toronto: Harper Perennial Canada, 2004.

Schaub, Thomas. "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson." *Contemporary Literature* XXXV 2 (1994): 231-50.

Schrieber, Le Anne. " Pleasure and Loss: A Review of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *New York Times*. Feb. 8, 1981, p. 14.

[1] Time Magazine's All Time 100 Novels as chosen by critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo. Jan. 7, 2010; The Guardian's 100 Best Novels written in English as chosen by Robert McCrum. Aug. 17, 2015.

[2] These descriptions appear in the essays by Millard, Caver, Rosowski and Burke respectively, which appear in this casebook or are included in the suggestions for further reading.

[3] See Doris Lessing, "Review of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *The Observer* 6 Dec. 1981, p.25.

1. William M. Burke, "Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping"

In the first selection, entitled "Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*," William M. Burke describes the novel as "an unconventional primer on the mystical life, in which the basic accomplishment for both the protagonist, Ruth, and the reader is the expansion of consciousness through a series of border crossings –social, geographic, and perceptual." Burke examines two competing impulses in the Foster family, as portrayed in Ruth's narrative, one towards rootedness and domesticity, the other towards transience and "the shifting margins of experience." Ruth and Lucille's grandmother Sylvia Foster embodies the first tendency. For the Grandmother, as Burke notes, "the rooted and the circumscribed life produces the 'resurrection of the ordinary'… as life passes through its cycles, and nature brings daily its 'familiar strangeness.'" The girls' grandfather, Edmund Foster, embodies the opposing trait or tendency. It is his wanderlust that first brought the family to the shores of Lake Fingerbone, and as "a trainman he is the prototype for the family tendency toward rootlessness" (717). The conflict between these two tendencies is most evident in the rift that develops between Ruth and Lucille over Sylvie's role in their lives, with Lucille aligning herself with her grandmother's conventional, middle class values while Ruth follows both Sylvie and her grandfather's example by embracing transience. Burke also draws attention to the epistemological dimensions of Robinson's novel, noting that for Ruth "the shifting margins of the physical world serve warning that the visible world falsely signifies reality" (720). As Ruth herself remarks, "Everything that falls upon the eye is apparition, a sheet dropped over the world's true working" (116).

As surrogate mother and spiritual guide, Sylvie "educates Ruth… in the hard disciplines of instability, loneliness, uncertainty and change the necessary conditions for seeing the true workings of the world" (721). In choosing transience over rootedness, a life of wandering over the comforts of home, Ruth aligns herself with the world of memory and desire. By burning down the family home and crossing the same bridge that had claimed the life of their grandfather Edmund Foster, Ruth and Sylvie are crossing from the world of appearances into a quasi-mystical realm where Ruth hopes to be reunited with her mother and her grandfather and all those other souls who now inhabit the depths of Lake Fingerbone.

Burke, William M. "Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 1991): 716-24. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://muse.jhu.edu/article/243403

2. Martha Ravitts, "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping"

In "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*," Martha Ravitts examines the novel's relation to the canon of classic American literature, defining the ways in which Robinson draws upon and augments many of the central themes in classic American fiction. Like others, Ravitts notes the many echoes of and allusions to earlier American writers in *Housekeeping*. However, she emphasizes the chief difference between Robinson's novel and the work of her predecessors. While there are numerous American novels that trace the efforts of a young male protagonist to define himself by escaping the constraints of society, Robinson is among the few contemporary women writers to adapt so successfully this familiar narrative structure to the story of a young woman's quest for identity. "In forging a *bildungsroman* about a female protagonist," Ravitts writes, "Robinson brings a new perspective to bear on the dominant American myth about the developing individual freed from social constraints" (644). In the classic American novel of development, the hero typically must forge his identity by turning away from the feminizing influences of society and entering into a wilderness that tests his courage and his ingenuity. Often the hero is accompanied by a companion who becomes both an ally and a surrogate father on this quest for identity. One thinks of Natty Bumpo and Chingachook in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Ishmael and Queequag in *Moby Dick*, Huck and Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or Ike McCaslin and the aptly named Sam Fathers in "The Bear." In *Housekeeping*, as Ravitts

notes, Robinson shifts the focus of this classic American myth from the male to the female protagonist and from the father-son to the mother-daughter relationship:

> Ruth's quest focuses long overdue attention on the individual's resolution of feelings about the bond to the mother as the primary, requisite step in the ascension to selfhood. For the maturing female hero, it is the mother—missing, absent, but always present to the child's imagination—who is the key to reality, in Whitman's term, 'the clef of the universes' (649).

Martha Ravitts is one of many readers who regard *Housekeeping* from a feminist perspective. In an essay published in the *South Atlantic Review* in 1991, for instance, Maureen Ryan has described the novel's narrator Ruth as a "new American Eve," noting that at the end of *Housekeeping* Ruth and Sylvie follow the examples of their literary predecessors-Huck and Jim, Ismael and Queequag—by turning their back on society, or 'sivilization," to quote Twain's young hero—but unlike their male counterparts, Ruth and Sylvie do not abandon one another. Instead, as Ryan observes, "Their flight from the… world of normalcy is an affirmation of female solidarity" (85). In yet another essay on the novel from 1990, Dana A. Heller claims that "through a reworking of the 'lighting out' motif that invokes elements of feminist literary and psychoanalytic theory, Robinson's novel explores new images of female selfhood and new modes of female social involvement" (94). [1] And, as the list of further readings included at the end of this collection of essays indicates, there are many other critics who have read Robinson's novels through the lenses of feminist and psychoanalytic theory. But not all such writers agree that *Housekeeping* is a feminist novel. In an essay published in *Genders* in 1990, for instance, Sian Mile has argued that in her portrayal of Ruth and Sylvie, and the disembodied forms of subjectivity they represent, Robinson's novel runs counter to one of the dominant trends of contemporary feminist criticism, namely, the reclaiming of the female body from the phallocentric designs of

patriarchy. According to Mile, Robinson's novel "does not reclaim but writes off the female Body..., the material world, and the sexual self as useless in the process of defining a woman's subjecthood" (129). [2]

[1] See Maureen Ryan, "Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: The Subversive Narrative and the New American Eve." South Atlantic Review 56 (Jan. 1991):79-86; and Dana Heller, "'Happily at Ease in the Dark: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." In *The Feminizatiion of Quest Romance*. Durham: U of North Carolina P, 1990:93-104.

[2] See Sian Mile, Femme Foetal: The construction/destruction of female subjectivity in *Housekeeping*, or NOTHING GAINED *Genders* No. 8 Summer 1990: 129-36.

Ravitts, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *American Literature* 61 (1989): 644-66. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/2926999

3. Karen Kaviola, "The Pleasure and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping"

In "The Pleasures and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*," Karen Kaivola attempts to balance the conflicting views of feminist critics by examining the ways in which Ruth's narrative "supports responses both amenable and antithetical to feminism"(672). Kaivola acknowledges that, on the surface, Robinson's novel seems to privilege Ruth and Sylvie's transient lifestyle and their unconventional values and behavior over the more conventional lifestyle and values of Lucille, the home economics teacher Miss Royce, and the good women of Fingerbone. But she also notes that in its indeterminacy in blurring the boundaries between the internal and the external, the self and the other, *Housekeeping* elides questions that are crucial to many feminist readers, most notably concerning the complex relationship of female subjectivity, embodiment and sexuality. But for Kaivola, it is precisely this indeterminacy that makes *Housekeeping* such a challenging and rewarding text. Rather than fault Robinson for failing to adhere to the central tenets of contemporary feminist theory, she claims that "*Housekeeping* challenges the theoretical perspectives critics have imposed on it," arguing that, given the novel's commitment to inclusiveness, it is "not reducible to these theoretical perspectives, based as they are on the very exclusions and distinctions it refuses"(674). Thus, she focuses on the challenges readers face, regardless of their theoretical convictions, when

confronted with the complexities and the contradictions in the text. Chief among these is Robinson's representation of Ruth. On the one hand, as readers, we are encouraged to identify with her desire for a surrogate mother to fill the void left by her own mother's suicide, and with her equally understandable desire to escape from the conservatism and conventional morality of Fingerbone. On the other hand, the alternatives to Fingerbone, and Ruth's embrace of loneliness and a life of wandering or transience pose challenges that are not easily overlooked. As Kaivola puts it, "Ruth occupies a position few, if any readers, share"(682). Even more problematic is Ruth's renunciation of the body, which as Kaivola and others have noted, is closely linked to her desire to merge her identity and her subjectivity both with Sylvie and with the natural world around her. While it is possible to see this merging of self and other as a positive goal, signalling psychological and spiritual fulfillment, it is equally possible to see it as a sort of death wish. Kaivola herself stresses that the positive and negative implications of Ruth's desire for self expansion/abnegation cannot be separated. Thus, she concludes that "Robinson does not offer a new and politically promising female subjectivity." Rather what she offers readers, according to Kaivola, is a novel that foregrounds both the pleasures and the perils of such a merging.

Kaivola, Karen. "The Pleasures and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 34 No. 4 (Winter 1993): 670-90.

4. Christine Caver, "Nothing Left to Lose: Housekeeping's Strange Freedoms"

Like Kaivola, Christine Caver also questions interpretations of *Housekeeping* that praise the novel as "a narrative of feminist freedom" (111). In "Nothing Left to Lose: *Housekeeping*'s Strange Freedoms," Caver challenges this view and argues instead that Ruth's story is best read as a trauma narrative. She acknowledges the presence of "feminist markers" in the novel, among the almost exclusive focus on female characters and female experience, the apparent escape of the two central characters, Ruth and Sylvie, from the constraints of patriarchal society, and the blurring of many of the categories that support that society. But Caver rejects the common view of *Housekeeping* as a feminist novel about the liberation of Ruth and Sylvie from the restrictions of traditional gender roles. "For all its suggestion of freedom from traditional female identities," she writes, "this narrative is deeply rooted in the trauma of abandonment, which may better explain its characters' rootlessness and difference than does Robinson's supposed attempt to compose a 'feminist fiction and theory'" (113). She goes on to explain the various ways in which the novel conforms to standard patterns found in trauma narratives, beginning with the curious passivity and lack of emotion that is so characteristic of Ruth's narrative voice, and including the frequent intrusion of traumatic memories in her account of her experiences. Caver focuses on the "claustrophobic" and "suffocating" tone of the novel, and on the challenges Robinson faces in having Ruth narrate her story of loss and abandonment. As psychologists and trauma theorists have noted, trauma silences its victims, rendering them incapable of putting into words the terror and helplessness they feel. It also

isolates them from others, who, they fear, will be unable to understand their experiences. Their mother's suicide has precisely this effect on both Ruth and Lucille. Gradually, however, Lucille breaks free from this isolation, seeking comfort and security in the conventional values that Ruth and Sylvie ultimately reject. In contrast, Ruth remains a victim of trauma, as is evident in the paradoxical nature of her narrative: "she *writes* her family history by recording sophisticated interior monologues, yet she is barely able to speak to those around her" (116). In choosing a life of loneliness and wandering, however, Ruth is not simply breaking free from the constraints of middle-class life, she is breaking free from all human attachments and all human needs. Viewed from this perspective, the novel's conclusion entails not an affirmation of feminist principles but a description of its central characters' social death. "In *Housekeeping*'s world," Caver observes, "the alternatives for women who long to escape from an abusive or repressive system are situated somewhere between madness and death. As in the film *Thelma and Louise* (1991), there is no place of welcome for female buddies who choose to live outside the social law" (114).

Caver, Christine. "Nothing Left to Lose: *Housekeeping*'s Strange Freedoms." *American Literature* Vol. 68 No. 4 (March 1996): 111-37. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/2927543

5. Erika Spohrer, "Translating from Language to Image in Bill Forsyth's Housekeeping"

Robinson's novel has inspired not only readers and critics but the Scottish filmmaker Bill Forsyth, who released a critically admired adaptation of *Housekeeping* in 1987. Shot in Nelson, and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and starring Christine Lahti as Sylvie, Sara Walker as Ruth, and Andrea Burchill as Lucille, it offers a uniquely cinematic interpretation of the novel. In her essay "Translating from Language to Image in Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*," Erika Spohrer examines the various ways in which Forsyth translates Robinson's richly allusive and poetic novel into the language of film. While she acknowledges the debate over "the practical feminist value" of *Housekeeping*'s representation of Ruth's fluid and at times contradictory subjectivity, Spohrer regards the novel as a feminist text and argues that Forsyth has not only captured this dimension of the text but made it more visible. Drawing upon the work of feminist philosopher and theorist Judith Butler, she claims that Forsyth's adaptation foregrounds the performative nature of gender by making viewers acutely aware of how both Sylvie and Ruth fail to perform the conventional gender roles assigned to them by the good people of Fingerbone. For Butler, gender roles are not simply socially constructed roles that individuals choose to embrace or reject, they are inherently performative in nature. As she writes in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), "Acts, gestures, enactments... are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (qtd. in Spohrer 57). In his film adaptation of Robinson's novel, Forsyth

foregrounds both Sylvie and Ruth's subversive performance of gender through his use of *mise-en-scene*, costumes and cinematography, often adding scenes and dialogue to draw our attention to Sylvie and Ruth's "incongruous female bodies and [their] exaggerated performances" (57).

Spohrer traces the development of Sylvie, Ruth and Lucille over the course of Forsyth's film, stressing that all three characters can best be understood as embodiments of Butler's views on the performative nature of gender roles. Whereas Lucille embraces the gendered identity expected of her by the community, Sylvie and Ruth eventually reject the hegemonic and normative gender roles they have attempted unsuccessfully to perform and choose instead to free themselves from such restrictive identities. As Spohrer notes, however, the conclusion of Forsyth's film differs significantly from the conclusion of Robinson's novel. Rather than providing us with a coda in which Ruth describes herself and her aunt as drifters who continue to exist, like ghosts, on the margins of society, in the final frames of his film Forsyth portrays the pair crossing the bridge into darkness as we hear Lucille in a narrative voice-over claim of Ruth, "She's always wandering away." "By wandering away from Lucille's voice," Spohrer writes, "and in effect leaving the patriarchal institution that she has grown to represent, Sylvie and Ruth eliminate from their existence the audience that regulates their gender performances"(68).

Erika Spohrer, "Translating from Language to Image in Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*." *Mosaic* 34:3 (Sept. 2001): 55-71. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A78575557/CPI?u=kwantlenuc_lib&sid=CPI&xid=3d292459

6. Maggie Galehouse, "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping"

In "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*," Maggie Galehouse approaches the novel from yet another perspective, situating it within the contexts of the contemporary critical discourse on homelessness and Emersonian Romanticism. As Galehouse notes, "the standard social text for vagrants… is almost always written from the vantage point of recuperation: How can people be housed? ask newspaper articles, case studies, and sociological surveys" (118). In the real as opposed to a fictional world, homelessness is associated with poverty, addiction, mental illness, spousal abuse, etc. In those rare instances when it is romanticized, as in the case of the mythical hobos of the Depression era, the subject is typically male and his wanderlust is regarded as a heroic refusal of regimented factory work in favor of seasonal agricultural jobs. Female hoboes, on the other hand, are rarely romanticized or idealized. Instead, they are regarded as a threat to the status quo "by reminding the non-transient population that women can and do exist outside the polarities of prostitution and domesticity… "(125). While acknowledging that *Housekeeping* is a work of fiction and not a "sociohistorical document," Galehouse argues that Robinson has subtly refashioned "the standard associations of the transient or hobo" [by portraying] drifting as a kind of liberation… a casting-off of unnecessary objects and social responsibilities "(119). Like others, she describes Sylvie's peculiar form of housekeeping as "a perversion of the ordinary" (128), focussing on the ways in which Sylvie's laissez faire attitude toward

keeping house results in a blurring of the boundaries between inside and outside, self and nature. "If the aim of housekeeping is to create an ordered universe where the objects associated with living are kept tidied and in their place by routine and discipline," she writes, "then Sylvie undermines it by her inability (or refusal) to register internal or external boundaries" (130). For Galehouse, this character trait is related directly to Robinson's reading of nineteenth-century American literature. As she notes, "Robinson shares with the American Romantics–Emerson especially-a reverence for the land and its spiritual, restorative qualities" (130). Like Emerson, she views nature as a force that is capable of evoking expanded forms of consciousness, and like Emerson, she clearly believes that to attain these altered forms of consciousness, one must turn away from the demands of society and immerse oneself instead in the natural environment. Whereas Emerson views nature as subordinate to the will of man, Robinson regards it as a "protean force" which ultimately cannot be contained. As Galehouse notes, "Robinson revises Emerson's notion of the dominion of man in her presentation of Sylvie, who is conducted by nature as often as she conducts it" (131).

Galehouse, Maggie. "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 117-37. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/1208966

7. Laura Barrett, "'The Ungraspable Phantom of Life': Incompletion and Abjection in Moby-Dick and Housekeeping"

In "'[T]he ungraspable phantom of life': Incompletion and Abjection in *Moby-Dick* and *Housekeeping*," Laura Barrett explores yet another dimension of Robinson's relationship to her nineteenth century precursors and influences. As she notes, Robinson has been open in her admiration for Melville's novel about Ishmael, Ahab and their hunt for the great white whale, claiming that if Melville could produce a novel focused almost exclusively on male characters that could somehow speak to a reader like herself, then she could write a novel that revolved almost entirely around female characters that was still meaningful for male readers. While others have noted the way in which Ruth's first words- "My name is Ruth"- deliberately call to mind Ishmael's famous declaration at the very beginning of his narrative—"Call me Ishmael"- Barrett goes further in exploring the structural and thematic affinities between *Moby Dick* and *Housekeeping*. Both are philosophical novels that focus on central characters who are orphans and outsiders; both narrators express a profound mistrust of appearances and believe that the "true workings of the world," to borrow a phrase from *Housekeeping*, are obscured by the senses. Even more important, however, are Melville and Robinson's shared concerns with the themes of corporeality and abjection, which Barrett defines as "that which is severed but not forgotten, that which is simultaneously necessarily dismembered and dangerously remembered" (15). In *Moby Dick*,

these two themes come together in the figure of Ahab, who has lost his leg to the great white whale, but also in Ishmael, whose cruel step-mother underscores the absence of his birth mother. In *Housekeeping*, Ruth is orphaned not once but repeatedly as one care-giver after another dies or disappears. Both Ishmael and Ruth respond to these absences by forming profound almost child-like attachments with others, Queequag for Ishmael, Sylvie for Ruth, but both remain haunted by loss, and these losses compel both characters to mistrust not only human bonds but the human body itself. In fact, as Barrett notes, in both *Moby Dick* and *Housekeeping*, [c]orporeality… is tantamount to incompletion, an incompletion generally manifested in the disintegration, mutilation, or failure of bodies… (1). Barrett concludes her essay by focusing attention on the shared epistemological concerns of Melville and Robinson, noting that "the mode of representation that both Ishmael and Ruth employ is an attempt to write the unnameable" (19). Ishmael's narrative enacts this dilemma through its use of highly detailed verbal pictures of whales to illustrate the inability of those pictures to capture or comprehend the white whale that is the object of his quest, and through its obsessive amassing of quotations, allusions, and references to this opaque and ultimately unreadable object. Likewise, Ruth's narrative is continually haunted by her memories or imaginative re-creations of not only her mother, but also her grandfather and grandmother and by all the other souls who have perished yet remain alive in her mind.

Barrett, Laura. "' [T]he ungraspable phantom of life': Incompletion and Abjection in *Moby Dick* and *Housekeeping*." *South Atlantic Review* Vol. 73, No. 3 (Summer 2008): 1-22. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/27784793

8. Paul Tyndall and Fred Ribkoff, "Loss, Longing and the Optative Mode in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping"

In the final selection in this volume, entitled "Loss, Longing, and the Optative Mode in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*," my colleague Fred Ribkoff and I examine Robinson's use of a stylistic and rhetorical device that we refer to as the optative mode. This term is used by Andrew H. Miller to describe a "mode of constrastive and counterfactual self-reflection" that that may be discerned in many modern and contemporary novels and poems, ranging from Henry James' *The Ambassadors* and Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" to T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. We liken the device to the optative mood in Ancient Greek and Sanskrit, which is a specific verb tense that was reserved in these languages for the expression of dreams and desires. In *Housekeeping*, however, the optative mode "is less a grammatical function than a narrative and stylistic device…, [which] frequently takes the form of a hypothetical or conjectural statement, often beginning with the phrase 'Say that," as in "Say that my mother was as tall as a man," or with the verb 'imagine,' as in 'Imagine a Carthage sown with salt'" (88). Drawing upon trauma theory and psychoanalytic approaches to the novel, we examine Robinson's use of this inherently speculative mode of discourse, arguing that it is through her use of the optative mode that Ruth is able not simply to narrate her story of loss and mourning, but to understand it, and to come to terms with grief and loneliness… "(88). We follow Burke and

others in seeing Sylvie as Ruth's spiritual guide in this process, and we also agree with Caver that *Housekeeping* is among other things a trauma narrative. However, we challenge the notion that the novel's conclusion describes Ruth and Sylvie's "social death." In burning down the family home and crossing the bridge that spans Lake Fingerbone, the pair are turning away from the middle-class comforts and values of their neighbours and embarking instead upon a life of wandering and rootlessness. The novel's final pages suggest that through her continued use of what we are calling the optative mode Ruth will remain attached to the past and to her estranged sister Lucille even though she may never see her again. In the final optative passages in her narrative, Ruth has no choice but to imagine her estranged sister's life, first in Fingerbone, then in Boston, while admitting that she and Sylvie have no place in that life. "We are nowhere in Boston," she observes, "and the perimeters of our wandering are nowhere" (218-9). Yet it is clear that just as Lucille's absence makes her a vital presence in Ruth's thoughts and feelings, so too will Ruth and Sylvie remain a living presence in her own life, regardless of their absence. "Ruth resorts to the optative mode," we argue, "not simply to *explain* her experiences but to *understand* them. And it is by imagining what might have been that she comes to terms with what has happened" (101-2).

Tyndall, Paul and Fred Ribkoff. "Loss, Longing, and the Optative Mode in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: On the Spiritual Value of Ruth's Wandering Narrative." *Renascence* Vol. LXVI, No. 2 (Spring 2014): 87-102. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=96403942&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Barrett, Laura. "' [T]he ungraspable phantom of life': Incompletion and Abjection in *Moby Dick* and *Housekeeping*." *South Atlantic Review* Vol. 73, No. 3 (Summer 2008): 1-22. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/27784793

Burke, William M. "Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 1991): 716-24. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://muse.jhu.edu/article/243403

Caver, Christine. "Nothing Left to Lose: *Housekeeping*'s Strange Freedoms." *American Literature* Vol. 68 No. 4 (March 1996): 111-37. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/2927543

Galehouse, Maggie. "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 117-37. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/1208966

Kaivola, Karen. "The Pleasures and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 34 No. 4 (Winter 1993): 670-90.

Ravitts, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *American Literature* 61 (1989): 644-66. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/2926999

Erika Spohrer, "Translating from Language to Image in Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*." *Mosaic* 34:3 (Sept. 2001): 55-71. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A78575557/CPI?u=kwantlenuc_lib&sid=CPI&xid=3d292459

Tyndall, Paul and Fred Ribkoff. "Loss, Longing, and the Optative

Mode in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: On the Spiritual Value of Ruth's Wandering Narrative." *Renascence* Vol. LXVI, No. 2 (Spring 2014): 87-102. https://ezproxy.kpu.ca:2443/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=96403942&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Further Reading

Select Interviews with Marilynne Robinson

Bartos, Eileen et al. "Interview with Marilynne Robinson." *Iowa Review* 22.1 (Winter 1992) : 1-28.

Boyers, Robert. "Talking about American Fiction" [a panel discussion with Marilynne Robinson, Russell Banks, Robert Stone and David Rieft]. *Salmagundi* 93 (1992): 61-77.

Hedrick, Tace et al. "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson." *The Iowa Review* Vol. 221. No. 1 (1992): 1-7.

O'Connell, Nicholas. "Marilynne Robinson." *At the Field's End: Interviews with Twenty Pacific Northwest Writers.* Seattle: Medrona, 1987. 220-30.

Pinsker, Sandford. "Conversation with Marilynne Robinson." *Conversations with Contemporary American Writers.* Amsterdam: Rodoplphi, 1985. 119-27.

Stevens, Jason. "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson."Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home.* Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 254-69.

Vorda, Allan. "A Life of Perished Things." *Face to Face: Interviews with Contemporary Novelists.* Houston UP, 1993. 153-84.

Critical Commentary on *Housekeeping*

A Study Guide for Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping. Cengage Gale Learning. 2017.

A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson. Mariotti, Shannon L. *and Joseph H. Lane. Eds.* UP of Kentucky, 2016.

Aldrich, Marcia. "The Poetics of Transience: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Essays in Literature* 16 (Spring 1989): 127-40.

Allen, Carolyn. "The Privilege of Loneliness, the Kindness of Home: 'Felt Experience' in the Writing of Marilynne Robinson. Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne*

Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 190-211.

Arac, Jonathan and Susan Balee. "Housekeeping, Wordsworth, and the Sublimity of Unsurrendered Wilderness." In Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home.* Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 24-37.

Barrett, Laura. "Framing the Past: Photography and Memory in *Housekeeping* and *The Invention of Solitude*." *South Atlantic Review* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Winter 2009): 87-109.

Bergthaller, Hannes. "Like a Ship to be Tossed: Emersonian Environmentalism and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*" in *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism.* Eds. Fiona Beckett and Terry Gifford. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. (75-97).

Bohannan, Heather. "Questioning Tradition: Spiritual Transformation in Women's Narratives and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Western Folklore* 51.1 (Jan. 1992): 65-79.

Booth, Alison. "To Caption Absent Bodies: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Essays in Literature* 19 (Fall 1992): 279-90.

Champagne, Rosario. "Women's History and *Housekeeping*: Memory, Representation and Re-inscription." *Women's Studies* 20 3-4 (1992): 321-29.

Chandler, Marilyn. "*Housekeeping* and *Beloved*: When Women Come Home." *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1991. 291-318.

Crisu, Corina. "At Home with Transience: Reconfiguring Female Characters in the American West in Marilynne Robinson's *Houseekping*." Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home.* Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 38-58.

Engebretson, Alexander John. *Understanding Marilynne Robinson.* U of Spouth Carolina P, 2017.

Esteve, Mary. "Robinson's Crusoe: *Housekeeping* and Economic Form." *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 55 No.2 (Summer 2014): 219-48.

Foster, Thomas. "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: 'Women's Time' and *Housekeeping*." *Signs* 14 (Autumn 1988): 73-99.

Galehouse, Maggie. "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 41.1 (Spring 2000): 9-33.

Gatta, John. "The Undomesticated Ecology of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." In *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and the Environment from the Puritans to the Present*. Oxford UP, 2004: 219-24.

Gernes, Sonia. "Transcendent Women: Uses of the Mystical in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Religion and Literature* 23 (1991): 143-65.

Geyh, Paula E. "Burning Down the House: Domestic Space and Feminine Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 34 (Spring 1993): 103-22.

Greiner, Donald J. "Revising the Paradigm: Female Bonding and the Transience of *Housekeeping*." In *Women Without Men: Female Bonding and the American Novel of the 1980s*. U of South Carolina Press, 1993: 66-81.

Griffis, Rachel B. "Sentimentality and Grace: Marilynne Robinson and Nineteenth Century Prodigal Son Narratives." Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 131-47.

Hall, Joanne. "The Wanderer Contained: Issues of 'Inside' and 'Outside' in Relation to Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Critical Survey* Vol. 18 No. 3 (2006): 37-50.

Handley, George B. "The Metaphysics of Ecology in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 55.3 (Fall 2009): 496-521.

"Religion, Literature, and the Environment in Marilynn Robinson's *Housekeeping*." Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays*

on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home. Leiden/ Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016: 59-90.

Hartshone, Sarah D. "Lake Fingerbone and Walden Pond: A Commentary on Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Modern Language Studies* 20.3 (1990): 50-57.

Hedrick, Tace.""The Perimeters of Our Wandering Are Nowhere': Breaching the Domestic in *Housekeeping*." *Critique* 40.2 (Winter 1999): 137-51.

Heller, Dana. "'Happily at Ease in the Dark': Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." In *The Feminization of Quest Romance: Radical Departures.* Durham: U of North Carolina P, 1990: 93-104.

Kaviola, Karen. "The Pleasures and Perils of Merging Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 34 (Winter 1993): 670-90.

King, Kristin. "Resurfacings of the Deep: Semiotic Balance in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Studies in the Novel* 28 (Winter 1996): 565-80.

Kirby, Joan. "Is There Life After Art?: The Metaphysics of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (Spring 1986): 91-109.

Klaver, Elizabeth. "Hobo Time and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* Vol. 43 No. 1 (Spring 2010): 27-43.

Lackey, Kris. "The Fatuous Light of the Senses: Melville, Carlyle and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *In-roads of Language: Essays in English Studies.* Eds. Ignasi Navarro Ferrando and Nieves Alberola. Universitat Jaume, 2006. 139-47.

Levin, Jonathan. "Making Shadows in the Dark: *Housekeeping* from Page to Screen." *Vision/Revision: Adapting Contemporary Fiction by Women to Film.* Ed. Barbara Tepa Lupack. Bowling Green: OH: Popular Press, 1996: 101-26.

Lin, Su-ying. "Loss and Desire: Mother-Daughter Relations in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Studies in Language and Literature* 9 (June 2000): 203-26.

Liscio, Lorraine. "Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: Misreading

The Prelude." *English Romanticism and Modern Fiction*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. New York: AMS Press, 1993. 139-62.

Maguire, James H. *Reading Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping*. Boise State UP, 2003.

Marriotti, Shannon L. A *Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*.

Mattessich, Stefan. "Drifting Decision and the Decision to Drift: The Question of Spirit in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Differences* 19.5 (2008): 59-89.

McDermott, Sinead. "Future-Perfect: Gender, Nostalgia and the Not Yet Presented in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Journal of Gender Studies* Vol. 13 No. 3 (November 2004): 259-70.

Meese, Elizabeth. *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986: 57-68.

Meyerowitz, Rael. "'Ruthlessness Gives Way to Ruth': Mothering and Mourning in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Psychoanalytic Review* 87.2 (April 2000): 189-226.

Mile, Sian. "Femme Foetal: The Construction/Destruction of Female Subjectivity in *Housekeeping*, or Nothing Gained." *Genders* (July 1990): 129-36.

O'Brien, Sheila Ruzycki. "*Housekeeping* in the Western Tradition: Remodelling Tales of Western Travellers." *Women and the Journey: Female Travel Experience*. Ed. Bonnie Frederick Pullman. Washington State UP, 1993. 217-34.

"*Housekeeping*: New West Novel, Old West Film." *Old West – New West: Centennial Essays*. Ed. Barbara Howard Meldrum. Moscow: U of Idaho P, 1993. 173-83.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Two Forms of Adaptation: *Housekeeping* and *Naked Lunch*." *Film Adaptation*. Ed. James Naremore. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 206-20.

Rosowski, Susan J. "Robinson's Politics of Meditation." *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature*. U of Nebraska P, 1999. 177-93.

Rubenstein, Roberta. "Transformations of the Ordinary:

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987. 211-30.

Ryan, Katy. "Horizons of Grace: Marilynne Robinson and Simone Weill." *Philosophy and Literature* 29.2 (2005): 349-64.

Ryan, Maureen. "Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: The Subversive Narrative and the New American Eve." *South Atlantic Review* 56 (Jan. 1991): 79-86.

Schaub, Thomas. "Lingering Hopes, Faltering Dreams: Marilynne Robinson and the Politics of American Fiction." *Traditions, Voices, and Dreams: The American Novel Since the 1960s*. Eds. Melvin J. Friedman and Ben Siegel. Delaware: U of Delaware P, 1995. 298-321.

Schiff, James. "Robinson and Updike: Houses, Domesticity, and the Numinous Quotidian." Jason W. Stevens. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016.: 237-53.

Smith, Jacqui. "Sheltered Vagrancy in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Critique* 40.3 (Spring 1999): 281-91.

Spohrer, Erika. "Translating from Language to Image in Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*." *Mosaic* 34.3 (Sept. 2001): 55-71.

Sprengnether, Madelon. "Mother Eve: Some Revisions of the Fall in Fiction by Contemporary Women Writers." *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Eds. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1989. 298-322.

Stevens, Jason W. *This Life, This World: New Essays on Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, Gilead, and Home*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi: 2016.

Stolls, Amy et al. "The Big Read: *Housekeeping*." An Online Reader's and Teacher's Guide, with audio media featuring readings by Annette Bening, prepared with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts. http: www. neabigread.org./books/housekeeping/.

Stout, Andrew. "'A Little Willingness to See': Sacramental Vision in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*." *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014): 571-90.

Tanner, Laura E. "The Contours of Grief and the Limits of the

Image." In *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006: 84-107.

Toles, George. "Sigh Too Deep for Words: Mysteries of Need in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Arizona Quarterly* 47. 4 (Winter 1991): 137-56.

Van Dyke, Annette. "Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: A Landscape of Discontent." *The Big Empty: Essays on Western Landscapes as Narratives.* Ed. Leonard Engle. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1994. 147-63.

Weintraub, Aviva. "Freudian Imagery in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 7 (Mar. 1996): 69-74.

Williams, Gary. "Resurrecting Carthage: *Housekeeping* and Cultural History." *English Language Notes* 29.2 (Dec. 1991): 70-78.

Wilson, Christine. "Delinquent Housekeeping: Transforming the Regulations of Keeping House." *Legacy* Vol. 25: 299-310.