5-2011

Looking for Adam: An analysis of the works of Marilynne Robinson

Kristina Y. Zavala
University of Texas-Pan American

LOOKING FOR ADAM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF MARILYNNE ROBINSON

A Thesis

by

KRISTINA Y. ZAVALA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2011

Major Subject: English

LOOKING FOR ADAM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF MARILYNNE ROBINSON

A Thesis
by
KRISTINA Y. ZAVALA

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Eric Williamson
Chair of Committee

Dr. Ed Cameron
Committee Member

Dr. Danika M. Brown
Committee Member

May 2011

ABSTRACT

Zavala, Kristina Y., Looking for Adam: An Analysis of the Works of Marilynne Robinson. Master of Arts (MA), May, 2011, 73 pp., references, 33 titles.

Many scholars have analyzed the works of Marilynne Robinson, focusing their work on analyzing her novels separately instead of as a whole according to her views of Calvinism and other faith-related themes. This thesis will take apart all of the essays in *The Death of Adam*, examining each of them for the most important views and opinions expressed by the author. These issues have served to evolve Robinson's opinions in such a way that to analyze her novels according to only her religious views would be an injustice. By examining the use of certain aspects of the novel form, this thesis will then use all of the views presented in *The Death of Adam* to link Marilynne Robinson's fiction together through the themes of compassion, grace, nature and family values.

DEDICATION

This work could not have been completed without the motivation, love and support of my family. My parents, my siblings and my husband all gave me the strength necessary to push my way through and come out at the end a new person. Thank you for your patience and your compassion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to Proposed Research

Midwestern Literature

The effects of the Midwest on literature is necessary to the study of an author like Marilynne Robinson who was born in Sandpoint, Idaho and now makes a living teaching at the Iowa Writer's Institute. As the research will show, the effect that the region has is unique in the sense of how it influences its citizens and how the rest of the country perceives the area. The good senses and open lands are prevalent in many examples of Midwestern Literature. The effects of small towns also plays a determining factor in these pieces which we see clearly in the work of Marilynne Robinson, who bases her fiction in small towns during the 1950s. Robinson has also stated that her writing was meant to convey the sense of place that she appreciated from her native setting in such a way that would appeal to her peers. The Midwest is also confirmed as being important to her family as Robinson talks about in detail in her nonfiction essays.

Religion in Literature

Religion in literature is a necessary avenue to pursue in order to understand Robinson because of the use of religious symbols, figures and teachings that prevail in all her writings, nonfiction as well as fiction. To understand how her writing of religion is unique, it is necessary

to examine the effects of religion in literature and the uses that other authors have used religion for in the writings. Religion has been important to Robinson since her childhood and still demonstrates importance to her today as she speaks of her church and her experience of being a guest sermon speaker on occasion as well. To set her apart, it is necessary to see how her use of religion differs, especially in concerns with her references to John Calvin, whose teachings she greatly admires.

Authorial Background Influences

The final means of research necessary to understand Robinson's writings is to examine the writers that she admires. She speaks constantly of her admiration for Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, for Emily Dickinson and other American Romantic writers. She has also spoken highly about her admiration for John Calvin whom she references in her essays and speaks about in interviews. To understand her sense of writing, her influences would highlight how her writing style developed and what she was able to put to use from her background to make her writing noteworthy to today's world. These writers have been shown to affect the content of her writing, her writing style and thematic concerns.

Principal Research Question and Method of Answering

The main question of concern for this thesis is how does a thorough reading *The Death of Adam* highlight the themes and views of Robinson's world of fiction? Marilynne Robinson's views in *The Death of Adam* can be seen in her novels by examining certain elemental characteristics of the novel. The method of answering this question will require the use of analyzing aspects of the novel such as symbols, point of view and characters.

The use of symbols will be used to analyze the use of names as definitions in the novel *Housekeeping*. These definitions will then be examined in relation to the themes of the novel to demonstrate how the author's choice of names reflects her views from *The Death of Adam*. Point of view will be examined through the use of employing the form of the epistolary novel in *Gilead*. By analyzing the choice of using the epistolary form, the themes and views of the author can be recognized as the narrator undergoes a personal transformation. In the novel *Home*, characters will be analyzed through the use of the literary foil to demonstrate how one character's actions serve to highlight the finer qualities of the main character.

Contribution to Existing Scholarship

This project is meant to provide an analysis that will encompass all of the existing views seen in current scholarship and focus them in one complete analysis of Marilynne Robinson's fiction. This analysis will serve as a foundation from which future research can carry on from as Robinson continues to publish works of fiction and nonfiction that may or may not deviate from the concerns expressed in her current body of work. This project could also potentially inspire future studies that may focus on other aspects of the novel, whether in relation to future Robinson publications or in other literature studies.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influences

The Middle West

The region of the Middle West is a significant part of the United States and considered the heart, or core, of the nation. James R. Shortridge refers to it as, "the 'heartland,' the home of the average 'middle' American" (209). Images of Main Street, according to Shortridge, are a symbolic landscape, bringing to mind the idea of "sensible, practical people." This is the type of landscape seen in the settings of Robinson's novels. She places her characters in towns where the houses are built in a number of rows that revolve around a main street with farmland all around and nature no more that a stone's throw away. Shortridge's article describes the people in these towns, saying that

> The moral tone to the Middle Western life acted to prevent ostentation and arrogance according to observers. Success was measured by competency in one's business and family life, not in terms of money accumulated . . . The idea is expressed through adjectives used continuously to describe the people: open, kind, humble, honest, genuine, wholesome, sincere, and hospitable. (215)

These are the characters seen in Robinson's novels. Her characters are not given to flights of fancy or determined to make a name in the world. They are mostly good, kind-hearted individuals at home in their towns and lives. Family life is a main concern in each of Robinson's

novels and the unconcern for money can clearly be seen in how Ames cared for his money during the course of his life in the novel *Gilead* and in how Glory keeps track of their funds at the Boughton house in *Home*. Further research about the literature of the Middle West region delves into an analysis about the characteristics of the writing recognized as having originated from the Middle West or written about the Middle West. David Pichaske declares, "The Midwestern narrator, for example, is rarely flamboyant or self-celebrating. Usually he is reticent, unpolished, and apologetic" (110). The narrators Ruthie and John Ames fall within this definition. Ruthie is extremely reticent; a fact that eventually brings turmoil during the course of the novel. John Ames has an apologetic tone during the course of his letters, as he will be long dead to his son by the time his boy reads them and he is sorry for not being there for the remainder of his son's life. These characteristics of the narrator resonate with Robinson's writing, proving that the Midwestern sentiment of writing is a big influence on her own work.

Pichaske's research also examines the style of Midwestern writing, concentrating on the use of language by the Middle West region writers. He asserts the style is "realism bordering on naturalism, with elements of humanism and social critique. Plain, colloquial speech, with elements of self-conscious doubt. Guarded experimentation" (111). Robinson's writing follows this definition of style. Nature is a major contributing factor to her novels and the element of social critique can be seen by examining her novels for her opinions, as this thesis is doing. To conclude on Midwestern Literature elements, Pichaske states that "Midwestern writers contain their stylistic and structural experiments within a relatively narrow range. Imagism, surrealism, mysticism, and *Field of Dreams* magical realism — all of which can indeed be found in Midwest literature — are usually so alloyed with realism as to slip by almost unnoticed" (110-11). This fact demonstrates the imagery seen in *Housekeeping*, Robinson's first novel. Sylvie speaks of

ghost children in a cabin that she takes Ruthie to during the second half of the novel (150-161). The element can almost go unseen but its addition only serves to highlight the poetic nature of the novel. The elements of Midwestern literature are necessary to understand where the sentiments of the characters in Robinson's novels come from. The culture of the Midwest permeates the behavior of these individuals and for a novel to be set in the Midwest, it is necessary that these individuals represent their area of life accordingly. Robinson makes this clear in her novels.

To understand the themes of Robinson's writing it is necessary to understand how the place known as the Midwest inspires its residents. Elements of the novel such as setting and theme can be recognized through an analysis of the Midwest in all three of Robinson's novels. These elements honesty and sincerity customary in residents of the Midwest are seen in each of our narrators, Ruthie, Ames and Glory. The setups of the narrator's hometowns resonate with the essentials seen in other Midwest classics such as farm life, dirt roads and neighborly concern. This project recognizes these concerns and delves further into the structure of the novels to demonstrate how Robinson's opinions permeate her writing in an internal sense, making this an examination of the motives behind the writing, as opposed to how the Midwest can be recognized in the words and actions of each novel in the course of reading each book.

Religious Literature

Religion in literature is a theme that is relatively simple to spot if the author chooses to make use of it. In most of the works where religion is a theme there are images of the church, talk of the Bible, praying, meditation and characters whose vocation is dedicated to the church. However, in recent writings, the idea of using religion has changed in order to make the subject

more enlightening to current readers. According to an article by Kathryn Ludwig, "characters who already espouse some religious belief take up secular challenges to religion by reconsidering religious assumptions, toying with the practice of faith, attempting to rebuild religion afresh, or placing an existing tradition alongside other faith systems in a syncretistic articulation of belief" (226). This can be seen in the work of Marilynne Robinson who Ludwig also names as an author partaking in these activities in her writing. Her characters reconsider their religion and attempt to rebuild their faith according to the ideals she has expressed in her nonfiction. They are characters that represent the trials and tribulations of real people, allowing for the audience to relate to them in their struggles.

Another author that is known for her use of religion in her writing is Flannery O'Connor. An article by Susan Petit used O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" to analyze *Gilead* and *Home*. Petit claims that "O'Connor communicated her Catholic vision by using 'the grotesque as a primary way to reach the unbelieving reader'; in contrast, in these two novels Robinson shows thoughtful people in ordinary situations working their way to greater receptivity to grace through following both Calvin's teachings and their own charitable inclinations" (301). Robinson demonstrates religion by using characters that represent the people that religion should be able to reach. They are real people struggling to find the accommodations that will make faith an everyday part of their lives and to learn the art of infinite grace towards others. Robinson's approach to religion gives the sense that she wishes for people to be comforted by the journey of her characters, attempting to appeal to them about the ideals and inherent compassion that she sees religion supplying to those who know where to look for it.

Concerning the term religion, Robinson has stated that she does not like the categories religious or not religious. She claims in an interview with Sarah Fay, "As soon as religion draws

a line around itself it becomes falsified. It seems to me that anything that is written compassionately and perceptively probably satisfies every definition of religious whether a writer intends it to be religious or not" (7). As long as the writing complies with being compassionate and perceptive, Robinson feels that it satisfies the notions of religion, specifically her notions of religion. Her novels highlight the fact that compassion and perception are currently lacking in today's reality. In a separate interview with Rebecca M. Painter, Robinson admits, "I seem always to have been interested in religion and religious thought and to have assumed that it had something to do with the most modest and ordinary aspects of life. Something that elevated them and revealed mysteries in them" (485). Her characters demonstrate the journey had can be undertaken to fully embrace the gift of infinite grace from God and the ability to understand. As much as she would dislike her work being labeled religious writing, the literature about her work categorizes her as such a writer. However, she can take comfort in the fact that her writing defies past examples in giving hope to individuals just as her own characters cling to hope during the course of their journeys.

An understanding of the approach that various authors have taken in employing the use of religion allows for readers to recognize an ongoing theme in the fiction of Marilynne Robinson. Robinson's religious education has shaped her outlook as an adult. This education comes across in Chapter 10 of *Housekeeping* when Robinson discusses the story of Cain and Abel and can also be seen in the religious discipline of the two former Reverends seen in *Gilead* and *Home*. The theme is important because it is necessary to understand this particular motivation of Robinson's work. The setting in all three novels is recognized as the Midwest. Religion can be named as a central theme linking each novel together.

19th Century Americans and Theology

The American Romantics, specifically Melville, Dickinson and Thoreau, are important influences of Robinson's, having been named her favorites countless times in interviews. She contends in an interview with Thomas Schaub that the book she admires most in the world, after the Bible, is *Moby Dick* (234). This comment goes with the analysis of *Moby Dick* in Robert Alter's book *Pen of Iron*. Alter says about Melville that "his decisive poetic models were Shakespeare and Milton (more the former than the latter), but he also had an intimate familiarity with Job, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the rest of biblical poetry to the extent of unconsciously internalizing Hebrew poets; and these, too, became a stylistic resource for him" (64). The same comments can be made about Robinson, as well. Robinson wrote her dissertation on Shakespeare and she has an intimate knowledge of the Bible making both of these resources for her writing style. Another resource for her writing style can be seen in her admiration for Melville whom she has credited as being her motivation to begin the writings that became *Housekeeping*. She has also stated in interviews that her intention with *Housekeeping* was to write a female counterpoint to *Moby Dick*, a book populated by the female sex that men could read and enjoy comfortably. In addition to this information, Martha Ravits's article draws the reader's attention to the opening line of Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*. She explains that the brief opening sentence, "My name is Ruth," echoes Moby Dick's famous opening line "about a castaway and survivor with a significant name" (644). To understand the form of her novel, it is necessary to understand Robinson's admiration for *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville.

Another writer that Robinson has claimed as favorite is the poet Emily Dickinson. Various resources have analyzed her novel *Housekeeping* to show the similarities between passages of Dickinson's poetry and the imagery seen in certain passages of the novel. In an

analysis of Emily Dickinson and Calvin, Magdalena Zapedowska says, "she [Dickinson] presents uncertainty as a prerequisite of faith, conceding that certainty, were it possible, would make faith redundant . . . " (381). These sentiments can be seen again in Robinson's writings found within *The Death of Adam*. She believes that there is no need for evidence in faith. Various searches for evidence, when conducted, have never been because faith required it for the people to believe. People do not go out of their way searching for evidence to support their faith. The idea of faith is to believe without anything else necessary to influence that choice. Certainty is not necessary, just as Dickinson would believe and Robinson claims the same. The uncertainty allows for the question of faith to stand and allow for the people who proclaim to have faith to feel stronger in their convictions because it is their decision to believe.

Robinson has also named *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau as one of her influences. A close reading of the text demonstrates many of the ideals seen again and again in Robinson's world of fiction. In the conclusion of *Walden*, Thoreau proclaims that "however mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard times. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is" (308-9). Robinson's writings and beliefs echo this ideal, to love every aspect of your life even when there are hardships. Life is a gift given by the grace of God. The term "fault finder" is also seen in the novel *Home* in regards to the character Robert Boughton, a former Reverend (84). Glory recalls that when they were children, their father, Boughton, would avoid "fault-finding" in the words he spoke to his children. This helps with the analysis of *Home* in Chapter 6 for the discussion of literary foils. The fault-finder ultimately turns out to be Robert Boughton, as the analysis will show in the chapter to come. The term that Robinson used and the

sentiments can be found in *Walden*, proving their influence on her opinions as a person and writer.

A final source to analyze as an authorial influence is the theologian John Calvin whom Robinson refers to as Jean Cauvin in *The Death of Adam*. She writes extensively about Calvin's historical influences in the essays on Marguerite de Navarre, part 1 and 2. In an interview with Scott Hoezee, Robinson states that "there are two things Calvin says that are deeply important to me. One is his insistence that any person one encounters is an image of God, with all that implies in terms of the obligation to honor and comfort, and with all it implies about the astonishing privilege of being given the occasion to encounter such an image, and to honor and comfort" (3). Robinson brings this sentiment to mind in regards to her wandering transient characters, Sylvie Fisher in *Housekeeping* and Jack Boughton in both *Gilead* and *Home*. The idea is that these characters are met with reluctance and distrust when they should be met as if they are the image of God to honor and comfort. The fact that the citizens of Fingerbone and Gilead are unable to perform these tasks suggests what Robinson finds lacking in the people that she sees day in and day out. Her belief in the writings of Calvin can also be seen throughout the novel *Gilead*, with the Reverend Ames quoting lessons from Calvin through his letters to his son. She holds this idea of Calvin so dearly to herself that her novels have come to revolve around this idea of infinite compassion towards others because of it.

Melville influenced and shaped the form of *Housekeeping*. Dickinson and Calvin helped shape the opinions Robinson speaks of in *The Death of Adam*. As a result, the reader can then recognize these influences as gestures of respect to the tradition of literature that came before Robinson. Robinson has come as the next step in American literature. To understand her

position as a respected contemporary author it is necessary to understand that her writing reflects the lessons she has learned from her predecessors.

Current Research Review

Housekeeping

A review of current research on the novel *Housekeeping* shows that a lot of critics focused on the issues of domestic space and transience. The novel's name alone supports criticism that examines the various facets of the domestic sphere and considers concerns with the role of women in the household. Other articles on the domestic space, such as Paula E. Geyh's article entitled "Burning down the House? Domestic Space and Feminine Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping,*" examine the different types of "home" found in the novel. Christine Caver's article, "Nothing left to Lose: *Housekeeping*'s Strange Freedoms," examines the power of traumatic experience by examining the effect of tragedy on Ruthie and Lucille. Martha Ravit's article, "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping,*" asserts that through Dickinson, "Robinson's relationship to tradition bridges both the spheres of male and female influence and the spheres of poetry and prose" (646). In relation to Ravits's point on the similarities between Dickinson and Robinson, Thomas Gardner wrote a book that analyzes current writers and Emily Dickinson with a chapter that affirms that *Housekeeping* "can be understood as Ruth's account of reading herself from within the terms of a Dickinson analogy" (31). The book then tells the story about how Ruth came to speak using fragments of Dickinson. Continuing with the points of Ravits's article, she states that one of the many things worth examining is what she calls the mother-daughter "passion" in the novel. Ravits claims that the death of Ruthie's mother "illustrates the determining influence of the mother-daughter

relationship on the child's outlook and sensibility" (647). This loss, either of the mother to the daughter or the daughter to the mother, is the "essential female tragedy," or the mother-daughter passion that is an essential aspect of *Housekeeping*. Ravits says that this is a tragedy that has not had recognition the way other human tragedies have had in literature, tragedies that include the father-daughter split in *King Lear* and the tragedy of both Hamlet and Oedipus (mother and son).

Articles by Anne-Marie Mallon and Jacqui Smyth examine the role of vagrancy and transience seen in the novel's lead Sylvie and the effects those issues have on Lucille and Ruthie. Sinead McDermott's article takes a different approach and examines the effects of nostalgic mourning how this affects visions of the future. Thomas Schaub also mentions nostalgia and says that "if nostalgia is a form of mourning, we may say that the entire narrative is shaped and constituted by Ruth's nostalgia" (311). There are also various articles that examine the religious undertones of the novel such as the article by Maggie Galehouse which examine the parallels between the Book of Ruth and the events in the novel *Housekeeping* before examining vagrancy as well. Finally William Burke's article examines the idea of spiritual "housekeeping" and the "expansion of consciousness through a process of border crossings" that are social, geographic and perceptual (Burke 717).

What is missing from these articles is an examination of Ruth's inspiration for making the decisions that she did in the novel. By examining Ruth's internal motivation, which can be considered an embodiment of her name, there is a potential to understand the novel in its entirety rather than just recognizing the points made in these articles on certain themes of the novel.

Gilead

A current review of literature on the novel *Gilead* shows that a lot of the focus has been on father/son relationships. Todd Shy's article, "Religion and Marilynne Robinson," specifically focuses on the lack of a father/son relationship between John Ames, the narrator and his godson and namesake, Jack Boughton. Gordon Leah's article, "A person can change: Grace, Forgiveness, and Sonship in Marilynne Robinson's Novel *Gilead*," takes the analysis of the father/son relationship one step further by examining the act of forgiveness that Ames must undertake to mend the relationship he has with his godson. An article by Laura E. Tanner, "Looking Back from the Grave: Sensory Perception and the Anticipation of Absence in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*," takes the analysis in a different direction. Instead of examining the more widely recognized themes of religion and father-son relationships, the article instead focuses on sensory perception and the changes the mind undergoes as it nears death. According to Tanner, "although Ames's sensibility clearly accounts in part for his attentiveness to the world, the journal that he creates in *Gilead* also reflects the heightened self-consciousness of an aging, ailing individual whose awareness of his imminent death shapes both consciousness and perception" (232). Moving on, Christopher Leise's article, "'That Little Incandescence': Reading the Fragmentary and John Calvin in Marilynne Robinson's '*Gilead*'," explores the traditional subjects of religion and beauty. Finally, Michael Vander Weele's article, "Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and the Difficult Gift of Human Exchange," examines the notions of judgment and blessing and the poetic work of the novel.

Each of these works focuses on the Calvin tradition seen in Ames, the narrator of the novel. However, in order to understand the whole of the work, it is necessary to examine what

allows for these changes in understanding and forgiveness in Ames to be recognized. Ames undergoes a transformation of his own making that the reader can see unfold due to the first person nature of the epistolary form. Had the novel been written differently, the essential transformation would have been lost. While the current scholarship analyzes the Calvinism in the novel and the themes of forgiveness, it is that which allows for these changes to be made, the self-reflection aspect of a letter, which makes the novel have the impact that it does on the reader.

Home

At the time that this research began, current scholarship on Marilynne Robinson's novel *Home* is still in the process of being published. There is an article by Jennifer L. Holberg, entitled "'The Courage to See It': Toward an Understanding of Glory," which focuses on the understanding of glory as a concept in each of Robinson's novels. After an analysis of each of the preceding novels the article explores the character of Glory Boughton, examining her actions and observations, and the use of her name as a "theological abstraction" (290), much the same as my analysis will be of *Housekeeping* in Chapter 4. What should be examined though is the effects that demonstrate how worthy Glory is as a character. Her actions reveal enough on their own but when they are highlighted by other lead characters, Glory's importance becomes undeniable to the structure and purpose of the novel.

Conclusion

This literature review establishes common elements that Robinson uses continuously in her novels, such as similar settings and themes. With these elements already established, this project can then explore the use of symbols, structure and characters as they pertain to each novel. This analysis will then demonstrate how these aspects reveal the underlying concerns of Robinson's novels which are explicitly stated in her work *The Death of Adam*.

CHAPTER III

TAKING APART *THE DEATH OF ADAM*

The Death of Adam is an interesting piece of nonfiction. Robinson explores key subjects that have interested her throughout this piece, giving each due diligence as she explains her views in depth about history, faith, nature and family. The literature review demonstrates that there have been several accounts of using *The Death of Adam* to analyze separate themes in Robinson's novels. The intention here is to demonstrate that the view and opinions of Robinson are so inherent in her nature that they come across at various instances throughout the whole of her work, even if she is not aware of that fact. In order to accomplish this feat, it is necessary to analyze certain key aspects of the essays found in *The Death of Adam*, in order to demonstrate how they filter out into Robinson's world of fiction.

Robinson begins her work with a more than sufficient "Introduction," a piece which resembles its own essay unto itself. She announces, "Religion, politics, philosophy, music are all seen by us as means of consolidating the power of a ruling elite, or something of the kind" (3). This demonstrates that Robinson believes that certain aspects of our existing traditions have been tainted by the need to rule over the weaker beings in the world. She continues with the thought, "If they have, by their nature, other motives than the ones they claim, if their impulse is not to explore or confide or question but only to manipulate, they cannot speak to us about meaning, or expand or refine our sense of human experience" (3-4). Human experience is one of the central

concerns that Robinson goes out of her way to elaborate on throughout her writing in this work. Human experience is in essence what makes up the nature of a person. If people are only concerned with motives to manipulate, they diminish the meaning of certain separate aspects of life, such as philosophy and music. Robinson is concerned that if the whole of our existence is focused on vile motives of control, the true essence of humanity will be stunted, leaving the public with nothing to move forward or expand from for the rest of their existence. This power of manipulation will be seen again in Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*, specifically with the power of the larger culture and its effects on the people who struggle under the control of it. Robinson begins to explore the reasoning behind such motives with this quote, "We have reached a point where cosmology permits us to say that everything might in fact be made of nothing, so we cling desperately to the idea that something is real and necessary, and we have chosen, oddly enough, competition and market forces, taking refuge from the wild epic of cosmic ontogeny by hiding our head in a ledger" (4). People are terrified that everything will in fact turn into nothing of importance so they cling to the notions that allow them power over particular individuals. The fact that they have chosen "competition and market forces" as the aspect to cling to that is real demonstrates that the values of humanity have become skewed. Rather than work together to find meaning in the world, people have built up the very things that have the best potential of leaving nothing for humanity to fall back on if they do come to failure. "What used to be meant by 'humanism,' that old romance of the self, the idea that the self is to be refined by exposure to things that are wonderful and difficult and imbued with what was called the human spirit, once an object of unquestioned veneration, has ended" (8). Robinson claims that the life that was once considered precious and full of meaning has officially ceased to exist. Exposure to the "wonderful" and the "difficult," things that would have given worth to

life, have diminished in today's culture, leaving few individuals aware of their existence and those that are aware are left to bear the unfruitful rewards of being in the minority compared to the rest of the general public. People have chosen to go with the easier route in their daily lives, leaving the sense of meaning that gave them purpose on the wayside to be destroyed however they see fit. The reaping of unfruitful awards is also an aspect seen in Robinson's world of fiction, specifically the novel *Housekeeping*.

A final effective aspect to consider from Robinson's extensive "Introduction" is this, "But humanism clearly rested on the idea that people have souls, and that they have certain obligations to them, and certain pleasures in them, which arise from their refinement or their expression in art or in admirable or striking conduct, or which arise from finding other souls expressed in music or philosophy or philanthropy or revolution" (8-9). The idea is that the soul, in its search for meaning and fulfillment, will find others like itself so that they may grow together, as people should strive for, in order to find a true balance to their existence. These souls gravitate towards music, philosophy, religion and politics, to express their pleasure in life and in the world. Robinson reveals that she misses civilization and that she wants it back (4), the way things were before they became immersed in the quest for power and the need to manipulate others. Humans lost their ability to be in awe of the simple act of being human at the same time they lost their ability to enjoy humanity, so says Robinson as she prepares to end her introduction and begin her first essay of *The Death of Adam*.

The first complete essay of this nonfiction work is entitled "Darwinism." Robinson's passion revolving around this subject matter comes to light as she delivers many telling opinions on the issue one after the other as this essay turns out to be the longest out of the entirety of the book. This essay also bears special significance because Robinson finds the title of her work at

the end of this piece. Not too far into the essay she begins by telling the audience, "Whether Darwin himself intended to debunk religion is not a matter of importance, since he was perceived to have done so by those who embraced his views. His theory, as science, is irrelevant to the question of the truth of religion. It is only as an inversion of Christian ethicalism that it truly engages religion" (36-7). What she means is that Darwinism was never meant to uphold the opposition to which organized religion had to establish itself against in the view of humanity. Those who have embraced Darwinism have done so for their own reasons. The debate between evolution and religion can continue forever but it is Robinson's belief that they have nothing to do with each other. It is only because Darwin's idea of "survival of the fittest" deems the weak in our population as expendable that Darwinism engages with religion at all because most religions argue that all people should have equal opportunity to succeed in this life. All life is deemed precious in the eyes of those who believe in the teachings of their individual faiths. Darwinism does not take into account the essence of human life which sends it into conflict with religion in general.

Robinson's investigation into the issue of religion in this essay explains that there are certain aspects of religion that do not require evidence, much the same as science does not offer evidence for every theory on the basis that it is only a theory. She argues,

> But the point to be stressed is that religious people – by definition, I would say – do not look for proof of the existence of God, or understand God in a way that makes his existence liable to proof or disproof. It is naïve to talk about proof in that way . . . That attempts at proofs of God's existence have been made from time to time, under the influence of the prestige of Aristotle, or of early science,

> does not mean that religious belief has sought or depended on that kind of affirmation, as any reader of theology is well aware. Faith is called faith for a reason. (39)

This affirmation is one of the opinions that hold true throughout Robinson's writing. Faith does not require verification. It has no need of evidence. Their belief is sufficient the way it is. This echoes the sentiments seen in the literature review concerning Emily Dickinson and her influence on Marilynne Robinson.

Robinson concludes the views of this essay by examining the misappropriation of words in certain contexts. Robinson claims that "Their scale and relentlessness have been owed to the disarming of moral response by theories authorized by the word 'science,' which, quite inappropriately, has been used as if it meant 'truth.' Surely it is fair to say that science is to the 'science' that inspired exterminations as Christianity is to the 'Christianity' that inspired Crusades" (71). She explains that "scientific" policies that allowed for the extermination of people have taken the aspects of Darwinism to the extreme. By using the name "science," nations have made rulings that have been recognized as detrimental to the existence of humanity. Using the titles of "science" and "religion" to further their own gains only confirms where Robinson stated in her introduction that the focus has shifted from the appreciation of humanity to the manipulation of power. Science and religion are just caught up in the crossfire.

Perhaps the most interesting view expressed in this essay is where Robinson starts to analyze the views she has previously stated in this essay in correlation with the goings on of our current existence.

> These are not the worst consequences, however. The modern fable is that science exposed religion as a delusion and more or less supplanted it. But science cannot

> serve in the place of religion because it cannot generate an ethics or a morality. It can give us no reason to prefer a child to a dog, or to choose honorable poverty over fraudulent wealth. It can give us no grounds for preferring what is excellent to what is sensationalistic. And this is more or less where we are now. (71)

The purposes behind both general organized religion and science are different. They cannot take the place of the other, no matter what the protests are. Robinson respects both equally but abhors the uses that people have put both science and religion to in past history. In an interview with Sarah Fay, Robinson says, "If different systems don't merge in a comprehensible way, that's a flaw in our comprehension and not a flaw in one system or the other" (9). Her demonstration here is that there is a possibility to hold both in equal balance and respect if only people were open to the idea. She finishes this essay by talking about what was lost when "modern thought declared the death of Adam." She alleges that the mystery of existence has been explained away by the use of science, leaving the meaning of life to be erased. By embracing the supposed views that Darwinism has come to be associated with, Robinson shows that people have lost what made them unique in this world.

As the work continues, Robinson begins to discuss subjects that concern the history of humankind that people have slowly forgotten in present day. In the essay "McGuffey and the Abolitionists," Robinson discusses the use of the McGuffey readers which were complete historical accounts used in the schools of the Middle West. She explains that the history found in these readers is fairly lost in today's culture, showing how people have slowly rewritten history into various kinds of history, specifically "the temporal past, the past inherited as culture, the recorded past," and "the past interpreted." The McGuffey readers were once a central part of the developing American culture and now people assume that the facts they know about them is

enough that it is unnecessary to actually read them anymore. Robinson asserts, "But in fact they are documents of remarkable interest, not least because they are an early and influential cultural product of the Middle West, a highly distinctive and crucial region which is very generally assumed to have neither culture nor history" (132). This alludes to the fact that Robinson holds the Midwest very dear to her background, having come from Sandpoint, Idaho, a region that she has frequently used as a setting in her writings. The McGuffey readers verify that there was more to the region than people today would even presume to know. In the essay "Puritans and Prigs," Robinson continues to lament the loss of our history by stating that

> If we must look to our past to account for our present circumstances, perhaps we might ponder the impulse long established in it to disparage, to cheapen and deface, and to falsify, which has made a valuable inheritance worthless. Anyone who considers the profound wealth and continuing good fortune of this country must wonder, how do we make so little of so much? . . . We are losing and destroying what means we have had to do justice to one another, to confer benefit upon one another, to assure one another a worthy condition of life. (172-3)

By forgetting the effects our history has had on the present day, we are diminishing the true nature of our world in ways that are cheapening our way of life. Robinson believes that the action of losing our history is a sin. Her arguments show that perhaps her opinions hold enough truth to be examined in our daily lives to help expand the meaning of our future.

A final historical essay encompasses Marguerite de Navarre, a woman whose influence on literature led to inspiring the works of John Calvin, or Jean Cauvin, a man that Robinson argues has been besmirched unfairly by a history that is at best inconclusive about the true meaning, extent and effect that his work has had on our culture. She breaks the essay into two

parts, the part under analysis right now being "Marguerite de Navarre, Part II." She talks about a book of poems that de Navarre published that was meant to "ensure that there would be a reformation in France," before going explicitly into detail about one certain poem entitled "The Mirror of the Sinful Soul in which she recognizes her fault and sins—also the graces and kindnesses done her by Jesus Christ her spouse" (216); a translation that Robinson made of the text herself. She explains about the poem that "The poem is ingeniously constructed so that a series of narratives of God's faithfulness and the soul's infidelity -- its failure as mother, paraphrasing the narratives of the judgment of Solomon; as child, paraphrasing the parable of the prodigal son – reads like the experience of a single soul, always failing and always meeting new and constant grace" (217). Constant grace, even compassion, is a theme that runs throughout Robinson's fiction. According to the literature review, failure of the mother and the parable of the prodigal son are also defining aspects of both *Housekeeping* and *Gilead* in Robinson's work. Once again, Robinson's work leads her into contemplating the state of the soul throughout history, specifically the history of her own background interest in the writer John Calvin, being a Calvinist herself. As the Calvin religion shows up again and again in her writing, it stands to serve her writing to research Calvin's influences, believing that they are influences of her own, as well.

Moving on from the influence of de Navarre, Robinson then delves into examining Calvin's commentary on Genesis, reflecting on his interpretation of Heaven. Calvin says,

> that while God is not to be seen "in his unveiled essence" he "clothes himself, so to speak, in the image of the world, in which he would present himself to our contemplation … arrayed in the incomparable vesture of the heavens and the earth . . . there is no meaningful distinction to be made between one soul and the next –

> each one is simple, absolute soul, and as if the only soul. This is heaven without hierarchy, a very revolutionary idea. It privileges anyone's relationship with God above any other loyalty or duty. (225)

To conclude on de Navarre and Calvin, Robinson's quote here examines the idea that there is no hierarchy concerning the souls of humanity. It is better to believe that it is impossible for each soul to be distinguished from the next, which in turn refutes Darwin's "survival of the fittest," allowing for there to be a sense of morality instilled in humanity along with equality, as well.

As Robinson reaches the end of her nonfiction work she moves away from history and delves further into the influence of her own background. The essay "Psalm Eight," begins with a reminiscence of Robinson's of a time when she attended an Easter Mass with her grandfather as a child. She heard the Eighth Psalm read and as she says, "kept for myself a few words from it" (227). She claims that she believes she "felt God" before she had a name for him, long before she understood the separate aspects of faith and belief that are synonymous with organized religion. The text of the bible is something that Robinson feels that she is not familiar with, a belief that brings her back to church again and again to hear the sermons and attend mass every Sunday. Going back to the sermon of her reminiscence, she remembers the minister giving a detailed account of how the finding of the empty tomb the morning of Christ's resurrection, in fact, has four different accounts of the events. Remembering parts of the minister's reasoning for such various accounts of the same event, she tells us that his explanation was,

> The Bible, he said, was full of proof that angels could pass for men, which must certainly mean that men could pass for angels. He concluded that, insofar as a young man is seen under the aspect of joy and kindness and holiness, he is

> properly seen as an angel, because that is a vision of his immortal nature. And that insofar as the joy and kindness and holiness of angels are addressed to human beings, angels are like us and at one with us, at their most beautiful when they express attributes most beautiful in us. That such a confusion could have occurred is central to the meaning of the resurrection, because it reminds us what we are. (233-4)

This "confusion," so to speak, not only gave Robinson something to think about but also gives the audience something to contemplate that has the potential to change perceptions. At our best, human beings can be confused for an angel. When an angel is at its most beautiful state of existence, they resemble human beings. The fact that there can be no distinction made between them at this significant point of existence allows for the human race, if it chooses to, to rise up to the potential that God has created for each of them. This essence of belief is something to strive for, a sense of balance and completion that the characters in Robinson's fiction strive for despite their not knowing the name of their struggle.

The concluding essay of *The Death of Adam* is entitled "Wilderness," and brings to attention many of the aspects Robinson previously addressed in her nonfiction work *Mother Country*, in a way expanding her regard to the use of the wilderness of the world. The concerns that Robinson has for the wilderness are seen explicitly throughout the novel *Housekeeping*, despite it's being published almost 20 years before *The Death of Adam*. The effects of her own childhood home are mentioned in this essay as well, for instance she states that "I started writing fiction at an eastern college, partly in hopes of making my friends there understand how rich and powerful a presence a place can be . . . My bond with my native landscape was an unnamable yearning, to be at home in it, to be chastened and acceptable, to be present in it as if I were not

present at all" (246). The effects of the Midwest can be seen extensively throughout Robinson's fiction. Her yearning can be deciphered through her characters appreciation for the nature that surrounds them, a constant comfort in the face of their turmoil. They are at home in the Midwest even after having come back from a long journey, the connection between them and their native landscape inescapable, something that they eventually come to terms with as the novels reach their ends. She declares that "Moses himself would have approved the reverence with which I regarded my elders, who were silent and severe and at their ease with solitude and difficulty. I meant to be like them. Americans from the interior West know what I am describing. For them it is, or is like, religious feeling, being so powerful a reference for all other experience" (246). This essence of the wilderness is a necessary background for the religious experience seen in Robinson's novels. Without this characteristic, the otherworldliness of her stories falls flat without the power of her native land to bring her concerns into a realistic light. The power of a place can be seen in Robinson's work, an effect that she is no doubt aware of and an effect that the audience of her work has come to appreciate into of itself. The magic that Robinson feels for the "interior West" can be felt at any given moment in her novels and this effect is important for the lessons that are intrinsically placed within the confines of her prose and creation.

CHAPTER IV

NOUNS AS CHARACTERS: THE HIDDEN MEANING BEHIND THE NAMES OF *HOUSEKEEPING*

In the opening paragraphs of her essay entitled "Wilderness," Robinson proclaims, "The oldest anecdotes from which we know ourselves as human, the stories of Genesis, make it clear that our defects are sufficient to bring the whole world down. An astonishing intuition, an astonishing fact" (245). Robinson dedicates the whole of this essay to arguing about the effects humankind has had on the issue of environmentalism, demonstrating that she is devoutly concerned with this issue. She also argues that the human race chooses to hide its intolerable acts from the public eye by using the wilderness as a cover for nuclear weapons, an argument she mentions in relation to Idaho, Utah, Nevada and New Mexico. As Robinson stated, it is our defects that can bring down the whole world. Nature can exist on its own without the interference of people. Nature is one aspect of *Housekeeping* worth analyzing in relation to the effect that it has had on Marilynne Robinson.

Her concerns for nature and the effect that humankind has had on it can be seen in the themes of the novel *Housekeeping*. The division between nature and humankind can be seen in the conflict between the character of Sylvie Fisher and the citizens of Fingerbone. This analysis goes further in analyzing this conflict by examining the definitions behind the main character's names. These definitions serve to demonstrate the previously mentioned conflict of nature

versus humankind and the necessary motivation required to establish an existence that can encompass both equally.

Lots of time used to be put into the decision about what names newborn children would be christened with. The concern was the *meaning* behind the name, what it meant to the parents and what it would eventually mean to the child. Despite the fashion to choose conventional favorites, many people now try to choose names that have a deeper meaning, even authors. Some of these writers take the time to choose names for their characters that add meaning to the overall thematic concerns of their novel. The same can be said of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* in the naming of her three main characters, Ruth, Lucille and Sylvie. Taking into account the origins of the names in question and the meanings that they possess, a deeper understanding of the novel can be recognized, one which coincides with Robinson's beliefs about humanity that she elaborated on in her nonfiction publication *The Death of Adam*. By examining the definitions of the nouns in which the names were derived from and examining how said definitions affect key scenes in the novel *Housekeeping*, the reader can reach a new understanding of the hidden depth of Robinson's work and how it reflects her outlook on the world.

In turn, these definitions help to establish how the characters of Ruth, Lucille and Sylvie become symbols in the novel. According to Friedrich Schelling, the one of characteristics of the symbol is the "fusion of the general, i.e. ideas and concepts, and the particular, i.e. the appearance of ideas and concepts 'in a perceptible way' . . . 'object not only signifies or means the idea but is *itself the idea*'" (qtd. in Antonova 46). As a result, Ruthie, Lucille and Sylvie become the ideas that are defined by their names. They are living symbols of human ideals that have slowly died out in our world. Their definition is their symbol.

Maggie Galehouse makes some interesting observations in her article such as the following that "the word 'ruth' dates back to Middle English and was used to denote passion, contrition, sorrow, or regret (the only form of the word in common usage today is 'ruthless')" (121). Galehouse also mentions in a footnote of her article that readers have made a connection between the name of Sylvie and the Latin word "sylva," meaning forest or woods (128). These observations show that even if it is not common, some readers and writers take into account the origins and meanings behind the names of characters in the novels they are interested in.

According to the literature review, no account exists which examines the definitions of the nouns that developed into the names Robinson came to use in her novel and how they pertain to the novel's subject matter. A deeper analysis of the novel suggests that Robinson did take into account the implications her character's names would have on the meaning of the novel.

Robinson's views of the world can be examined in her collection of essays entitled *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*. In the introduction she proclaims, "I want to overhear passionate arguments about what we are and what we are doing and what we ought to do. I want to feel that art is an utterance made in good faith by one human being to another. I want to believe there are geniuses scheming to astonish the rest of us, just for the pleasure of it. I miss civilization, and I want it back" (4). This quote indicates the displeasure that Robinson has with the human race. She argues in her essays that our culture does not value the things that add true meaning to everyday existence. Her statement declares that our standard of living is deteriorating in such a way that unacceptable in her eyes and this view can be seen in her novels as well.

Robinson announces in an interview conducted by Rebecca M. Painter, "I love loyalty and trust, and courtesy, and kindness, and sensitivity. They are beautiful things in my mind.

They require alertness and self-discipline and patience. And they are qualities that sustain my interest in my characters" (492). These "qualities" can be seen in the definition of "ruth" as a noun. Also for the purpose of this analysis, the meaning of the name "Lucille" also adds to the deeper understanding of the novel according to the definitions of the nouns behind the names. Lucille means light, its roots being from the Latin name "lucia" formed from the Latin words "lux", "lucis" or "luce", all meaning light or daylight. If Ruth is the qualities that humanity should possess and Sylvie is the knowledge they should seek to understand, then Lucille is the light with which Ruth finally comes to see the decision that she has to make. Also, according to Lucille's characterization in the novel, the reader can assume that the "light" which Lucille provides is the embodiment of man-made products, the imagery being the artificial light bulb or even the harnessing of electricity to run machinery.

By merging the qualities of the word "ruth" with an understanding of "sylva," or nature, through the decision of the character Ruthie to follow in her Aunt Sylvie's footsteps, Robinson seems to be suggesting the type of existence that she wishes individuals would follow. The public would have an understanding of the world around them, possessing the compassion, pity, regret and contrition that the truly religious inherently have to look at the world that God created for them and expand not only their knowledge of it but also expand the knowledge they have of each other. A careful examination of certain pivotal scenes in the novel reveals that Robinson chose her character's names for the intention of providing the example that everyone should try to emulate in their own existence. A merging of the forest and nature (sylva) and the contrition and passion (ruth) is necessary for humankind to learn from their mistakes and grow from them. Various scenes in the novel show the conflict between nature and humankind, Sylvie

and Lucille respectively, and the motivating factor of compassion, Ruth, which is ultimately able to make a distinguishing decision between the values of both.

The first scene to be analyzed occurs when Sylvie takes Ruthie's hands and begins to waltz around their flooded living room floor until Lucille opens the door, causing the water to shift and knock over the woodpile on the porch, a chair and a bag of clothespins (64). The merging of ruth and sylva with Ruth and Sylvie waltzing in the flooded room signifies the convergence of the qualities needed to be content in life. Ruth and Sylvie are not devastated by the ruin that nature has wrought on their house and town. Instead, they take the time to find the beauty in the situation, enjoying the feel of the water as they dance. The line, "the house flowed around us," emphasizes the idea that their actions are at one with the surrounding force of nature and the world that was created for them to explore. When Lucille opens the door and causes the crash of the woodpile, it is an example of the harsh qualities of man-made light disturbing the peace and tranquility of nature.

The flood continues to provide pivotal scenes in the novel when Sylvie remains downstairs contemplating the rising water while her nieces venture back upstairs for the safety of being above the water level. When Sylvie fails to return after some time, Ruth becomes anxious to find their aunt while Lucille remains indifferent to her absence. The quality of compassion from the definition of ruth can be seen in Ruthie as she begins the search for Sylvie. Her consideration for the well being of her aunt contrasts with the lack of caring that Lucille exhibits. Ruthie demonstrates a well meaning for others and her concern shows the reader how simple consideration for others can expand the sense of possibility and humanity inherent in each of us.

The definition of sylva can be seen with Sylvie's reluctance to leave the flooded room where Ruthie finds her. Sylvie is more content to be in the presence of the force of nature, with

the water around her legs, then upstairs in the safety of the bedrooms. Her affinity with nature is inspiring, considering that the somewhat expected reaction would be to run for higher ground. Sylvie shows that while nature can be frightening, there is a sense of beauty and wonder in it that most people have forgotten to appreciate. In a flood, the citizens of Fingerbone are concerned with the damage to their homes and other possessions. This behavior is understandable but it lends itself to the idea that all forces of nature are dangerous, leaving the simple beauty of the water to go unappreciated. As stated before, it is the human race's defects that can bring the world down and in this instance it is the concern for material things that makes people come to fear nature, even coming to a point where they live unconcerned as to its destruction. Sylvie recognizes the threat but as she sees no immediate danger to herself she is content to admire the flood as long as her safety permits.

Once Ruthie manages to bring her aunt back upstairs Lucille is seen trying to protect the candlelight when they enter the room. This demonstrates Lucille's inability to embrace the dark of nature as she clings to the source of light. The candle going out forces Lucille to have to venture downstairs for a coal to light it again, which she is reluctant to do. Her dismay at venturing down into the flooded first floor demonstrates her inability to embrace nature as being the source of life that surrounds her. Safe in her home, Lucille is content to keep nature outdoors, where she believes it belongs. The invasion of her home by the floodwaters leaves her upset and the distance she feels between her sister and aunt begins to grow as she slowly begins to align herself with the citizens of Fingerbone and their limited ideals.

The difference between aunt and nieces can be observed when Ruthie and Lucille witness Sylvie admiring the water from her vantage point halfway across the bridge (81-2). Her behavior is seen as questionable by the "hoboes" she left at the water's edge and by her two nieces. They

jump to the conclusion that she may be attempting suicide which Sylvie never really considered but does understand how it could be the logical conclusion. Her need to appreciate the water at a different view further demonstrates the definition of her name. Fisher can also explain Sylvie's particular affinity for the water. Lucille's reaction to her aunt shows how she affiliates herself with the more conservative point of view of life.

The combination of the bridge and the water would never be beautiful to Lucille and her harsh light contrasts with the feelings inherent in Ruthie's narration. Ruthie shows no contempt or anger, neither in her words nor in her relating of the events that transpired. She embodies a sense of sympathy and compassion in the adjectives she uses to describe her aunts movements such as "confident" and "gentle" and a sense of regret and sorrow in her description of Lucille as having a voice that is "small and flat and tensely composed" (82) just like the definition of ruth suggests. The feelings may have otherwise gone unnoticed but with the added definition of Ruthie's name, the reader can identify the tone of the narrator and her unique sense of self that Robinson is promoting.

Sylvie's ease with which she crossed the man-made bridge suggests the Sylvie understands all aspects of the world, whether they are the human condition, nature or the industrial. Her sense of self allows her to be at one with any situation. It is also her sense of self that sets her apart from the other citizens of Fingerbone. While the town struggles with the effect of the flood, Sylvie revels in its simple beauty. Also, by novel's end, Sylvie ends up at risk of losing Ruth to a town that believes Ruth would be better off in someone else's care. They believe this because Lucille chose to leave them and also because Sylvie's standards of child-rearing differ from their own.

Sylvie being at odds with the other citizens of Fingerbone brings up another quote from the essay entitled "Facing Reality," found in *The Death of Adam*. "Anyone who has brought up children knows the overwhelming power of the larger culture, and how for the peace and sanity of the family it must be in some degree accommodated. Anyone who struggles to meet the expectations the society creates must cope with emotional injury and exhaustion, or at best, very unsatisfying rewards" (79). As the novel continues and Ruthie and Sylvie start to feel the chasm opening between them and Lucille, who sides with the rest of Fingerbone, this quote becomes more obvious as a demonstration of reality, where the existence of a being like Sylvie would be met with constant turmoil because of the effects of the "larger culture." Compassion for nature has the potential to leave people at odds with their surrounding community, a situation that becomes more apparent as the novel moves towards its ending.

Ruthie continues her account of the encroaching elements of nature upon the household with her observation of her aunt Sylvie (99). She explains that Sylvie can be found "enjoying the evening," which means she sits in the dark because she does not enjoy "counterpoising a roomful of light against a worldful of darkness." She also relates to the readers the fact that there are crickets, squirrels and sparrows taking up residence in their home. Sylva is seen in the nature that has entered their home and it also seen in Sylvie's preference for the dark. This aversion to man-made light is essential in the continuing separation between Sylvie and Lucille. As Lucille breaks from her family, she ends up embodying the essence of electrical lighting. Modern day individuals are sometimes terrified of the absence of light. What they do not understand is that there is never an absence of light in the darkness of the world because of the natural light coming from the stars and the moon.

When the modern day world turns off the lights, their senses make them believe that they are immersed in total darkness. Sylvie shows that this is not the case with her preference for living with the light that nature provides for them rather than disturbing it with the harsh fluorescents of the average light bulb. Ruthie's compassion is seen in her romantic description of her aunt being akin to a "mermaid in a ship's cabin." She demonstrates the ability to attempt an understanding of that which may confuse others. Also her increasing positive feelings for her aunt and the subsequently growing negative feelings towards her sister demonstrate Robinson's belief that the merging of ruth and sylva is what human beings lack in their daily lives.

Now that the analysis of Ruth and Sylvie has been set, the use of the definition of Lucille can be contributed to the overall effect of the names and meaning behind the novel. As Lucille drifts away from her sister and aunt, her "light" becomes that of the harsh fluorescents that light the town of Fingerbone rather than the natural light of the sun and moon. Her alignment with the town also reveals that she holds their values as the means to live her life by as opposed to the example her aunt sets for her and her sister. Lucille's harsh essence of light shines on the values of modern day people to contrast with the values of Ruthie and Sylvie. Lucille insists on a light on during suppertime, china to eat off of and meat and vegetables for meals (102). These seem like the average desires of a modern day family, however, in their context they serve to illuminate the difference between the qualities of Ruthie and Sylvie and the harsh tones and fleeting values of Lucille and Fingerbone. Lucille and Fingerbone's true treasures are fleeting because what they value, a house and light, even fine
china, are all things that will eventually crumble into dust. The same can be said about nature except that when something dies in nature it will almost always be replaced or even reborn. Nature does not need the human race in order to rebuild itself; it is continuous and never-ending.

When the world of humankind no longer exists, the essence of nature will continue on as it always has. However, a point to address here would be the fact that people today are sometimes unaware of the effects that they have on the world.

As stated in "Wilderness," Robinson claims that "Wilderness is not a single region, but a condition of being of the natural world. If it is no longer to be found in one place, we assume it exists in other places. So the loss of wilderness always seems only relative, and this somewhat mitigates any specific instance of abuse" (247). The citizens of Fingerbone are being faced with instances of abuse that they have acted upon their surroundings. By ignoring their actions, they attempt to make the responsibility fall to someone else. By merging "ruth" and "sylva," Robinson demonstrates that people need to take responsibility now instead of putting it off. Assuming that wilderness exists elsewhere, people show that they are content to live with a lie rather than embrace the truth. This existence, one that ignores the growing problems in nature, is one that Robinson is disgusted with but does seem inevitable in today's reality. In today's world there are movements of "going green," recycling and concerns about global warming. However, despite the growing awareness of such issues, the world is still deteriorating as a result of humankind. Ruthie's journey to embrace "sylva" and Sylvie, demonstrates the movement that individuals need to make to embrace the world and gravitate towards a new way of life.

Lucille's final night in nature with her sister and the lack of concern from Sylvie about their whereabouts confirms to Lucille that she does not belong with this family of confusing ideals (110-18). This sequence of events embodies the final breaking away of Lucille from Ruthie and consequently Sylvie. She makes the decision then to make a greater effort to naturalize herself with the ideals of Fingerbone. Lucille sheds light on the situation for Ruthie to see that she has a choice to make about her existence. She can follow the path that her sister has

chosen or she can make her own decisions. Lucille's actions show that she does not possess the qualities that Ruth does, proving that her existence and that of the close-minded Fingerbone, is not the ideal for humanity to follow. The harsh actions of Lucille and the pity and compassion seen in Ruthie suggest that Robinson believes that Ruthie and Sylvie have a better understanding of the world and their position in it. They can exist with other individuals because they show a desire to understand others and they can also exist on their own if the need calls for it when Fingerbone decides to act on their close-minded tendencies.

Lucille's destruction of the flowers pressed in the dictionary shows the harsh confines of the world that Robinson believes people have resigned themselves to live in (127). They are unable to appreciate the natural beauty of a pressed flower and even turn violent when their ideals are questioned. Lucille's destruction of nature is man-made vanity destroying the beauty of nature that God created in the world. Her disregard for the flowers shows that people lack a connection to the world that provides us our existence. Ruthie's furious reaction to her sister's senseless act of destruction demonstrates the futile attempt of the radical few who try to expand the knowledge and understanding of a world that refuses to let their ideas grow and to discover new things.

Ruthie is unable to change her sister's mind about what to value and Lucille refuses to understand Ruthie's sentiments. Ruthie displays both pity and regret towards her sister when she tries to reconcile after their fight. Their interaction illustrates the void that now stands between them with Lucille firmly stating that the way she is in her manner is not what needs to be changed because Ruthie and Sylvie are the ones that are different. Her lack of compassion towards her sister demonstrates that the qualities of the noun "ruth," seen in Ruthie, are not seen in Lucille or the citizens of Fingerbone. The negative light with which Ruthie narrates her

sister's actions and Robinson uses for these scenes demonstrates that those individuals who claim to be sincerely pious individuals are not exhibiting the true qualities that they should.

In the essay "Darwinism," Robinson asserts that "People who insist that the sacredness of Scripture depends on belief in creation in a literal six days seem never to insist on a literal reading of 'to him who asks, give,' or 'sell what you have and give the money to the poor.' In fact, their politics and economics align themselves quite precisely with those of their adversaries, who yearn to disburden themselves of the weak . . . " (40). The citizens of Fingerbone wish to "disburden themselves" of Ruthie and Sylvie, rather than attempt to understand what it is they could teach them about existence. Ruthie and Sylvie demonstrate the true qualities that should be embrace in life but the citizens of Fingerbone are blind to the lessons they could learn if only they opened themselves to the chance to grow, just as nature does and learn from those who oppose them.

Ruthie's final act of choosing to run away with her aunt demonstrates the genuine joining of the qualities that Robinson feels the human race is lacking (210-12). By having "ruth" choose "sylva" instead of Lucille, she means for the human race to learn what deserves true value and meaning, an affinity with nature and not a devotion to economics, marketing and artificial/meaningless inventions. The progression of the novel was to show the difficulties in the journey of one truly understanding and compassionate person to understand the possibilities of the world and explore it if they felt the need to. In *The Death of Adam*, Robinson quotes, "Those who are concerned about the world environment are, in my view, the abolitionists of this era, struggling to make an enlightened public aware that environmental depredation is an axe at the root of every culture, every freedom, every value" (251).

Ruthie is the "abolitionist" that Robinson admires. Her actions demonstrate what Robinson finds lacking in today's way of life and her journey is meant to inspire the audience to undertake similar advances within their own nature. Their spiritual growth has the potential to possess so much more if only they allowed themselves the chance to take the first step.

Ruthie is not cowed by her sister's actions but rather makes the choice for her to embrace a life without material concerns. Ruthie and Sylvie's crossing of the bridge to escape further exemplifies how a connection with nature leads to greater possibilities. Lucille announces in the novel that she hopes to escape to Boston just for the fact that it is not Fingerbone (132). However, if Lucille is truly content with the life she has established for herself, then it stands to reason that she may never feel the need to go off and explore the world if everything she wants is there with her. Ruthie and Sylvie leave because they are forced to, but with their semblance of life, they can be truly happy with whatever comes their way in the future. Ruthie and Sylvie are able to use the bridge to escape to the rest of the world, one that may not understand them but which they also do not need to have appreciate them in order understand their own existence.

CHAPTER V

THE CONFESSIONS OF *GILEAD*

The aspect of the novel known as narration, or point of view, is particularly unique in regards to Robinson's second novel, *Gilead*. *Housekeeping* used first person as well but in *Gilead* Robinson chooses to use the form of the epistolary novel for her first person narrator to use in order to convey his life's message to his son. These aspects include the intention behind the writing of a letter and the format that a series of letters can be gathered into, such as this novel. The basic aspects of letter correspondence can be seen in the novel *Gilead*. In an article by Susan Foley, she alleges that "the essential meaning of the personal letter is to bind the correspondents. The writer reaches out to the recipient, expressing the value of that person for the writer. Explicitly or implicitly, the writer seeks reciprocation of the gesture" (239). Ames has placed great value on his son by making him the recipient of his letters and hopes that his son will value them as he would value his father. The letters bind them together so that as the audience reads Ames's letters, his son is also always on our mind as it is always on Ames's. Foley also declares that "Letters not only compensated for absence but were also 'long distance conversations' through which the relationship continued . . . writing or reading a letter linked past, present, and future, making the absent person present in spirit, if not in the flesh" (251). Ames's letters give him the chance to bring all the aspects of his life together in one place. When reading his letters, Robby will be able to feel the presence of his father from beyond the

grave in a way a narrative would never have able to do. The effects on the recipient are unique because the form is a letter. However, the effects of letter writing also extend to the writer of them. By using the form of letters John Ames, our narrator, is able to not only recall his life but to reflect on it. This self-reflection allows the narrator to go on a journey of self-discovery. He is able to confess to feelings and thoughts that he may not have spoken aloud to his son had he lived to see the boy grow up. As a result, the reader is able to take the journey with John Ames that allows for the audience to experience the growing awareness that Ames gains about his own shortcomings. These letters have implicit meaning in them for the recipient as well as the writer. This journey ultimately falls in line with the views Robinson expressed in her essays located in *The Death of Adam* collection.

The reader goes through the journey, witnessing firsthand how Reverend Ames is able to embrace the views of his Calvinist religion and change, not only the way he looks at his past but also the way he looks towards the future with his son reading his letters. Robert Alter in his book *Pen of Iron* explains that "*Gilead* is a novel in which introspection is more prevalent than narration because it is, after all, a book in which a spiritually serious person is trying to take stock of his life" (163). The Reverend Ames is determined to make sense of his life in a way that will hopefully attest to be beneficial to his son. As a result, his letters lack dialogue, instead focusing more aptly on confession, a course of action that the form of a letter allows to take place, especially in the case of Reverend Ames. His reminisces have no particular order, going from memories of his childhood to present day with the simple passing of a page. One scene that he recalls involves his abolitionist grandfather, also named John Ames, when he encountered the old man on his way to school after some children were teasing the older gentleman.

Rather than do anything to stop the children, Ames struggles with coming to terms with the eccentricities of his grandfather and his loyalty to his family. As if sensing this inner turmoil, the old man gives his grandson an accusatory stare, as if Ames had helped the children with their teasing. Ames alleges in this passage that he felt it was unfair of his grandfather to look at him in such a way, as if he were "the betrayer" (98) as he says. This continues into what Ames himself labels a confession, one in which he owns up to feeling somewhat embarrassed about his grandfather and even a bit a shame. As the novel continues, Ames makes more telling confessions, some even of his own free will, however the more telling confessions come from a sense of defense and even injury. These confessions transpire to be the more telling of all the passages in the novel.

One telling passage comes across when Ames takes it upon himself to explicitly state his reasoning for writing these letters to his son to be read when he is older (102). He explains that he is trying to make the best of the situation of his death by writing down the things that he may never have had the chance to tell his son, even if he had lived to do so. One telling aspect of this passage is how Ames declares that he believes these things that he has set out to tell his son are absolutely necessary in that the generations to come after Robert Boughton will deem the information in these letters absolutely necessary in order to understand Ames's son, Robert. This echoes Robinson's sentiments in *The Death of Adam* where she argues that understanding the background and history that makes up a culture is necessary for the well being of civilization today. Robert Boughton must not disregard his own history that Ames is going to great lengths to write down for his last living child.

If it is possible to name a plot in an ongoing, organized correspondence, the plot of the novel *Gilead* would revolve around the grievances of the Reverend John Ames against his

godson Jack Boughton, christened John Ames Boughton to honor the Reverend and force a relationship between that has been nothing if not strained and difficult for the entirety of Jack's life. After Jack returns to his father's house in Gilead, the Reverend begins to bring up more slights and difficulties that occurred between him and his godson than in explaining his life's worth of memories in a telling history to his son. The form of letters allows for Ames to work through these slights at a pace befitting the Reverend, allowing for the reader to gain insight into the working of one man's mind and how it slowly comes to terms with the notion of change.

Jack Boughton, for reasons unknown at this point, decides to ingratiate himself into Ames's new young family. Both his wife and his son take a particular interest in Jack that the Reverend does not like or trust. One particularly telling passage occurs over the course of a page when Ames begins grumbling over the supposed 'charms' of Jack Boughton and how his family has become quite taken with his godson (120). He describes Jack as having a "preacherly manner," after which he admonishes that Jack has done nothing to deserve such a sense of self or so he believes. The interesting thing is that the passage gives no indication that it was his wife or son that called Jack's manner "preacherly." The passage is set up to suggest that Ames came up with the description on his own for the sole purpose of tearing apart that image of Jack Boughton in his own mild manner. The passage finishes with Ames acknowledging the fact that he had been keeping his distance from his friend, the Reverend Boughton, in hopes of avoiding any interaction with Jack, believing that the man in question would only be in town for a short while. The passage as a whole has no sense of the confession that Ames gave away so freely before but under the circumstances of the self-reflexive letter, it stands to conclude that Ames has given more away about himself here than he had ever intended to convey to his son.

Only a few pages later does Ames give this telling confession, after having spent several hours meditating over himself and Jack Boughton at church. He claims, "I must be gracious. My only role is to be gracious. Clearly I must somehow contrive to *think* graciously about him, also, since he makes such a point of seeing right through me. I believe I have made some progress on that front through prayer, though there is clearly much more progress to be made, much more praying to be done" (123). This passage demonstrates the inner turmoil that Ames is struggling through concerning his godson. The fact is that he has spent many hours praying over the strife that Jack has apparently caused him. The fact is that as a reverend, Ames is meant to extend a gracious hand to all of God's children. In the case of Jack Boughton, however, he finds himself unable to even think graciously of his godson, something that he hopes meditation and prayer will eventually remedy for him.

In the essay "McGuffey and the Abolitionists," Robinson claims the following, "Now if he has not only deserved no good at your hand, but has also provoked you by unjust acts and curses, not even this is just reason why you should cease to embrace him in love and to perform the duties of love on his behalf" (131). This passage from John Calvin illustrates what Ames is unable to do. While Ames has not divulged what "unjust acts and curses" Jack has made against him, it is obvious that Ames has held on to this grudge for a number of years. This lack of graciousness in Ames that Robinson so obviously agrees with demonstrates that the letters are meant to show the passage towards such a conviction from Ames towards his godson by the time the letters have ceased. Ames is not only meant to confess his greatest grievances and personal shortcomings but he also meant to finally embrace all of Calvin's teachings in the hopes of bettering the last moments of his life the way that Robinson wishes all would allow themselves to do in similar circumstances.

At this point in the novel Ames is unable to see the shortcomings in himself. He is only able to see the every slight and supposed injury intended at him in any little action from his godson. He doesn't understand that it is his own feelings that are influencing the conflict between him and Jack. He thinks all the fault lies with his godson. This is made particularly clear when Jack joins Ames's wife and child during a mass one Sunday morning. Ames announces in his letter to his son,

> Now, as I have said, I did not expect him to be at that service. Furthermore, there are plenty of people whose behavior toward their children falls far short of what it should be, so, even when I departed from my text, and even though I will concede that my extemporaneous remarks might have been influenced by his sitting there with that look on his face, right beside my wife and child, still it was considerable egotism on his part to take my words as directed at him only, as he clearly did. (131)

Taking apart Ames's confession bit by bit, we see that Ames begins somewhat apologetic about the course of events that occurred during his sermon. He even gives a little away about what his grievance against Jack concerns. It's the third and fourth line of the quote that is the most telling about Ames's state of mind. He *concedes* that while Jack joining his family during church might have influenced his going off on a tangent during his sermon, he ends his rant by saying it was egotism on Jack's part to believe that the remarks were meant only for him. The self-reflexive aspect of his letters rebounds here in a circle, showing how adept Ames is at self-denial. Rather than take the responsibility for the change in his sermon and accept the reasoning for it, Ames feels it is better to find the slight in Jack. He clearly admitted that Jack's presence could have influenced his remarks but he takes offense that Jack could, or would, take the sermon

personally. Ames is still unable to embrace Jack with anything except a cold shoulder and stern words for his past transgressions.

Eventually Ames returns to the simple reminiscences of his past letters to his son, attempting to explain a bit of his standoffish attitude that led him to be a bachelor for most of his adult life (134). He confesses that he has always suffered from the sin of covetise and rather than accept that as a part of himself, he shunned interaction with the community in the hopes of not disobeying said Commandment. He picks up on the issue of covetise again when he admits that it was this sin in him had a hand in directing his comments towards Jack at the terrible service that he attended. He claims that the "old covetise" he had mentioned before took over him and made him feel "the way I used to feel when the beauty of other lives was a misery and an offense to me" (141). Instead of holding in the effects that the sin of covetise has on him, Ames lashed out at an easy victim, or possibly what he believes to be the constant source of vice in his life, his godson, Jack Boughton. He confesses that his diverging from his original sermon had a lot more to do with him personally, showing that if Jack took offense to it, he may not have been wrong in doing so.

Believing that the supposed wrong he'd done Jack at his service would have made his friend Boughton, Jack's father and Glory, Jack's sister, upset with him, Ames visits the house under the pretext of returning a magazine article. Ames even confesses to his son in this letter that conceals his motives fairly effectively, even from himself. This brings to mind in the reader that when it comes down to it, Ames is fairly capable of concealing all kinds of truths from him, so long as they keep him in a better light. He contends that he thought of apologizing for his actions in the church but he felt that would only confirm their suspicions about his motivations which Ames still believes had nothing to do with Jack's presence. He also makes the claim that

an apology would end up depriving Jack of coming up with a less damaging conclusion of the sermon; by apologizing Jack would have to face the fact that Ames meant to hurt him with the remarks he made during the service (147-8). This is a key passage because Ames confesses to his ability to conceal the truth to himself, a fact that slowly starts to strip away as Ames becomes more focused on the lessons of John Calvin and learns to embrace his godson with love instead of disdain.

Calvin's passage continues in the McGuffey essay with the idea of the Commandment, love thy neighbor as thyself. More explicitly, the quote asserts that

> Assuredly there is but one way in which to achieve what is not merely difficult but utterly against human nature: to love those who hate us, to repay their evil deeds with benefits, to return blessings for reproaches. It is that we remember not to consider men's evil intention but to look upon the image of God in them, which cancels and effaces their transgressions, and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace them. (131)

Ames is still struggling to see the image of God in his godson. Until he has done so, he will continue to look upon him and see the past grievances he has against him rather than be able to embrace him with love. As Ames comes closer to realizing the full extent of Calvin's teachings, the reader is able to see how the change is slowly overcoming the sentiments of Ames's past letters to his son. He begins by recalling the awe he felt at Jack for being able to keep secret the fact that he took off in someone's car as a child, then left it on the side of the road when it ran out of gas, allowing for it to be stolen a record number of times before it was finally recovered by the officials. Ames then recalls one of the many pranks that Jack played on him as a child and then taking a look at the situation in a different light. He remembers that

> There is a sadness in all this I do not wish to obscure. I mean a sadness in the child. I remember coming out of the house one morning and finding my front steps painted with molasses. The ants were so think they were piling over each other. They were just absolutely solid. Now, you have to ask yourself, How lonely would a child have to be to have time to make such a nuisance of himself?. (182)

This is the first more promising instance in which Ames begins to rethink his opinion of his godson. At the time Ames still felt the slight against him for having the prank played on him but the fact that he remembers feeling a bit of pity and compassion towards the loneliness that spurned Jack's actions and the fact that he confesses them now in a letter to his son, demonstrates that Ames is finally beginning to make sense of his relationship with his godson.

Ames continues with his memories of the day he christened his godson. He discussed the matter with his friend, the Reverend Boughton, about what the name would be, only to be caught unaware as Boughton announced to the whole of the church that the child would be called John Ames. Ames confesses that it took him some time to forgive his friend for putting him in a position like that. Continuing in his confession mode, Ames admits that when he blessed the child he felt a strong inclination to declare that the boy would not be any child of his. He brings up covetise once again, this time stating while desiring someone else's happiness is one aspect of the sin, his experience suggests that it is also the act of "rejecting it, taking offense at the beauty of it" (188). Ames finally admits to his son that he has often believed that the baby felt his thoughts at the moment of his christening and that their discord began with that thought of his. He understands the foolishness of it but by this point in his correspondence Ames has gotten into the feel of confessing all his important thoughts to his son in the hopes that his son can come to understand him even after death.

Finally Ames comes to acknowledge Jack as "a more cherished self," a true son to him (189). Ames recalls his own teaching from Calvin, an insert from Robinson of course, after which he reveals, "It seems to me people tend to forget that we are to love our enemies, not to satisfy some standard of righteousness, but because God their Father loves them" (189). He states this and has acknowledged his connection to Jack Boughton, but in the following pages he once again falls prey to his old grievances against Jack, believing that his godson means his wife and son harm.

Over the course of his letters Ames has illustrated the points of Calvin that Robinson holds dear but he has consistently been unable to sustain these thoughts of love and graciousness towards his godson, for reasons of his own. He returns to memories of his father and of his brother to explain the idea of measuring one's sins against another's. He claims, "it is seldom indeed that any wrong one suffers is not thoroughly foreshadowed by wrongs one has done" (194). Whatever the wrongs Jack has done to him, Ames does not have the right to judge him on them when he has sinned himself.

Eventually, as the letters begin to wind down, Ames comes to the realization that he has spent more time worrying to himself than he has been talking to his son. However, it stands to reason that these worries have done more in revealing his father's character to Robert than just "speaking" to him could have done. The self-reflexive/ confessional aspect of the letter allowed for more truth to be seen than a regular straightforward, first person narrative. However, for the sake of his letters to speak to his son, Ames returns to putting to paper the memories he feels his son could benefit from learning of.

So for the following letters he returns to the time when his wife, Lila, first came to the church and the feelings he had of looking forward to seeing her at every service. He talks of how

he taught her about their faith and helped her to be baptized. He then concludes that letter with how she told him that they should be married. However, the issues between Ames and Jack still have to be resolved and while Ames is determined to put his past to paper, it is the present that weighs on his mind. However much Ames wishes to put his reminisces down on paper for his son, he still finds the present conflict between him and Jack being written down instead. Also, because of his close relationship with Boughton, he constantly hears about their family's conflicts with Jack's homecoming. At this point, Glory comes to take Lila and Robbie to the movies and Boughton visits Ames, seeking advice about his son. The scene ends with Glory and her father returning home, still at odds with the strife that is plaguing Jack's life. It seems that no matter how much he wishes to avoid it, he is confronted with Jack Boughton wherever he turns.

The break between the Ames that looked at Jack with suspicion and the Ames that feels a newfound connection with his godson is the most telling scene in the novel (217). Jack comes to Ames's church seeking advice and finally admits that he has a wife and son that he is in misery over because he is unable to find a suitable place to live that would accept an interracial couple and their child. Jack explains how their relationship came to be, the troubles they have encountered and how they have led him back to his childhood home hoping to find a place for them to live there. Ames comes to terms with this new image of Jack that allows him to see his suffering for what it is and the image of God in him that Calvin has said is the reason to accept Jack with a loving embrace. Ames contends to his son, "You might wonder about my pastoral discretion, writing this all out. Well, on one hand it is the way I have of considering things. On the other hand, he is a man about whom you may never hear one good word, and I just don't know another way to let you see the beauty there is in him" (232). This final telling confession is not the end of the novel, but it wraps up the journey quite efficiently for the sake of this

analysis. Ames's journey of self-discovery and confession through the form of letters has finally led him to a complete understanding of Calvin's teachings. He is able to accept his shortcomings and how they come to affect others. He is also able to acknowledge that the newfound relationship he has with his godson is one he would have gone through the whole of his life again just to come to the point where he was able to bless him and make up for the christening he performed on him as a baby (241-2). His journey demonstrates to the reader the turmoil it takes to undertake change and the joy that such a journey can benefit to the traveler should they choose to undertake the task.

In the essay entitled "Marguerite de Navarre," Robinson proclaims on the concluding page of the piece, "Most of us know that religion was once very important to our national life, and believe, whether we ourselves are religious or not, that we were much the better for its influence" (206). She states this in relation to Calvin, explaining that Calvinism was once a very important tradition amongst the people. Throughout the novel *Gilead*, Robinson has demonstrated how the teachings of Calvin helped an old man to change his ways, having his letters perform the journey of self-discovery that has led him to a more complete and balanced existence consistent with other religious individuals who adhere to the true traditional values of religion in general and not the less meaningful lessons that have since developed in its place. There should be an inherent sense of compassion and pity, grace and understanding in people. However, these lessons have been neglected, leaving people to become suspicious of each other and to employ judgment when the situation would call for forgiveness.

CHAPTER VI

THE ESSENCE OF FORGIVENESS IN GLORY

After examining symbols and point of view, another aspect of the novel that can be examined are the characters. The characters in Robinson's third novel, *Home*, are the aspect that with a thorough analysis reveals the views seen in *The Death of Adam*. Specifically, by analyzing the characters, the Reverend Robert Boughton is seen to be a foil to his daughter Glory. This ultimately highlights her graciousness and ability to forgive that demonstrates Robinson's beliefs mentioned in her nonfiction. In an article by Nicole M. Coonradt, she cites that the definition of a literary foil "is literally 'a "leaf" of bright metal placed under a jewel to increase its brilliance'" (169). Glory is the character whose brilliance is highlighted by the shortcomings of her father.

By using a literary foil, Robinson is able to draw attention to the traits that Glory gains over the course of the novel that people should emulate in their own lives. The audience is able to see that a man of faith may not always follow the lessons that he preaches. Their position of authority over a parish as their spiritual leader does not ultimately mean that they are a figure to model one's life after. Every human is fallible and Robinson shows that through the former Reverend Robert Boughton's inability to forgive or understand his recently returned son. Instead, Robinson shows that even a woman returned home after a failed career and engagement has the ability to expand her understanding of family and grace in ways that should be admired

and incorporated into every existence, traits that she spoke highly of in her *Death of Adam* collection.

As a means of framing the analysis of the literary foil employed in the novel, it is necessary to examine the ability to forgive or show compassion, a quality that is of great importance in the novel *Home*. The theme is central to each character during the entire course of events seen concerning the Boughton family. The story of grace begins with the arrival of Jack Boughton, a character previously seen in the novel *Gilead*. Glory Boughton had already returned home to care for the family's ailing patriarch, their Reverend father. Jack's return brings back painful memories, forcing the residents of the Boughton home to confront their religious faith and demonstrate the qualities that they cultivated over a lifetime together.

Robinson discusses the idea of God's grace in the essay entitled, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," an essay dedicated to a German Lutheran pastor known for his courage in resisting the Nazi movement and establishing the Confessing Church for the "pastors and seminarians who left the official churches rather than accept their accommodation with Nazism" (108). Robinson explores various sources of Bonhoeffer's writings and his theology which focused on the idea of grace. She indicates that

> The will of God is not a system of rules which is established from the outset; it is something new and different in each situation in life, and for this reason a person must ever anew examine what the will of God may be. The heart, the understanding observation, and experience must all collaborate in this task. It is no longer a matter of a person's knowledge of good and evil, but solely the living will of God; our knowledge of God's will is not something over which we

> ourselves dispose, but it depends solely upon the grace of God, and this grace is and requires to be new every morning. (116)

Every day require a new outlook to understand God's will. The idea is that holding to the belief that faith, charity and grace, the teachings of God, are the same on a day to day basis is incorrect because they are ever changing. People need to be open to the every growing grace of God. The rules are not set in stone. What a person knows of the world is not the only basis of faith. One person cannot judge the ways of another because God's will is unique to each and every one of us. His grace requires for people to be open, not cut off or judgmental. These issues become a driving force in the action of *Home* concerning the well being of the character Jack Boughton.

The issue of grace comes up in Glory's reminisces. She says**,** "There is a saying that to understand is to forgive, but that is an error, so Papa used to say. You must forgive in order to understand. Until you forgive, you defend yourself against the possibility of understanding . . . If you forgive, he would say, you may indeed still not understand, but you will be ready to understand, and that is the posture of grace" (45). This is the driving force of the novel. The conflict is the need to learn how to forgive and understand the wayward ways of Jack Boughton, the prodigal son who has returned after a 20-year absence. Glory remembers her father's teachings because she took the idea of faith to be the one constant aspect of her life. Faced with the return of a brother she barely knew before he disappeared, she brings her teachings back into the forefront of her mind, willing to attempt to put them to good use in her interactions with her brother.

As their relationship begins to grow, Jack brings up the concept of the soul, an issue that has been worrying him for some time. Robinson discusses this in her essay, "Marguerite de Navarre Part II," stating that "the Christian soul is perfect in the sense that its imperfections are

made good by God's faithfulness and grace – and perfect in no other sense" (217). Robinson reveals that her study of de Navarre's poem shows the soul in a state of dualism, "straying and restored," "offending and forgiven," at the same time. With Jack's concern for his soul, the writings seen in *The Death of Adam* show that Robinson means for the audience to understand that Jack, unworthy as he seems, is still worthy in the eyes of God, for God sees the imperfections and finds them perfect.

The concerns of the soul can be seen explicitly stated in relation to the concept of home in the novel.

> That odd capacity for destitution, as if by nature we ought to have so much more than nature gives us. As if we are shockingly unclothed when we lack the complacencies of ordinary life. In destitution, even of feeling or purpose, a human being is more hauntingly human and vulnerable to kindnesses because there is the sense that things should be otherwise, and then the thought of what is wanting and what alleviation would be, and how the soul could be put at ease, restored. At home. But the soul finds its own home if it ever has a home at all. (282)

Jack's soul has been trying to find home for the whole of his life. Glory, having learned to understand the character of her brother, understands his concerns about his soul and the journey he is on to find some kind of peace within himself and with others. As the analysis turns to focusing on the Reverend and Glory, the central issues of grace and the well being of the soul are seen again and again as both father and sister demonstrate their capacity to forgive.

In order to highlight the qualities to admire in Glory the analysis must begin with Robert Boughton. In her essay on Bonhoeffer, Robinson affirms, "The heresies he [Dietrich Bonhoeffer] and Barth denounced now flourish independently of even the culture and forms of

Christianity, beyond any criticism they might have implied. And we have not learned the heroic art of forgiveness, which may have been the one thing needful" (111). The one thing needful in the character of Robert Boughton is forgiveness. He acts as if he could forgive, he knows the concept and has even preached on it. When it comes down to the act itself of forgiveness, Boughton is unable to put his words to action. There is a scene at the kitchen table when Boughton asks his son to say grace (132). Jack has issues with his father's religion and faith, so the idea of saying grace makes him uncomfortable, leading him to try to refuse. Boughton insists on Jack saying grace after which Jack gives a perfunctory grace recitation, one that has been heard before. Boughton responds with, "That will do, I suppose. . . . Perfectly all right. And the Lord is forgiving. So we can start our breakfast now." This shows that Boughton is judgmental of the shortcomings of his son which actually inspired Jack's refusal to say grace in the first place. His insistence seems as if he is ordering his son to do something he does not want to do. Then his reaction makes it seem like he is ungrateful for the obedience because the grace was not up to his standard. The comment about the Lord being forgiving highlights the fact that Boughton was not forgiving of his son in this instance, despite how he tries to talk around the situation.

At one point in the novel, Boughton talks to Glory about Jack's relationship to his namesake, John Ames who is Boughton's lifetime friend (203). Jack wants to mend the relationship he has with his godfather so he has begun to spend more time at the Ames house, hoping to be of some service to the old man and his family. When Glory mentions this to Boughton, Boughton responds that he had always hoped that Ames would take an interest in his son. He claims, "when you give a man a namesake, you do expect a certain amount of help" (203). This shows more of Boughton's true character coming through. He admits to expecting

his friend to help in the raising of his son because of the act of naming Jack after him. This shows that the sentiment behind the namesake was not for honoring John Ames. Boughton performed this act, an act we know from reading *Gilead* was a surprise for Ames, because he wanted something in exchange.

An interesting fact to take note of here is that Ames has named his own son Robert, after his friend as Boughton himself had done with Jack. Boughton's old age keeps him confined to his home and retired from his church. He does not in any way help with the raising of Robby. In this conversation with Glory, Boughton does not lament over the fact that he is unable to help the Ames family after receiving his own namesake. The conversation could be looked at differently had he mentioned this kind of guilt. However, the fact that he did not only draws attention to the fact that he does feel some kind of slight for the fact that his friend did not take an interest in his son. A slight that makes him look prideful, not forgiving.

When Boughton learns that his friend, John Ames, gave a sermon at church that forced Jack to leave in shame, he takes great offense at the injury. Ames avoids the Boughton home for several days believing that the family is upset with him. The passage confesses that Boughton had suffered a shock, realizing that the relationship between his son and his friend was more tumultuous than he had ever taken notice of before. He had thought things would come together the way he wanted with his son attending church of his own free will and his friend being able to preach the good word to him. Boughton had wanted to do that for years himself but his old age and retirement had put an end to that sentiment. So the task was given to Ames, so to speak. "Who better than Jack's second father, his father's second self, to say the words of welcome and comfort he could not say? It would never have occurred to him that Ames would not speak to the boy as if from his own heart" (212).

Glory watches her father stewing about this insult and the chasm that has opened between him and Ames for the time being and she knows what it is that he is thinking. Boughton still acts as if the people around him are in the wrong. He judges his friend Ames for this act but the scene is key mainly for how it ends up turned around by the end of the novel. Both Ames and Glory comes to different levels of understanding with Jack before he takes leave from Gilead again. It is Boughton who is ultimately unable to forgive his son for needing to leave. He does not understand his son's feelings and as Boughton had previously preached to his children, until he forgives his son he will continue to not understand.

As the novel goes on there are more scenes where Boughton demonstrates his inability to forgive and understand. When he asks Jack and his son Teddy, home for a visit to see Jack, to promise to help each other and accept the other's help he breaks down because Jack does not make the promise at first. Boughton starts weeping over this, tossing aside Teddy's reassurances that a promise isn't needed as an excuse. He turns his back on his son after Jack tries to make amends by making the promise himself. His failure to understand the feelings behind Jack's reluctance makes him blind to his son's actual pain. He feels the refusal as a personal injury and then moves on. The scene makes it seem as if Robert Boughton is a very difficult man to please despite the fact that he may think otherwise. He talks about the infinite feelings of love that he has for his son, but it seems as if he loved the idea of his son and not the son he actually has.

The novel's theme of forgiveness escalates when Jack has decided that what he needs to find for himself is not in Gilead, leaving him with no other choice but to leave. Boughton's true nature becomes further revealed as he speaks more in the manner of intentionally hurting his son rather than forgiving him. He tells Jack that he asked the Lord, "why do I have to care so much? It seemed like a curse and an affliction to me. To love my own son. How could that be? I have

wondered about it many times" (273). To think this about your own son suggests failures in the character of Robert Boughton, not Jack. Boughton has tried to control Jack since infancy but he never truly spared the time to show the boy true compassion. He left his son to flounder on his own and that has left Jack as a wanderer looking for a home.

After Glory tells Boughton to be kinder to Jack, explaining that it's been difficult for Jack coming home, Boughton snaps. He says,

> Kinder to him! I thanked God for him every day of his life, no matter how much grief, how much sorrow—and at the end of it all there is only more grief, more sorrow, and his life will go on that way, no help for it now. You see something beautiful in a child, and you almost live for it, you feel as though you would die for it, but it isn't yours to keep or protect. And if the child becomes a man who has no respect for himself, it's just destroyed till you can hardly remember what it was—. (294-5)

Boughton is indignant at being judged for the feelings he has for his son. He's offended that his son was unable to accept his affection rather than being concerned about the reasoning behind Jack's loneliness and isolation. Glory was the one who was needed to try to curb her father's anger, but Boughton was unable to see how his actions only served in making things worse between him and Jack. He is unable to forgive his son for constantly leaving because he sees it as a fault in himself, which he finds insulting. To Boughton, there is no other reason to see. Because of this, he has contributed to the factors that drive his son away again, this time probably for good.

The true instances of forgiveness and understanding are seen in the character of Glory. The more her father makes his true sentiments obvious, the clearer the image becomes of Glory

being the true example to follow in grace from this novel. In her essay entitled "Family," Robinson says,

> Imagine that someone failed and disgraced came back to his family, and they grieved with him, and took his sadness upon themselves, and sat down together to ponder the deep mysteries of human life. This is more human and beautiful, I propose, even if it yields no dulling of pain, no patching if injuries. Perhaps it is the calling of some families to console, because intractable grief is visited upon them. And perhaps measures of the success of families that exclude this work from consideration, or even see it as failure, are very foolish and misleading. (90)

Glory inhabits this opinion of Robinson's thoroughly by the end of the novel concerning her new relationship with her brother Jack. She grieves over his losses, both the ones he trusts to tell her and the ones she perceives on her own. She suffers for him, praying to help him in any way possible with anything and everything. She sits with him and "ponders" over their childhood together and they have discussions about his soul. She knows that their short amount of time together could not have erased the effects of his life, healing all his injuries and pains, but she feels that in some way she and Jack have shared something privileged together that none of their other siblings can claim to have done. She will stay in Gilead, keeping their childhood home exactly the same, because she told him if he needed her she would be there, easy for him to find. Glory demonstrates the true success of being a family to Jack and her example is one to be admired and emulated.

Glory's childhood memories of her brother show the deep admiration she has had for him for a long time. Early on in the novel she speaks of a time when she had the mumps and she was miserable at home believing that all her siblings were at school. Jack comes out of his room and

pays his little sister a dime to stop crying, a nickel to stop hiccupping and a nickel not to tell who gave her the money. When she recounts this memory to her brother he jokes that the money was meant to buy time and patience between them in present time. She responds that it garnered him some loyalty as well (123). This scene is heartening to the audience because it demonstrates that the affinity for family is possible between them. It may have been the connection that Jack needed in his youth but the age difference between them and the remaining family members left Jack and Glory unable to bond as siblings should until they are reunited in Gilead nearly 20 years after Jack left the family for good the first time. The fact that she brings up this memory verifies that she has always cared for her brother in keeping this memory so close to herself and using it to form her opinion of him.

Continuing in her essay on Bonhoeffer, Robinson says that

> Falseness and error and even extremest viciousness are, for him, utterly within the reach of God's compassion, which is infinite. In Bonhoeffer's understanding, the otherness of God is precisely this boundless compassion. The failure of the church and the evil of the world are revealed in their perfect difference from this force of forgiveness, which they cannot weary or diminish or evade. (110)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that God could forgive every sin. God's compassion is infinite in the sense that no human can do something to offend him and not receive forgiveness afterwards. This infinite compassion is seen in Glory as she slowly learns the quirks of her wandering brother and begins to forgive him for the pains she remembers from the past and attempts to buffer the effects that their father has on him.

Glory takes on the discouraging task of trying to establish Jack's good character to people who suspect things otherwise from him. When the Reverends Ames and Boughton think Jack

has been stealing money and hiding it in the piano bench after Robby finds some money there, Glory becomes furious at the fact that they would believe that and that they are ignoring her explanation for it. She takes a Bible from another room and swears that she was the person to place the money in the bench and professes, "if I'm lying, may God strike me dead" (190). She goes above and beyond what she can to show that her brother is not the terrible character they remember from his youth. She does not want anyone believing anything else from and takes the time and energy to extend grace to him when the people who should, two Reverends, are unable to do so.

Not all things run smoothly between Jack and Glory, of course. They are both human and able to make mistakes. There are times when Glory believes she has offended her brother and there are times when Jack apologizes for the eccentricities that leave him isolated from her attempts at taking care of him. Near the end of the novel, when Jack tries to hurt himself with the car in the barn, Glory is hurt enough to feel angry at the harm he could have caused himself but that's the extent of the matter. She thinks about, "How resigned to Jack's inaccessible strangeness she must be to forgive him something so grave, forgive him entirely and almost immediately. They all did that, and he had understood why they did, and he laughed, and it had frightened him. She thought, I will not forgive him for an hour or two" (249). She takes the time to clean him up and get him back home, already forgiving him for his actions although she wishes that somehow she could hold on to her anger for a while longer. She tries to save his clothes from the damage he wrought upon them and she digs through his possessions to rid him of the alcohol that is so detrimental to his well-being. She knows she is not making any progress on rescuing her brother but she understands that this is who Jack is and the fact that he lets her get so close to begin with is payment enough for her to want to take all his sadness unto herself

and ease all his sorrows however she can. This demonstrates the idea of infinite grace in Glory because she loves her brother enough to forgive him for almost hurting her and their family. She forgives him as family should be able to do effortlessly. She loves Jack's soul just the way it is and tells him so during the course of the novel, explaining that she would not change anything about it (287).

When Jack makes the decision to leave again Glory does not resent him for it as their father so blatantly does. She tries her best to help him decide to stay and when he still decides to go she decides that she will keep the house in Gilead in the hopes that she can be there again for him one when he needs her again. When they eat dinner one night, she watches her brother feed their father and thinks, "These last few days his gentleness had been especially striking to her, and why should it be? She had always known he could be gentle. She would tell the others in case they had forgotten, so that they would all hope someday to know him as well as she did. Then if he ever came to any of them he would be deeply and immediately welcome, however disreputable he might seem or be" (311). She looks at her brother and sees all the good in him despite what his appearance might suggest. She loves everything that she sees in him and while she grieves for him, she knows that he won't stay if he thinks he should leave. She does not hold that against him, demonstrating once again her infinite compassion for her brother. The fact that she wishes to inform the rest of their family of this is not meant to brag about her newfound closeness with her brother but to showcase the inherent gentleness that they should know in order to understand their brother as a human being. She means to help him in any way she can and if she can ensure that her siblings will welcome him, she feels that it is her duty to do so for Jack. Boughton has revealed to be completely at odds with his son despite his years in service to

the Lord. Glory demonstrates that having an open heart and mind are enough to grow into infinite grace towards others, as she does for her brother.

Glory demonstrates her infinite grace once again in the final scenes of the novel when she envisions the future she sees for herself in Gilead. She hopes for the day that Jack's son, named Robert after their father, will return to Gilead, curious about his father's childhood and how she will be there waiting for him. She thinks,

> He will be curious about the place, though his curiosity will not override his good manner. He will talk to me a little while, too shy to tell me why he has come, and then he will thank me and leave, walking backward a few steps, thinking, Yes, the barn is still there, yes, the lilacs, even the pot of petunias. This was my father's house. And I will think, He is young. He cannot know that my whole life has come down to this moment. That he has answered his father's prayers. (324-5)

She acknowledges that her whole life will come down to the moment when Jack's son will need her to be in Gilead when he returns and resolves that this is a task that she will fulfill, for both her brother and his son. She will devote her life to waiting for the day that they will need her, content that this is her calling. Jack has affected his sister in such a profound way that she will do this for him even though he has no idea that his wife and child came to Gilead after his departure. She will do this for him for the sake of his soul, knowing that it was something that he hoped so desperately for while he was in Gilead. It is enough for her to wait, getting nothing in return except the knowledge that she has done all she can for them. The infinite compassion that she can extend towards these people cements the fact that Glory's infinite grace is to be admired.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Housekeeping

The merging of the definitions that the main character names are based on in the novel *Housekeeping* expresses the critiques that Marilynne Robinson has about the modern world. The merging shows the growth that could happen with proper motivation and a concern for nature or wilderness. Humanity has been cornered and it is content to stay there rather than venture out into new discoveries, discoveries that could lead to a better sense of the world and a new beneficial way of existence. Robinson shows that the need for more is missing in people. By having Ruthie choose an existence of her own that merges with the ideals of her aunt, Robinson demonstrates a need for individuals to reevaluate their ideals and truly take into consideration what they value in the world. By analyzing the novel according to the names of the characters, the readers can see Robinson's sentiments about various issues, not just those on the Calvin religion or domestic space. The tagline for the film based on Robinson's novel is, "The story of a woman slightly distracted by the possibilities of life." This sentiment mirrors Robinson's view exactly, demonstrating that it is the possibilities that add meaning to life as the world knows it and that the lack of possibilities means the lack of meaning, growth, compassion and happiness in our future.

Gilead

The use of letters is the most unique characteristic of the novel *Gilead*. *Housekeeping* is in the first person and *Home* is in the third, making this choice of narrative distinct in Robinson's world of fiction. Ames is able to reflect on his life and notice the very aspects that leave him unable to interact as he should in the world. His letters act as a confessional in which he purges every sinful thought he has ever had about his godson, leaving him feeling like a new man when he is able to look at Jack and see the beautiful soul that others overlook so readily on a daily basis. These confessions help Ames to grow as a human being, demonstrating to the audience that everyone has the ability to grow and evolve if they take the opportunity to be honest to themselves. Honesty opens the door to new beginnings, leading Ames to fully embrace the teaching of Calvin, the same teachings that Robinson believes so deeply in and employ them in his life. Robinson shows through Ames that despite the worst, people should accept others with love and not judgment because the image of God can be seen in everyone, giving them the chance to feel love for themselves and for others as Ames is ultimately able to do before the end of his life.

Home

Glory is the true example of God's infinite compassion, the grace necessary to forgive her brother for every transgression he has ever made. Robinson uses Glory and Boughton to demonstrate that there is a wrong way to use the teachings of God and there is a right way to embrace his views. Those who preach the words but do not take them to heart are left feeling bitter and distrustful because they are unable to forgive or to understand. Glory shows the reader that a person can relate to her in her struggle to do something with her life and demonstrates that

one can extend compassion to others in a way that helps everyone, including their own self. Glory's infinite grace is admirable in the face of her own inner turmoil and the suffering of her both her father and her brother. Glory's example shows Robinson's beliefs in extending forgiveness and understanding to family, a need she believes is lacking in today's world. The gift of grace is something to strive for and Glory shows that even the most sinful individual can have the capacity to show grace and receive it.

WORKS CITED

Alter, Robert. *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Print.

Antonova, Clemena. "'The world will be saved by beauty': The Revival of Romantic Theories of the Symbol in Pavel Florenskii's Works." *Slavonica* 14.1 (2008): 44-56. Print.

Burke, William. "Border Crossings in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 37:4 (1991): 716-24. Print.

Caver, Christine. "Nothing Left to Lose: *Housekeeping*'s Strange Freedoms." *American Literature* 68.1 (1996): 111-37. Print.

Coonradt, Nicole M. "To Be Loved: Amy Denver and Human Need—Bridges to Understanding in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *College Literature* 32.4 (2005): 168-187. Print.

Fay, Sarah. "Marilynne Robinson: The Art of Fiction No. 198." *Paris Review* 186 (2008): 37-66. Print.

Foley, Susan. "'Your Letter Is Divine, Irresistible, Infernally Seductive': Léon Gambetta, Léonie Léon, and Nineteenth-Century Epistolary Culture." *French Historical Studies* 30.2 (2007): 237-267. Print.

Galehouse, Maggie. "Their Own Private Idaho: Transience in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping.*" *Contemporary Literature* 41.1 (2000): 117-37. Print.

Gardner, Thomas. *A Door Ajar: Contemporary Writers and Emily Dickinson.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Geyh, Paula E. “Burning Down the House? Domestic Space and Feminine Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping.*” *Contemporary Literature* 34.1 (1993): 103-22. Print.

Holberg, Jennifer L. "‘The Courage to See It’: Toward an Understanding of Glory." *Christianity & Literature* 59.2 (2010): 283-300. Print.

Hoezee, Scott. “A World of Beautiful Souls: An Interview with Marilynne Robinson.” Perspectives Journal, May 2005. Web. 2010.

Leah, Gordon. “A Person Can Change: Grace, Forgiveness, and Sonship in Marilynne Robinson’s Novel *Gilead.*” *Evangelical Quarterly* (2008): 53-58. Print.

Leise, Christopher. "‘That Little Incandescence’: Reading the Fragmentary and John Calvin in Marilynne Robinson's ‘*Gilead’*." *Studies in the Novel* 41.3 (2009): 348-367. Print.

Ludwig, Kathryn. "Postsecularism and a Prophetic Sensibility." *Christianity & Literature* 58.2 (2009): 226-233. Print.

Mallon, Anne-Marie. “Sojourning Women: Homelessness and Transcendence in *Housekeeping.*” *Critique* (1989): 95-105. Print.

McDermott, Sinead. “ Future-Perfect: Gender, Nostalgia, and The Not Yet Presented in Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping.*” *Journal of Gender Studies* 13.3 (2004): 259-70. Print.

Painter, Rebecca M.. “Loyalty Meets Prodigality: The Reality of Grace in Marilynne Robinson's Fiction.” *Christianity and Literature* 59.2 (2010): 321-40. Print.

Painter, Rebecca M.. “SPECIAL FEATURE Further Thoughts on A Prodigal Son Who Cannot Come Home, on Loneliness and Grace: An Interview with Marilynne Robinson.” *Christianity and Literature* 58.3 (2009): 485-92. Print.

Petit, Susan. "Finding Flannery O'Connor's 'Good Man' in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and *Home*." *Christianity & Literature* 59.2 (2010): 301-318. Print.

Pichaske, David. "Where Now 'Midwestern Literature'?." *Midwest Quarterly* (2006) 100-119. Print.

Ravits, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *American Literature* 61.4 (1989): 644-66. Print.

Robinson, Marilynne. *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*. New York: Mariner, 1998. Print.

---. *Gilead*. New York: Picador, 2004. Print.

---. *Home*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008. Print.

---. *Housekeeping*. New York: Picador, 1980. Print.

Schaub, Thomas and Marilynne Robinson. "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson." *Contemporary Literature* 35.2 (1994), pp. 231-251. Print.

Shortridge, James R. "The Emergence of 'Middle West' as an American Regional Label." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74.2 (1984): 209-220. Print.

Shy, Todd. "Religion and Marilynne Robinson." *Salmagundi* 155 (2007): 251-64. Print.

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

Tanner, Laura E. "Looking Back from the Grave: Sensory Perception and the Anticipation of Absence in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*." *Contemporary Literature* (2007): 227-52. Print.

Weele, Michael Vander. "Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* and the Difficult Gift of Human Exchange." *Christianity & Literature* 59.2 (2010): 217-239. Print.

Zapedowska, Magdalena. "Wrestling with Silence: Emily Dickinson's Calvinist God." *ATQ* 20.1 (2006): 379-398. Print.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristina Yvette Zavala was born on September 24, 1985 in McAllen, Texas. She entered the University of Texas-Pan American in 2004 and received her Bachelor of Arts in English in 2008 and her Master of Arts in English in 2011. She is currently enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing program at UTPA.

Permanent Address: 18129 Kayla Ln

Harlingen, TX 78552