The House of Fiction as the House of Life

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Edited by

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TO GIUSEPPE AND PIERO, WITH LOVE

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INTRODUCTION: THE PAPER HOUSES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

FRANCESCA SAGGINI
AND ANNA ENRICHETTA SOCCIO

> The house is old, the trees are bare,
> Moonless above bends twilight's dome,
> But what on earth is half so dear—
> So longed for—as the hearth of home?
> (Emily Brontë, "A Little While, A Little While", 1834)

I. Over the last few decades most of the vast literature concerning the representations of houses in literature has explored the concept of inhabited space from several points of view, involving related fields of enquiry such as architecture, social sciences, gender studies, economic history, geography, anthropology, in both diachronic and synchronic perspectives.[1]

Starting from the French social theorist Gaston Bachelard, whose seminal study, *La poétique de l'espace*, was essentially a phenomenological enquiry into the significance of the house and its variations in connection with folk memory,[2] and from Martin Heidegger, whose vision of the German farmhouse is rendered through a lyrical description in "Building Dwelling Thinking",[3] a number of studies have investigated issues and themes related to the house and home imagery, examining its domestic dimension and the mental structures it evokes, as well as its potential to articulate spatially a writer's poetics and, more at large, the contemporaneous view of the world which he represents.

In more recent years, the interest for the house has grown irresistibly, to the point that in many ways houses seem to be situated at the very core of the creative, artistic and cultural domains of contemporaneity. Their presence sprawls across the media, from magazines to TV programmes, and across the globe, possibly because as repositories of the human, houses have a long-standing and profound connection not only with

human beings but, at a deeper level, with the ways of representing—imagining, ostending, articulating—man's world, across its declinations of gender, class, and race. As Bill Bryson has recently put it, when writing the house we write "a history of the world".[4] It will not come as a surprise then if a basic browse in the website of Barnes & Nobles, arguably the world's largest bookstore, retrieves 472,644 hits as result of a simple, one word search: "house".[5] Houses—the perennial, ubiquitous and silent background to our daily lives—could many "a tale unfold", to paraphrase *Hamlet* (I.v): the tales of their inhabitants and/in their relationships with the others, of the times they lived in, of their configurations of the world as well as the visions (and nightmares) of the artists who created them.

Quite significantly, in English there are two terms, "house" and "home", which, in spite of their different uses in context, both refer to the *physical* structure providing shelter and other primary needs for human beings and are inevitably linked to domesticity and the domestic universe. However, the term "home," related more to privacy, intimacy and retreat, symbolizes its inhabitants and their values, whereas "house" refers primarily to the building customarily used for habitation. In considering such a space, one cannot avoid confrontation with crucial themes often re-elaborated in literature and culture, representing the house/home as the metaphor for either inner, psychological space, or the entire universe, on the one hand, and the ordering and spatial representation of an artist's *Weltanschauung* on the other. "For our house", says Bachelard, "is our corner of the world".[6] If we wish to bring this view one step further, we may suggest that the term *world* in fact refers to both our actual habitation and the epistemic dimension in which this habitation is located. In other words, the house/home stands for both the extension of the self—and as such it is a living body, a physical edifice possessing and revealing the soul of its inhabitants—and the entire world, being a *cultural* microcosm that reduplicates the world's structures and laws. As Italian critic Mario Praz expressed it in his fascinating account of his own artistic and domestic habitats, an artist's imagination shapes the house as neither a simple space nor a place, but rather as an authentic "house of life".[7] To paraphrase Dante Gabriel Rossetti's opening line from the homonymous sonnet sequence *The House of Life* (1870-81), probably the source of Praz's own inspired title, a literary house is a moment's *monument*, both a memorial and a sign(al) of an epoch and of an artist.[8]

Not only does the house/home topic encompass a wide range of other related ideas and topics, it also involves a set of binary categories, e.g. public vs. private; male vs. female; adult vs. child; master/mistress vs. servant; rich vs. poor; powerful vs. powerless; sane vs. insane; animal vs.

human; moral vs. immoral, etc. In so doing, it poses questions about the complex dynamics of interaction and transformation within the family and society. In spatial and cultural terms, traditional assumptions consider the house in relation to domesticity, femininity, family, and intimacy. Home as the space physically and emotionally separated from the environments of work and professional life was a concept that slowly developed in England and in other Northern countries during the XVII century. With the development of a proto-capitalist society, "home" became ever more associated with the idea of an environment for women, especially of middle-class background, upon which female refinement and taste on the one hand and female virtue and modesty on the other could put their stamp. Society underwent a process of transformation which lastingly associated the domestic and the female, with all too predictable stifling consequences for women, confined to the sickly "hot-*house*" of femininity.[9]

However, in the proto-capitalist universe of the late Georgian reign, the house as a wish-fulfilling signal of status and belonging could also be imag(in)ed as the space of self-fashioning, market mobility and social possibilities, as summarised by Elizabeth Bennet's half-regretful and half-mischievous musings upon visiting Darcy's seat, grand Pemberley: ""'And of this place", thought she, "I might have been mistress!'"" (ch. 43 *Pride and Prejudice* [1813]).[10]

However, the house as the materialization of an achieved (or at least pursued) social goal might rapidly deteriorate into a domestic jail since status and security in fact abided the rigid male-headed gender and familial hierarchy reinforced in the household. If we elaborate on the significance of the biblical Joshua's last words, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (XXIV:15), and envision them as a hidden template for domestic relations within the modern-age household, the sets of binary oppositions mentioned above take on distinct sexed and class connotations, implying the portrayal of the house as solely marital or paternal.

The spatialization of male authority within the domestic realm is well represented by the fraught negotiations for a domestic space of their own—or more correctly for the re-instating and dismantling of the imaginary and physical boundaries shaping the *inside* of the house—in which most eighteenth-century heroines embark at some stage of their novelistic lives.[11] Samuel Richardson's Clarissa's desire for a retreat to which she can escape (antiphrastically satisfied by a coffin, her final house and the last stage of her homeward journey) strikes as dolefully germane with the vain quest of Frances Burney's orphaned Cecilia for a house she may eventually call home (*Cecilia*, 1779). Three guardians are not enough

to offer one woman a secure shelter, Burney suggests, while the end-of-the-century house takes on the more sinister nuances typical of a prison, be it displaced and re-imagined in the visionary outlandishness of the Gothic or portrayed in hyper-realistic terms as in Mary Wollstonecraft's highly politicised critique of domesticity and the domestic apparatus (*Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, 1798). The house as *asylum* (in the sense of sanctuary and refuge) is unmasked to reveal itself to be a place of violation of the vulnerable, the site of a *mimicry* of domesticity, as well as its structures and strictures, as exemplarily expressed by Fagin's Dore-esque den in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-39).[12]

In Victorian times the relations between domesticity, femininity, and family—including the limitations inherent in this discursive nexus—were further embraced by the theory of the "two separate spheres" for which John Ruskin gave a powerful description in his 1864 lecture "Of Queens' Gardens". By claiming that a woman's place is *inside* and a man's place is *outside* the home, Ruskin summarizes the spirit of the age that considered "home" as a "sacred place".[13]

However, if the nineteenth-century cult(re) of the home reveals itself to be highly gendered in so far as it is usually associated with women and the feminine, the Victorian house in both its external appearance and internal organisation consolidates its important status symbol of male power, a reflection of the *pater familias*'s social and economic standing and his hierarchical positioning. The outside structure of the house, its size and style (Classical, Gothic, Italianate), its type (detached, semi-detached, terraced, etc…) and location (town, village) suggest the position that its male master has achieved in the world. On the other hand, the interior of the house, its arrangement and furnishings, general fittings and decoration, and even single objects inside it, belong to the female universe as they mirror its mistress's origins, upbringing and tastes. Moreover, the Victorian house is the concrete expression of the owner's religious adherence to family values, and as such, its structure is built and its spaces arranged in order to satisfy the needs of the family, servants included, as well as to respond to the expectations of a fast-growing modern society.

II. From these introductory discursive considerations it appears that the study of houses/homes in literature invites an increasingly interdisciplinary approach, while reconciling the requirements of a historical-cultural-anthropological-sociological examination with a textual and narratological analysis within the context of a general re-evaluation of the novel as the genre which more than any other has dominated the English literary scene. This volume of critical essays originates from an international Seminar

bearing a nigh exact title, *The House of Fiction as the House of Life. Representations of the House in Literature and Culture from Defoe to Woolf*, held in Aarhus in 2008 within the biannual European Society for the Study of English conference. The volume contains the expanded proceedings of that Seminar, incorporating more recent papers by other well-known scholars. The main aim of the project is to investigate and reconsider the forms and modes through which the figure of the house was represented in English literature from the middle of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century into the early Modernist period. The time frame bookended by two canonical authors (Samuel Richardson/Virginia Woolf) was chosen because it marks the evolution of this genre from its origins as the eighteenth-century middle-class novel, through its blossoming in the Victorian era, up to its radical transformation in the avant-garde experiments of the early twentieth-century.

Throughout the volume, the contributors' focus remains closely on the house, its functions, forms and significance for/in the authors and the texts examined. In these essays, however, the house is not construed simply as a space for containing and organizing narrations, or as a semantic structure conveying paradigmatic models and archetypes. The architectural locations of literature in fact move from backdrop to centre stage while the house is approached as a literary function as well as a character, a signifying element with a poetics and a voice of its own. As a tool of cultural investigation, the study of literary houses may shed light on individual authors, their work, and the historical periods in which they lived. From a strict chronological point of view, over the course of the centuries and certainly until the twentieth, the concept of the house, so inextricably linked to the rise and development of the middle class and so deeply rooted in its patrimony of values, has undergone only minor changes; however, it still offers us a privileged observatory for epistemic transformation. Paraphrasing Henri Lefebvre, we are dealing with a "logical-epistemological space" that includes a *physical*, *mental*, and *social* aspect,[14] which together make up a code for describing, analysing, and revaluating history.

Thus we present here in these essays not only a vantage point from which we may view the house in the world, but more especially, from which we may view the world from the house. In this sense, the house becomes a dynamic narrative element, which, like a fictional character is endowed with proairetic capacity and thus acts upon the events. The house becomes an animated being whose space not only contains—it actually *houses*—the plot but guides and conditions it.

At once container and content of the narrative structure, the house has a special affinity with the novel in which its representation finds fullest formulation.[15] Henry James's famous poetic image, "The House of Fiction" provides a perfect metaphor for the relation between domestic space and literary space.[16] Decoding a literary house means delving down into a vast reservoir of knowledge tapping into many disciplines, all of which hearken back to an ideal vision of the house as a symbol of national and social identity and of the physical and psychic intimacy of the individuals dwelling within it.

III. Chronologically arranged by era of publication of the work under analysis, the papers in this volume comprise a highly cohesive whole even though they employ diverse methodological approaches and depart from very different points of view. The first section deals with eighteenth-century authors and texts, from Henry Fielding (Susan Purdie) to Samuel Richardson and Frances Burney (Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz and Karen Lipsedge); from Elizabeth Montagu (Mascha Hansen) to Ann Radcliffe (Jennie MacDonald); from Jane Austen (Mirella Billi) to William Godwin (Lidia De Michelis). In most of these essays, the house is portrayed as a place of perfection whose function as shelter/refuge and dispenser of happiness is continually undermined by disturbing elements, those very elements which will clearly emerge in the Gothic novel as it develops at the end of the century. Moreover, domestic space begins to be viewed in relationship to the character inhabiting and transforming it, following the radical changes taking place over the next century in the social, cultural, and economic structure.

The second part of this volume focuses on the Victorian period and the multiple directions pursued by the discourses of the house in an age that, with reason, has been often described as mythopoeia of home and the home-y. The works of Charlotte Brontë (Laura Tommaso), Charles Dickens (Patricia Michael, Doina Cmeciu), Edward Bulwer Lytton, Henrietta Jenkin, Giovanni Ruffini (Allan Christensen), Elizabeth Gaskell (Ilse Bussing), George Meredith (Anna Enrichetta Soccio), Wilkie Collins (Maurizio Ascari), Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle (Alessandra Calanchi), Algernon Charles Swinburne, Aubrey Beardsley (Matteo Fabbris), Walter Pater (Zdeněk Beran), and R. L. Stevenson (Ilaria Sborgi), to end with the elegy of the "Great Good Place" envisioned in the following century by Virginia Woolf (Janet Larson), all trace the profound epistemic transformations wrought by the Victorian era's revolutionary discoveries and groundbreaking scientific theories, by industrialisation and the arising of modern technologies, heralded by the Great Exhibition of

London in 1851. The social scene was dominated by a new ruling class who, while championing a whole new perspective on the relationship of individuals to society, also continued to cling to the privileges of the landed aristocracy, so that a constant friction was created between the present and the legacy of the past. As Francesco Marroni aptly writes:

> […] at the very moment in which they discovered their economic supremacy the Victorians realized that they were alone with their dilemmas, that they lacked stable points of reference and were at the mercy of events they could no longer control. In many ways, society was changing at such a great speed that it was impossible for them to exercise a control on reality. Added to this was the fact that Victorian society was too far conservative to keep up with the changes that were taking place.[17]

The house manifested the Victorians' wealth and power, and reproduced in scale the hierarchies and interpersonal dynamics existing at the highest levels.

In this phase of social and cultural history, the house becomes a place of strident contradictions, and of that "disharmony" which celebrates the progress of English civilization even as it bears witness to the monstrous advancing of machines, the deterioration of the urban poor, and the painful loss of past certainties now become terrible doubts.[18] The Victorian house, shrine of the family and thus of social perfection, becomes an illusory symbol of harmony shaped by the values transmitted by the Royal Family and its glorious past. As the *locus* of honour, both familial and societal—as suggested by the name Honoria, the heroine of Coventry Patmore's famous poem *The Angel in the House*, who meekly and faithfully presides over one of the most artful, and enduring, idealisation of Victorian domestic bliss—the house is the centre of all moral life and an ordering force through which every threat aimed at destabilizing its harmony is rejected, expunged, or simply denied.

Like its outer physical structure, nonetheless, the interior of the Victorian house reflected persistent barriers of sex, age, and class, along the fault lines of conflicting discourses introduced in the previous century. There were rooms to be used only by women, others only by men; adults and children were separated as were masters and servants. Even the furniture and decorations were functional to the maintaining of the "separate spheres" theorized by Ruskin.

Domesticity and privacy become the terms of a revived middle-class ideology, at the heart of which pulsates the image of Queen Victoria, matriarch and loving mother first of the nation and then of the empire, with her consort Albert at her side and their numerous children. And yet,

in this homely haven of domestic *Stimmung*—in itself the recognisable re-elaboration of the Georgian conceptualisations of the town, middle–class *domus*—the most frequently recurring spatial metaphor is that of a prison, of the physical and psychological barriers separating the Self (frequently gendered) from the rest of the world, all concerns that will play a major part in Victorian Gothic and sensation fiction.

Continual factors of disturbance intervene to tell the story of the changes happening, of the impossibility of achieving the harmony so desperately desired. The Victorian novel, like the Victorian house, perfectly incarnates this tension between opposing polarities and clearly illustrates how domestic spaces function as a discursive arena where the debate concerning roles, the awakening of consciousness of the individual subjects within the family, and of the crumbling of dominant power structures—political, religious, moral—took place.

IV. The last section of this volume, dealing with the representations of the house in early twentieth-century fiction, maps a deeply changed domestic geography. From the critical readings of works by Henry James (Aloisia Sorop), Virginia Woolf (Francesca Pieri, Janet Larson), Susan Glaspell and Ernest Hemingway (Alessandra Calanchi), it becomes clear how twentieth-century aesthetics redefined the physical and symbolic shape of the literary house.

The break with the cultural legacy of the past is manifest in the rejection of the idea of the country house—mansion or manor house—as the centre of a "system of space"[19] able to regulate the life of modernity. Thus, in this historical and cultural phase we find the representation of disintegrating ideals once upheld by previous generations who defended a culture of power based on the control of social space commensurate with the possession of private space. The fading myth of the country house becomes the symbol of a nation in transformation, which in the aftermath of the First World War will come to realize that it can no longer cling to the dream of an idyllic "Old Rural England".

While engaged with experimentation of new narrative modes and techniques considered more suitable for expressing modern consciousness, twentieth-century novelists did not refrain from voicing their criticism of contemporary society, reflecting on the changes of thought, manners and life style at large. In this sense, the house as primary locus of aggregation and a metaphor for life itself, becomes an active arena of cultural discussion and social reconstruction.

Far from aspiring to offer a conclusive survey of the relevance of literary houses in the early modern and modern periods, the essays in *The*

House of Fiction as the House of Life. Representations of the House from Richardson to Woolf aim to offer an original interpretative framework for the study of the discourses of the literary house from an interdisciplinary perspective. It is a fascinating field of enquiry where, we feel, much still needs to be discovered. If the social, architectural and economic import of houses in the XVIII and XIX century has provided essential insights to literary and cultural historians, across the whole range of humanities, the mapping of the houses in literature is a remarkable plot waiting to be told. *Hic manebimus optime*,[20] we could say with our forefathers, it is here that we will so happily dwell.

MR ALLWORTHY'S "GOOD HOUSE"

SUSAN PURDIE

Early in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, in Book 1 Chapter IV, we are introduced to Squire Allworthy's house. As we shall see in detail, this house is constructed not merely as a "good" but as a "perfect" one, especially viewed from the mid-eighteenth century context. This is unusual. In novels throughout the eighteenth century (and afterwards) there is a proliferation of houses which are "homes", i.e., buildings which are the dwellings of relatively small nuclear families. These are fictional representations of a pattern of domestic habitation which was indeed greatly on the increase throughout the period,[1] so it is not surprising to find such houses repeatedly depicted in novels which generally aimed to give readers a credible picture of their own contemporary world.

However, it seems that the very large majority of these fictional houses/homes are, at best, flawed dwellings for the novels' protagonists. Significant criticism has explored the ways in which domestic interiors in Gothic novels (almost all written in the late eighteenth century) function as prisons and testing grounds for the female characters.[2] Early in the century though, and early in the development of the novel as an established literary genre, we find the male protagonist of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* constructing an intricate domestic space to house himself and his self-proclaimed family of animals, whose merit lies mainly in the double-impaled bulwark it provides against Crusoe's real and imagined island threats. Midway between *Tom Jones* (1749) and the 1790s Gothic, Frances Burney's 1778 *Evelina* allots its eponymous heroine a rural childhood home which, initially a nurturing refuge, nevertheless provides a very inadequate preparation for a young lady's "entrance into the world".

When we look closely at Fielding's extensive description of the perfections of Allworthy's house and grounds we can first see why it is, in eighteenth-century terms, so absolutely perfect. We can then see how Fielding undercuts this, not by introducing any diegetic threat or deficiency, but by demanding that his readers recognize that this description is only and wholly a rhetorical construction, a flight of words conjuring up an absurdity. I shall finally consider how this might be

related to the novel text as a whole and further, to the wider project of the "realist" novel.

Fielding actually warns readers to be wary of the forthcoming word picture to come in the title of Chapter Four of Book I, though in a typically oblique manner: "The reader's neck brought into danger by a description, his escape [...]". The chapter then opens with just over four lines directly describing Allworthy's house, which are followed by a much lengthier description of this house's placement and surroundings. It will be simpler to begin with the latter, because this will help to clarify the rather odd direct description of the house itself.

First we are told:

> It stood on the South-east Side of a Hill, but nearer the Bottom than the Top of it, so as to be sheltered from the North-east by a Grove of old Oaks which rose above it in a gradual Ascent of near half a Mile, and yet high enough to enjoy a most charming Prospect of the Valley beneath.[3]

The house, then, is situated in what is literally and practically speaking the most advantageous position possible: low enough to be naturally sheltered from wind, cold and rain yet high enough to enjoy "a most charming prospect"—"delightful views" as a modern estate agent's selling phrase might put it.

From the outset, however, this description lends itself to a more abstract, philosophical interpretation as perfection: the house is situated in an Aristotelian Golden Mean between extremes, neither "too high" nor "too low". This terminology has always carried more than mere geographical resonance.

Fielding, though, always expects his readers to read carefully. Doing so, we may find that the clause which describes the "grove of old oaks" is a little too long, a little redundant, slightly offsetting the balance of the sentence. Yet Fielding also always *writes* carefully.

The next paragraph is rather long, but to pursue my exploration I need to quote it in full:

> In the midst of the Grove was a fine Lawn, sloping down towards the House, near the Summit of which rose a plentiful Spring, gushing out of a Rock covered with Firs, and forming a constant Cascade of about thirty Feet, not carried down a regular Flight of Steps, but tumbling in a natural Fall over the broken and mossy Stones, till it came to the Bottom of the Rock; then running off in a pebly Channel, that with many lesser Falls winded along, till it fell into a Lake at the Foot of the Hill, about a Quarter of a Mile below the House on the South-side, and which was seen from every Room in the Front. Out of this Lake, which filled the centre of a

> beautiful Plain, embellished with Groups of Beeches and Elms, and fed with Sheep, issued a River, that, for several Miles, was seen to meander through an amazing Variety of Meadows and Woods, till it emptied itself into the Sea; with a large Arm of which, and an Island beyond it, the Prospect closed. (12)

This whole paragraph is constructed from two long sentences. In both we find clause upon main clause strung together and linked primarily by conjunctions. These are paratactic sentences, contrasting with the much more complex verbal geometry of Fielding's usual hypertactic long sentences, in which subordinate clauses are carefully arranged in relation to their one main, ruling, clause. Like the desirable spring, this paragraph "gushes". Such sentence construction is rare in this novel, as any page of *Tom Jones* will demonstrate. Yet here while the vista widens before the reader's eyes, its ideal balance increasingly emphasised, the parataxis continues with very little variation, unlike the view described.

The construction of the golden mean represented by the setting of Allworthy's house is carried a step further in this paragraph, for above it lies "Nature" in a lively, dynamic but charming form, while below unfolds a tranquil and fertile terrain of hayfields and fuel-providing woods.

Mediating the two, immediately below the house lies a lake and a "plain" which is "fed with" (rather than "feeding") sheep; in other words, the animals, in a perfectly practical arrangement, manure the grass. This "lake and plain", in particular, can be seen as a model of the acclaimed landscapes which Capability Brown skilfully created throughout the 1740s (as for example at Stowe, where he altered lakes and replaced the formally ornamental parterre with an extensive grass "lawn"; Pope extols Stowe's design in his *Essay on Man*, IV, 65-70). At this stage Allworthy's surroundings seem to represent the rare, unaided perfection of nature which Brown strove to imitate.

The next, short paragraph expands the view further, while offering the felicitous conjunction of genial human habitation in the present time with pleasing relics of a grimmer past:

> [o]n the Right of this Valley opened another of less Extent, adorned with several Villages, and terminated by one of the Towers of an old ruined Abbey, grown over with ivy, and part of the Front, which remained still entire. (12)

Now zooming out to encompass the outer edges of the view from Allworthy's house, the description further reinforces the idea of "perfect balance," while suggesting an element of discreet, Brownian intervention:

> [t]he Left Hand Scene presented the View of a very fine Park, composed of very unequal Ground, and agreeably varied with all the Diversity that Hills, Lawns, Wood, and Water, laid out with admirable Taste, but owing less to Art than to Nature, could give. Beyond this the Country gradually rose into a Ridge of wild Mountains, the tops of which were above the Clouds. (12)

In commenting on these paragraphs I have avoided the terminology of "Sublime", "Beautiful" and especially "Picturesque", because they were not current terms in 1749. Soon afterwards, in 1756, Burke would launch the first two, antithetically, into popularity (*A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*) and in 1768 William Gilpin would add the term "picturesque" to popular vocabulary, in his *Essay Upon Prints* which offered to outline "the Principles of picturesque Beauty". The language Fielding has adopted in this description of Allworthy's view is, nevertheless, very obviously that of an eye surveying its surroundings aesthetically more than practically.

Fielding has identified such thinking about landscape which was in fact widely current throughout the earlier eighteenth century, but several years before it was packaged into neat terms by Burke and then Gilpin. What the later writers deal with are views which are not (or at least not necessarily) owned by the viewer; their thrills and pleasures derive precisely from what is beyond human control (or in Gilpin's work, can be painted to look like that). We find just the opposite in earlier writings. Several of Addison's *Spectator* essays and many of Pope's writings praise landowners' efforts to create the illusion of a naturally-produced and delightful, balanced contrast: "a fine landskip".[4] In other words: the result "Capability Brown" was hired to produce.

One of the later writers most saturated with the influence of Burke and of Gilpin's "views" of landscape is Ann Radcliffe. If only Radcliffe had written earlier than *Tom Jones*, rather than over forty years later, it would have been very tempting to say that the passage I have been examining was intended to be a direct parody of the opening of her 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

> On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony, stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vines, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenees, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous

> precipices were contrasted by the soft green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds, and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east, the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west, Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay.[5]

Radcliffe's and Fielding's word-paintings illustrate the changing conception of the ideal panorama in the course of the eighteenth century. Radcliffe's view pans out with dramatically "Sublime" detail, encompassing nature beyond any human shaping. Allworthy's view does indeed terminate with "the Sea" on one side and "a Ridge of wild Mountains" on the other. The scheme is the same as the view from St. Aubert's chateau, but it does not hint at the *danger* intrinsic to Burke's Sublime, as Radcliffe does. It may be that Radcliffe used Fielding's description as a model, but given his pervasive irony along with the novel's reputation for "indecency", it seems an unlikely source of influence for Radcliffe. Rather, I think, Fielding has captured the essence of a feeling for landscapes and an approach to nature which later writers will greatly embellish upon with no irony intended. His descriptions are so intricate and precise they almost appear to be a parody of later writing.

St. Aubert's chateau, as we will next learn, is the idyllic childhood home of the heroine, Emily and for several pages more we are introduced to the refined delights of the chateau's interior and the commendable ways of its inhabitants. The flaw in this "more than good" house/home is that Emily will soon have to leave it, to accompany her grieving widowed father upon his travels, during which he dies and she will be subjected to nearly seven hundred pages of tribulations before she regains legal possession of her home.

Allworthy's possession and occupancy of his house are never threatened. Fielding has already told us that Mr Allworthy was a fortunate legatee: "he was decreed to the inheritance of one of the largest estates in the county".[6] He is thus the wealthy owner of all the lands that he can survey in any detail. In the final paragraph of this passage, Fielding places him, as viewer, within it. Again, the landscape and even more its owner are the height of perfection. The syntax has become hypertactic, the diction almost bombastic:

> It was now the middle of May, and the morning was remarkably serene, when Mr Allworthy walked forth on the Terrace, where the Dawn opened every Minute that lovely Prospect we have before described to his Eye. And now having sent forth Streams of Light, which ascended the blue Firmament before him. [sic] as Harbingers preceding his Pomp, in the full

> Blaze of Majesty up rose the Sun; than which one Object alone in this lower Creation could be more glorious and that Mr Allworthy himself presented; a human Being replete with benevolence, meditating in what Manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most Good to his Creatures. (12)

There are hints of Genesis here. The "flaw" in the perfection of the Garden of Eden is about to be revealed. In terms of the plot, we will learn that Allworthy's house is actually called "Paradise Hall" and that it does indeed come to harbour a serpent in the person of Blifil. It is Tom, not Allworthy, whose identity as Tom's uncle will be revealed at the end, who will be cast out, though at last returned to even greater, and well-earned, felicity.

We can now see why the description of the house itself with which the chapter opens is not only puzzling but nonsense:

> [t]he Gothic Style of Building could produce nothing nobler that Mr Allworthy's House. There was an Air of Grandeur in it, that struck you with Awe, and rival'd the Beauties of the best Grecian Architecture; and as it was as commodious within, as venerable without. (12)

This can be construed to mean that in terms of beauty, grandeur, and comfort, Allworthy's house is equal to the finest examples of both Gothic or Classical style architecture. It lies within the perfect mean between all extremes. Since the mixture of Gothic and Classical styles in the same building would be an abomination (certainly to any educated eighteenth-century eye), such a house can exist only as a word game. We can *read* it as belonging to either of the contrasting styles, and as an endorsement of neither, but we cannot possibly visualise it.

The house can exist only in verbal description. Fielding then proceeds to describe the surroundings which are, precisely, so picturable, only to tell us that this too is merely words: as forewarned our neck has just been "brought into danger by a description".

> Reader, take care, I have unadvisedly led thee to the top of as high a hill as Mr Allworthy's, and how to get thee down without breaking thy neck, I do not well know. However, let us e'en venture to slide down together; for Miss Bridget rings her bell, and Mr Allworthy is summoned to breakfast, where I must attend, and, if you please, shall be glad of your company. (12)

Having drawn our attention to the word-game he has just played, in a swift final joke (by taking his simile of the hill and the chapter title's

escape as a physical reality) Fielding delivers us ludicrously back into the diegesis—the world of his story.

The game played in this seven-paragraph passage is somewhat different from the other word-games that are played very *nearly* everywhere else in this novel. It is not a judgement of persons and their actions (fictional or actual) presented through some form of irony. Nor is it the exuberant bathos in which minor events are presented in the style of mighty Homer or Virgil; this is not mock-epic and, though the modes of thought it deals with are significantly present in the earlier eighteenth century, it is not a pastiche or a parody of any distinct form of writing which had emerged by 1749. There is no obvious thing which stands as the joke's object, neither a writing thing nor anything physically actual.[7]

If we search for this game's object, it lies, I think, in its insistence upon this impossibility of any total perfection, in man or his actions. Perhaps Fielding has placed this warning here, early in his novel, to remind us that no matter how desirable the possession of "the Good Heart" is, along with "prudence and Christianity", no matter how thoroughly our "everyman" hero, Tom Jones, comes to enhance his innate good nature with prudence, total perfection is never within human reach. The one character who seems to be totally perfect, from the outset and throughout, is Sophia; and while she is a thoroughly red-blooded and immensely appealing heroine, her name (the Greek word for wisdom) may be intended to remind us that her perfection is not, actually, something that non-fictional people can ever quite achieve. The careful reader of this long and lovely novel will be offered a genuine recipe for living a "good" life; but early on Fielding offers a warning against taking his text as unquestionable.

If this is indeed the point of the passage, it is interesting that the point is made through the description of a house. Fictional houses/homes tend to stand as emblems for the character of their owners, whether these serve as oppressors or as friends to protagonists, or are the protagonists themselves. At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned some fictional houses/homes which illustrate this (remembering that Evelina's childhood home belongs to her benevolent but unworldly guardian). To add just two more, the decently appropriate house of Oliver Goldsmith's not-quite-hero in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) serves as an emblem of his temporarily over-blown ambition when it proves too small to admit the ludicrously allegorical—and large—family portrait he has commissioned. When this flaw in the hero is removed, the house's flaw also disappears and it becomes again, a happy home, perfectly and fittingly decent for this family. To take just one example from Dickens, in his 1848 novel, Mr. Dombey's house is a dwelling of misery and emotional deprivation for his

daughter Florence, as long as he remains misogynisticly obsessed with "The Firm of Dombey" and the "& Son" he craves. In contrast, "The Little Mid-shipman", with all its material lacks and oddly assorted family, provides her with a happy home and a quaintly pleasant, though financially threatened, house.

However we have seen that the "fault" in Allworthy's house is not anything related to its owner's nature (even though he is not quite the perfect character his name initially suggests). Rather this fault lies outside the diegesis, in the inherent nature of language itself, which can always be manipulated and misunderstood.

To conclude this discussion, first I need now to qualify my original argument slightly. We do quite often find houses/homes that are constructed as "perfection". These are finally allotted to protagonists who after proving themselves through various tests and tribulations, attain a position allowing them to become possessors of their own homes (whether directly or through happy marriages). Evelina, Emily (and all Radcliffe's heroines) reap this final reward, as do Dickens's and also Austen's (after rescue from his island, Crusoe never again pays much attention to his home). In fact the perfect house becomes the usual setting for novels that have "happy endings". Readers reach them in the novels' closing pages, which is exactly where we find Tom and Sophia finally guaranteed their perfect life together, in Paradise Hall.

Perfect houses, without any flaw or threat, are part of a "happy ever after" with which realist novels are not concerned. The only obvious exception is the house/home of Janet and John in the mid-twentieth century series of English children's school readers.[8] Reading a novel, we should immediately be suspicious of any desirable dwelling presented in its early pages. Reading *Tom Jones*, Book 1 Chapter IV, and paying the attention thus asked for, we find that the danger in Mr Allworthy's "good house" lies in a place we all inhabit: words.

"… AS IF IT WERE NOT A PART OF THE HOUSE": THE HOUSE AS SEMANTIC AGENT IN *CLARISSA*

BARBARA PUSCHMANN-NALENZ

Samuel Richardson's second epistolary novel continues to use places as signifiers, filling them—more than in *Pamela*—with meaning that reveals or enhances the development of plot and characters.

In recent research, the Gothic novel and the nineteenth-century novel are considered as the first evidence of semantically utilized place**.** Modernist narration often reverses the protective function of the house into imprisonment,[1] while "in the novel of the eighteenth century, socially defined space is simply taken for granted and to a large extent represented by the characters alone".[2] Yet it has been stated that Richardson in *Pamela*, as well as in *Clarissa*, creates the "room-as-prison" type of place,[3] which later became a *topos* of the Gothic novel. Only with *Sir Charles Grandison* does he publish a narrative where the happy ending for the protagonists is accompanied by detailed descriptions of house and park.[4] The extension into the later eighteenth century of the controversy concerning place and space as topics of the novel and the continuing tradition of dispute in which even Jane Austen took a stand, are evinced by Horace Walpole's advice in his 1764 preface to *The Castle of Otranto*[5] that writers should avoid "unnecessary descriptions", and in the same period, by G. E. Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766), which suggested that time was to the poet what space was to the painter.[6]

This paper will argue, based mainly on the modified theoretical concept of Natascha Würzbach, that as early as in 1747 the house became an important component for the themes and characters of *Clarissa,* though not a theme in itself.[7] Unlike the early nineteenth-century novel with its clearly divided and gender-specific use of the bourgeois house—e.g. the library and the drawing-room in Jane Austen's novels—the narrative in *Clarissa* shows an emphasis on a private/public dichotomy and epitomizes how the traditional meaning of the house as shelter can fundamentally change. Furthermore, Richardson's novel confirms the feminist thesis that

the self-fashioning of a female protagonist often develops through the questions of space and place.

As architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright proposes, "homes serve as metaphors, suggesting and justifying social categories, values, and relations".[8] The home of the heroine, a "young lady", as the subtitle states, is Harlowe Place, a "Palladian Country House".[9] Criticism on *Clarissa* has stressed the metaphorical nature of this house, however, solely in regard to the novel's epistolary form: Clarissa's search for privacy leads her into the closet where she writes, letter-writing being the act through which she asserts her identity. The private room thereby receives a special meaning as symbol of "internal space" or "consciousness", the novelist's principal interest: "[p]rivacy as sought by the heroine is the need of a soul in distress; it has a distinctively spiritual character".[10]

With regards to social classification, Harlowe Place is home to the protagonist as well as her parents, her elder sister Arabella, and her brother. It is not described, but many of the details offered to the reader suggest two of the aspirations of an ambitious upper middle-class dynasty: to "control intimacy",[11] and to display the social rank of the family. The Harlowes' ambitions may be judged through their landed property. This includes the estate of Clarissa's brother in Scotland, bequeathed to him by his generous godmother, and Clarissa's own, called "The Dairy-House" or "Grove", which she received as a present together with a sizable sum of money from her grandfather,[12] thus making her financially independent. In an age obsessed with the fundamental significance of possessions, land ownership led the Harlowes to believe that they were wealthy enough to consider themselves competitors with the rank of the landed aristocracy.

Though they do not yet belong to the gentry, the Harlowes' demesne shows their inherited and increased wealth; on the other hand, Mr. Lovelace, who is the nephew of a nobleman, can hope to inherit Lord M[ontague]'s large manor and huge fortune (*Clarissa*, 3). While he is rich, it is not so much the real-estate he owns that distinguishes this gentleman's class from Clarissa's own class, but rather his lifestyle, connections, reputation and morals, because Lovelace is an aristocratic rake. A man of his inherited status sneers at the parvenus from the merchant class, who feel contempt for the moral stances of one of the noble "non-domestic men,"[13] a libertine, and plainly consider him a débauché.[14] Men of both classes travel; Clarissa, on the other hand, only visits the homes of relatives and friends. Her father's house remains her natural dwelling place during the first months of the narrative, while Lovelace's visits come to be regarded with growing antipathy.

Difficulties arising between genders, classes and generations are very early semanticised by two spatial aspects of plot development to which Clarissa is especially exposed: 1. accessibility and crossing of boundaries; 2. positioning and movement of characters.[15] Lovelace is no longer allowed to enter Harlowe Place—a decision which infringes upon his social superiority—because its inhabitants resent his proposal to Arabella and his person, and Clarissa is reproached for having seen him several times at the home of her friend Anna Howe (*Clarissa*, 13). Although she denies that this was the purpose of her visits, her friend's house provided an opportunity otherwise barred.

Solmes's proposal of marriage to Clarissa, which is accepted by her parents and her brother, enables the reader to discover the layout of Harlowe Place, situated in Berks(hire), in a rural environment with poultry and hens. Clarissa's "apartment", consisting of parlour,[16] bedroom and closet, like the apartments of the other (female) family members, is located on the second floor (*Clarissa*, 26). She is sent for by a servant and summoned downstairs to tea, where she can meet Mr. Solmes in the less private grand parlour—a social sphere which is open to visitors from the outside. Significantly, her absolute rejection of Solmes leads to the paternal prohibition to "correspond with *anybody* out of the house" (*Clarissa*, 16, emphasis in original)—letters being a mental and representational border-crossing which extends beyond the physical limits of the house. This is the first step in a process through which Clarissa's shelter turns into a prison not even a written sign may enter or exit.

Privacy in a house inhabited by at least five persons belonging to the nuclear family, where several aunts and uncles frequently visit, seems to be a value never questioned in spacious Harlowe Place.[17] It also creates a distance between family members on the physical level, implicitly made apparent by the necessity of letter-writing. Arguably, Richardson follows an architectural and ethical ideal which "reflected the class hierarchy that dictated separation between master and servants, parents and children, and men and women".[18] This model also makes it appear more natural when Clarissa later insists so adamantly on safe-guarding her private space in relation to Lovelace, while explaining his constant criticism of "this distance" (e.g. *Clarissa*, 240), which she keeps.

Inclusion and exclusion pave the way to Clarissa's conflicts with her family: the fury sparked by her rejection of the rich, but uneducated and personally disagreeable Mr. Solmes results in her banishment from the common rooms, where her family decides for her in her absence: "they are all shut up together. Not a door opens; not a soul stirs", Clarissa informs her correspondent, while "the keys of everything are taken from me"