



NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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Outward Bound

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Issue 3.2

<1> The startling conclusion of Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel, *The Pickup*, leaves its heroine Julie, a prosperous young white woman and citizen of a highly westernized African city, in an unnamed Arab land, the home of her new husband Abdu. But Julie feels neither abandoned nor stranded, neither unhappy nor oppressed by *hijab*, the injunction for women to veil themselves, or by other Islamic laws and customs governing women's lives. In fact, she has chosen to remain behind after her husband decides to seek his fortune in America—a decision Julie scorns as dangerous self-delusion—and to become absorbed in the community of women constituted by Abdu's female relations. This late-twentieth century daughter of extreme privilege, with funds and freedom to travel anywhere in the world, voyages out and lights in an unexpected place. She leaves behind a homeland where women like herself—white, rich, educated—have almost unlimited liberty, to make a new home for herself in a culture that confines women almost exclusively to a domestic role and, by Western standards, a constrained life. But for Julie, the inadequate and merely nominal home she has left is a place of empty values and bondage to capitalist and individualist aspirations, and the new one offers a feeling of belonging, psychic peace, and the ability to dream. Exile in this alien land promises her, in other words, the experience of true Home.

<2> Gordimer's somewhat perverse ending, which challenges us to reconsider the meaning of freedom as we have come to define it in the west, overturns the paradigms of Home and Abroad, Domesticity and Travel, Constraint and Freedom that we have been accustomed to in women's writing of the last few centuries and takes us back—if we are inclined to think back—to the way these themes figure importantly in what we would call the female literary tradition. We might think back first to a passage in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in which Mrs. Ramsay, after an exhausting day of tending to children and houseguests and meals and plans to visit the lighthouse, settles down to rest, sitting by herself, knitting, relishing the moment in which she "need not think about anybody":

To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk with a sense of solemnity to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. ...it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures..... Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it (62).

For the profoundly domestic Mrs. Ramsay, one of the last great literary avatars of Victorian womanhood, travel, adventure, and limitless horizons are pleasures out-of-reach, save in the imagination. The circumscribed life, even of the comfortable, well-off woman on the eve of the First World War, renders travel an almost illicit mental pleasure, something undertaken when the family is asleep and chores are finished (although the knitting never stops...). And even then, Mrs. Ramsay does not imagine herself venturing into Rome or onto the Indian plains in the form of her physical self—in her own body—but rather in the *invisible* form of a "wedge-shaped core of darkness." To see and yet be unseen is the utmost she can conjure. What Mrs. Ramsay can literally only imagine, the heroine of Gordimer's *Pick-up* manages at the drop of a hat; and the regimen of domesticity that restricts Mrs. Ramsay to this armchair adventure is the very regimen that Gordimer's Julie appears to choose as her lot. For Woolf's protagonist, as for the 19th-century heroines who came before her, home and travel are antitheses; for Julie, the latter—the freedom to venture forth—leads her to the former, to a place where she can discover home, a

place of both origins and destination, a place to settle and to find repose.

<3> Mrs. Ramsay led me to think back even further, to the 19th-century women novelists and to my overwhelming and enduring sense of their narratives not as *domestic* fictions but as stories that are resolutely *outward bound*. These narratives share impulses that are passionately anti-domestic and peripatetic, restless and wandering, antipathetic to the trappings of the domestic sphere and of family life. Their heroines crave adventure and escape, and they long for “home” in its most metaphorical sense—a place (and not necessarily a literal one) where they belong, a person with whom they feel themselves, and, most interestingly for our purposes, an existential destination that lacks or even rejects attributes of the domestic. Another way of saying this is to suggest that no major 19th century woman novelist could have created a heroine like Mrs. Ramsay or Mrs. Dalloway, women defined and circumscribed by their ties to the private sphere, even for the purposes of dissecting or exorcising the type. Cooking *boeuf en daube*, throwing a party—these were not the stuff of women’s narratives from Jane Austen through at least George Eliot: these were the invisible, unrepresented, undesired realities of married, domestic life, while the tramp to Netherfield, a trip to Lyme Regis, the escape from Thornfield, a train ride to Liverpool from Manchester, and a voyage across the Chanel to Labassecour were the representable expressions—fantasies, perhaps—of a powerful, generative, and indelible anti-domestic and outward-bound impulse.

<4> As I argue for the primacy of anti-domestic impulses in 19th-century women’s fiction, I realize I may be preaching to the converted; and yet there are important and undeniable mythological, literary, and critical traditions that habitually associate woman with the sphere of home, man with the enterprise of travel and adventure, that perennially imagine woman as Penelope and man as Ulysses, and that understand the woman who ventures forth as both dangerous and endangered. And there is also good reason to believe that the 19th-century woman writer has been successfully cast as the author, indeed the inventor, of what has come to be called, without adequate reflection, “domestic fiction.” It isn’t my object here to launch a critique of certain trends in literary criticism that have side-lined or undermined feminist critical perspectives, but I will mention briefly a few sources—some old and some new—for the persistence and elaboration of the idea that women writers are house-bound in a literal and, more importantly, figurative way, that they are occupied with the emotions and doings of the private sphere and, beyond that, with the imposition of essentially conservative values that inhere in their domestic role and perceived domestic power.

Part I The Myth-makers: House-Bound

<5> Long ago—in 1957—Ian Watt declared that “feminine sensibility” made women like Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, and George Eliot more skilled at revealing the “intricacies of personal relationships” in fiction than men: the reasons for women’s advantage in this arena is hard to explain, Watt continues, but “one of the main ones is probably that suggested by John Stuart Mill’s statement that ‘all the education that women receive from society inculcates in them the feeling that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty’” (298). (It is ironic that he should use Mill as evidence for his claims, given that Mill’s intention was to lament this state of affairs and argue for women’s involvement in the public sphere.) He goes on to say that the “dominance of women readers” exacerbated this tendency in women’s writing to the point where “feminine sensibility” had a detrimental effect on the novel as a whole: this dominance, according to Watt is

connected with the *characteristic weakness and unreality* to which the form is liable —its tendency to *restrict the field* on which its psychological and intellectual discriminations operate to a small and arbitrary selection of human situations, a restriction which...has affected all but a very few English novels with a *certain narrowing of the framework of experience and permitted attitude* (299).

“Weakness,” “restriction,” “unreality,” “narrowing” of both experience and sanctioned attitudes: shades of Grundyism, petty subject matter, and the dangers of limited horizons, Watt seems to suggest, haunt women’s writing and threaten the very genre they love to write and read.

<6> Exactly thirty years later, after the inauguration in the 20th century of feminist literary criticism, Nancy Armstrong, writing against Watt in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, nonetheless echoes some of his suggestions about the woman writer, albeit in a Foucauldian key. Armstrong, using the terms “domestic fiction” and “the domestic woman” rather casually, argues that women

have had more power within capitalist individualism than “we” (meaning we women, we feminists) have cared to acknowledge, that this power comes from our position as shapers and enforcers of bourgeois domestic life, and that the novel itself is implicated in the consolidation of women’s authority in the household, gender relations, constructions of sexual desire, and the formation of middle-class hegemony. The domestic realm, over which the domestic woman presides, emerges as the “only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world,” as a *depoliticized* sphere that, through its representation in fiction, sucks all of the political meaning out of the way the middle class imagines the world. The “modern individual,” Armstrong asserts, was first and foremost a woman; and a certain notion of the “household as a specifically feminine space *established the preconditions for a modern institutional culture*” (251).

<7> The most powerful, lasting, and irresistible source for understanding the 19th-century woman writer as a domestic novelist, however, is Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf’s indispensable text, which inaugurated the enterprise of feminist literary criticism in the 1920s, uses a number of fictions and fictional figures—Mary Seton, Judith Shakespeare, Mary Carmichael—in order to make the argument that women had historically been denied the material and psychological conditions necessary to becoming a writer. Another of Woolf’s fictions, I would suggest, is the 19th-century woman writer herself: schooled narrowly in the ways and emotions of the middle-class sitting room, confined to the domestic sphere, sheltered from and ignorant of “the world,” denied the freedom to travel, and, as a consequence of all this, wedded to the novel as a form of writing that could be undertaken in the common sitting room and could use to advantage women’s “training in the observation of character” and “the analysis of emotion.” (Is this, one wonders, where Ian Watt got his more condescending but very similar formulation in *The Rise of the Novel*?). We know the passages almost by heart: Jane Austen never got to ride in an omnibus through London or lunch by herself in a shop, “experience and intercourse and travel” were not granted Charlotte Brontë and so her books would be “deformed and twisted,” her genius never expressed “whole and entire,” and the extraordinary works *Villette*, *Emma*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Middlemarch* were “written by women without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman” (66-8, 70).

<8> At this last point the mind boggles just a bit, and Woolf, to her credit, anticipates this: yes, she adds, George Eliot did live in sin with a married man, but she lived in seclusion, “‘cut off from what is called the world’ [Eliot’s own phrase].” When we consider that Charlotte Brontë, an unmarried woman from Yorkshire, twice lived abroad in Brussels (albeit for short periods) and traveled numerous times to London, especially after the deaths of her sisters, and that Eliot journeyed to the Continent almost yearly between 1854, when she began living with George Henry Lewes, and 1880, when she died, and had a more cosmopolitan frame of reference—both intellectually and socially—than any other major Victorian novelist, we know that Woolf is up to something. What that something is, as I’ve already said, is indulging in fiction-making, expressly (I would add) for the purpose of defining her predecessors as a phenomenon against which to define herself and her own modernist work. For *A Room of One’s Own* is, among other things, a manifesto for new kinds of women’s writing—in which Chloe likes Olivia, in which the writer has forgotten that she is a woman and so writes without grievance or consciousness of her sex. Woolf seeks both to reconstruct a tradition and to mark that tradition as limited and constraining, as any woman thinking back through her mother(s) might reasonably do. For her, to create the 19th-century woman writer as a sheltered and house-bound creature is to strike out for new territory as an artist.

<9> One final author of this domestic image of the 19th-century woman writer needs to be mentioned, and that is the 19th-century woman writer herself. Woolf quotes Eliot asking not to have any visitors at the Priory unless she invited them herself, as if to suggest that she saw few people and preferred to see even fewer. In her “Notice” to new editions of *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights* in 1850, Charlotte Brontë insisted that her sisters Anne and Emily were reclusive, retiring, refined, and, by extension, chaste, implicitly ignorant of the sensational experiences about which they wrote: adultery, physical cruelty, emotional brutality, and alcoholism. Elizabeth Gaskell, as we know, followed suit in this project of biographical bowdlerization when she published her posthumous life of Charlotte: no passion for her Belgian “master,” M. Heger, is mentioned. Just as the Victorian woman novelist relied on pseudonymous publication to protect her privacy and the fact of her sex, so too did she continue to block and sanitize the public’s knowledge of her real life after her works were in circulation. Both the Brontë sisters and George Eliot had to negotiate the desired separation between private self and public author when they ventured into the public sphere, so that attending parties at the London homes of Thackeray or the Brontës’ publisher, George Smith, proved troubling and awkward; and

homes of Hackberry of the Bromes' paragon, George Smith, proved daunting and awkward, and frequenting Continental salons may have been preferable to appearing in English drawing rooms.

The detestation of publicity, about which Woolf wrote so perceptively in *A Room of One's Own*, prompted the Victorian woman novelist to participate in the creation of her own myth as a profoundly and inescapably domestic figure.

II The Novelists: Setting Sail

<10> I turn now to a few of the major texts of the period that exemplify, in ways both predictable and not, the impulse to reject, even revile, the domestic sphere and venture forth into uncharted waters. In the 1970s, during the first explosion of late-20th century feminist literary criticism, Ellen Moers proposed that the Gothic novel became a "feminine substitute for the picaresque," the form in which heroines could have adventures, go on journeys, and conquer adversity, in short, a form that allowed them to be travelers without leaving the proper and ultimately safe space of indoors. Mrs. Radcliffe's idea of "female selfhood," Moers writes, was the "traveling woman: the woman who moves, who acts, who copes with vicissitudes and adventure" (126).

Radcliffe's association with Italy inspired fictional women who longed to or did travel—Rose Yorke in Brontë's *Shirley*, Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh—and Mme de Stael's *Corinne* added further weight to the idea of this Mediterranean country as a favored destination of the traveling female mind.

<11> In Moers' view, the Gothic narrative becomes a pretext for travel and adventure, and I think the same could be said of the 19th-century courtship plot. In Austen and Charlotte Brontë, the search for a mate or soul-mate involves a departure, sometimes an escape, from some incommodious, uncongenial home and the discovery of Home (with a capital H), a site, though not necessarily a dwelling, of true belonging. This terminus of Home is not always a literal place or abode and, even when it is, it is virtually never imagined as a domestic space. In addition, the dominance of the courtship plot saves the novelist from ever having to imagine the heroine as implicated in the kind of domestic nightmare from which she originally fled. Although the narrative inertia of Austen's *Emma*—Emma Woodhouse really goes nowhere and will never have to leave her father's house when she marries—might make it a glaring exception to my generalization, it is interesting to note that Emma will never, even after the moment of closure, have to become the wifely head of a household, the model of domestic virtue, or the manager of her own home.

<12> The heroines I want to focus on here are the restless ones, the peripatetics, who seem at times to be propelled forward and outward by irrational and barely understood impulses: Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Eyre, and especially Anne Elliot and Lucy Snowe. As a coda to my discussion of their anti-domestic narratives, I will touch briefly on George Eliot's restless heroines, whose fates depart from the model of her two predecessors and suggest something, I think, about the new demands of realism in the second half of the 19th century.

<13> The first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, associated most famously with its opening sentence, closes with an indictment of marriage, or at least of the most important marriage we are witness to in the novel—Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's. If the chapter begins with a sly, ironic announcement that this will be a narrative about courtship, it ends with a subtle warning about what courtship can lead to: badly matched spouses and a lack of understanding between husband and wife that cannot be overcome by twenty-three years of marriage. But even more dire consequences are to follow: as a result of Mrs. Bennet's witless obsession with marrying off her daughters and unchecked identification with the most wayward and foolish of them and of Mr. Bennet's passivity and uncensored contempt for his wife, Lydia Bennet comes dangerously close to becoming a ruined woman. After Lydia runs off with Wickham and the novel is plunged into a dark subplot—a story of fallen sexuality that might destroy Lydia and, by association, all of her sisters—Elizabeth understands the full force of her parents' misalliance: "Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of *conjugal felicity or domestic comfort*. Her father captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humor...had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished forever; and all his views of *domestic happiness* were overthrown" (228). "Conjugal felicity," "domestic comfort," "domestic happiness"—Elizabeth's image of all of these has indeed been warped by the example of her family; and the anti-domestic thrust of Austen's narrative begins with and is propelled by the Bennet's mismatch and the home it has built.

<14> Elizabeth's realization about the regrettable consequences of her parents' marriage intensifies over the course of the narrative and ultimately conforms to the nasty and humiliating things that Darcy thinks about her family. But even before she knows the worst, Elizabeth's sense of the Bennets' marriage produces in her an antipathy to domestic life that fuels her restlessness and keeps her in almost constant motion, striving, as much as possible, to be away from home. At the drop of a hat she is off to tend to an ailing Jane by walking—or tromping—three miles to Netherfield, “crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity” and exercising, in Bingley's sisters' view, “an abominable sort of conceited independence.” She visits Charlotte Lucas' new “establishment” in Hunsford, where the advantage of being absent from her own home will make even a stay with Mr. Collins bearable, at least for a while. She stops at her aunt and uncle Gardiners' in London and then travels with them to Derbyshire, where she sees Pemberley for the first time and where the news of Lydia and Wickham's elopement aborts a greatly anticipated journey to the Lake District.

<15> The suspicion the novel casts on the realm of home is fed not only by the disarray, emotional and otherwise, of the Bennet marriage but also by the sense, indeed the fact, that the home, or at least the house, is a male possession and preserve. Each country estate in the novel, with one exception, is identified with a man. Although Rosings is clearly the domain of Lady Catherine, Netherfield is Bingley's, although he does not own it; Pemberley is Darcy's—indeed Pemberley *is* Darcy; the Parsonage at Hunsford is Mr. Collins'; and Longbourne, the Bennets' home, is...also Mr. Collins'. “[Mr. Collins] was interrupted by a summons to dinner; [we read] and the girls smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Mr. Collins's admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything would have touched Mrs. Bennet's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property” (64). The law of entail, which dictates that Longbourne be inherited not by any of the Bennet daughters but by their male relative, Collins, plays an important role in the narrative, as we know, not least in helping to make absolutely clear that the home, like the women who inhabit it, is the property of men. Elizabeth is both a restless inhabitant of Longbourne and a temporary one, a transient. Homes, as Pemberley makes clear more than any other residence, are extensions and expressions of the male self. When Lady Catherine says that Darcy and her daughter are destined for each other “by the voice of every member of their respective *houses*,” she makes use of the aristocratic understanding that a house stands as a metonym for pedigree, the lineage of wealth, property, and position that descends through the male line.

<16> There is one residence in *Pride and Prejudice* that stands outside of the patriarchal model, whether aristocratic or gentry, and that is the Gardiners' house in Cheapside, a district of London associated with trade. From his home in this odd- and vulgar-sounding quarter of the capital, Mr. Gardiner can see his own warehouses—a fact that earns him the opprobrium of people like the Bingley sisters, who are anxious about their own status. It would be stretching things a bit to say that the Gardiners' home is the site of an egalitarian marriage, and yet, their intimacy, like-mindedness, lack of pretension, and shared good judgment make them the perfect guides for Elizabeth in her quest for a real Home, that is, a place of belonging. The house in Cheapside reflects this: here, their children strike the right balance between ebullience and reticence; here, the urban dwelling opens out into an easy exchange with the public sphere. Elizabeth, Jane, and their aunt spend the mornings in “bustle and shopping,” the evenings at “one of the theatres” (150).

<17> Appropriately, then, the Gardiners accompany Elizabeth when she first visits Pemberley. Together the three are equipped to “read” the house, to take its measure as the perfect blend of nature and human art, to understand the tasteful furnishings of the house as an expression of its owner's discernment in weightier things, and most important, to gauge the contentment of those in his domestic employ as signs of Darcy's charity and good mastership. In the end, the house Darcy has built becomes a magnet not just for Elizabeth but for her aunt and uncle, her father, her sister Kitty, and Jane and Bingley, who vacate Netherfield and move to Derbyshire after a year of marriage to get away from Mrs. Bennet. Mr. Darcy, all perceive, is a superb home-maker and ideal parent to his sister. He had, after all, saved her from the very fate Mr. Bennet did not manage to avoid for Lydia. The true spirit of home in *Pride and Prejudice* is a man.

<18> If Elizabeth Bennet is a refugee from Longbourne, Anne Elliot, the heroine of *Persuasion*, is an exile from her natal home, the family seat Kellynch-hall. Both are peripatetic—Anne

travels to her sister Mary's home at Uppercross, to Captain Harville's home in Lyme Regis, to Uppercross a second time, and then to Bath where her father and sister Elizabeth have taken up residence. And just as Mr. Bennet had never economized for the sake of his daughters because he assumed he would someday have a son to inherit Longbourne, Sir Walter Elliot, as the novel opens, is forced to vacate Kellynch-hall because he has been profligate and is now "distressed for money." Although Mr. Bennet chooses not to leave Longbourne in the course of the novel until Elizabeth marries, his attachment to home pales in comparison to Sir Walter's narcissistic regard for his estate and vain preoccupation with the lineage that estate embodies. His entry in the Baronetcy, which he pores over compulsively as the narrative opens, is "*Elliot of Kellynch-hall*," as if to underscore that the man's identity is inseparable from his dwelling. The portrait of Sir Walter is scathing, and, unlike Mr. Bennet, who dotes on Elizabeth, he dismisses and depreciates Anne as a "nobody," a person unworthy of any regard or attention. As the father of daughters, however, his estate will be inherited by a male relation, Mr. William Elliot, just as Mr. Bennet's will go to Mr. Collins. Exiled from the home she loves in spite of her callous father and oldest sister, Anne Elliot will wander in search of congenial surroundings and sympathetic companions throughout the novel. Unlike the plucky Elizabeth Bennet, however, Anne feels herself barely entitled to happiness or a place of belonging—life has passed her by, she is a mere appendage to her relations, an all-but-invisible faded spinster—but even more significantly unlike Elizabeth, she will end in a non-place, a "true Home" alongside Captain Wentworth but with an indefinite location, as likely to be on board a ship, or many ships, as anywhere else.

<19> In *Persuasion*, the critique of landed domesticity that appears in mild form in *Pride and Prejudice*, becomes a full-scale assault. Here, in her last completed novel, with its autumnal tones, Austen appears to be taking leave—of a permanent abode, of commodious country life, perhaps of life itself—without any apparent regret. The heroine's pilgrimage toward an unmoored and unrepresentable dwelling place works in tandem with the novel's embrace of new social structures, newly ascendant sources of wealth and influence, and a society that values "worth" over birth, character over lineage. As resentful sister Mary reassures herself, when Anne marries Wentworth, she "had no Uppercross-hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family" (219). Though Mary tries to find comfort in this thought because she feels outdone by Anne's marriage to a wealthy man, for Anne herself, this lack of station, house, and property comes as a true mark of liberation. The signs that this will be the case, that to be landless (quite literally) will mean true happiness, accrue throughout the narrative. Kellynch-hall, to Sir Walter's considerable chagrin, is rented not only to a naval man, made rich through the Napoleonic Wars, but to his wife, the sister of the very man of "obscure birth" Sir Walter and his friends and relations had deemed unworthy of marrying Anne years before. And this brother, Captain Wentworth, has, through "merit and activity," reached as high in his profession as was possible and now has a substantial fortune of 25,000 pounds.

<20> These new tenants of Kellynch-hall are understood by Anne, however, to be worthier occupants of the estate than her own kin: "however sorry and ashamed for the necessity of the removal, she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners" (113). These "better hands," Admiral and Mrs. Croft, present Anne with an example of conjugal happiness and loving companionship. Mrs. Croft stands before her as the model of womanhood she might have emulated had she married Wentworth long ago. Her face reddened and weathered by many years at sea with her husband, she has been an intrepid traveler all over the globe and made five different ships her home. For her, domestic comfort is achieved in being with her husband, discomfort and inconvenience suffered when she is forced to separate from him. As is the case with the Gardiners in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Crofts' exemplary union is inseparable from the unconventionality of their habitual dwelling.

<21> Other unconventional households in the novel serve to loosen Anne's attachment to the ideal of home that had been her mother's. The rooms in Bath of her loyal and ever-hopeful friend, Mrs. Smith are humble and out-of-the-way. Lady Russell cannot even get her carriage close to the narrow way into the Westgate buildings where this loyal girlhood friend of Anne's lives in reduced circumstances near the hot baths. Captain Harville's home in Lyme Regis, where Anne goes with a congenial party of her sisters-in-law and Wentworth, has tiny rooms, inadequate furnishings, the dingy air of a seaside dwelling, and it is let rather than owned by its resident. Still, to Anne it is "*the picture of repose and domestic happiness*," a reminder, like Mrs. Croft's world travels, of what her life might have been like had she married Wentworth—even the *poor* Wentworth, the man of no consequence. Lyme, with its Cobb extending [as if suspended], out into the water, exists as a kind of half-way house between land and sea, a location closer to both

Anne's lost life and ultimate fate than Kellynch-hall. The sea air, acting as a promise of things to come, revives Anne's youthfulness and brings color to her cheeks: it makes her beautiful again and, if she is lucky, it will eventually redden and age her face to resemble Mrs. Croft's.

<22> *Persuasion* envisions a world that is determined not by repetition and replication, as Sir Walter's beloved *Baronetcy* suggests and Lady Russell anticipates, but by contingency, accident, change, and the forces of history. It imagines a world in which women are not pale, smooth-skinned, and passive but are, instead, intrepid and adventurous, in which women cross the Atlantic over and over again and do not cleave to home in its landed, stationary, or inherited form. Home, for Mrs. Croft and now for Anne Elliot, is not simply where the heart is—though it is clearly that. More a space of possibility, perhaps, than anything real or realized, this new incarnation of home begins to take shape at the moment when these women set sail.

<23> Some of Charlotte Brontë's anti-domestic and outward-bound impulses extend and deepen features we have seen in Austen: restless heroines, first and foremost, with a penchant for venturing out alone and wandering in search of true home. *Jane Eyre* follows the paradigm of *Pilgrim's Progress*, tracing the peripatetic heroine's journey from Gateshead Hall to Lowood School to Thornfield to Marsh End and then, finally, to Ferndean. And, as in the Austen novels I have discussed, the grand estate in *Jane Eyre*, the place, the structure Jane believes might become her true home, is distinctly the property of, indeed almost the physical extension of, a man. As we know from the letters Brontë wrote to George Henry Lewes expressing her views on Austen, however, the two novelists also differed dramatically (though not, I think, as much as Brontë believed). Unlike Pemberley, Thornfield, with its madwoman incarcerated in the attic, atmosphere of a "Bluebeard's castle," and oriental boudoir fit for the sultan Rochester almost becomes, must finally be razed. Its destruction follows from two potent anti-domestic forces that Brontë introduces into the fabric of her narrative: the proto-feminist articulation of a desire for economic independence and equality with men and the potentially disruptive powers of sexual longing and fulfillment. As many readers from Richard Chase to Nancy Armstrong have noted, sexual desire is chastened and socialized in *Jane Eyre*; and the removal of Rochester and Jane to the more homely environs of Ferndean is part of this process. Ferndean houses not only a legally

sanctioned and tamed—though still urgent and vivid—sexual bond, however, but also a union of ostensible equals. Brontë's insistent rhetoric of slavery and servitude throughout the novel and the dialectic of two of her favorite terms—*independent* and *dependent*—work themselves out, somewhat uneasily, in the equilibrium of the home finally imagined at the novel's end. Homelessness and rebellion, which determine Jane's condition for much of the narrative, threaten nonetheless to override the domestic and domesticating pressures of the novel's denouement and have lingering effect in Rochester's diminished circumstances and in Jane's implicit power, the result of both economic and physical dominance.

<24> The formative Continental experiences of Brontë's life found their way into her fiction, from the settings of *The Professor* and *Villette* to the French language spoken in the midst of Yorkshire in *Shirley*. The alienating and anti-domestic effects of such intrusions and locations are felt most powerfully, of course, in Brontë's last novel. In *Penelope Voyages*, Karen Lawrence's book on women travelers in the British literary tradition, the author writes that the first hundred pages or so of *Villette* "offer the domestic as a kind of annihilating setting, as the narrative increasingly robs Lucy Snowe of her ability to signify, to mark her place. ... *Villette* stages [she continues] the necessity of a voyage out of the domestic realm, as if the centripetal impulse of the genre threatened to collapse the narrative, causing it to cave in on itself as around a black hole" (26-7). Increasingly, Lawrence argues, Lucy comes to "mark her place" as a writer and traveler, leaving behind the spaces of domestic fiction that fill the novel's first chapters. I want to extend this reading of the novel by noticing how the recurrence of the uncanny, a feature of this semi- or pseudo-gothic text that has been much remarked upon, continually undermines any idea of permanence in the novel and by suggesting that *Villette* offers us a wholly new idea of home.

<25> Brontë begins to recast the relationship between home and abroad, domestic and foreign, from the first disorienting pages of her novel. The reader puzzles momentarily over whether "Bretton," the "clean and ancient town" where the narrator's widowed godmother lives, is an English one, as she does over who the heroine of this novel will turn out to be. Are we in England or Ireland or Brittany or Belgium? Is the nameless speaker our protagonist, or is she just a passive narrator and the girl Polly Home to be our heroine? Why are the godmother's surname and the name of the town the same? (The first paragraph is devoted to telling us that the narrator

and the name of the town the same: (The first paragraph is devoted to telling us that the narrator does not know.) At the very least, the female characters' names we do know at the outset (Louisa Bretton and Polly Home) encourage us to ponder the close connection between place—or home—and the identity of women. But we are also alerted to the possibility that the surname Polly carries can have an ironic twist: her mother, Mrs. Home—“(Home it seems was the name),” the narrator tells us, repeating the word parenthetically—was a “giddy careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband” (2). This mother having died, Polly is left to her father, to whom she is deeply attached, and, temporarily at least, in the company of Mrs. Bretton, her petted son, Graham, and the goddaughter, the narrator we come to know in the second chapter as Lucy Snowe. Lucy, whose status as daughter, sister, or even grandchild remains opaque, observes as an outsider the drama of these two parent-and-child dyads. What we do know about her is that she is closed out of these oedipal couples, whose very intimacy seems to define the fact and the idea of home.

<26> In the pattern that Karen Lawrence observes, Lucy loses the series of transitory homes she journeys through at the beginning of the narrative, as if *Jane Eyre's* entire pilgrimage were compressed into just a few opening chapters. At the beginning of chapter 5 we encounter the complicated, not to say confusing, extended metaphor (or is it wholly a metaphor?) of shipwreck that appears to evoke Lucy's final separation from any family she may have had. Lucy challenges

the reader (in a tone that will recur most importantly in the final pages of the novel) to picture her during the eight years between Bretton and shipwreck as a “bark slumbering through halcyon weather.” The wreck of this bark sends Lucy on to Miss Marchmont's and, in less than a chapter's length, Miss Marchmont's death sends her to London. There she begins to enjoy an expansive sense of life and adventure until, abruptly and without adequate explanation, she decides to take a steamer to Labassecour. Not for Lucy the conventional climb up Mont Blanc that Polly dreams she will one day take with Graham, this journey is both a “voyage out”—the ship she takes is called the “Vivid”—and a gesture of utter self-estrangement, even self-obliteration, a crossing, as she imagines it, of the River Styx to the Land of Shades. “I had nothing to lose,” she informs us, “If I died far away from—home, I was going to say, but I had no home—from England, then, who would weep?” (44).

<27> Homeless, Lucy Snowe makes her way to Villette and to the school in the rue Fossette ruled by surveillance and the corrupt hand of Mme. Beck. An outsider again, this time by nationality, religion, and language, Lucy takes masochistic refuge in her alienated and dissociated state of being. At least, that is, until she breaks down completely, confesses to a Catholic priest in near delirium, and collapses. At this moment, of course, the uncanny enters Lucy's narrative to dizzying effect. In a chapter ironically titled “Auld Lang Syne,” Lucy awakens in a place unknown but disorientingly familiar (this is the very definition of uncanny or *unheimlich* or unhomely). Surrounded by objects “of past days, and of a distant country” that may, on the other hand, be “ghosts of such articles” (“phantoms of chairs, and...wraiths of looking-glasses, tea-urns and teacups”), haunted by Bretton and her fourteenth year, she knows not where she is or what year she may have time-traveled back to: “Where was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord? ...Am I in England? Am I in Bretton?” (162, 165). The disorientation felt by the reader on the very first page of the novel here returns (in another instance of the uncanny) in the consciousness of our narrator. The objects she fixes on—including her godmother's pillow with the initials “LLB” formed in gold beads—are the markers of homely, respectable bourgeois clutter, and they comfort Lucy even as they disturb her. The crowning object she spies is the portrait of Dr. John that hangs on his mother's wall—confirmation, finally, for the reader that Lucy has been haunted throughout her stay in Labassecour by the reappearance of Graham Bretton.

<28> What is the promise of this return for Lucy Snowe? What does it signify? It may finally provide her with the home and homecoming that had always eluded her; and it will certainly deepen and may even satisfy the longing she has felt for Dr. John by bringing them together outside of the context of the rue Fossette. But these possibilities prove to be illusory. Lucy recognizes this even at the beginning of her stay with Mrs. Bretton and expresses the inevitable distance between herself and her godmother through the by-now familiar figure of the sea-going vessel: the elder woman is “the stately ship cruising safe on smooth seas, with its full complement of crew,” while the younger is a mere “life-boat, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, ...when danger and death divide between them the rule of the deep” (176-7). “No,” Lucy concludes, “the *Louisa Bretton* never was out of harbour on such a night, and in such a scene” (177). Lucy's lot is to be that storm-tossed raft, as we already know from the beginning

of chapter 4 and will be reminded again at the novel's end. Her godmother's is to voyage out only in the safest of circumstances, bolstered by a capable crew, when she isn't securely cosseted in the shelter of home.

<29> Graham's fate is to make of Lucy not a lover but first a go-between in his courtship of another woman, Ginevra Fanshawe, and, finally, a companion to his true love, Polly Home, who also makes an unexpected reappearance in Labassecour just as the renewed friendship between Graham and Lucy gathers force. The oedipal dyads of Lucy's youth reconstitute themselves in Labassecour, and the sibling, child bond of Polly and Graham is remade as a marriage bond.

Closed out of the circle again, Lucy contemplates the plenitude of Polly's gifts, symbolized by the interwoven plaits of hair, one from lover and one from father, she places in a locket around her neck. Lucy's phantasmagoric outing into the nighttime streets of Vilette culminates in a vision of the Homes and Bretttons celebrating the union of their families, with Polly "compassed by the triple halo of her beauty, her youth, and her happiness" (449).

<30> Displaced again by Polly, that feminine avatar of the patriarchal idea of Home, Lucy eschews the existence of a "bright lady's shadow" and tells Polly that she intends to "share no man's nor woman's life in this world, as you understand sharing" (421). Finally, neither able to find repose in bourgeois comfort nor assured of ever having a "true home," Lucy begins to envision another kind of place of her own, and her vision is quite specific: a home as schoolroom, a "tenement with one large room and three smaller ones, . . . with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an *estrade* [platform] for myself, upon it a chair and table, with a sponge and some white chalks" (357). When, later in the narrative, M. Paul Emanuel brings Lucy to the Faubourg Clotilde to show her the school and "neat abode" he has acquired for her, it appears as another instance of the uncanny, for Lucy has imagined it before (if not quite as delicately ornamented as M. Paul has lovingly made it): here are the benches and desks, here the teacher's *estrade* with table and chair, there behind them the tableau. A new model of home takes shape in Lucy's imagination and is realized in the Faubourg Clotilde: a place where work and home merge, where home is all but stripped of its domestic associations, where a family or even a romantic partnership is not essential and may indeed be superfluous, where a woman can live and thrive alone. That Lucy does so is borne out by sentences she uses at the close of her narrative: "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, *they were the three happiest years of my life*" (488).

<31> But the "paradox" Lucy invites us to detect in these sentences alerts us to the fact that the idyll might come to an end. Her "wonderfully changed life [and] relieved heart" have sustained her to the point of the novel's conclusion, which abruptly suspends time and action. "My *school* flourishes, my *house* is ready," she tells us, staying with the present tense as she underscores the inseparability of home and work in this new life she leads. Lucy leaves the reader, again challenged to picture happiness if she so chooses, to imagine a future for Lucy Snowe beyond the ending. But the reader's inclination to "picture union and a happy succeeding life" is blocked by mention of the "south-west storm" in the Atlantic that may or may not have stopped M. Paul in his journey home from Guadaloupe. Even had Lucy not told us that she knew the "signs of the sky; . . . noted . . . ever since childhood," we would recognize the uncanny return of a deadly image. By the novel's end we have learned to read these repetitions, this return of the repressed, the cyclical pattern of Lucy's life, and we have also learned the meaning of threatened, metaphorical, or real shipwrecks. Home as the place of companionship and warm familial relations will elude Lucy permanently; the unhomey rhythm of loss will continue to determine the shape of her life; and home will inhere only in the sphere of work and authorship.

<32> Brontë's open-ended but resolutely anti-comic and anti-domestic conclusion brings her final novel closer to a modern key, and it also reflects the reality of some women's lives, including her own, in a way that the resolutions of *The Professor*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Shirley* do not begin to do. But realism was not her formal mode or her aspiration, as it was so clearly George Eliot's. I want to mention very briefly, here at the conclusion of my paper, the twist that the anti-domestic strains of Victorian women's writing take in Eliot's hands. Put simply, Eliot sends her heroines out, bound for travel, or elopement, or preaching, or a life devoted to social reform and, one by one, she brings them home again. Dinah gives up the preacher's life, now outlawed for women by the Methodists, to stay home as Adam Bede's wife. Seth Bede, her erstwhile suitor, laments this sacrifice and claims they could have joined a denomination that, unlike the Wesleyans, would put no "bonds on Christian liberty" (538). But Adam condones the change and remarks that even Dinah now realizes that most women preachers did "more harm nor good." Dorothea Brooke's frustrations, her youthful inability to separate marriage from education and her more mature resignation to the life of a reform politician's wife, are the stuff of many a young reader's dismay,

not to say depression. Not satisfied with condemning Dorothea to a “hidden life,” Eliot’s narrator buries her finally in an “unvisited tomb.” Maggie Tulliver, in an aqueous tradition that links her to Anne Elliot and Lucy Snowe, ventures forth on the water, sailing out on a tide of sexual, anti-domestic desire only to be brought back, conscience stricken, to St. Ogg’s. Her disgrace dictates that she will be a “lonely wanderer,” unmarried and homeless. But before she can leave again in search of a life elsewhere, St. Ogg’s claims her in the flood, the waters closing over her head rather than carrying her to adventure or love or a new life. Our last glimpse of Maggie is, like our last of Dorothea, a tomb.

<33> Are the fates of these Eliot heroines a matter of realism or punishment? Does Eliot share Virginia Woolf’s impulse to represent the life of the unexceptional Victorian woman, always stymied by social convention and enmired or enshrined in the domestic realm? Or is she determined to block the route of any heroine who starts to get away, repeatedly coloring her narratives with what Ellen Moers called a “specially female melancholy and weariness”? In partial answer to these questions I would point to the eponymous male protagonist of Eliot’s last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, who sets sail at the novel’s end in search of a Jewish homeland in the Levant. More like Anne Elliot and Lucy Snowe than any of Eliot’s heroines—most especially Daniel’s own lover manqué, Gwendolen Harleth—Deronda voyages out to a distant and hypothetical nation to find a true home, in its deepest and widest sense. Deronda’s imagined home is continents and oceans away, like the adopted homeland of Nadine Gordimer’s heroine Julie, with whom I began this talk. Eliot simply could not imagine any of her heroines setting off on an enterprise like Deronda’s (and when she does so, in the case of Fedalma at the end of *The Spanish Gypsy*, the heroine departs in a state of mourning and defeat). If we think, for the moment however, of Deronda as a stand-in for the Eliot heroine, we see vividly the difference between Eliot’s Victorian aspirations for home and Gordimer’s tentative 21st-century fantasy: the Victorian hero-heroine voyages out to freedom, citizenship, and a sense of mission, while Gordimer’s Julie, having seen all that, voyages back toward domesticity and constraint.

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