

DOMESTIC SPACE IN THE SHORT FICTION OF ANDRE DUBUS

by

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(Under the direction of James Nagel)

ABSTRACT

This project explores the theme of domestic space in the development of the American short story and in the short fiction of Andre Dubus. The first chapter begins with an overview of Dubus' career and then defines the idea and its connection to his work. Familial relations are central to Dubus' fiction, and his conclusions link him to other significant short story writers.

The second chapter is a survey of American short fiction and the prominence of family environment in the genre. A metaphor central to the nation's consciousness, home becomes a sanctuary against the rapidly changing landscape. At the same time, characters must explore the possibilities around them. As the short story has developed, the motif has reflected a dual perception of home. The dominant struggle has been finding a balance between containment and expansion. Within this framework, the home has been a trope for protagonists and their different domestic circumstances.

The third chapter focuses on Dubus' women who for various reasons find themselves in restrictive places. These characters are static, unable to act or to move out of their pain due to violence that has been inflicted upon them. They find themselves ultimately trapped by their own limitations.

The fourth chapter gives an alternative view as these women are able to transcend their problems by redefining themselves. Though temporarily held back or forced to make modifications in order to deal with crises, they make the necessary changes to move on with productive lives.

The fifth chapter focuses on men in Dubus' fiction who have to renegotiate their connection to their families and their residence. Some are so shattered by tragedy that they are cut off from any future sense of domestic peace. Others are able to push past their dislocation to build new sanctuaries.

The concluding chapter is a study of Dancing After Hours. This work is an appropriate ending to a career that celebrates the healing power of the human heart in connection with another. In the cycle stories, the protagonists reach peace after years of struggling to find ground in the confusion of the postmodern world. Likewise, the satellite stories work to reinforce the movement towards healing.

INDEX WORDS: Andre Dubus, American short story, Domestic space, Home, Story cycle.

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“The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.”

Ernest Hemingway
A Farewell to Arms

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Chapter 1

Andre Dubus: The Short Fiction

Andre Dubus published his first short story, “The Intruder,” in the Sewanee Review in 1963,¹ the same year he left the Marine Corps to move with his wife and four children to Iowa City, where he was accepted into the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa. By 1967 he was publishing short stories on a regular basis, achieving recognition by having “If They Knew Yvonne” selected for inclusion in Best American Short Stories for 1970.² His career was filled with awards, beginning with a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1976 and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1978.

Early on, Dubus found favor with the critics, and in 1987 Delta devoted its entire February issue to him, including one of his short stories, an interview with Thomas E. Kennedy, reviews, and criticism.³ In 1988, Kennedy published his study of Dubus’ short fiction, which gives an overview of each of the stories and includes interviews and reviews of Dubus’ various collections.⁴ In “Tenderhearted Men: Lonesome, Sad, and Blue,” Vivian Gornick connects Dubus with Raymond Carver and Richard Ford, tracing their influence to Ernest Hemingway: “Just behind the leanness and coolness of the prose lies the open--but doomed--expectation that romantic love saves. Settings vary and regional idioms intrude, but almost always it is men and women together that is being written about.”⁵ In comparing Dubus with Carver and Ford, Gornick calls him “the most

complex and least well known,” but “the most articulate in the matter of men and women together.”⁶ She says he reaches “with as much ambition as did Hemingway.”⁷ In his review of The Times Are Never So Bad, Brian Stonehill compares Dubus’ fiction to that of Flannery O’Conner, finding a connection between their reoccurring “concern with matters spiritual. . . . [Dubus] hunts for purity’s place . . . and is too clever and clear-sighted to settle for an easy answer.”⁸ Interestingly, Joyce Carol Oates says that Dubus has a tendency towards Naturalism. She sees many of his characters in Separate Flights as “trapped,” though they work “their defenses against the panic of dissolution.” Some characters “are unable to accept their lives but at the same time haven’t the courage or the imagination to change them.” She concludes by calling Dubus a writer of “considerable skill . . . his collection a fine one.”⁹

In Contemporary Writers of the South, Anne E. Rowe mentions James Yaffe’s review of The Last Worthless Evening, which points out why he feels that Dubus has been less read than his fiction deserves. Yaffe reaches the conclusion that because many of Dubus’ short stories are long enough to be termed novellas, they have escaped critical attention. He finishes by calling Dubus “one of the best writers of fiction in America today.”¹⁰ Kennedy agrees. He proposes that Dubus has been slow to achieve recognition because when he first began writing in the 1960s, his fiction went against the grain of the “leading new writers” who were “anything but realists. To the sixties, the very concept of an objective, comprehensible reality was suspect, a house of lies hammered together of truisms, partly promises, and straight-faced socio-economic lunacies,” a world “contrived,” made up of “purely imaginative realms, testing, pushing at the accepted technical limits” of writing.¹¹ Though Dubus writes from many points of view, including

women and men who are at varying stages of self-awareness, each of his stories has in common the fact that the characters and the conflicts in their lives are believable and immediate. Kennedy as well as other critics all agree that in contrast to many postmodern writers, Dubus writes realistic fiction that concerns itself with the way human beings treat one another in an oftentimes confusing world: “From the start of his literary career, Dubus has written about the world, the real world in his own terms through a strategy of literal verisimilitude.”¹² In each of his stories, characters are confronted with crises that are often the result of shifting parameters when roles are redefined or traditions are discontinued. What is many times the focus in these stories is not the crises alone but how the characters live their lives in the aftermath, how they are able or unable to negotiate their shifting circumstances. For some, moving forward means redefining themselves; for others overwhelmed by the conflicts in their lives, moving forward is never an option. Though the landscape may change, some characters are unable to conform to their new environment.

In a 1993 interview at Dubus’ home in Haverhill, in response to a question about a character’s motivation, he said that “we are all shaped by our environment. I don’t get beyond that. Within that, we are morally responsible.”¹³ In all of his short fiction, characters are “shaped,” limited or motivated by their respective environments. Some are able to break through their limitations, to go beyond their conflicts to reshape their lives and to come through “strong at the broken places,” as Ernest Hemingway wrote decades earlier in A Farewell to Arms.¹⁴ This holds especially true in Dubus’ final short-story cycle, Dancing After Hours. In this work, characters damaged physically and emotionally are, within their limitations, able to adjust to their environments. Paul Gray connects

these characters' ability to overcome their "pain and loss" to Dubus' own struggles following an accident in July of 1986.¹⁵ After stopping to offer his assistance to victims involved in an automobile wreck, Dubus was struck by a car. Subsequently, after almost dying, he lost one leg above the knee while the other was damaged. Dubus was frank about adjustments he had had to make after returning home from the hospital, from the little things such as negotiating for a cup of hot chocolate to the painful awareness that he did not have much in common with his characters anymore and, therefore, did not know if he would write stories again. For a while, he wrote essays, the result of his efforts published in Broken Vessels in 1991. His sense of anxiety about returning to short stories was tempered by his daughter's advice to relax, that eventually he would construct a character with whom he could identify and recognize, and the stories began to come again. Dancing After Hours, his last collection of short fiction, was published in 1996.¹⁶

On February 24, 1999, Dubus died suddenly of a heart attack. He was at his home in Haverhill. Since that time, writers who have known and been influenced by him have been forthcoming in their praise of his craft. Kennedy discusses his generosity, of what a privilege it was to know him, and his ability to inspire and encourage beginning writers: "Andre never, not for a second . . . lorded it over you with his success or put himself in a station above you as a writer. He was too big to be small. When you sat and drank and ate with him, he made you feel you were his equal as a writer, that you could be, would be, that you shared the same place where he lived and worked."¹⁷ In a collection of tributes, Frederick Busch comments on the respect with which Dubus treated both his craft as well as those who came to him hoping to learn something. At the end of his essay, Busch concludes with a common observation that Dubus "wrote about the soul in its agonies

and occasional triumphs. . . . He tried to make beauty. And he succeeded.”¹⁸ The beauty comes in a variety of ways, from the artfully constructed sentences to the characters’ realization, all resonating long after the stories are over.

Admittedly, some of Dubus’ characters in his earlier fiction are not able to rise above their circumstances. They are held back by their relative place in the world, unable to see beyond their limitations, confined by their inability to see their own capabilities and strengths. Still others spiral downward into despair, victims in a seemingly indifferent and hostile world. Many of Dubus’ characters are women who find themselves at moments of crisis. Some are able to break through to positive change; others remain trapped within their environments, unchanged and unable to see any possible hope for a better life; still others conclude that they alone are to blame for their circumstances and punish themselves without hope of forgiveness. Within Dubus’ stories, women from all levels of life struggle to exist within the confines of their domestic environments with varying degrees of success. Likewise, Dubus writes with an immediacy brought about by personal experience as he attempts to frame men’s roles in the shifting boundaries of domestic space that have, until postmodernism, been fairly consistent. As women have left the home on journeys of their own, men have stepped into homemaking roles, having to create a space for themselves in what up to this time has been viewed as women’s territory.¹⁹ Judith Fryer focuses on the malleability of gender roles as a result of cultural changes by making reference to Sociologist Erving Goffman, who has pointed out that “one learns to play a variety of roles by making smooth adjustments of the requirements of social scenes, performances that highlight official

values like an ongoing ceremony that comes to be taken for reality itself.”²⁰ With the shifting political landscape, the idea of domestic space has expanded roles for men.

Just as the realism that Dubus uses in his short fiction has been a tendency in American fiction since the mid-1800s, his concern with the place in society of his characters and their struggles to fit into their changing environmental circumstances has been a consistent theme of the canon. One reoccurring motif in Dubus’ short stories is domestic space, a central theme of the American short story. Dubus ties into a long history of writers who have concentrated on the home and men and women’s relationship to that framework. American short fiction has always been interested in the political and social expectations that make up the mores and habits of homelife. Certainly, the metaphors used in creating this motif have been various and many and have changed over time. Nevertheless, the home and its importance as both backdrop for and extension of the self have been evident from the earliest American sketches as well as the first works of Andre Dubus.

From its beginnings in American short fiction, domestic space has been a term associated primarily with women simply because they were normally relegated to the home to nest and nurture. A woman was expected to create a comfortable and secure place of retreat for her family, centering her life around the hearth.²¹ She was responsible for the daily upkeep of her home, for the moral standards of her children, for their physical welfare, and for their sense of place in the world. As Annette Kolodny points out, the American home “ideally was to function as the moral, ethical, and spiritual center of family and nation alike, the nursery of republican virtue, and the haven from the masculine competitiveness of the marketplace.”²² Home became a vision of stability

against a rapidly changing world. For Kenneth Mitchell, “geography, or ‘landscape,’ has a profound influence in shaping any society. . . . Literature, like all art, is ultimately a reflection and illustration of the landscape that produced it.”²³ In a country that was to a large extent unexplored, its earliest citizens made it clear in their writings that home was a fortress against the unknown. Therefore, it became socially and politically imperative that women have a known, a defined place in society to contend with the feelings of dislocation and fragmentation present during any time of expansion and flux. Ironically, as settlers were carving out new domains, a process that relies on reconfiguration, the ideals surrounding the American woman were fixed. For Kerstin W. Shands, “rest and passivity have traditionally been linked to femininity in Western culture while movement has been aligned with masculinity and change. Change is frequently masculinized, while stasis is feminized.”²⁴ The home, typically a woman’s place, became a bastion against the unknown and potentially dangerous wilderness. Shands defines this idea of home as “a sheltered solitude in which we, shuddering as we withdraw from the cold into snug warmth, are pleasantly aware of stark contrasts.”²⁵ Home becomes a place of refuge associated with women.

On the other hand, men were conditioned to find fulfillment outside of the confines of the domestic arena. For men, a complete life meant a separation from home and an alliance with movement, even within the tight parameters set by the early Puritans, who saw emigration as a threat to their religion. Too much exposure to a various landscape was a risk better avoided. In spite of this inhibition, men had to engage in the world outside of the home to provide for their families. Consequently, the role of women

as the preservers of values and traditions, of beliefs and customs, became even more important.

As the landscape around them changed, the earliest American women were expected to provide establishments of constancy. Doreen Massey refers to Genevieve Lloyd, who sees women's responsibility as being "to preserve the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Man of Reason will repair for solace, warmth and relaxation. If he is to exercise the most exalted form of Reason, he must leave soft emotions and sensuousness behind; woman will keep them intact for him"²⁶ From its earliest conception in America, home became a place of solitude for men who were thrown into the world of change: "Woman stands as metaphor . . . for what has been lost (left behind), and that place called home is frequently personified by, and partakes of the same characteristics as those assigned to Woman."²⁷ As early settlements began to expand in spite of the fear of what lay outside the security of community, home with its defining walls and contained gardens became even more important in setting up a defense against the unknown, as a space of custom and tradition brought to fruition.

Massey challenges the assumption that women could be expected to live in stasis in that a fixed and constant ideal "does not encapsulate the lives of real women."²⁸ This conflicting view of stasis and change holds especially true during the 1700s and 1800s, when America was defined by its mobility, by its constantly having to readjust itself to absorb new spaces as it sought to bring the land to harness. Against this "howling wilderness" home became a sanctuary, but a woman was not expected nor was she encouraged to change with her landscape in spite of the fact that metaphors linked to women often invoke images of nature, mutable by its very design. Nevertheless, this idea

of home as containment carried over into the nineteenth century when public space “figured mainly in opposition to the concept of the private sphere, which separated business and political activities from the home and associated them exclusively with men.”²⁹ These set roles created definite boundaries.

Conflicting views of domestic space have worked in tandem to create a dichotomy that persists into postmodern America. A metaphor viable to the American consciousness, home is expected to remain fixed in the face of change. This place of sanctuary is invaded by the outside forces of progress, yet it must not suffer distillation. Woman are expected to keep pace with the changing world, yet the ideal image encourages stasis. In fact, as Massey points out, “space is not a ‘flat’ surface . . . because the social relations which create it are themselves dynamic by their very nature.”³⁰ This tension has resulted in a dual perception of containment and imprisonment, not only for women but for men as well. These opposing views are easily held, as Shands concurs: “Throughout the centuries, feminists have implied that women’s lot has overwhelmingly been one of confinement, a word . . . that carries associations to both birth and death, to beginnings and endings, to imprisonment and restriction as well as to oppressive boundaries and limited horizons.”³¹ Confinement may be conceptualized as “positive and womblike”³² as well as restrictive and stifling. In present discourse, Shands has discovered a trend that concludes that being “associated or settled is negatively associated with consistency and coherence, with absolutes and closures, with linear time and limitation.”³³ In addition, as the home might also be seen as a place from which one ventures and a place that fuels and prepares one for expansion, the perception has been conflicting at best, brought about by images of flight from the undesirable in contrast with the positive explorative journey,

both literal and spiritual, actual and imagined. Baym adds to this conflicting view; early in American history, houses were “fountainheads of civic morality and thus essentially public in their nature.” Women saw themselves as “part of the nonofficial public sphere . . . influential in forming public opinion, whether as writers or mothers or spouses or all of these.”³⁴ Therefore, to be adept at preparing her children for society, a woman must be socially and politically conscious, knowledgeable of the political framework and even participating vicariously in its restructuring at the same time that she must be a refuge from the conflicts brought about by participation in the world.

Because of these political and social demands, women have had to extend their domestic space, moving out from their previous confines, in spite of the fact that they were not actively encouraged to seek outside interests until the 1960s. For Shands, the confines of domestic space and women’s desire to move outside of their political and social limitations have resulted in two distinct literary emphases: “If one were to make a single binary reduction about literature one could say that there are works which stress the existence of, and need for, boundaries; and works which concentrate on everything within the individual . . . which conspires to negate or transcend boundaries.”³⁵ Shands breaks down these two very different concepts into what she terms “bracing,” which is a “resisting . . . of constant travel and of sites of resistance where all comforts of home, unity, and dwelling are programmatically to be withstood” and “embracing,” which is an “open ‘parabolic’ space that is not only politically but also spiritually empowering.”³⁶ These are useful definitions when considering the conflicting responses to the two, particularly in terms of home. “Bracing,” though it celebrates the home, has in its definition an emphasis on comfort and unity that factors out the negative experiences of

domesticity that have appeared in American short fiction beginning with Washington Irving. Likewise, “embracing” focuses on such positive words as “open” and “empowering.” Nevertheless, this concept also has a negative side that American writers were quick to incorporate into their earliest narratives. There are both real and imagined dangers outside of the confines of home. In addition, motion for its own sake, moving outside of the domestic sphere simply to avoid stasis can be reductive. This problem becomes especially apparent in postmodern short fiction as many representative writers have shown both male and female characters who have resisted or rejected residency only to find that their lives lack value. Their wanderings have left them feeling empty as if they have been on a series of trips with no destination in sight. What Shands goes on to hope for is a blending of “bracing” and “embracing,” a “‘parabolic’ travel-in-dwelling concept of embracing space—a unifying concept that neither denies our fundamental need for home nor sees an ever-accelerating, hypertransgressive movement away from home as more sophisticated or progressive than dwelling.”³⁷ Shands’ hope is for cyclical journeys that allow for positive experiences outside of the home, journeys which enrich and expand horizons at the same time that they allow for and in fact encourage a time to roost, to come back home for fortification. This best of both worlds is also a theme present in American fiction.

What oftentimes hold true for the American man or woman is that fulfillment comes from a secure sense of domestic space that allows for expansion. Certainly, in postmodern America with the fragmentation and feelings of isolation brought on in part by the breakdown of the nuclear family, a compromise is critical. However, this blend of the two views, of containment versus expansion, has not always been encouraged.

Though early American writers may have focused on the negative experiences that are the result of moving too far from the domestic scene, by the 1900s, the “critical consciousness . . . is ‘constructed’ on the run” where “being rooted in one place” is “undesirable.”³⁸ Therefore, Shands’ hope for compromise has not always been the obvious answer for personal fulfillment in America, especially with regards to women.

These two opposing ideas, containment versus expansion and the positive and negative results of each extreme, have worked in opposition to one another from the earliest sketches in American fiction up through the postmodern feminist upheaval that encouraged women to leave home to find meaning outside of the domestic sphere. The short story has been a record of the varying landscapes of the American home, its focus a way to suggest a character’s potential for negotiating within the expected framework of social codes and behaviors. Like Shands, many American writers of short fiction have concluded that if men and women are able to move through crisis to reach a sense of healing, the ability to do so has in part hinged on their comfort within their own domestic sphere. From the first American narratives, fiction has been a medium helping to illustrate the concept of domestic space as both “bracing” and “embracing.” Though the concept of women’s place in the home has shifted from the idea of containment to expansion, even to the point of rejecting the home, this movement has not been straightforward; rather, conflicting views of women’s place and their role in and outside of the home have had to be worked through and negotiated, as much cyclically as linearly. Nevertheless, what becomes apparent is that a woman’s autonomy within her own domicile is necessary for a sense of completion, and this empowerment is especially important if she is to move beyond the walls and windows of home to harvest what the

world has to offer her. This knowledge may be used for the sole purpose of making her own life more complete or may be reaped primarily as bounty for her family or may be used by herself and shared with her family. Unfortunately, this autonomy has been under attack from threats outside of the home, from within the family, from within the self, or from a combination of forces. Likewise, men who have a positive place in the home, who are engaged in rather than fleeing from it for whatever reason, find that their lives have a richness and completeness that cannot come solely from public space. The dominant struggle in the motif has been in finding a place that contains and nourishes without smothering either the self or those around balanced against a place with open doors that encourages growth. From the earliest sketches and narratives, the metaphor has helped to frame various protagonists and their differing circumstances. Dubus fits into this historical framework by focusing on the myriad possibilities of home.

Notes

1. Andre Dubus, "The Intruder." The Sewanee Review 71 (April/June 1963): 268-82.
2. Robley Wilson gives an interesting account of the publishing history of "If They Knew Yvonne." The essay discusses the controversy surrounding the sexual frankness of the story, which the Iowa Attorney General's office found offensive. Robley Wilson, "If They Knew Andre," in Andre Dubus: Tributes (New Orleans: Xavier Review Press, 2001), 112-14.
3. The entire issue of volume 24 of *Delta* (February 1987) is devoted to Andre Dubus.
4. Thomas E. Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction (Boston: Twayne, 1988).
5. Vivian Gornick, "Tenderhearted Men: Lonesome, Sad and Blue," New York Times Book Review (September 16, 1990), 1.
6. Gornick, 32.
7. Gornick, 32.
8. Brian Stonehill, "Memory, the Lens to Look at Life," review of The Times Are Never So Bad, by Andre Dubus, Los Angeles Times Book Review (August 14, 1983), 5.
9. Joyce Carol Oates, "Separate Flights," review of Separate Flights, by Andre Dubus, Ontario Review 5 (Fall/Winter 1976-77): 106.
10. Anne E. Rowe, "Andre Dubus," Contemporary Writers of the South: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook, ed. Joseph M. Flora (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), 108.

11. Thomas Kennedy, "The Progress from Hunger to Love: Three Novellas by Andre Dubus," The Hollins Critic 24 (February 1987): 2.
12. Kennedy, "Progress," 3.
13. Olivia Carr Edenfield, personal interview with Andre Dubus, (February 23-24, 1993), Haverhill, MA.
14. Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Scribner's, 1929), 249.
15. Paul Gray, review of The Times Are Never So Bad, by Andre Dubus, Time (August 15, 1983), 61.
16. Andre Dubus, Dancing After Hours (New York: Random House, 1996). All future references are to this edition.
17. Thomas E. Kennedy, "Sweet Fire: Memories of Andre Dubus," AGNI, 50 (Fall 1999): 182-83.
18. Frederick Busch, "Andre and the Daughters," in Andre Dubus: Tributes (New Orleans: Xavier Review Press, 2001), 41.
19. Susan Saegaer and Gary Winkel make an obvious but relevant point that to "the extent that the household runs smoothly or roughly, [the woman] is usually held responsible. "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles," in New Space for Women, eds. Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Morley (Boulder: Westview, 1980), 47.
20. Judith Fryer, Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 18.
21. Kerstin W. Shands points out that happiness in marriage is often symbolically represented by "the form of a house," which would stand "for permanence and separation

from the world.” Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 63.

22. Annette Kolodny, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630 -1860 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 163.

23. Kenneth Mitchell, “Landscape and Literature,” in Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines, ed. William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 23.

24. Shands, 4.

25. Shands, 113. Saegert and Winkel add to this idea of home as a place of containment for women and as a retreat for men by pointing out two different ways of viewing one’s place: “Women feel that the meaning of the home involves a sense of belonging. . . . Men are more likely to relate the meaning of the home to its being a place where things belong to me” (47). A woman’s role has been to provide sanctuary without proprietorship. In a capitalistic society, what follows is that even in the home, a woman’s value is lessened as she gives away rather than claiming. This public sentiment was played out in the lady’s books of the 1850s, an example of which appears in an anonymous essay that validates women’s selflessness by pointing out that “man, in his connection with society and the world, passes through scenes calculated to alienate the kinder feelings of humanity; woman has no such trials of her faith; thus, her love is more pure and devoted.” Godey’s Lady’s Book, 5 (Philadelphia: L. A.Godey and Co.,1832), 287.

26. Doreen Massey, Space, Place, and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 10-11.
27. Massey, 10.
28. Massey, 11.
29. Nina Baym, American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790 - 1860 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 5.
30. Massey, 265.
31. Shands, 59
32. Shands, 113.
33. Shands, 9.
34. Baym, 6. Massey adds to this idea pointing out that a “large component of the identity of that place called home derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one way or another been open, constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it” (171).
35. Shands, 71.
36. Shands, 2.
37. Shands, 2.
38. Shands, 8.

Chapter 2

Domestic Space and the American Short Story

One of the earliest and most popular forms of written expression that used domestic space as a central motif was the Indian captivity narrative. In fact, according to Annette Kolodny, the “single narrative form indigenous to the new world is the victim’s recounting of unwilling captivity,” a form popular with women due to their identifying with the “genre’s mode of symbolic action” that expresses “the dangerous or unacknowledged meaning of women’s experience of the dark and enclosing forests around them.”¹ Though not fiction by definition, the Indian captivity narrative had a profound influence on the framework of domestic space as it would appear in the short stories to follow.

Printed in 1682 and reprinted twice in the same year, A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson was the first and most widely distributed of the captivity narratives, which is considered the “first coherent myth literature of America. . . . Almost from the moment of its literary genesis, the New England captivity narrative functioned as a myth, reducing the Puritan state of mind and world view, along with events of colonization and settlement, into archetypal drama. In it a single individual, usually a woman, stands passively under the strokes of evil, awaiting a rescue by the grace of God.”² The captivity narrative is one of the first American genres to recognize home as even more sacred and desirable due to its very vulnerability. In this

context, the containment images are positive, setting up lodgings as fortresses against outside dangers. Richard Slotkin makes the very important point that rather than an “outward looking spirit, the captivity narratives speak for an inward turn.”³ Women who were already fearful of the wilderness, a fear perpetuated by the church to discourage emigration, identified with Rowlandson primarily because they lived with the same threat of captivity, particularly those who moved with their husbands outside of the relative safety of the Bay Colony Settlements. Approximately 750 individual captives were taken between 1677-1750; many who vanished were absorbed into Indian society.⁴ At the same time that domestic space is seen as positive containment, the narratives also reveal how vulnerable the home can be, even if its inhabitants are vigilant and living their lives according to the prescriptions of Puritan behavior.

On the other hand, the narratives became a way for repressed women to experience vicariously the landscape denied them. Many were bound to the home by the requirements of their narrow society and its views towards their vulnerability against the temptations of the wilderness; others found few opportunities available to them to move outside of their domestic sphere. In fact, as Slotkin reveals, the captivity narrative for both men and women “constitutes the Puritan’s peculiar vision of the only acceptable way of acculturating, of being initiated into the life of the wilderness.”⁵ Puritans typically saw the captive as one of God’s subjects privileged to carry Christ’s cross, a suffering which only made the captive love her cross more. Vicariously, congregations and readers could suffer the same redemptive trial and come through safely.

When former captives were returned, as Rowlandson was, they were used as instruments of instruction, reminding the Puritan communities of the importance of home

as sanctuary. Rowlandson never connected to the land around her. There was no wanderlust in her nor none of the nature lover. The wilderness can kill her, as she is reminded over and over again through twenty removals lasting eleven and one half weeks. She dreams of home and of being reunited with her family, and it is her connection to home and the skills that she brings with her that lead to her successful ransom. Given very little to eat, she learns by her eighth removal that though she is no longer in the familiar and relatively safe confines of family, she can still use what she knows of home to make herself more familiar with the Indians and, ironically, remain relatively safe. She never gives herself credit for her skill at negotiating her survival; instead, she thanks God for his mercy and for “preserving [her] in the wilderness . . . and returning [her] in safety again.”⁶ What is obvious beneath this posture is the personal strength and ingenuity that she brings with her. She uses her sewing skills as a way to survive and to make herself valuable to the Indians. One shirt she trades for a piece of horseflesh, another for a knife; a cap gets her a pancake. In this way, she brings her skills from home into the wilderness.

At the end of her narrative, Rowlandson comes to the thesis of her text, that God will call each person to trial. Also obvious is her warning of not appreciating one's home and taking it for granted:

When I lived in prosperity, having the comforts of the world about me, my relations by me, my heart cheerful, and taking little care for anything, and yet seeing many, whom I preferred before myself, under many trials and afflictions, in sickness, weakness, poverty, losses, crosses, and cares of the world, I should be sometimes jealous least I should have

my portion in this life. . . . Yet I see, when God calls a person to anything, and through ever so many difficulties, yet He is fully able to carry them through and make them see, and say they have been gainers thereby (166-67).

The hardships that Rowlandson endured made the home by comparison a sanctuary against the temptations and trials of the wilderness.

An interesting twist on the captivity narrative is Harriet Prescott Spofford's short story "Circumstance." In this piece set during the times of Indian rebellion against white settlers, the protagonist, who remains unnamed, is a young woman who has been aiding a sick neighbor. As she travels home to her family, the landscape through which she must pass is described in venerable terms that invoke a "sweet home-feeling."⁷ However, her tranquility is shattered by an apparition full of portent. She goes forward only because of her child and her home which wait for her return. When she is captured by a panther, she must sing in order to sooth him, using her thoughts of home to motivate herself to keep faith: "She did not think at this instant to call upon God. She called upon her husband" (86). This reaction is very different from Rowlandson's, who having seen the ineffectualness of the British army has little faith in it or her husband to save her; therefore, she calls upon God every time.

Spofford's protagonist uses her singing to sooth and in effect to domesticate the beast just as she has sung to her husband and child. As she croons to the panther, she is mentally transported home, and the memory of the safe cabin both inspire her at the same time that it brings on an intense emotional response that makes her song too sad to sustain. The contrast of her present scene in comparison to her memories of home is too

stark. Her thoughts of family actually weaken at the same time that they strengthen her. What she finds is a pragmatic balance, a way to use what she has learned at home while focusing on the reality at hand. Furthermore, the longer she is with the panther, the more connected to nature she becomes. Rather than fearing her surroundings, she begins transcendently to connect to the wilderness, finding strength from God in the beauty of the woods. Rowlandson never venerates her surroundings; instead, she focuses on the harshness of the landscape.

In the ending comes the greatest departure from the typical Indian captivity narrative: in addition to her spiritual salvation, her trial has actually saved her life. By being away, she has missed being slaughtered by Indians who have attacked and burned her home. Because her husband has been out looking for her, he and his child have also been spared: "The husband proceeds a step or two in advance; the wife lingers over a singular foot-print in the snow, stoops and examines it, then looks up with a hurried word. Her husband stands alone on the hill, his arms folded across the babe" (96). The tableau Spofford creates suggests a reversal of roles. The woman is bent, studying her landscape for clues; she has a voice while the husband is silent. He stands in maternal embrace, his gun no longer useful in the disaster before them: "The log house, the barns, the neighboring farms, the fences, are all blotted out and mingled in one smoking ruin. Desolation and death were indeed there, and beneficence and life in the forest" (96). The untamed wilderness and the woman's success in keeping alive in it suggest that women might find their way in the world that transcends the domestic sphere. Though unfamiliar, the landscape provides her with opportunities to use her resources as well as to make a spiritual connection through her appreciation of nature. Furthermore, her family is as

much the beneficiaries of her sojourn as she. Rather than harming them by being away, she gives them life. Because her husband has come out to find her, he and his child have escaped death. The political intent is obvious: women may safely negotiate their way in the world; though they can look to the home for strength, they need not be confined to it out of fear.

Home as a haven against the discomforts of the rough American terrain is perpetuated in another of the early works by an American woman writer. Caroline Kirkland's A New Home—Who'll Follow? can be roughly defined as a short-story cycle.⁸ In a collection of sketches held together by the common theme of emigration to Michigan, a journey which she undertook in 1835 with her husband and children, Kirkland sets down practical suggestions concerning frontier life. Under the pseudonym Mary Clavers, Kirkland fulfills her opening promise to give "a veracious history of actual occurrences, an unvarnished transcript of real characters, and an impartial record of every-day forms of speech."⁹ Kirkland's account is an illustration of the struggles that women faced in trying to create a safe and comfortable domestic space for their families in a difficult and oftentimes dangerous environment. Not discounting the hard journey by wagon to Michigan, the minute Kirkland arrives in Montacute, she is initiated into the everyday drudgery of life in the wilds. She soon comes to realize that those who were lured by the possibilities of private ownership found little privacy in the new Michigan communities. Any sense of independence was worn down by the insistent need for community goods and services, an interdependence that wore away former Eastern manners. The early settlers organized together against the threatening wilderness, an arrangement which sometimes fostered an unnecessary, unhealthy dependence on

neighbors. In women's fiction during the 1850s, Kolodny has discovered an "anxiety" created by the "fear of geographical isolation," a worry that women lose their connection to the network of strength that a community provides.¹⁰ This fear is hardly the problem for Kirkland. In their close proximity, the Montacute citizens wore on each other's nerves.

From sewing circles to banking ventures, from staking out village plots to organizing church services, Kirkland writes of the "deficiencies and disadvantages of the settler in the new world" (167). Kirkland lived in Michigan with her children for seven years while her husband tended to his Montacute investment. Kolodny makes the point that like "their husbands and fathers, women too shared in the economic motives behind emigration; and like the men, women also dreamed of transforming the wilderness. But the emphases were different. . . . Women claimed the frontiers as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity."¹¹ Though her protagonist tries hard to make a comfortable home for her family, the environment is too much to contend with. Her home is far from ideal. Though she set out for Michigan with high expectations, the economics of frontier life overwhelm her good intentions. Kirkland's reaction rings true to Fryer's observations concerning westering women whose "letters and diaries of the frontier make clear the absence of mythologizing—or of any response to the land that was not direct and matter-of-fact. . . . Seldom involved in the decisions to go west, these women followed their men, often with a great deal of unhappiness, loneliness, privation and illness; for them, place meant the reestablishment of domestic routines that gave order to their lives."¹² Too devoted to William to undercut his business investments, her descriptions of land speculation nevertheless show that she did not approve of her husband's business affairs:

“Men look upon each one, newly arrived, merely as an additional business-automaton—a somebody more with whom to try the race of enterprise” (99). The narrative seems to forecast Kolodny’s conviction that “the masculine transformation of the wilderness into profit threatened women’s transformation of the wilderness into home.”¹³ Kirkland saw very little to praise and much to criticize in the early frontier communities as one family after another was destroyed by dubious investments.

Furthermore, though tempered by her humor, the confusion of the backwoods community life is revealed in the realistic descriptions of the meager means by which frontier families had to face the day to day. She describes in detail the sad poverty of a nearby settlement, focusing on the uninhabitable houses and the filthy mire that serves as a square. The close proximity and dependence on one another prompts a long commentary on the habits of borrowing, a custom that goes so far as one woman asking to borrow another’s baby. Her frustration is evident as she concludes that on the frontier Eastern conveniences are either useless or soon lost to a neighbor with a more pressing need: “No settlers are so uncomfortable as those who, coming with abundant means as they suppose, to be comfortable, set out with a determination to live as they have been accustomed to live” (86). Without their customary surroundings and overwhelmed with the tasks of daily living, Kolodny points out that for many emigrating women the “dream of a domestic Eden had become a nightmare of domestic captivity” as only men were at liberty to roam outside the confines of home. Women were “excluded . . . shut up with the children in log cabins.”¹⁴ For many westering women, positive expectations were shattered by disappointing realities. Andre Dubus’ postmodern characters are not immune to these dangers still present in the American landscape. Several stories focus on women

who must learn to survive on a day-to-day basis as they live in fear of what awaits them both inside and outside of home. From domestic violence to lack of self esteem, women in Dubus' short fiction are defined in part by their domestic containment, both negative and positive. Trapped by fear or abuse, their memories painful, their futures bleak, these women are often not able to free themselves and never have the opportunity to experience any healing expansion.

In spite of all of the ragged and sad living conditions of the Michigan emigrant, Kirkland's narrative makes it very clear that the only asylum from the maddening demands of neighbors and the dangers from near-by Indians is one's domestic space. She sets up what she sees as the hopeful promise in the descriptions of the Beckworth home. In contrast to the many naive settlers who come ill equipped to withstand the demands of the Michigan landscape, the Beckworths are set apart from their neighbors and take on allegorical weight. Their home, a "palace of pine boards," is comfortable and clean (123). In her simple transcription, Kirkland reveals to her Eastern readers that it is the Beckworths' sort of self-reliance that will best serve the new settler. Individuals who remain apart from the day-to-day dependency on community can build, in spite of its difficulty, their own version of Eden in the Michigan wilds. They must come prepared, and they must strive to keep their own independence so as not to become an inconvenience to their neighbors. In one account of two lovers who go west simply for the romance, the naive Everard and Cora almost starve to death. As Kirkland reminds her readers, "the world's harshness soon cures romance" (208). Practical planning and self-sufficiency in the home are the only way to survive.

If the literary scene is any indication of the public's desire for romance, then Americans were ready for a love affair. According to Arthur Voss, "the earliest published pieces of short fiction in America . . . appeared late in the eighteenth century. Some of them were Gothic narratives, while others were tales and sketches in imitation of Addison, Goldsmith, and other English periodical writers" as well as "the English character sketches written to inculcate good manners and morals."¹⁵ These pieces were written in abundance and had many opportunities for publication primarily due to the rise in popularity of the lady's books. In fact, Fred Lewis Pattee believes that the public interest in sentimental fiction and publishers' willingness to feed that demand were responsible for a twenty-year lag in the development of the short story that should have made good progress after Washington Irving.¹⁶ Nevertheless, moral tales and sketches that romanticized the home as a place of retreat and sanctuary were popular in part because they offered a sense of continuity in the face of change. Without a positive sense of domestic space, a character is often unable to cope with the demands of life.

The first "annual proper,"¹⁷ to use Pattee's term, was The Atlantic Souvenir; A Christmas and New Year's Offering. One of the most popular of its kind, the publication was an assortment of short stories, character sketches, and poetry, all by native contributors. Even though the stories lack the sophistication of works to follow by Irving and Kirkland, The Atlantic Souvenir was responsible for giving American writers a medium for their fiction. The "Preface" to the first volume attests to the pride that the publishers must have felt in giving to the American public a work in which "every article is the production of our own citizens."¹⁸ For Pattee, the popularity of sentimental fiction was due in part to the limitations put upon American women who had been by and large

stifled by social restrictions: “Woman in the early nineteenth century was beginning to emerge. She had been repressed; she was adolescent in her views of life, given to extremes of emotionalism, prudish, sentimental, full of dreams and idealism, addicted much to exaggeration and often to gloom.”¹⁹ The result of this repression is a population of readers who responded to didactic fiction that upheld the strict codes of behavior. As Eugene Current-Garcia points out,

the general make-up of this fiction—its themes, structure, tone, emphasis—reflected the actions, interests, and aspirations, as well as the doubts and fears, the manners and morals, of a self-conscious, democratic society adjusting to new conditions and problems and seeking its identity in the very process of dramatizing its behavior under the guise of moralistic self-examination.²⁰

Throughout this flux and introspection, the home remained a ballast in the winds of change.

One of the longer pieces in the first volume, “A Tale of Mystery” is a fast-moving, humorous story that focuses on a young woman’s complete absorption with romance.²¹ Traveling with her mother on a scenic tour up the Hudson River, Cecilia, unimpressed by the scenery, is nevertheless intrigued by a man who has come to Saratoga Springs for its healing powers. Cecilia has made the adventure in order to find romance, and the lack of “lions” at the retreat has left her desperate for amusement. Bored to the point of exhaustion, Cecilia is revitalized by her interest in a “mysterious stranger” who pursues a “mysterious course of life” (151). He keeps to himself, speaks to no one, and pays no attention to Cecilia, who is used to being the center of attention. She convinces herself

that the stranger is none other than Lord Byron and, if she is wrong, at least “it was certain that he was both a poet and a misanthrope, and man-hating poets are so delightful!” (155-56). Most of the action of the story revolves around Cecilia’s observations of the stranger and her mounting belief that only her love can cure his malady. She becomes convinced of the necessity of her place in his life once she overhears him telling another visitor to the springs that he has neither name nor home: ““I am here today, and gone tomorrow. I am looking about the world for what I shall never find, and running away from what must speedily overtake me”” (160). Cecilia is emphatic in her composite of the man, attributing everything brilliant and exciting to him. The genesis of her romantic nature is not left to the imagination. As the author makes clear, she has barely “survived the perils of a life of fashionable dissipation, reinforced by a course of fashionable novels” (166). Much like a heroine in one of these novels, Cecilia sees herself and her marriage to the stranger as the final destination of his life’s quest. What is clearly wrong with the man, as Cecilia concludes, is he has no stationary home, no place of refuge in the world to help him overcome his melancholy.

When Cecilia finally meets the stranger, he is not Lord Byron but Mr. Stump from Dog’s Misery. One after another of her romantic conclusions is proven false. He is no poet, no musician, no misanthrope. He is, in fact, no mystery. As Mr. Stump tells her, ““I am not in the least extraordinary—there are thousands of such men as I am, drifting about the world, without an anchoring place” (176). Though she never learns what exactly is physically wrong with him, Cecilia contents herself for awhile by giving over to a “delightful state of perplexity,” which entertains her for a few days when her attentions, “aided by public sentiment,” are given to a man worthy of all of her romantic tendencies

(181). Not long after, she marries the “irresistible, and marriage is a sovereign remedy for romance” (182). In spite of the playfully satiric ending, there is an underlying moral in the story. Though marriage and home life may cure one of the types of romance found in popular fiction, a rootless life, a life without the refuge of home and spouse, is a life that is not worth living: “Mr. Jacob Stump . . . continued to live, and move, and have a being, and this was all. He wandered from place to place, in listless and increasing languor; rising every morning weaker than he lay down at night, and going to bed every night weaker than he rose” (182). Even his name suggests that moving through his life without a rooted sense of place has cut off any chance of growth. Without a home, one is barely living, merely escaping “by changing the scene, and fleeing from one place to another” (177). In this story and in many others like it in The Atlantic Souvenir a sense of domestic space is necessary for a complete and mature life.

This attention to home as positive and vital is carried forward in the lady’s books which followed the success of The Atlantic Souvenir. Two of these, The Token and Godey’s Ladys Book, were especially popular, finding favor with a large readership. By the 1850s, as James D. Hart points out, fiction belonged to the middle class,²² and many scenes of controversy in sketches, poems, and short fiction are played out in scenes of the home: “One of the great inventions of the middle class was the new woman. . . . Her power was of a sort no ruling-class woman had ever possessed before. Men were busy with money-making, politics, and all the other so-called practical affairs of the day; women took over the arts, social deportment, and domestic standards.”²³ These were not new concerns for women who for the most part had been denied access to the commercial world of men. Though a majority of women may have been content up until mid-

nineteenth century in the domestic role, some were not. At the same time that Godey's and other popular books were promoting women's containment, the first Women's Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls in 1848. If the public response was any indication of the uphill struggle that women would face as they sought to redefine their place in American society, the hard climb should have been clear as during the convention "women were stoned, and even jailed"²⁴ for their participation. From daughters to mothers, wives and friends, Dubus' female characters likewise go through myriad changes and struggles seeking to find their respective roles. He often shows women in contrast to the stereotypically masculine world of business. Some find closure after much inquiry into themselves. Rarely superficial, their questions and confrontations are usually the deeply difficult problems of maintaining order in the home.

By 1856, "feminine fiction was running at high tide," according to Pattee,²⁵ but with controversial and conflicting views of women played out on the political front even as the dominant literary works, particularly those included in Godey's, attempted to gloss over the debate. One way to squelch the dilemma was to reemphasize the importance of residence and women's unique and viable place within her domestic sphere. As Kolodny points out, home was elevated to a "new domestic professionalism" as women were denied outside opportunities:

Addressing a largely comfortable and highly literate middle-class readership, editors of fashionable ladies magazines and domestic novelists alike suggested that, by eschewing the world of trade and commerce, the home had become something better: a kind of moral and spiritual "beacon light" in a crass and materialistic world. . . .

The story of feminine trials and triumphs . . . must . . . be seen as a literary response born of the anxiety attendant upon rapidly changing role expectations and accelerating technological transitions. In the face of increasingly restricted employment opportunities for middle-class women, “slave wages” for working-class women, quickened industrialization, spreading urbanization, and still carrying with it the memory of the economic upheavals following the Panic of 1837, the domestic fiction of mid-century America sought solace and security in the image of the home “as moral repository in an immoral society . . . [and] a bastion of stability in a changing, fragmentary world.”²⁶

On the surface, this ideal seems harmless enough. However, the lady’s books gained in popularity as women with time on their hands sought to find a positive image of themselves mirrored in the pages of popular fiction. Unfortunately, much of the art of the short story initiated by Irving and continued by Kirkland and others of equal merit disappeared under a veneer of political dogma which in effect criticized women who craved expansion outside of the narrow prescriptions outlined in the lady’s books. As a result, Pattee points out that during the 1850s “with a few exceptions, the short story ceased to be distinctive [and] . . . seemed about to disappear as a reputable literary form.”²⁷

Some of the recurring ideals about the sacredness of home and woman’s defined place within that sanctuary are hammered out in didactic essays, sketches, and poems that make up each issue of The Token and Godey’s Lady’s Book.²⁸ A very short piece by

Hope Leslie suggests that the foundation that home provides for its children is worth any sacrifice a woman must make in regards to public connections or private enterprise:

Home can never be transferred—never repeated in the experience of an individual. The place consecrated by paternal love; by the innocence and sports of childhood; by the first acquaintance with nature; by linking the heart of the visible creation, is the only home. There is a living and breathing spirit infused into nature. Every familiar object has a history; the trees have tongues, and the air is very vocal. There the vesture of decay doth not close in and control the noble function of the soul. It sees, and bears, and enjoys, without the ministry of gross and material substance.²⁹

A sketch by Leslie entitled “Country Lodgings” adds to the sacredness of domestic space. In her piece, she catalogues all of the faults of a country boarding house in comparison to one’s own home. She points out every minute deficiency associated with traveling from one’s familiar and comfortable lodgings, referring to herself when she is away as an “inmate” rather than a guest.³⁰ Her advice to her readers is to stay home and make oneself and one’s family comfortable within the known rather than risking one’s health by seeking variety in the landscape. An anonymous essayist echoes this position: “Let all your enjoyments center in your home. Let your home occupy the first place in your thoughts; for that is the only source of happiness.”³¹ The popular stance was that there was no vocation, no calling as important to a woman as wife and mother, and the only way to find fulfillment in the world was to focus on the home as its only source:

The great endeavor of a wife must be, therefore, to fix the disposition of her husband by increasing and persevering attentions: there is nothing more easy, if the task is assumed upon the outset in the marriage state; it is then a pleasure—the bride thinks no exertions too great to promote the happiness of the man she loves, and she perseveres in the task, until the very task itself becomes connected with her habits and manners of life, and, consequently, with her happiness. But if she neglects this opportunity, it can never be regained; the favorable moment will not return, and then, when the excitement of the occasion has abated, and the novelty of the new situation worn off, she discovers the fallacy of her expectations, and that all her high-built hopes are castles in the air (286).

The shift in tone in the middle of the paragraph from promises to warnings serves as a reminder to women that their place in the home is tenuous at the onset. Unless she makes herself valuable to her husband by making his comfort her first priority, she will lose any hope of being content herself. In fact, as the essay continues, she will be to blame if her husband seeks his comfort elsewhere. It is the wife's "task to preserve a perpetual charm; or rather a variety of charms, by which [her] husband, always finding pleasures at home, will never wish to roam abroad for others" (287). The future of her entire family, those prospects and immediate joys separate from commerce were her responsibility alone. As an essay in The Token reminds women, after surrendering to God, "her first duty is *to take care of her own house*" so that men might be free to take care of any dealings,

professional or political, outside of the home.³² Dubus never condones this definitive split in roles. Instead, characters boxed in are typically dissatisfied.

A sketch by Sir T. Monroe, taken from his correspondence, warns of the careful balance that a wife must make between familial devotion and absolute entrapment. His essay, "A Tender Wife," is an account of the easy shift from a positive containment that nurtures and supports to one which smothers and stifles. Having perhaps read too many selections in Godey's about a woman's obligation to a man's welfare, the wife of the protagonist has become too attentive, so much so that she cannot be happy herself unless she is tending to her husband's needs. He sees in her affections the duplicitous intent of subversive mastery: "Such women are never at rest when their husbands sleep well a-nights; they are never at ease except when the poor man is ailing, that they may have the pleasure of recovering him again; it gratifies both their medical vanity and their love of power by making him more dependent upon them; and it likewise glorifies all the finer feelings"³³ Inherent in the essay is the warning that a woman must not seek to gain any power over her husband, or her intentions, no matter how innocent on the surface, will be found out and exposed. This possibility is illustrated in an anonymous short story in a latter volume of Godey's that might easily have been written by Monroe for its comparable style, tone, and message. In "My Wife: A Whisper," a first person account of his wife's short comings, the narrator outlines all of the defects of the different types of wives, comparing them to the variant moods of the weather. The plot of the story revolves around his wife's smothering nature evidenced by her insistence that he wear a night cap when he travels. The climax comes when the narrator mistaking his night cap for his handkerchief pulls the offending article from his coat while at table with mixed company:

“Alas! My too-fond, too careful wife, had, without my knowledge, slipped it into my pocket, when she embraced me at my departure.”³⁴ High embarrassment and extreme mortification would have sufficed, but the narrator does not stop there. In fact, he runs from the room—without his cap—and as a result becomes so ill that his wife must tend him for three months: “How thankful the kind-hearted creature was that the incident had taken so serious an effect upon me!—it afforded her such an admirable opportunity of evincing her devotion. How grateful was she for my sufferings!”(231).³⁵ Her overzealousness results in his illness, which he concludes was the aim of her affections from the beginning. If she cannot nag him to death, she can at least keep him close to it.

As entertaining and enlightening as these stories might have been for their audience, little published in the gift books has endured. Fortunately, some of America’s earliest and best writers were involved with the short story, working to develop its form and to bring respect to the genre. One of the most prolific and respected female writers of the nineteenth century was Harriet Beecher Stowe, and many of her short stories take on the theme of domesticity, showing the myriad moods and faces of American home life. One of the titles of her early works, “Mrs. A. and Mrs. B.: or, what she thinks about it,” is suggestive of the western dime novels so popular with the reading public. However, the domestic spin that Stowe brings to the typical western tale is interesting for what it has to say about women’s place in society.

Rather than dealing with the high drama and exaggerated action and tension of confrontations between gunslingers and sheriffs, Indians and white settlers or any of the other fast moving themes so typical of the western texts, Stowe creates a parody of the wild west dime novels. In her story, the plot is reduced to conversations about the

affordability and practicality of gingerbread and how one's neighbor influences one's household. Two women, Mrs. A and Mrs. B of the title, compete with one another on who can maintain the most economically run household. The story moves on to an assortment of examples of women in competition with one another, constantly being influenced by what others are doing and altering their own behaviors to fit those of their neighbors. From daughters' dresses to the propriety of attending dancing parties, no subject is too trivial that it might avoid being, just as a "shuttlecock back and forward, kept up on both sides by most judicious hands."³⁶ Stowe pokes fun at the so-called importance of such trifles in women's lives. Throughout the story, the narrator speaks directly to the audience, warning women of the propensity of falling into types rather than working to have minds of their own: "Nothing is more tedious than a circle of young ladies who have got by rote a certain set of phrases and opinions. . . . A genuine original opinion . . . would be better than such a universal Dead Sea of acquiescence" (114). Just as Stowe deviates from the expectations that her title suggests, she asks women to be original in their domestic choices and to strive to make a home for themselves and their families in which they have invested enough of their own tastes so as not to be so readily influenced by those around them. Dubus takes up this same theme as his female characters often work for self-expression in their sometimes tedious household responsibilities.

In addition, the western magazines captivated America's attention and gave popularity to the short story genre. One of the most influential writers of the time was Bret Harte, whose short story "The Luck of Roaring Camp" brought him immediate fame.³⁷ Though the story has been praised for its variant style, its attention to detail, and

the tightly descriptive characterizations, what is also interesting is Harte's twist on the domestic scene. In this story, he creates a band of men who have inherited a baby born to the local prostitute, Cherokee Sal, who has died giving birth. The men make a comic but endearing effort at providing for the baby, joining together as a community to be both mother and father to the orphan. Harte's descriptions of the cabin assigned to the baby, Tommy, whom they call "The Luck," is a tableau of domesticity that is in glaring contrast to the rest of the camp inhabited solely by men: The cabin "was kept scrupulously clean and whitewashed. Then it was boarded, clothed, and papered . . . [as] the rehabilitation of the cabin became a necessity."³⁸ The baby's presence and his clean lodgings soon have an effect on the rest of the camp, transforming the otherwise rough men, who begin to pay attention to their own hygiene and deportment. They become more refined, leaving off swearing and yelling and taking to bathing and wearing clean clothes. The transformation permeates every aspect of the mining community, even to the point of giving better return on their claims. The only visitor to the camp, the expressman, explains the transformation best by focusing on their domesticity: "They've got vines and flowers round their houses, and they wash themselves twice a day. But they're mighty rough on strangers, and they worship an Ingin baby'" (16). Cut off from surrounding camps, their containment is positively expressed, their unity for the sake of the child unyielding: "No encouragement was given to immigration, and, to make their seclusion more perfect, the land on either side of the mountain wall that surrounded the camp they duly preempted" (16). Nature and a fierce loyalty to the child work in tandem to isolate the men as they mother the baby. Tamed, they are the happiest they have ever been in their lives, their contentment best revealed in Harte's descriptions of bliss which surround their domesticity.

Harte was not the only fiction writer to concern himself with the influence of domesticity on men. In fact, men's role in the home, their containment and expansion both positive and negative, can trace its roots to the very beginning of the genre in America. For all accounts and purposes, the genesis of the American short story is the publication of Washington Irving's The Sketch Book in 1819.³⁹ Irving is important for the grace he brings to the genre, but more significantly he was one of the first to create an American voice, to use an American setting and American characters. His influence on future short story writers has been widely documented.⁴⁰

Just as Irving was one of the first writers of short fiction to bring merit to the genre, so was he too one of the first to use the motif of domestic space in relation to its influence on men. In addition, three other notable writers of the nineteenth century, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Henry James add to the motif. Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Melville's "The Piazza," and "The Jolly Comer" by James are useful when examined together for what they have to say about the diverse effects of residence as containment. In each of these stories, the protagonist embarks on or returns from a journey that becomes important due to its influence on how he reshapes or redefines his connection to home. Whether the journey is actual or spiritual, the end result of each protagonist's quest is his disparate feelings about his relationship to his domestic space. Dubus continues the exploration of men in relation to their homes in many of his short stories. Most particularly, men who are not grounded in positive living arrangements or who violate home by a negative expansion into infidelity or too much attention to their vocation do not fare well. On the other hand, men who are able to negotiate the pressing demands outside their home and reconcile

themselves to the limitations imposed by the needs of family reach the greatest sense of internal peace and are rewarded by scenes of familial security.

Irving's Rip Van Winkle is a man who has made a vocation of doing nothing but encouraging his own lazy but good-natured view of the world. He lives on a badly maintained farm that he all but ignores as he chooses instead to spend his time keeping company with other men in the village, meeting at the inn and passing the day with little for which to account: "He was a simple, good-natured man; he was, moreover, a kind neighbor, and an obedient, henpecked husband"⁴¹ His wife is of a very different nature than Rip, and her nagging turns the village against her as they feel pity for Rip for having to live with a woman so ill-humored. To escape her criticism, he stays away from home as much as possible, having as his "sole domestic adherent" his dog, Wolf, who is as cowed by Dame Van Winkle as his master is (41). As the years pass, rather than mellowing with age, her complaints become shriller, her tolerance even less than before as "a tart tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use" (41). Home becomes an uninhabitable place, and Rip begins to "take to the outside of the house—the only side which, in truth, belongs to a henpecked husband" (41). Though her children are ragged and her situation bleak, no one in her village sympathizes with Dame Van Winkle; no one wants to commiserate with a shrew. No female neighbor wants to be associated with her even in feeling, separating themselves from her and any possibility of being defined by connection. Instead, everyone sides with Rip.

When the village can no longer provide him with enough distance from his wife's abuse, Rip escapes into the mountains. There he embarks on a dream-like journey from which he returns some twenty years later. There are several levels of irony at work in the

story. Like many Americans before and after, Rip travels into the wilderness in search of a better life. Yet he goes not to change the landscape, not to make an enterprising difference, but to escape from any profitable work. Furthermore, as he sleeps, the landscape about him is rapidly changing. He awakens to a world where no one knows him to the degree that he wonders if he knows himself. Because he has refused or been denied autonomy in his home, the world has become unrecognizable, and he has lost his place: ““God knows . . . I’m not myself—I’m somebody else. . . . I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”” (50). Current-Garcia, Voss, and others have pointed out the theme of mutability, suggesting that the narrative represents the rapidly changing American scene. “America’s first really great story”⁴² is also about the importance of home as a positive place of containment. Driven from his house by his wife’s ill temper and inability to understand her husband’s passive nature, Rip does not have a place to call home; rather, he is rootless and as time passes does not know himself nor do his neighbors know him. It is only after he learns of his wife’s death that he is able to proclaim: ““I am . . . Rip Van Winkle”” (51). With that declaration, his daughter accepts him and invites him into her home where he lives the rest of his life without having to flee from “petticoat government. Happily that was at an end; he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony and could go in and out whenever he pleased, without [dread]” (53). Without a secure sense of domestic space, the story suggests, a man could never be sure of his place in the world. Only by knowing a positive connection to home does he truly know himself. Rip’s journey is both an escape and a self-affirming discovery.

Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown,” on the other hand, is a spiritual journey that leaves its protagonist with very negative and destructive conclusions about the world

and his place in it.⁴³ Set at the turn of the eighteenth century, it tells of the transformation of a newly married young man who begins to doubt the possibility of goodness in everyone around him, including his young wife, Faith. The allegory centers around the reoccurring Hawthorne theme of man's natural depravity "and that every heart conceals iniquity of thought or deed."⁴⁴ What is interesting is how Goodman Brown's loss of faith affects his domestic space.

Having only been married for three months, Brown leaves his wife at home for the night in order to meet the devil in the woods. He knows the dangers of losing his soul and burning in hell, but has confidence that his wife's good conduct and sure salvation will be strong enough to save him as he plans to ride to heaven on her skirts. He even uses his wife to make an excuse for his tardiness: "'Faith kept me back awhile.'"⁴⁵ That woman is man's moral touchstone is a recurring theme of the times, just as the essayists and fiction writers of the lady's books would constantly proclaim. His wife and his belief in God have made him hesitant to go to a meeting that can only end badly. When Brown meets the Devil, he is shaken when he is witness to the apparent sins of his neighbors. Though he is rattled by what he sees, he is able to withstand the pain until his own wife's conversion to evil is suggested. He begs her not to give over to the devil, calling for her to "'resist the Wicked One!'" (288). Whether she does or not, whether she is really there in the woods or simply conjured there by the devil as a trick to make Brown give over more easily is really immaterial to what follows. He finds himself back in the forest alone, everything back to its previous tranquil state, except for Brown himself, who has been so altered, so shaken that he spends the rest of his life as a "stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man" (288). His connection to his townspeople is broken,

but what so destroys Brown is his own wife's supposed weakness. Certainly the story is allegorical on many levels, the most obvious being that the loss of faith is centered in a person's propensity to believe that human beings are capable of such a uniform lack of goodness and moral strength. The fact that Brown can believe that his wife is at union with the devil makes the literal union irrelevant. Without his wife's spiritual strength, Brown too is weakened and lost. Home becomes a metaphor for the body which houses the soul; without the strength of home, Brown is incapable of withstanding temptation or in believing in the goodness of humankind. When he no longer believes in his wife, he loses his spirituality just as he loses his love for her. As a result, his home becomes a morbid place. His journey leads him away from the strength of home into a dark view of the world from which he never recovers. This reoccurring motif appears also in Dubus, who likewise shows men in confrontation with their beliefs. Those who have a grounded faith are better equipped to deal with the hardships that life brings.

Herman Melville adds to the motif of domestic space also by setting his protagonist on a journey, yet in "The Piazza," the trip is a literal one. Like Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Melville's story suggests that one's residence, no matter the view it affords, can become a place of negative containment. When Melville's protagonist moves into his house, he finds as its only deficiency the lack of a piazza, a place which combines "the coziness of in-doors with the freedom of out-doors."⁴⁶ After a great deal of thought and consideration as to which side of the house would best suit a view, he finally builds his piazza. From his northern perch one autumn afternoon, he catches sight of a place in the mountains, a little hollow where scenes of magic are played out for him. He begins to think that it is "fairy-land," and deciding to "set sail," he makes

his “voyage” in order to shake off a weariness that has overcome him (626). What he discovers is a cottage where a young orphaned girl sits sewing and crying. He learns that she has spent her days watching his home, wishing only to meet whoever it is who dwells in the house above. Her domestic life has become the worst sort of containment as she is left alone every day while her brother is able to work in the open air. Her life is a series of tedious domestic rituals that leave her feeling bored to weariness, unable to find any relief: “‘Mine is mostly but dull woman’s work—sitting, sitting, restless sitting’” (633). Her only comfort comes from imagining the life that must go on in the protagonist’s house on the hill. Dubus echoes this theme in many of his stories, showing the negative effects on women who have no autonomy and who are trapped, prisoners of their overwhelmingly tedious domestic tasks. Ultimately, most of Dubus’ women rebel, shrugging off their yokes even if such liberty means losing their families.

Though both Marianna and the protagonist are given a view into the world and a connection to nature through walks in the woods, neither is content. The piazza, a blend of both the home and the surrounding landscape, gives each a view into the other’s life, yet neither is able to find satisfaction as they lack a positive connection to another person. Marianna might journey into the woods, but they are “‘lonesome; lonesome because so wide. . . . Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know—those in the woods are strangers’” (633). The protagonist cannot bring himself to shatter Marianna’s illusions regarding the happiness of his own unfulfilling life, so he never reveals himself to her. Ironically, were he to do so, the two might make a connection with one another and thereby fill the emptiness in each other’s hearts. He can only “‘wish that I were that happy one of the happy house you dream you see; for then you would behold

him now, and, as you say, this weariness might leave you” (634). The metaphor of the journey is continued when the protagonist makes his way home and paces on his piazza like a sailor on a ship’s deck, never reaching port for he never makes that necessary human connection. What the piazza suggests, and what lies in Marianna’s hopes is the perfect blending of containment and expansion, a way to be at home in a world that offers one a positive view. Yet the protagonist’s inability to see himself as the waking answer to her daydreams makes his piazza, his world view as lonely and, therefore, as harborless as a ship lost at sea.

Henry James’ “The Jolly Corner” is a combination of these stories by Irving, Hawthorne, and Melville in that it uses domestic space in conjunction with the journey motif to suggest a character’s sense of containment and expansion as both positive and negative. After living abroad the majority of his adult life, the protagonist, fifty-six year-old Spencer Brydon, has come home to America, where he notes the “newnesses” and the “bignesses” that assault “his vision wherever he looked.”⁴⁷ He has come back to his boyhood home from which he has been apart for more than thirty years. Having no lingering sentimental attachments to his house, he has contracted to have it broken up into a series of apartments, creating his own newness from the old. Furthermore, he has reconnected with his friend Alice Staverton, making a new relationship on an old foundation.

His home becomes a metaphor for what his life might have been had Brydon stayed in America and perhaps made a connection with Alice. He begins to sense a presence in the house, a “ghost” that finally represents his alter self, whom he could have and, frighteningly, might should have been, ““a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly

possible, development of [his] own nature” had been ““blighted”” by transference (321). What haunts him at night is “the real, the waiting life” (324) of what might have been, whose possibilities finally overwhelm him. Finally, only through his perfect connection with Alice, who finds him and revives him from a nightmare swoon, does he make peace with the self that he could have been and the self that he has become. He is able to reject the possibilities of the “alter self” by realizing that the other would not have known and loved Alice as he does now: ““He has a million a year. . . . But he hasn’t you”” (340). The ghost cannot haunt Brydon anymore. Though he has almost been commodified by moving far away from the foundations of his heritage by breaking apart his family home, he realizes there in that backdrop of domesticity that positive human connection is life’s defining and most rewarding aim. Many of Dubus’ stories focus on characters who reach similar conclusions, a pattern that Thomas Kennedy has pointed out: Dubus’ “treatment of human love becomes . . . clearly a spiritual direction away from the hunger concerned with the individual’s relation to himself toward those further reaches of communion. The hunger of Dubus’ characters to transcend the solitude bounded by their flesh is where their progress toward the communion of love begins.”⁴⁸ Like many of Dubus’ characters, Brydon reevaluates his attitude towards domesticity; though he initially left home for its restrictiveness, the positive containment that it offers through his rejoining with Alice gives his life new meaning. She, too, has seen the other self, the other possible life, and yet she loves him all the same, her love “supporting him” as he accepts himself through his realization that Alice loves him no matter what he might have been (339).

This positive acceptance of place and of self was certainly not always the case in stories concerned with the motif of domestic space. In fact many of the most respected

writers prior to World War I construct short stories that provide scenes of the home as a negative place of containment. One of the heralds of the realistic and regional trend came prior to the Civil War. With stark attention to detail, Rebecca Harding Davis in “Life in the Iron Mills” writes with dignity and sensitivity of people who are oppressed by the industrial revolution that had already begun in the northern states.⁴⁹ Her portrayal of the pitiful living conditions brings a dark pall on the motif of domestic space. Ground down by poor wages and inhuman hours, the characters who struggle to survive against impossible odds are treated with a respect that can only come from presenting them honestly. Davis never attempts to romanticize nor does she shy away from giving the reading public a view into the oppressiveness of characters who stand for the many at work in the American industrial world.

The narrator directly addresses her audience, inviting, in fact insisting that the only way completely to understand the day-to-day problems of the mill worker is to experience them vicariously. Rather than a healthy, happy domestic scene suggested in the lady’s books as the typical and appropriate family structure, Davis’ characters live together like rats, six families sharing a cramped and filthy house. The protagonists live in the cellar, a metaphorical reference to their place on the social ladder. Rather than a garden of herbs or vegetables, the cellar has as its only vegetation a mold which thrives on the damp which permeates their “kennel-like” rooms where they eat “rank pork and molasses” and drink “God and the distillers only know what” (42). Animal imagery runs throughout, suggesting that these characters have no more autonomy than dogs, living crushed together in the worst sort of containment with no hope of expansion, no hope for change. The food that they are able to afford cannot possibly nourish them. Nevertheless,

Deborah saves what little she has to give to Hugh. Playing upon the stereotype of a woman's willingness to sacrifice herself for those she most loves, Deborah would rather go without in order to have more to offer. As a woman, she has been conditioned to believe that providing food is a way to show love. Many scenes in Dubus' stories are set in kitchens or show characters fixing meals or buying groceries for their families. Food becomes a metaphor of renewal, the preparing, the giving and receiving a sacramental rite. Yet here, the pitiful fare suggests her lack of anything that might nourish and sustain Hugh. He does not love her romantically; he cannot accept her just as he eventually rejects the food that she offers as she offers herself. He is too worn down for an appetite just as poverty and the absence of any chance of moving ahead have dissolved his spirit.

When Hugh and Deborah are arrested and thrown in jail for robbery, their cell is merely an extension of the life that they live, prisoners of their poverty. The only hope comes from a Quaker woman too late to help Hugh but in time to provide Deborah with a life radically different from the oppressive domesticity she was forced to endure. The imagery shifts from dark and red, suggestive of the hell in which they live, to sunlight, a metaphor for the possibilities of social change offered by the approaching dawn.

The influence of one's economics on domestic space is likewise the theme of Rose Terry Cooke's short story "Mrs. Flint's Married Experience." In this story, however, the twist comes in the fact that the protagonist had her own money and certainly enough of it when she was the widowed Mrs. Sarepty Gold. However, when she marries Mr. Flint, her security is taken from her as the law favors the husband's right to control his wife's money. The didactic nature of the story is evident in the choice of names. When she was in her first marriage, a good relationship in that husband and wife lived together

in harmony, she treasured her home and her role as wife just as her name suggests. Her wealth, too, is not only connected to her happy union but also to the experiences of her life that she can share with her daughter if only Mindwell will do just that, listen to her mother and try to understand the grief that Sarepty is still suffering due to missing her husband. Part of the conflict that later arises is due to her daughter's unwillingness to speak as frankly to her mother as her mother does to her. This need for daughters to claim their own autonomy and to divide themselves from their mothers is played out in a variety of ways in Dubus' fiction. Those who struggle with creating independent selves, usually due to their having conflated their mothers' experiences with their own, live in confusion until they are able to find their own voices. Only then can they begin to define their lives on their own terms, usually with healthy, healing results. Nevertheless, that daughters should inherit their mothers' treasure of experiences is suggested by Mrs. Gold's name as well as her daughter's, Mindwell. What Dubus' daughters must learn to do is to reinvest rather than appropriate their mothers' gifts.

The widowed Mrs. Gold is financially independent. She has leased her farm to a capable man and has savings set aside to see her through her life. However, she has lost her station by moving in with her daughter. She no longer has the title of wife and feels that she has lost her role as mother in her daughter's marriage: "She who had been all in all to Mindwell was now little more than 'grandma' in the house—a sort of suffered and necessary burden on [her son-in-law's] hands."⁵⁰ She desires to feel again what a home of her own can offer, "a place of dignity among other women—a place where she could ask her children to come to her, and give rather than receive" (99). She wants autonomy in life, to have the only respectable role reserved for women, mistress of her own home. She

fears being shuttled from place to place, of having no spot to call her own. She wants a “permanent shelter” (99). Certainly her desires reflect the best of Kerstin W. Shands’ blend of “bracing” and “embracing” space in that Widow Gold wants the positive containment that a solid marriage can provide at the same time that she wants to be able to have a say in her own affairs.⁵¹ Furthermore, she feels pressured by the expectations put upon women to marry if they have the opportunity; therefore, she accepts a proposal from Mr. Flint in spite of his reputation for being tight fisted.

Her marriage is anything but good. Mr. Flint uses both scripture and the law to gain control of his wife’s money. He gives her so little to eat that her health declines in only a few months. She is watched like a hawk by her husband who will not even allow her to bake sweets for her grandchildren or to eat meat with her meals. She is trapped, for there “were no amusements for her out of the house” (111). Furthermore, the weather conspires against her as well, bringing storms in the winter months that make the roads impossible for Mindwell to visit. With nothing to hope for, desperate for her health and mental well being, Sarepty eventually leaves her husband, an unthinkable action that results in her being chastised by the church.

The end of the story makes a mockery of the preacher’s decision that a woman should stay and starve and eventually die rather than offend her husband. In scene after scene, Mr. Flint’s greed is played out against his wife’s declining health and her inability to stand up for herself against both the church and her husband. The message is not hard to find, but the irony is that the final theme comes from the preacher’s sermon, later repeated by Mrs. Flint’s friend: ““Folks that ain’t just to themselves don’t never get justice elsewheres””(127). The warning to women is skillfully rendered with each scene:

Because both the law and the church and by extension most of society favor men, a woman must consider her own self first, for a man might marry her only to have his “house kept . . . his clothes mended, his whims humored, his table spread to his taste, and his children looked after” while his wife is a mere “domestic necessity” (106). Cooke’s story makes the claim that being a wife is not enough; because both secular and religious laws favor a man, a woman must claim autonomy in her own home or she will suffer as Mrs. Flint suffers. Better for a woman to be alone with her own capital than to give it over merely to fit into society’s expectations of her.

The power of a husband to dominate his wife to the point that it cripples both her body and mind is also made evident in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The text offers a portrait of a woman who is in effect held prisoner by the medical treatment in vogue at the time that women nervous or near hysteria needed bed rest and an absence of stimulation.⁵² Told from the first person point of view of a young woman who has been sent to the country by her physician husband, the story is an account of her dwindling sanity. Her autonomy in her home has been completely stripped from her. Like Mrs. Flint, she has been reduced to her bed by her bad health, virtually a prisoner due to her inability to fight the established system that validates a man’s control over his wife. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the control is even more complete in that the man responsible for her confinement is both her husband and a physician with influence over her own doctor: “If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing wrong with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?”⁵³ Claiming to love her and to understand her condition, he takes away every stimulant, any amusement that might

occupy her mind. With nothing to focus on but her own illness, her symptoms multiply until she goes mad. By the end of the story, her delusions are so complete that she sees her husband as the enemy. Ironically, he is, for his dominance over her leads to her complete breakdown.

The narrator's domestic space mirrors the way she is being treated. She has been confined to the nursery, appropriate to the diminutive way in which she is handled, as if rather than being a grown woman, she is a child unable to make her own decisions. Her husband, John, reinforces this by calling her "little girl" and by bringing his sister into the home to make sure that his wife follows his orders (174). Her only self-expression has been her writing, and he in effect silences her by refusing to let her continue. She knows that this is the one activity that makes her better, but she is powerless to assert her own desires over her husband's commands. With no outlet for self-expression, her containment becomes the worst sort of entrapment, evident by the choice of adjectives she uses in describing her room: "smothering," "dull," and "sickly" (168). Even the windows have bars, a metaphor for the prisoner she has become within her own domestic space. By mid story, she has begun to see a figure trapped behind the wallpaper, a woman like herself, contained and unable to break free.

Entrapment comes in a variety of ways. Isolation and the daily drudgery of maintaining a farm serve as another sense of negative, life-draining containment in Hamlin Garland's "Up the Coolly" in Main -Traveled Roads. The story is told from the point of view of Howard McLane, the eldest son of poor mid-western farmers who has returned home after a ten-year absence. Doreen Massey makes the point that it "is interesting to note how frequently the characterization of place as home has come from

those who have left . . . framed around those who—perforce—stayed behind.”⁵⁴ A successful actor and producer, the contrast of his life of plenty adds to his shock at the poverty of his people. Without his realizing it, his brother, Grant, has lost the farm; consequently, his mother, Grant, and Grant’s wife and child have all had to move farther up the coolly to an even harder living than they had before. Howard struggles for his brother’s acceptance, blaming himself for neglecting his family. Though eventually the two are reconciled, the reunion comes too late to help Grant, who is resigned to a life of utter defeat: “‘I’m a dead failure. I’ve come to the conclusion that life’s a failure for ninety-nine percent of us. You can’t help me now.’”⁵⁵ Though Howard is willing to buy back the family farm, the prospect comes without any sense of hope for Grant, too defeated by his life to start again.

When Howard first sees his mother, she is framed by a landscape that only adds to the sorrow of the scene. The faint yellow sky, the “dim purple silhouettes,” and the locust trees metaphorically suggest the lack of substance in lives consumed by bad finances; just as locusts can devour a crop, so, too, has poverty devoured the spirit of Howard’s family. His mother sits in “sorrow, resignation, and a sort of dumb despair,” rocking on the porch, her back and forth action suggesting stasis (53). Like her life, her daily labor gets her family nowhere but back to where they started as another day of unceasing and backbreaking labor begins. Though Laura and Mrs. McLane toil every day to make a home for their family, their domestic space is described by Howard in the bleakest terms: “Every detail of the kitchen, the heat, the flies buzzing aloft, the poor furniture” leapt out at him and “smote him like the lash of a wire whip” (54). Even the gifts that he offers

them, the “shining silk,” only serve to throw “into appalling relief [his mother’s] age, her poverty, her work-weary frame” (70-71).

In fact, the women’s hopes and their ability to be excited about the gifts make the situation even more pitiable. Howard’s mother has the memory of her previous farm, a loss that intensifies the bleakness of her present life. Likewise, her daughter-in-law had a career of her own through which she was financially independent. Laura compares this to the constant misery that she endures on the farm: ““I made a decent living teaching, I was free to come and go, my money was my own. Now I’m tied right down to a churn or a dish-pan, I never have a cent of my own. [Grant’s] grownlin’ round half the time, and there’s no chance of his ever being different”” (80). The negative containment which she lives with every day is intensified by the fact that she has known a better life of independence and autonomy that gave her choices rather than asking her to resign herself to the ““fret, fret, and work . . . never going any place, never seeing anybody but a lot of neighbors just as big fools. . . . I spend all my time fighting flies and washing dishes and churning. I’m sick of all of it”” (79). Though Howard realizes that money would have made these women’s lives very different, the understanding comes too late. Though they continue to hope, too much time has passed, and the world has taken too much from Grant. His resignation suggests that nothing will change to alter their domestic prospects, even if they move back to the old farm with his brother’s help.

Their neighbors’ hopes are little better, and the poverty which has engulfed these farming people has threatened not just the McLane’s family, but the future of all families. Men are too poor to marry; consequently, they emigrate in order to find work, leaving the girls behind to grow into old maids. The future of the American family struggles under

the yoke of poverty. Those who do marry, like Grant and Laura, find no joy in one another, each too tired to offer support to the other.

Ironically enough, what can appear on the surface to be a negative containment can actually be a very positive, necessary one. This is the case with Theresa in Theodore Dreiser's "Old Rogaum and His Theresa." At eighteen, she longs for freedom from her father's rules. She wants to be permitted to stay out on the streets longer than her father allows. Keeping company with one of the neighborhood boys, she is naive enough to believe that his forwardness with her is innocent. She does not see that he is a masher, waiting to take advantage of her innocence and inexperience. Even nature seems to conspire against her father's restrictions, compelling her to linger long after he has called her home: "Well enough she meant to obey, but on one radiant night late in June the time fled too fast. The moon was so bright, the air so soft. The feel of far summer things was in the wind and even in this dusty street."⁵⁶ She feels powerless against the pull of nature, both the night and her own budding self.

That home is a place of safety against the desires on the streets is clear from the beginning. Rogaum keeps the door of his stoop unlocked, and this habit has made his doorway a retreat for folks who find themselves without a place to sleep. His home, besides being a place of "refuge" is also described as the most "comfortable" (201). The policeman's warning early on that no good will come of the unlocked doorway is ironically the opposite of his reprimand at the end when he scolds Rogaum for locking out Theresa when she lingers too long and upsets her father. He believes he is teaching her a lesson, but the lesson is his to learn when a young woman who has attempted to kill herself for having gotten into a relationship with a man who has thrown her over once her

reputation is ruined takes refuge on Rogaum's stoop. Her sad fate is a warning to him that his daughter might end up as this woman has.

Certainly Rogaum is not all to blame in his daughter's behavior. She makes a conscious decision to punish her father when she realizes that she is locked out of her home. What she is too naive to understand, however, is that when she, "white, quiet, shut out, waiting at her father's doorsteps" (211), decides to turn her back on her family and go with her young man that she is choosing inevitable destruction. Her home has been her whole world up until meeting the boy who is so eager to "[pounce] upon her" gets her attention: "Home meant so much. Up to now it had been her whole life" (212). She does not have the experience to compete with the boy's urging, her innocence symbolized by the white dress she wears. Without her father's protection, without a solid connection to home and family, she is doomed to the same fate as the girl who drinks acid and makes her way to Rogaum's, a girl whose own family has turned her out. That a female without the positive containment of home is lost is grounded in the policeman's reprimand: "Don't lock her out anymore. . . . That's what brought the other girl to your door, you know!" (226). But the boy will wait again for her as he warns: "They better not lock 'er out again" in spite of the fact that he doesn't "want her" (228). Home and family are sanctuary in a world that waits to consume the innocent. In several stories, Dubus takes up the relationship between fathers and daughters. As Kennedy points out, parenthood "is a special honor of responsibility to which one must rise. This is true for both mother and father, of course, but though Dubus does portray women in parenthood . . . clearly his main focus is on the father's share of parenthood's high responsibility."⁵⁷ A father's ability to help his daughter negotiate her way through the problems of her expansion is

seen in many of his works. In addition, Dubus often shows a daughter's reciprocal love as a father's motivation to get his own house in order.

What the world can and will do to children without a positive home life is illustrated in many of Stephen Crane's Bowery stories. Born into absolute squalor in the Bowery of New York, the Johnson children are described as having little or no chance of making a life any different from the domestic hell they endure with their drunk parents, who take their anger at life out on their children and each other. The details of their tenement house metaphorically suggest the negative containment of life for the working poor at the turn of the century. In "A Dark-Brown Dog," Crane creates a Naturalistic world in which the helpless and inexperienced are set upon by a hostile world. Tommie Johnson, still a baby, is left to take care of himself most of the time, free to wander the streets. Unlike Theresa, whose father calls her home and tries to protect her, Tommie's parents are unconcerned with his whereabouts. When he does come home, he enters a dangerous world of violence and obscenity, very little nourishment, and no security.

When Tommie comes upon a stray dog, he beats him in spite of the dog's "prayers."⁵⁸ God as a hostile force is played out in the boy's behavior to the helpless dog. Its fate is in the boy's hands, and, repeating the pattern of violence that he has learned from his father and mother, the boy beats the dog though it has done nothing to deserve it. Like the Johnson children who are powerless against their parents' strength, "the dog apologized and eloquently expressed regret" for "being [a poor] quality of animal" (83). Beaten down and ashamed, the dog has been conditioned that he can expect nothing but harsh treatment from the world. The Johnson children will demand no more from life than this pitiful dog, clearly the metaphorical implication: "He was too much of a dog to

try to look to be a martyr or to plot revenge” (85). All the dog and all the children can do is survive the best they can on the streets and in their dangerous home. When Mr. Johnson drinks, he holds “carnival with the cooking utensils, the furniture and his wife” (86). His violence has taught his children to hide from his blows; they have lived in hell long enough to know how to act around the devil. The dog has not, and his fate is in Mr. Johnson’s hands. When he flings the dog out of the window into the streets below, Tommie in despair makes his way out onto the streets. His helplessness and his inability ever to move forward and eventually away from his violent home is suggested by his backward progress down the stairs: “It took him a long time to reach the alley, because his size compelled him to go downstairs backward, one step at a time, and holding with both hands to the step above” (88). The fate of the young boy is tied to the fate of the dog as later in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets Crane reveals that Tommie dies while he is still a baby.⁵⁹ What violent end he suffers is left to the imagination. Without a positive home that offers a secure sense of containment, children are helpless against the ill will of the world.

This importance of home as a refuge against a changing, violent, and insecure world continues to be played out in other stories. The short fiction that can be termed as Regional offers up some of the best examples. Just as the setting was an important issue in “The Jolly Corner,” the Bowery stories, and in Garland’s Main-Traveled Roads so, too, was the idea of regional place becoming a dominant concern in the American short story beginning with the settling of the west.⁶⁰ The interest in regional habits and mores increased in part due to the wide expanse of the American landscape being in effect reduced by the rail system. According to Kathleen Kirby, Wolfgang Schivelbusch gives

an interesting view on the influence of the railroad, seeing it as “the prime force in the disorganization . . . of space. . . . Prior to the industrial era, spaces . . . were closed containers manifesting an affinity to some natural origin, outgrowths of some topographically grounded center. Technological development, epitomized in the rail system, disrupted the old stabilities.”⁶¹ This confusion was a positive force in American fiction as short story writers worked against the flux and shifts brought about by rapid technological change to ground a location, to bring a stationary picture, a focused view on a region’s unique qualities. In attempting a definition of place and its relevance, Massey points out that

the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this occur) and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location (their happenstance juxtaposition) will in turn produce new social effects. . . . [Therefore the] identities of places are inevitably unfixed . . . in part precisely because the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing. They are also unfixed because of the continual production of further social effects through the very juxtaposition of these social relations.⁶²

Short fiction was a way for writers to freeze a moment, to show a local’s distinct flavor at a particular point in time, an attempt to give stasis to regions which were otherwise in constant flux.⁶³ James Nagel accounts for this emphasis by stressing the country’s desire to redefine itself in the wake of the Civil War as America moved into a “period of

national self-definition, an accounting of the peoples, dialects, folkways, and diverse traditions of the geographic sections of the United States.”⁶⁴ This concern with regional differences is especially important to the motif of domestic space as writers use the home and associations of space as positive containment or expansion in a variety of ways.

Sarah Orne Jewett’s The Country of the Pointed Firs is set in the fictional coastal town of Dunnet Landing, Maine. The cycle is told from the point of view of a woman who has settled in the community for solitude but who comes to realize that she craves connection to the people of the town. Little by little, the unnamed narrator is accepted by the natives. She lives with Mrs. Almira Todd, whose house proves to be busier than someone seeking quiet and solitude would want: “The tiny house . . . which stood with its end to the street, appeared to be retired and sheltered enough from the busy world,” but she soon discovers that “there was only one fault to find with this choice of a summer lodging-place, and that was its complete lack of seclusion.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, what at first appears to be a deficit in regards to her domestic space while she is a visitor in Maine is later the source of her positive, expansive connection to the people of Dunnet Landing.

“Mrs Todd” begins with descriptions of her surrounding garden in which she grows herbs and flowers, a “bushy bit of a green garden,” which is “pushed up against the gray-shingled wall” (206). The proximity of the garden to the house is suggestive of the connection that the owner has to nature, and this blend of the beauty of the surrounding landscape with the interior of the home works to show the narrator’s pending connection to the people who live and grow and die in Dunnet Landing. The adjectives that the narrator chooses in describing the garden’s contents, “strange,” “occult,” “sacred,” and “mystic,” suggest that this is no ordinary garden but a magical place where “strange and

pungent odors” rouse “a dim sense and remembrance of something in the forgotten past” (206). The garden serves as a metaphor for the legends and myths, the ancient knowledge passed on from generation to generation that will come to be so much a part of the narrator’s experience as she begins to harvest stories of the neighboring people. Mrs. Todd uses her garden’s herbs to heal the sick and to bring comfort to those who are suffering. The narrator even suspects that Almira’s herbs can transform nature, affecting the winds and the sea.

Just as her garden has a healing power over the community, so too does its beauty serve as a fulfillment for the narrator’s desire for solitude. As the neighbors come for their cures, the narrator must answer the door when Mrs. Todd is out: “For various reasons, the seclusion and uninterrupted days which had been looked forward to proved to be very rare in this otherwise delightful corner of the world” (207). Forced to interact with the villagers rather than cutting herself off from human connection, her society with the folks of Dunnet Landing ends up being more rewarding than her own company. She begins to find more satisfaction in helping Mrs. Todd with her business than in her own writing and eventually has to put a stop to so much ““seein’ folks”” in order to get her work done. In spite of the change, the narrator and Mrs. Todd grow even closer and develop a “deeper intimacy.” Mrs. Todd begins to talk of her life and of the village, and the narrator “was only too glad to listen” (208). Mrs. Todd’s house and the narrator’s acceptance of the fluidity and community connection that her new arrangement provides end up offering her a positive connection to people who tell her the stories of their lives. This expansion gives her the best writing material that she could hope for.

As the narrator and Mrs. Todd become better friends, their ease with one another is displayed in Mrs. Todd's coming often to the narrator's sitting room on one pretext or another, any excuse for fellowship. The cosy room with the sweet odors coming from the nearby garden work magic on the two women who fall "under the spell" of sharing their lives through stories. In the final scene, the narrator learns of the story "deepest in [Mrs. Todd's] heart" of the man she loved but was not allowed to marry. As she tells the story, she stands in the "center of a braided rug," the black and grey rings suggestive of the rings of a tree that measure its years. Mrs. Todd's history, the tales of her life, ring about her and measure the successes and failures, the happinesses and the disappointments of her life. The final image is one of strength, anchored there, her feet planted in her own home, her "height and massiveness in the low room" a testament to the strength of her character brought by the wisdom of living (208). This is the narrator's to glean, an offering of friendship that invites her to move beyond the seclusion of her sitting room and into the homes and lives of the people she will come to know and love.

A friend of Jewett's, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, also wrote about New England in her regional tales of small-town life. Many of her stories focus on the lives of women who are marginalized. The framing technique she often employs works to suggest there exists an external, more dominant point-of-view than the women about whom she writes. While the frame suggest the margins on which these women live, Freeman centralizes them by making them the focus of her narrative.⁶⁶

Two such women are spinster sisters in "A Mistaken Charity," victims of the village do-gooders who believe that they know what is good for the sisters better than they know themselves. Yet unlike many of the frame stories for which she is popular, this

narrative opens without an overlaying tale. Instead, Freeman begins by describing the sisters' house, which works metaphorically to suggest the sisters themselves, who are as broken physically by age as their home has been. Nevertheless, one sister is at work in the outlying field, harvesting a mess of dandelion greens while the other sister, Charlotte, pretends to watch from the porch. Charlotte has lost her eyesight, but she is too proud to admit such a physical weakness, and Harriet loves her sister too much to humble her by making her admit to her failing vision. In spite of her rheumatism and the pain that it causes her, the scene that surrounds Harriet and Charlotte is beautiful, with the "short young grass" blown by a "soft spring wind."⁶⁷ The landscape will sustain them and give them strength through its healing, restorative powers, sustenance they need to keep living in domestic harmony together. The wild landscape nurtures them just as it provides food for them to eat.

The women are set against their house, a reflection of their own worn and old bodies. Its doorstep is "sunk low down among the grasses," and the whole house . . . had an air of settling down and mouldering into the grass as into its own grave" (235). Just as it is on its way back to nature, being claimed by the landscape around it, so too will the women soon make their way back to the earth when they die. What they want in the meantime is to live as comfortably as they can in the space they have inhabited all their lives in spite of its poor shape: "Nature had almost completely overrun and obliterated the work of man, and taken her own to herself again, till the house seemed as much a natural ruin as an old tree stump" (236). The landscape has consumed their home to the point that it is hard to tell where nature stops and the domicile begins.

The house has been given to the women to live in until their deaths by a man from whom they have rented all their lives. Too old to earn their present livings, the women are dependent upon his “trifling charity” for their home (235). Yet the narrator makes it clear that his willingness to let the women live for free is the equivalent of allowing a squirrel to nest without expecting it to pay rent for the tree. Furthermore, their connection to their home is part of their heritage as their father and his father before him lived in the same location. Their history is tied up in the house, and just as it will soon fall in on itself and be habitable no more, so too will the family die out with these women who leave no heirs. When the house and women go, they will go together, their connection to one another as close as blood ties.

The two have lived alone together since their parents’ deaths, but they have a connection by their work to the rest of the village. Harriet, a tailor, goes from one house to another while her simpler sister takes in the easier sewing at home. This bit of communion with those around them is an expression of their positive expansion at the same time that the two have the solid foundation of domestic containment. This security is fractured for a while when the town’s charity committee takes it upon themselves to move the sisters out of their home and into the county charity home. Like the tough doughnuts that the visitors bring, the sisters will not be nourished by the scheme to move them from the independence of their domestic space, no matter if the roof leaks and is too weak to patch. The minute the sisters catch on to their neighbors’ threats to relocate them, Harriet feels “an old dread” and again connects herself and her sister to her home: “‘The old house will last as long as Charlotte an’ me do. . . . It’s enough sight better than goin’

on the town” (240). Better to live with the discomforts of an old house that they can at least call their own than to live off charity.

When the do-gooders prevail and move the sisters, their lives are temporarily shattered. The “Home” is not really home in any sense of the word for two women who have thrived on being independent and who have had such a positive connection to the land that has provided for them. Light is used symbolically to suggest that Charlotte will not last long if her sister does not find a way to get them both home again. Her only sight comes in moments of vision that she call “chinks.” The light is suggestive of the hope she feels in the simple pleasures of living: a bit of light that streams “in all of a sudden through some little hole that you hadn’t known of before when you set down on the doorstep this mornin’, and the wind with the smell of the apple blows it in your face . . . O Lord, how it did shine in!” (241). The chinks come when she is happiest, at home, so overwhelmed by the joys of the day that her mind gives her a memory so powerful that she believes that she actually sees light. Though the town’s intentions are good, all of Charlotte’s chinks disappear when she is away from her home: “They were totally at variance with their surroundings, and they felt it keenly. . . . No amount of kindness and attention—and they had enough of both—sufficed to reconcile them to their new abode” (245). Massey makes the interesting point that place and the spatially local may be “interpreted as an evasion; as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of ‘real life,’ which is what we must seize if we are to change things for the better.”⁶⁸ However, the opposite hold true in this case. By holding onto their space, by insisting that they live out the rest of their lives in their familiar territory, the women save themselves from a so-called better life that brings them only misery and a negative feeling

of disconnection. The women recognize that their independence is tied to the security of their home, and moving away takes them further from that security. After two months, the sisters decide to run away and go back home.

As they navigate the path that winds through the fields near their home, Harriet begins to describe the landscape, ripe and rich and full, just as the two women are near the end of their season. Back in harmony with their home, the sisters enter their dwelling “triumphantly” (249). Harriet continues to describe the bounty outside of the window, waiting for harvest that will nurture them through another winter. The completeness of the reunion is indicated by Charlotte’s vision of light that follows her sister’s determination that nature will provide: “‘O Lord, Harriet . . . thar is so many chinks that they air all runnin’ together!’” (249). Her happiness is so strong that it brings back memories of the light, the positive joys of being at home. The chinks work to extend Charlotte’s limited vision just as the women’s reconnection to home extends their lives, moving them from the certain death of confinement to the expansion brought about by the autonomy inherent in their own domestic sphere.

This positive extension of the domestic scene is the subject of Grace King’s “The Balcony,” one of her many stories about the life of Creole Louisiana. As Voss comments, in Balcony Stories, King “sought to correct” what she considered to be misrepresentations of “creole character, manners, and traditions” by previous writers.⁶⁹ Most of the stories are told from a woman’s point of view, and the opening story, “The Balcony,” shows the richness of the tradition as children inherit bits and pieces of their history in overheard fragments of their mothers’ conversations. In the hot summer months, children would sleep “within easy hearing” from their mothers who would collect on the balconies of

their homes in order to catch the night breezes.⁷⁰ The balconies extend the domestic scene into the landscape of “stars breaking the cool darkness, or the moon making a show of light—oh, such a discreet show of light!—through the vines” (1). The Louisiana outdoors serves as a backdrop for the stories of “old times, old friends, old experiences” passed on in “mother voices” to the children who listen as they drift into and out of sleep. These stories “from other women’s lives,—or other women’s destinies, as they prefer to call them,—and told as only women know how to relate them” are their children’s legacy, their connection to times long past (2). The openness of the balconies urge on the women who come together to share what they know with each other and with their children who will one day have to make their own way in the world:

And if a child inside be wakeful and precocious, it is not dreams alone that take on reflections from the balcony outside: through the half-open shutters the still, quiet eyes look across the dim forms on the balcony to the star-spangled or the moon-brightened heavens beyond; while memory makes stories for the future, and germs are sown, out of which the slow, clambering vine of thought issues, one day, to decorate or hide, as it may be, the structures or ruins of life” (3-4).

The balcony provides a frame for their mother’s stories, which serve as the genesis for their own history, their own voices, their own heritage. The balcony is a positive containment that works to suggest expansion as the mothers have brought the experiences of their lives into the boundaries of their homes. These stories will nourish the children as they leave the containment of home for the expansive journeys, both positive and negative, of their own lives.

Like King, Kate Chopin also wrote about Creole Louisiana and used the motif of domestic space to suggest her characters' connections to the world around them. "The Storm" serves as an example of home as negative containment transformed by an experience of positive expansion. One of the stories set in the fictional Natchitoches Parish is told of a woman's reconnection to her sexual self through a chance encounter with a her former lover. Calixta has been in a secure but passionless marriage to Bobinot, a Creole who in spite of his intense desire for his wife has never been able to fulfill her sexually. Her desire has been spent on Alcée, an Acadian who out of social obligations felt that he could not marry her. The result has been that neither has expression for the intense passion of which they are both capable. Alcée's wife is not interested in sex and looks for any opportunity to avoid it while Calixta, though she appreciates her husband, is not physically attracted to him. Consequently, Calixta has lived without experiencing her "birth right," Chopin's term for a woman's right to be sexually fulfilled, and in essence she is still a virgin though she has delivered a child.⁷¹ Her white bedroom with its white bedclothes suggests that she is still a maiden. Furthermore, the room's proximity to the living quarters of the house, opening off from the "general utility room" suggests that her sexual life up until the afternoon with Alcée has been primarily utilitarian rather than passionate.

A violent storm forces Alcée to seek refuge on Calixta's porch. The intensity of the storm eventually drives him into the house, and the metaphorical implications of the storm in relation to their passion is played out for the remainder of the story. The weather is hot, suggestive of their desire, the lightning as potentially dangerous. As the two stand together in the utility room, the bedroom door is open, looking "dim and mysterious" as

the two have little understanding of the possibilities of a fulfilling sexual relationship. However, Naturalistically trapped, the two are “unthinkingly” brought together in passion. “The house is too low to be struck” (928), so with the danger of their encounter brought into prospective, the two surrender to one another: “There was nothing for him to do but to gather her lips in a kiss,” and she, “inviolable,” knows “for the first time her birthright” as she journeys to the “borderland of mystery” (929). Her sexual journey has in effect broadened her experience to the point that her home is transformed. When her husband and son return, she is a changed woman, attentive and loving rather than the “over-scrupulous housewife” who has made her husband nervous for years. The domestic scene on which the story closes is a promise of better days: “Bobinot and Bibi [their son] began to relax and enjoy themselves, and when the three seated themselves at table they laughed much and so loud” (929). The tableau is a nurturing, fulfilling scene brought about by Calixta’s new association with home as a place of containment that can also provide an expansive release into sexual freedom. Conversely, the ability to reconcile oneself to infidelity is rare in Dubus’ fiction. In fact, those who move into the negative expansion of adultery usually lose their families, if only temporarily, to divorce. On the other hand, spouses who remain faithful to one another are able to build spiritual bonds that help them weather bad times.

The motif of domestic space remained a central concern throughout the late eighteen hundreds and into the twentieth century. However, with a few notable exceptions such as Theodore Dreiser and Henry James, most stories resemble those popular during the age of the lady’s books. Most of the characters are flat and “emerge as types.”⁷² In addition, very much like the fiction popular during the 1850s, readers turned

to the short story as a means of escape. This sort of story lacking for the most part any lasting literary merits was popular in the “‘family’ magazines whose fictional contents were exclusively given over to the short story. . . . The typical magazine story was short, untaxing, amusing; the typical American reader was increasingly hurried and pressured. Escape—a kind of psychic balm—could be found in the quick and entertaining read.”⁷³ Nevertheless, as time would pass, the short story would gain in merit.

Just as the Civil War had resulted in shifts in perspectives, so too did World War I make its mark on the American consciousness. The response to the sense of social breakdown following the war resulted in writers questioning even the most basic beliefs. As William Peden points out, “the mass circulation magazine . . . can claim little credit for encouraging the new short story. . . . [which] was a reaction against and a breakaway from unrealistic, contrived, sentimentalized, and mechanically plotted short fiction.”⁷⁴ However, not all writers were willing to abandon these type of stories, for they had proven to be economically profitable. In fact, Colliers and the Post during the 1930s and 1940s “consistently published . . . mediocre fiction” whose characters “are as stereotyped as those of the old class-B house operas.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, and fortunately for the development of the short story and for the serious reading public, not all writers steered away from the more complicated issues. According to James Watson, “between the two wars, American writers published more and more with the little literary magazines that doubled in number during this time.”⁷⁶ As writers confronted the overwhelming sense of isolation and fragmentation as the result of years of devastation, a reconsideration of the individual and his or her place in the world became central. One continuing concern was domestic space and how the home either alleviates or adds to a character’s sense of

isolation. Dubus would continue these same themes years later as many of his characters either find strength or pain within the confines of their homes.

In a meaningless, fragmented world that had seemingly lost its center, the home became even more important as a refuge from the chaos of the modern world. Unfortunately, characters often found themselves just as isolated, just as confused, sometimes even more so, in the very homes that might have offered solace. One of the first and most important writers to address the isolation felt by many Americans after WWI was Sherwood Anderson, whose short-story cycle Winesburg, Ohio is important for its reaction to “the deadening effect of urbanization and technology, the erosion of religious faith and its usurpation by the money-god, the separation of men and women from work that provided a sense of purpose, and a consequent drift toward bewilderment, malaise and despair.”⁷⁷ In each of the short stories, characters attempt to make connections but often fall short of doing so. Instead, many are paralyzed by an inability to act or to say what is on their hearts. Anderson wrote, “I have come to think that the true history of life is but a history of moments. It is only at rare moments that we live.”⁷⁸ As a result, his stories typically focus on a fragment of a person’s life, one isolated bit of time that is chosen to reveal the character’s basic need for human connection. As Kimbel points out, “in Anderson, the emphasis is not on the growth to maturity and wisdom of the unifying character . . . but rather on a succession of separate, isolated lives.”⁷⁹ One of these characters Elizabeth Willard is living just such a life.

Elizabeth is the protagonist of “Mother,” a title that reflects the one desire that remains with her, to reach out to her son and to establish herself in his life before it is too late. She is a mere shadow of a woman who has missed her opportunities for happiness;

her marriage is unfulfilling, and as a result, she seems to have no role in life. The one remaining title that she might take on, one that has brought her at least some connection in her otherwise negative life of domestic containment, is the role of mother. The story provides a view of Elizabeth's attempts to take what she sees as her one chance to redefine herself in that role as she desperately tries to reach out to her only child, her son, George.

Her domestic space intensely reflects Elizabeth's sense of self. Rather than a stationary place, a home of her own that she can claim, she lives under the proprietorship of her husband in the New Willard Hotel. The name is ironic, for there is nothing new about the place. Just as Elizabeth feels worn out and in effect over, so, too, is her home "disorderly [with] faded wall-paper and . . . ragged carpets. . . . a mere ghost of what a hotel should be."⁸⁰ Elizabeth is as ghostly as the hotel itself has become in part due to her husband's disappointment in both her and in his business life: "The presence of the tall ghostly figure, moving slowly through the halls, he took as a reproach to himself" (39). The hotel is always on the verge of bankruptcy, just as the Willards' marriage has moved very close to the edge of failure. Elizabeth's metaphorical connection to her domestic space is emphasized by the descriptions of her and the hotel given in tandem in the opening paragraph of the story. Both are shadows of lost potential.

Elizabeth's only sense of satisfaction comes when she visits her son's room when he is out of the house. There, she feels an overwhelming connection to the potential inherent in his youth. She wants for her son what she has not come to know in her own life, a fulfillment of dreams, a life of meaning, a reason to live and hope rather than simply to exist: "She went into his room and closing the door knelt by a little desk, made

of a kitchen table, that sat near a window. In the room by the desk she went through a ceremony that was half a prayer, half a demand, addressed to the skies. In the boyish figure she yearned to see something half forgotten that had once been a part of herself re-created" (40). Her ritual mirrors Christ's instructions for prayer: to go into a room and shut the door, to pray in isolation. The kitchen table suggests the sacrament of the last supper as she is willing to sacrifice her own dreams if only her son can profit from her loss. As his mother she desires, even demands to martyr herself for her boy's salvation: "God may beat me with his fists. I will take any blow that may befall if but this my boy be allowed to express something for us both" (40). What Anderson terms "communion between George Willard and his mother" she certainly sees as a holy sacrament. The pitiful fact is that their union "was outwardly a formal thing without meaning" (41). Because her desires for him remain unexpressed except in prayer, George leaves Winesburg never really knowing her intense hopes to connect with him.

George does try to be a good son to his mother. He comes into her room when she is sick, but this space, dark and oppressive, makes the two awkward with one another. Her room is in an "obscure corner" of the hotel, suggestive of her marginalized life. From her window, she and her son watch the activity in the street, a contrast to the "sick woman, perfectly still, listless" (42). Their brief connection is like the short stay of the hotel guests who make the New Willard Hotel "their temporary home" (42). Just as the visitors come and go without connection, most of the visits that George makes to his mother end without any meaningful transcendence. Finally, Elizabeth's domestic space works metaphorically to suggest her own temporary home, her weak body that ultimately defeats her.

Emily Greerson of William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" likewise attempts to create a new life, to redefine herself and cast herself in the role of wife. For all of her years up until her middle age, she has been merely "daughter" under the oppressive yoke of her father's control. He believes that no one is good enough for his child, and he selfishly keeps her for himself. Like Elizabeth's isolated room that suggests her disconnection and negative containment, Emily's house is a reflection of herself. Once a grand and beautiful home, time has taken its toll, and the town has moved in upon the house as "garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores."⁸¹ Like the house that stands long after the neighborhood has changed, Emily has remained in Jefferson as "a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town" refusing to acknowledge or to pay her taxes (119).

When she meets Homer Barron, a Northerner who has come to Jefferson for a temporary contract to pave the streets, she believes that she has one last chance to create a role for herself by marrying him, in spite of the fact that neither the town nor her people would ever approve of the union. His connection to the streets while she is anchored to her home work in contrast to suggest that Homer will soon make his way down those same roads while she will be stuck in Jefferson.

In the final scene of the story, the townspeople come to her home for her funeral. As the narrator reports, the men come out of respect, the women "to see the inside of her house which no one save an only man-servant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years" (119). No one had been into Emily's house just as no one has

attempted to see into or to understand her life. She had isolated herself, and her negative containment had left her “bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water” (121). With her death, the townspeople can break into the prison that her home had become. When the men enter the upstairs room, the reason for her intense solitude is made clear: the body of her murdered lover has been at rest in her upstairs bedroom, which was “decked and furnished as for a bridal” (129). When Homer had refused to marry Emily, for “he was not a marrying man” (126), she takes what she believes is rightfully hers. If she cannot have him in life, she will have him in death, and she sleeps beside his body long after his spirit is gone. In the final scene, Emily has gone back to the same dust that covers her upstairs room.

Perhaps no story better captures the utter sense of disconnection and negative containment than Ernest Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home.” Harold Krebs has come back from his tour of duty in WWI too late for the hero’s welcome. He has been at some of the bloodiest battles, but no one wants to hear about his experiences. They know the stories and now want to return to their lives. For a while, Krebs tells lies, but the falseness makes him nauseated, and “in this way he lost everything.”⁸² Unable to articulate his grief and find release in the sympathy of a good listener, Harold is frozen, waiting for change but unable to initiate any positive expansion. Instead, he sits on his front porch, watching the girls pass by: “They were such a nice pattern. It was exciting. But he would not go through all the talking. He did not want one badly enough. He liked to look at them all, though. It was not worth it” (148). Though he needs to talk, to find expression for the emptiness that he feels, the girls are too complicated. Instead, he takes refuge on his porch and watches.

The title of the story is especially revealing. His home is as much a part of Harold's problem as his own fear. His parents do not understand him and are set in their lives and in their mid-western, middle-class roles. They are a "pattern," but one that Harold cannot fit into. His father, a real-estate agent, lives a routine life, parking his car outside of the bank every day. He is rigid in his habits, down to the way his paper must be folded at breakfast. Harold's mother, though she seems to want to reach out, is as confused about how to talk to her son as George Willard's mother is, but for different reasons. Mrs. Krebs naively believes that her son is ashamed of the women that he must have had when he was overseas: "I've worried about you so much," she tells him. "I know the temptations you must have been exposed to. I know how weak men are" (151). She has heard stories from her own father, hints and snatches of half-truths that she has latched onto as some way to diagnose her son's inability to move forward. What she does not see is that he does not "love anybody" (152). The war has taken everything from him, and the best he can do is to look at maps, to find patterns in the landscape, and to try to hang onto himself: "He couldn't tell her, he couldn't make her see it" (152). He cannot communicate with his mother nor his father, who is so naive that he believes that letting Harold use the car will remedy the problems. Harold had just wanted "his life to go smoothly. . . . [but] that was all over now" (153). His parents expect him to date a nice girl, to marry, and to get a good job, to go back to being the son of their patterned experiences. Harold has no choice but to leave them behind and, by the end of the story, he has made his plans to leave town, to "go to Kansas City and get a job" (153). Whether Harold will be better off in Kansas City or whether the connection with his sister Helen will be strong enough to offer him positive support is hard to wager. However, what he

must do is leave the predictable, smothering home of his childhood and make his own way in the world.

Another of Hemingway's stories, "Cat in the Rain," expresses the desires of an "American wife"⁸³ who wants more from her husband than the transient life that they are living, moving from hotel to hotel, not knowing or connecting to anyone. In the opening scene, she stands looking out of the window at a cat who is trying to stay out of the rain. Though the husband has a name, George, his wife is nameless; she is "the American wife," "the American girl," or simply "the wife." Though George is seemingly complacent in his role as her husband, he does not understand her desire for a more permanent, a more contained domestic space. Their expansive life has left her feeling as vulnerable as the "poor kitty." Just as the cat crouches under a table, "trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on" (167), the girl is described as feeling "very small and tight inside." She felt "very small and at the same time really important" (169). In spite of her compactness, she feels a strength in being needed as she wants to mother the cat. She wants a child, evidenced by the maternal feelings that she transfers to the cat: "'I get so tired of looking like a boy. . . . I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,' she said. 'I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her'" (169). She wants a child to love, a husband to give her a secure home, a positive, nurturing domestic space of containment where she can "'eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes'" (170). Her list of wants, strung together without pause, suggests that she has pent up feelings that are finally released in her desire to care for the animal.

Having a kitten and certainly having a baby would mean having a permanent home.

George has no sympathy for her. He simply wants her to ““shut up and get something to read”” (170). The sterility of their relationship is evidenced by the “tortoise-shell cat” that the maid brings to the wife at the end of the story. This male cat is not the cat she went searching for, just as her life with George is not what she wants to be living. Instead, it is a poor substitute for the fixed life that she craves.

The blend of one’s domestic space as both positive containment and positive expansion can be found in the short-story cycle by Katherine Anne Porter entitled The Old Order. In this cycle, a young girl grows into a strong woman due to her positive connections to her home which provided her with a sturdy foundation on which to build her own experiences.

“The Grave,” by Porter, is the final story. It centers around Miranda, who is nine, and her brother, Paul, who is twelve. Like the girl in Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain,” Miranda undergoes a transformation in the way that she views her body. In her experience one afternoon with her brother, she becomes aware of the potential of her gender, the gift of life inherent in her biology. The lesson comes from the old family cemetery, the final space to which everyone retires. Miranda and her brother are playing in one of the open graves of the old family cemetery, the caskets having been moved as the land has been sold bit by bit. “Miranda leaped into the pit that had held her grandfather’s bones,”⁸⁴ and from the seemingly empty hole she reaps a treasure that she holds onto for life. In the old grave, the children find a coffin screw and a gold ring. When Miranda puts on the ring, she feels changed, losing interest in going shooting with her brother, who up until now

has made all of the rules while she follows behind, taking the second shot, trying to stay quiet. Now, she feels transformed:

She wanted to go back to the farmhouse, take a good cold bath,
dust herself with plenty of [her sister's] talcum powder . . . put
on the thinnest dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a wicker
chair under the trees. . . . These things were not all she wanted, of course;
she had vague stirrings of desire for luxury and a grand way of living
which could not take precise form in her imagination but were founded
on family legend of past wealth and leisure. These immediate comforts
were what she could have, and she wanted them at once (365).

Up until this moment, Miranda has dressed as her brother does, in overalls for comfort and freedom of mobility. Her father has given her the same liberties that he gives to Paul in spite of the disapproval of the women in their community, who feel that without a mother to guide the children and with the matriarch of the family dead that the “family was running down” (364). However, Miranda trusts her father, and her freedom builds strength in both her body and her mind. She knows who she is in part because she has not been oppressed. She is curious, and her wonder leads her to self-acceptance.

The title is a reference to the three graves in the story and the gifts that they offer. The first, the grave of her grandfather, offers her the strength inherent in strong family ties, in her ancestors' wisdom passed down to her. The grave also offers her the ring, which sets her in the right mood to receive her second gift from the second grave. Paul shoots a pregnant rabbit, and when he slits her open, Miranda sees the unborn rabbits in their opened “scarlet bag,” and “she wanted most deeply to see and to know. Having seen,

she felt at once as if she had known all along. The very memory of her former ignorance faded, she had always known just this” (366). She understands the connection of the unborn rabbits to babies and to blood and to her own place in the cycle of life. Her understanding is the third gift, the gift of her pending womanhood. Finally, years later, “in a strange city of a strange country”(367), she has a flash of remembrance, and she is transported by her imagination through time, back to the day with Paul when she found the ring and knew her stationary place in the cyclical motion of an expansive and rewarding life. As Massey says, “home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.”⁸⁵ Miranda’s home and her affirming history brought forth through the power of her imagination give her a vision of her brother that cancels out the oppressive market street on which she stands, and she, through the treasure of memory, is home again.

The power that a positive sense of heritage can provide is carried over into the short stories of postmodern America. However, just as Modernism often focused on the home as another place where isolation and fragmentation were played out, so does the postmodern story more often than not show the disintegration of the nuclear family and the negative affects of separation on both spouses and children. In many of his stories, Dubus shows the difficulties of negotiating one’s domestic space in the aftermath of divorce. As in Dubus’ fiction, postmodern characters often suffer from a sense of rootlessness, and with no positive foundation such as Miranda has, they seem adrift in lives of negative expansion. This disconnectedness is also seen in stories that deal with regional shifts as post-WWII economics brought about a change in the landscape. With

industrial progress sweeping the country, regional differences and traditional values were threatened. Chaos brought about by rapid change dominates postmodern American fiction and is reflected in a variety of ways and as a central issue in many short stories following World War II.

This sense of rootlessness is certainly the case for the protagonist in Peter Taylor's "Miss Lenora When Last Seen." The story is told from the point of view of one of Miss Lenora's former students who recognizes in his high school teacher a quality that no one else in their home town quite equals, a woman who represents "something that had never taken root in Thomasville and that would surely die with her."⁸⁶ What the narrator cannot quite name is Miss Lenora's connection to and understanding of a way of life that is fading away in post-WWII America, especially noticeable in the deep South. Miss Lenora's house, which she inherited from her great-uncle, has been condemned by the county so that the new high school can be erected on her property. Refusing to sign the papers that will result in the demolition of her family home, Miss Lenora departs, traveling across the deep South, moving from state to state in perpetual motion so that she will not be able to sign the papers and can thereby thwart the school board's plans.

Her connection to her house and her refusal to see it destroyed in the name of progress work metaphorically to show how the traditions of the South were giving way to economics. Miss Lenora comes from a family that "for a hundred years and more did all it could to impede the growth and progress of our town," keeping out the railroad, the cotton mill, and the snuff factory. The narrator does attempt to balance the blame by admitting that she and her family simply "wanted to keep the town unspoiled," but then goes on to say that he is "not quite sure about that" (507). What she resists and what is

evident in her unwillingness to have her family home destroyed is her determination not to participate in a progress that is willing to obliterate what it cannot commodify. Miss Lenora is the last of the Logans, the last to cling to the old ways. That even the most sympathetic to her viewpoint is still in effect against her is seen in the narrator's statement that "still, times do change, and the interests of one individual cannot be allowed to hinder the progress of a whole community" (504). He admits that even Miss Lenora realizes that, but rather than concede to progress, she has left, the narrator certain that he will never see her again.

Miss Lenora's home has been more than just a place for her to live. It has been a place where the children of Thomasville have visited to sit with her, not to socialize but to continue their instruction. The only room the visitors were allowed into was her sitting room, her "office . . . that was furnished with a roll-top desk, oak bookcases, and three or four of the hardest chairs you ever sat in. It looked more like a schoolroom than her own classroom did" (509). She brings the children there to instruct them, to question them and urge them to do something meaningful with their lives, to come back to Thomasville and protect it by maintaining a value structure that should have been inherited just as she has inherited her home: "That was how she was going to populate the town with the sort of people she thought it ought to have" (509). Nevertheless, in spite of her good intentions, she could not stop time forever. So she ran. Rather than give in to the new ideas and ways, she leaves in an expansion that is negative in that she has had to leave her home in order to save it, positive in the sense that she has for a while stopped time in a region being swept along, losing connection to former values and traditions.

In the narrator's final visit to Miss Lenora's house, he acknowledges his shortcomings as she forgives him and admits her own. Though she tries to create in the moment a vision of former visits, the narrator knows that nothing is the same. The old South is gone, for him and for all of the boys now men who "had already scattered out and were living in the big cities where there was plenty of industry and railroads for them to invest their money in; and they had already sold off most of their land to get the money to invest" (516). As the landscape gives way to progress, Miss Lenora leaves rather than admit defeat, staying in motion, for there is no place familiar enough to call home anymore: "Without her the house was nothing but a heap of junk" (533). Without concern for one's roots and heritage, the narrator realizes, the South will change, for better or worse depending on one's point of view, but nothing that Miss Lenora can stay around to witness. The last he sees of her, she looks at him with hopefulness, still believing in his potential to do the best for Thomasville. Perhaps that is what tradition allows, hope that not everything honorable will diminish, but will remain in spite of change. Whatever the outcome, Miss Lenora does not wait for "the jury's verdict" (534). Just as her house will eventually be demolished, and just as Miss Lenora will perhaps never return, time will eradicate and win, at what price Miss Lenora seems to know.

The soldiers of Vietnam also left their homes behind, facing the worst possible expansion in unfamiliar country. The soldiers of Tim O'Brien's short-story cycle, The Things They Carried, have had to reduce their sense of domestic space to what they can carry on their backs. The pack of each man reflects his individual connections to home, his personality revealed in the details of what he is willing to carry. The extra weight works metaphorically to reveal each man's personal baggage, the burden of self and the

connections to rituals and habits and home. Kerstin Shands states that what is achieved by “removing the subject from ‘containing’ notions of dimensionality, substantiality, or interiority and placing it instead on the flat spaces of battlefields and engaging it in confrontations” results in “the sense of transiency and temporariness associated with movement itself.”⁸⁷ This point is especially interesting in regards to O’Brien’s short story “The Things They Carried.” Each man is constantly on the move without control of where he must go next. With the possibility of death every day, the men are hyper-aware of their own vulnerability, of the “transiency and temporariness” of their lives. Their packs become a way to control and to contain their space. Though they are forced by the military to carry certain items, the weight of their packs in addition to their required loads is their attempt to bring a bit of their controlled sense of self to the chaotic landscape that threatens to consume them. They “carried whatever presented itself, or whatever seemed appropriate as a means of killing or staying alive. . . . They carried all they could bear, and then some including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.”⁸⁸ This “terrible power” is ironically the very vulnerable sense of self and connection to home and one’s past that the war threatens to eradicate. Like Miss Lenora, who recognizes the threat of time to all things, these men must remain in motion, a negative expansion that works against the positive containment of home that is self expressed in the things they carry contained in their packs that they struggle to bear.

A war of a different sort is played out in myriad stories that express the breakdown of the nuclear family in America, a disintegration that leaves characters struggling to hold to a center that has shifted and spun out of control. As in many of Dubus’ stories, the fragmentation of the home leaves characters isolated, with no positive connections or

ballasts. Susan Minot's Monkeys is a short-story cycle about a family's deterioration and its attempts to rebuild itself in the aftermath of the mother's death. Though the parents do not divorce, the distance between husband and wife is played out from the first story, "Hiding." Minot chooses as her epigraph a reference to T. S. Eliot: "The houses are all gone under the sea,"⁸⁹ a prophetic statement that is set up with the opening story. "Hiding" is told from Sophie's point of view, here only ten years old. She will be the one who takes on her mother's role later in the cycle after her mother's death, so she is the appropriate one to tell her mother's story from the beginning.

The first glimpse of Sophie's mother comes with her buttoning her children against the cold as they prepare to go to church, all being protected against the metaphorical cold inherent in the dangers of the outside world. While the children are inside the house with their mother, the first view of the father comes with him outside of the home, "waiting for us to go" (2). Rather than helping, he lingers on the periphery until they are gone, when he can return to the house that is "big and empty now and quiet" (3). His disconnection played out in the opening scene eventually destroys his family.

The garden works in connection to Rose. It is haunted by the ghost of a woman who used to meet her lover there, "or she'd hide in the garden somewhere and he'd look for her and find her" (5). One night, he does not come, and in desperation she kills herself. Metaphorically, the fate of Sophie's mother is tied up in the story of the ghost. One particular Sunday, her family goes for a picnic after church. In the car, an extension of their home, the family laughs and jokes, the life in Rose bubbling up in her beautiful exchanges with her children, all except for the father, who wants quiet, who rather than interacting concentrates "on the road" (7). He is excluded from the domestic scene, his

eyes and mind far ahead, separate from his family. As a result, Rose's life has become empty in spite of her attempts to connect with her husband. When he comes home from work, he isolates himself with a book in front of the television. He does not share meals with his wife and children. Instead, he "comes in for a handful of onion-flavored bacon crisps or a dish of miniature corn-on-the-cob pickled" (10-11). His sparse meals reflect the diminishing role that he plays in his family, choosing to stay away from the sacrament of the table while Rose keeps the children quiet. When he does interact with his family, he takes them places outside of their home, to the beach where "Dad looks at things far away" (12). His mind's expansion away from his family is very different from Rose's interest and the strong connection that she has to her children.

On this particular Sunday, coming home from skating, Rose enters the house "carrying so much stuff" (14). Like the soldiers in O'Brien's short story, she carries her children's "stuff" as an extension of her self. She turns on lights, making the house cosy, pulling them together on the couch, huddling together, safe. Her husband is typically absent from the domestic scene. When the children demand a game, she comes up with an idea to hide in the closet upstairs so that when their father comes home, he will find them missing and search for them: "We picture him looking around for a long time, till finally we all pour out of the closet" (18). What actually happens makes the children's and Rose's excitement pathetic by comparison. He comes back into the narrative in a flood of negative descriptors, "dead," "crack," "bang," "empty," "rattle," none of the soft, nurturing words associated with Rose, her very name suggestive of the beauty and precious love associated with motherhood. The negative words suggest that he will never really connect to these hopeful people who wait for him to find them. He never looks.

When the children surrender to their disappointment, their mother “guides our backs and checks our landings” while her face, though turned away, is winced “like when you are waiting to be hit or right after you have been” (22). The fact of her marriage comes hard upon her while her children wait “to see what she’s going to do next because we don’t want to go downstairs yet, where Dad is, without her” (22). Their mother guides them, the children almost paralyzed, waiting for her, who must go down to face the fact that her life with her husband is as negatively contained as one who hides in the dark closet, waiting to be found by someone who has no interest in looking. Like the ghost in the garden, Rose’s disappointment will drive her to suicide, the most negative imaginable release.

It is not because of home but a lack of one that drives the young prostitute to suicide in Breece D’J Pancake’s short story “A Room Forever.” The narrator of the story works on a tug, and he is waiting to ship out New Year’s Day. Though the story begins by mentioning the new year, the narrator is at odds with any hope that change in the calendar suggests. His life has been a series of transient stops, foster parents and a stint in the Navy, now living only in boarding houses or cheap hotel rooms, waiting for his time back on the tug, a month on, a month off. His negative expansion has left him feeling so empty, so desperate for a place to call home that he contemplates ending his life. When he checks into his room on the night the story takes place, he thinks, “Maybe I have bought this room forever—I just might not need another flop after tonight.”⁹⁰ He has grown so tired of his disconnected life. What he wants is meaningful connection to another person: “I need a woman—not just a lousy chip—I need the laying quiet after that a chip never heard of. When I come into the lobby full of fat women and old men, I think how this is all the home I have” (54). He wants to create a positive domestic life, a

containment that will give meaning to his expansion. He wants a place to call home, a defined retreat from work that demands constant motion.

When he goes out on the streets, he goes with two possibilities in mind: he can try to make a more stable life for himself, or he can end the life he has known up to this point. He comes across a prostitute, still a child, really, “fourteen, fifteen,—but she stares at me like she knows what I’m thinking” (55). That she can know his thoughts gives her an edge over him, that and the fact that she, unlike him, “had a home once” (55). He desires all that he sees in the potential he creates in the girl: her youth, her understanding, her domestic history. He wants something more from this girl than sex, evident in his first words to her: ““You got a room?”” (56). That she does not should be a warning that this girl is not who he believes her to be, that she is not full of the potential that he imagines in her.

When he brings her back to his rented room, his desire for a more permanent space is evidenced by his attempts to make his accommodations into a sort of home, domesticating the place by getting extra towels, making coffee. Clearly, the girl appreciates his gestures: ““It’s nice here”” (56). She, too, wants a place: ““I got to stop moving around,”” and her words make him believe that he has found a girl to help him make his mark in the world. He offers to buy her a permanent room, a home, a break in life that no one has ever offered him: “I look at her, think what she could be if she had a break or two” (57). He wants to give her a chance. But she does not understand or cannot bring herself to accept what he offers her, a shot at getting her life together.

After she leaves, angry at him but more at her own pathetic life, he goes back out into the streets, his disconnection and isolation intensified by the fact that others around

him have someone, a place to be. In the final scene, he leaves by the back door, looking for the girl. He finds her: "She is sitting against a building in the rain, passed out cold. When I shake her, I see that she has cut both wrists down to the leaders" (59). Confronted with a new possibility for hope, her inability to meet what she might be overwhelms her. The narrator turns from the scene, going to the only home he will ever know, his tug: "I turn toward the docks, walk down to see if the Delmar maybe put in early" (60). When the story ends, he is as alone as he has ever been, but with a new understanding that he cannot kill himself to get away from the pain of his rootlessness that he must learn to endure.

Negative containment in marriage has been dealt with in a variety of ways by many postmodern writers including Dubus. One of these is Bobbie Ann Mason, whose short story "The Retreat" deals with a woman whose positive experience of expansion leaves her so dissatisfied with her marriage that she makes the decision at the end of the story to leave her husband. Georgeann married Shelby believing in something about him that never really existed. She thought that he was exciting, dangerous, and she was attracted, though a little frightened by "his gloomy countenance—a sort of James Dean brooding—and his tendency to contradict whatever the teachers said."⁹¹ She gives the most romantic spin to even his worst qualities, excusing his not taking her to her senior prom by believing that he is just too self-conscious to dance in front of a lot of people. She is attracted to his commitment to becoming a minister, though later on she admits that she is unhappy and bored with her role as a preacher's wife.

As the story progresses, Georgeann begins to rebel against the restrictions that her life demands. "Shelby lives by many little rules, some of which come out of nowhere"

(133), and the rigor of his life down to the proper way that he hugs her on Sundays has settled in on her. With the same sort of rebellion that she first admired in Shelby, she begins to shirk what he sees as her responsibility, her purpose in life. When two communion glasses break, she neglects ordering replacements. When she plays the piano one Sunday, she switches hymns, substituting “Joy to the World” for Shelby’s choice. He is furious at her change as he likes to keep the programs from church as an “accurate record of what went on that day” (134). He likes the world ordered, contained, while Georgeann wants spontaneity and control of her own. To spite him, she begs off attending a funeral and spends Sunday afternoon cleaning out her henhouse; as a result, she becomes infected with chicken mites from caring for a sick hen. The chicken takes on metaphorical weight, the disease that infects the chicken house and her own like the problems that have infected her marriage. She has to strip the beds, disinfect the whole house; but no matter how much work she does, though she may sterilize her rented house, another metaphor for the temporariness of their marriage, their union is as incapable of recovery as the doomed chicken.

When Shelby and Georgeann go on a Christian retreat, she finds the strength to leave her unfulfilling marriage. Her power comes from playing a video game. Mastering control over the aliens, she ““forgets everything but who [she is]”” (146), something that living totally for her family has left her no time for. She wants control over her own life, just as she masters the video game. Her positive expansion gives her a glimpse of power, and when she gets home, she sees her domestic space in a new way: “The brick house looks small and shabby, like something abandoned” (146), reflecting her feelings about her marriage. That she will not follow Shelby to his new assignment in another town is

clear in the final action of the story when she has the strength to kill the sick chicken: “When the ax crashes down blindly on its neck, Georgeann feels nothing, only that she has done her duty” (147). The connection to her ending her marriage has been set up by her realization that the union is beyond repair. When she got home from the retreat, she “wandered around her house, pulling up the shades, looking for things that have changed” (146). Metaphorically, she must wander, leave her husband in order to bring light back into her life. She has changed, and she will move on. In several of Dubus’ stories, characters find the courage to break free of their negative domestic restraints and find new hope in the expansion that awaits them. Though some regret leaving home, others are reconciled to their new lives and find themselves better connected to their new space.

This idea of embracing space in order to move ahead with one’s life is a common theme in postmodern fiction. Like Georgeann, Vera, from Raymond Carver’s short story “A Serious Talk,” has moved on with her life in spite of her husband’s inability to face up to the fact that their marriage is over. Set during the holidays, Burt feels even more estranged from his former wife and children by their having excluded him from their Christmas dinner plans. Burt has been invited over to exchange gifts, but “Vera had warned him before hand. She’d told him the score.”⁹² Burt has to be out of the house before Vera’s boyfriend and his children arrive to spend the evening. The story begins in medias res with Burt returning to the scene of his destruction, and from the moment the story begins with his pulling back into the driveway the day after Christmas, his inability to let go of the past in spite of things having moved on beyond him is made clear in the metaphorical descriptions of his former home.

That Burt and Vera are at differing levels of accepting their break up is made clear by the presents that they give one another. Vera gives Burt an impersonal gift certificate to a clothing store while he has taken the time and expense to choose a cashmere sweater for her. That the children would like to see their parents reconciled is evidenced by their begging their mother to try on the sweater. She is reluctant, but when she does, Burt feels “a welling in his chest” (106), believing that her actions mean more than they do.

When he and his family finish exchanging gifts, they have little to say to one another. Eventually, Vera and the children begin preparations for their guests. However, rather than sticking to the “score” and leaving on time, Burt stays where he is: “He liked it in front of the fireplace, a glass in his hand, his house, his home” (106). In his living room, he feels a false connection to his family that is shattered when, one by one, each gets up and begins to ready the house for company. He focuses on his daughter, who has learned from modeling her mother how carefully to set the table, her actions furthering the fact that her father is no longer a part of this domestic scene. This realization is more than he can bear, so he sabotages their plans. If he cannot have a nice Christmas dinner with his family, no one will, so he takes the carton of wax and sawdust logs and puts each one on the fire, making sure before he leaves that they are blazing. On his way out, he steals six pumpkin pies, “one for every ten times [Vera] had ever betrayed him” (107). The house works as an extension of his family, and while he cannot commit violence against his former wife and children, he can at least lash out at their residence, disrupting their home as a way to disrupt their lives as he feels his has been.

When Burt returns the next morning, one of the spilled pies is in the driveway. Rather than cleaning up his mess, Burt walks around it just as he looks at the devastation

of his former living room, a disaster he has created, without offering to help clean it up. Apparently, he has a history of this type of behavior as the front door is “permanently locked since the night his key had broken off inside of it” (107). Though Vera has changed the locks apparently to keep him out, he has broken his key in the door; now, no one can come in. Therefore, he has to go around to the back of the house, suggesting that his own forcefulness has locked him out of regular admittance to his family’s life.

The scene that confronts him when he comes back to his house the day after Christmas also works to suggest the shambles of Burt and Vera’s relationship and the mess that her own life will continue to be unless she finds a way to make him understand that their marriage is over. Everything in the room is burned out, burned up, or over: “There was a pile of colored tissue paper and shiny boxes at one end of the sofa. A turkey carcass sat on a platter in the center of the dining-room table, the leathery remains in a bed of parsley as if in a horrible nest. A cone of ash filled the fireplace. There were some empty Shasta cola cans in there too. A trail of smoke stains rose up the bricks to the mantel, where the wood that stopped them was scorched black” (107-08). Their home has become a “horrible nest,” not a nurturing place but a place from which Burt has been forced to leave. The yard is full of weeds, just as their once healthy life was overrun with problems; a bicycle without a front wheel stands upside down in the yard, suggestive of their relationship, motion going nowhere. The house and yard metaphorically reveal what Burt will not admit, that their marriage is beyond repair.

When Burt insists on talking rather than leaving as Vera wants him to, he cannot think of anything to say. Instead, he focuses on a piece of pottery that the two had bought on vacation together years ago. He still thinks of the piece as a vessel that is useful for

holding things, food to nurture like part of a sacrament. A dish is only useful when it is full just as he feels empty without his family. However, Vera uses it as an ashtray, suggesting that their marriage is useful only for holding what is finished. The last scene shows him in the driveway, going backwards. He has stolen the piece of pottery and plans to return soon to explain to her that “the goddamn ashtray was a goddamn dish” (113). What he wants to tell her is that their life together should be a useful container holding nourishment rather than ashes, that their marriage is worth saving. Instead, he again steps around the pie in the driveway, gets into this car, and puts “it into reverse” (113). Burt will never be able to move forward with his life until he admits the marriage is over. That he must let go of the past is clear in the final line: “It was hard managing until he put the ashtray down” (113). The conclusive name for the piece, “ashtray,” suggests that the marriage is as spent as cigarette butts. Burt will remain in meaningless expansive movement until he accepts that his former life with Vera is as “permanently locked” as his former front door.

Throughout his career, Andre Dubus continued the theme of women and men coming to terms with their domestic situations as they negotiate within shifting environments every bit as dangerous and confusing as writers before had recorded. Kennedy has noted in Dubus’ stories a “continuing focus and refocus on the question of a character’s defining her or his own identity juxtaposed against the identity a situation seeks to impose upon a character.”⁹³ Dubus writes of people whose ability to influence their domestic space determines their potential to move beyond their respective crises while their inability to do so dooms them. Likewise, just as previous short-story writers have celebrated home’s nurturing containment as well as praised positive expansion,

Dubus writes of women and men who see residence as sanctuary at the same time that they feel free to move beyond its walls, sustained by its positive influence.

Home as a restrictive place of containment can be found in a variety of stories by Dubus. “Leslie in California” and “Rose” deal with women who are victims of their husbands’ physical violence. Leslie is trapped by her fear, powerless to stop future abuse or to escape her marriage. Though Rose is finally able to react against her husband’s brutality, she again becomes victimized, this time by the legal system that judges her actions without justly considering her motivations. When she loses her children to the court, she loses the temporary strength that allowed her for a moment to move out of the worthless image that she has of herself. She remains a victim of her own lack of self-worth, unable to see the goodness in herself that the narrator sees.

In “Anna,” “Waiting,” and “Killings,” women are unable to act, to move out of their pain due to the violence that has been inflicted upon their lives. Each of the three women in these stories is waiting for deliverance from her pain. Though Anna, from the title story, and Ruth, from “Killings,” experience temporary transcendence, both stories end with a returning sense of loss. In “Waiting,” Juanita realizes that her life is on hold and that she simply has been marking time, waiting for salvation from the aftershock of her husband’s death. These women move through days full of empty domestic rituals, and though they long for an escape, they are trapped, fixed by their circumstances. Two additional stories add to the theme of domestic space as negative containment: “Now They Live in Texas” and “The Pretty Girl.” Both stories deal with a woman’s attempting to break free of her domestic constraints but finding that she is restricted by her own limitations.

Other stories by Dubus deal with women who are able to break through their negative containment by redefining themselves. In “Adultry,” Edith decides that she can no longer remain in her adulterous marriage. She rejects Hank’s negative expansion in order to create a healthier situation for herself and her daughter as she is forced to reconsider her role as wife and mother. Similarly, in “Molly,” a mother and her daughter learn in the painful aftermath of divorce how to work through the difficulties of creating autonomous selves while living through and with one another. “Miranda Over the Valley” and “The Fat Girl” are concerned with young women who are able to transcend expectations, creating lives in which they can become whom they believe themselves to be rather than what their families expect of them. Both women endure struggles resulting from their parents’ prospects for their futures; nevertheless, both Miranda and Louise are successful in negotiating their circumstances, and what looks like failure to their families is actually personal triumph as each one regains a sense of self, moving ahead independently.

Likewise, Dubus writes about men who for a variety of reasons have to renegotiate their connection to their families and their domestic space. Matt Fowler of “Killings” attempts to bring healing to his family shattered by tragedy and in doing so cuts himself off from any future sense of peace either at home or in the world. In a three-part short-story cycle from We Don’t Live Here Anymore, Hank Allison loses his family due to his selfish attention to his career and his unwillingness to be defined as husband or father. Later, however, he is broken by a betrayal that makes him reexamine his life and create a permanent, positive connection with his daughter, his ex-wife, and his lover. For a while, his friend Jack Linhart tries to extend the boundaries of his own marriage, having

an affair to try to feel some of the happiness that he imagines comes with freedom from domestic constraints. Nevertheless, he later realizes that his bond with his wife and children will bring him a more lasting sense of peace than temporary escape can ever offer. “A Father’s Story” tells of Luke Ripley’s negotiations with his conscience and with his God as he justifies breaking the law in order to maintain his family’s domestic security. Likewise, “The Winter Father” deals with failures and successes as Peter Jackman learns to build a new home for his children in the wake of his divorce.

Dubus’ final short-story cycle, Dancing After Hours, brings together the most nurturing view of home as a place of both positive containment and expansion. The book begins with LuAnn’s graduation from college and moves her into a world that leaves her wanting, needing fulfillment beyond the empty routines that she finds marking her days. The stories trace her progression into marriage and motherhood, accounting for her ability to be a wife and a mother without surrendering herself to either role. In the final LuAnn story, “Out of the Snow,” she defends herself against her attackers, the violent scene in her kitchen working as a metaphor for her fight against the varying forces that have threatened to overwhelm her sense of self. The cycle is a celebration of a woman who is able to create a space for herself that is worth defending, fighting successfully against outside violence. Her life neither overwhelms nor dis-empowers her. On the contrary, LuAnn triumphs in her struggles and comes through completely.

The satellite stories that surround the LuAnn and Ted stories in Dancing After Hours add to its theme. Though the characters are different in the remaining stories, each one works to support the cycle’s movement towards healing, of recovering from the violence of ordinary living. In the final and title story, “Dancing After Hours,” Emily is

on her way to being healed, moving with faith into a world that has previously battered her. The story and, consequently, the cycle end with two people reaching out to one another with promise.

Each of the stories can be connected through Dubus' use of domestic space, a theme in American literature since the earliest captivity narratives. His stories revolve around women and men who are unable to move on with their lives, victims trapped by violence and fear whose homes are places of negative containment. Likewise, Dubus deals with those who are able to move beyond temporary moments of crises into lives with meaning, creating havens that work as fortresses against the outside world. These characters come to value their expansiveness due to their positive containment within their homes. In myriad ways, Dubus uses domestic space as a backdrop to suggest his characters' sense of self and potential for growth. Without a nurturing place to call home, characters are paralyzed by their inability to negotiate either their own crises of self or crises brought about by the very violence of living. Those who do have autonomy within their own homes or who provide positive spaces for others are best fortified to meet both themselves and what the world has to offer.

Notes

1. Annette Kolodney, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 163.

2. Richard Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 95, 94. For an interesting and thorough overview of the history of Indian captivity narratives see Gordon M. Sayre, American Captivity Narratives, ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). Sayre's text defines the genre and accounts for its popularity by presenting a variety of important narratives.

3. Slotkin, 99.

4. On June 20, 1675, Metacomet led the first in a series of attacks on colonial settlements. In one year, 1,200 settlers' homes were burned; 600 English colonists were left dead along with 3,000 Indians. The Indians were starving, and, desperate to get back their land, this war was the last effort to stop white expansion. Slotkin, 97.

5. Slotkin, 102. Slotkin sees the Indian captivity narratives as especially effective in discouraging emigration in part due to their metaphor of home which contains a "garden" . . . protected from the encroaching wilderness by a stiff 'hedge' of religious dogma and rigorous government. The younger generation, seeking land beyond the hedge, are equated with the Indians for the breaches they make in good order and filial piety" (99). This idea reinforces the fact of the vulnerability of the home and its inhabitants at the same time that it elevates the importance of domestic space in the struggle for salvation. As Slotkin continues, the "Puritan was no longer sure of his ability

to conquer the wilderness in a righteous manner; instead, he felt himself weak enough to be debased by the wilderness to the level of the depraved natural man, the Indian” (99).

6. Mary Rowlandson, A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, in Narratives of the Indian Wars: 1675-1699, ed. Charles H. Lincoln (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), 134. All references are to this edition.

7. Harriet Prescott Spofford, “Circumstance,” in “The Amber Gods” and Other Stories (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 84. All references are to this edition.

8. James Nagel’s The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre is especially important in regards to defining the genre. His text begins with a thorough discussion of the genre in America, tracing both its influences as well as the most significant of the cycles. In his discussion, Nagel makes the point that in “the last two decades of the twentieth century, it has become increasingly clear that the tradition of the short-story cycle is one of the most important in the history of American fiction.” The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 3. In addition, Susan Garland Mann’s The Short Story Cycle is especially useful in coming to terms with some of the most important short-story cycles. Mann, however, concludes that no set definition for the cycle will serve as the shared characteristics have changed over the years. Concerning short-story cycles in America written during the nineteenth century, she makes the point that a cycle was often defined by a collection of tales held together by a frame, but that as writers became more secure about the genre that they did not feel compelled to frame every collection in order to hold it together as if it were a

novel. The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 6-7. Nagel, on the other hand, states that “the central idea of the short-story cycle, the linked set of short narratives . . . antedates the concept of the formal novel” and that the genre can be defined: “Although there have been myriad variations on the concept, the unifying tendency of the genre of the cycle has been the collection of a group of independent stories that contain continuing elements of character, setting, action, imagery, or theme that enrich each other in intertextual context” (3, 15). Kirkland’s text is a loose fit for this definition, but a fit nevertheless.

9. Caroline Kirkland, A New Home: Who’ll Follow?, ed. William S. Osborne (Albany: New College and University Press, 1965), 33. All references are to this edition.

10. Annette Kolodny, “The Domestic Fantasy Goes West,” in Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticisms, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 791.

11. Annette Kolodny, The Land Before Her, xii-xiii. She continues by pointing out that in spite of Kirkland’s husband’s commercial interests that women were focused almost exclusively on domestic affairs: “Massive exploitation and alteration of the continent do not seem to have been part of women’s fantasies. They dreamed, more modestly, of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden” (xiii). Women’s ability to adjust to their new landscape depended upon their positive connections to others and to the familiarity with which they found their new homes. Women who were unable to establish comfortable houses and an extended community were essentially trapped. Furthermore, women were eager to bring a part of their past selves to their new environment as a way to make their unfamiliar landscape

feel more like home and as a way to reach out to other women: “For in the exchange of cuttings, scions, seeds, and overripe fruit (for its seeds) and in exchange of information about their garden activities, women shared with one another both their right and their capacity to put their personal stamp on landscapes otherwise owned and appropriated by men” (48).

12. Judith Fryer, Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 17. No matter her husband’s economic involvement, “for the most part westering [women’s] private writings reflect their involvement with family, with the difficult and exhausting business of daily life, with illness and death” (18). Though women like Kirkland may have disapproved of their husband’s business dealings, most were too overwhelmed with their own daily concerns of establishing and maintaining a home to protest.

13. Kolodny, The Land Before Her, 8.

14. Kolodny, The Land Before Her, 9.

15. Arthur Voss, The American Short Story: A Critical Survey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 4. Voss does concede that Kirkland was a notable exception (13). An excellent overview of the development of the short story in America can be found in Eugene Current-Garcia, The American Short Story before 1850: A Critical History (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985). Particularly interesting is his chapter “Types of Magazine Short Fiction Before 1820” in which he concludes that most of the stories were written for moral guidance and entertainment as well as dramatizations of “physical or psychological dangers confronting the harried citizen in the new world” (5).

16. Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940), 151. “The tale, the short story, to most of the American writers, was an inferior thing, a fragment, a convenient, apprentice exercise, a stepping stone to better things” (292).

17. Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey (New York: Biblo and Tannen), 30.

18. “Preface,” The Atlantic Souvenir: Christmas and New Year’s Offering (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea., 1826).

19. Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story, 72.

20. Current-Garcia, 4.

21. “A Tale of Mystery,” in The Atlantic Souvenir: Christmas and New Year’s Offering (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea., 1926): 136-82.

22. James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 104.

23. Hart, 86.

24. Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, 97.

25. Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, 110.

26. Kolodny, The Land Before Her, 166, 167.

27. Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, 145. Pattee’s observations are reinforced by Hawthorne’s sentiments in a letter written January, 1855: “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women. I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed”(149). Though Hawthorne’s statement has been attacked, and rightfully so in a reassessment of such writers as Fanny Fern, Pattee for one agrees with him: “At least as

to the matter of quality” his was simply “a statement of fact”(150). Some of Hawthorne’s earliest works appeared in The Token. According to Voss, his was “serious short fiction that was in contrast with the “light and sentimental poetry and prose” which filled the majority of the “ornate and showy” bindings (14). In addition, Pattee gives recognition to women writers such as Kirkland and Hope Leslie for her “mastery of detail and a facility for sketching in backgrounds,” as well as Mrs. Hale, literary director of Godey’s, who “in her own short-story work stood for truth and morality” (74, 73).

28. The “Preface” to The Token makes the intent of the magazine editors very clear: to provide women with “literature which is calculated to promote their moral and intellectual improvement. . . . It is time that a new era should commence in the history of literature for ladies. They should be presented with that which is truly useful, in an interesting and entertaining form,” “Preface,” The Token, vol I (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey & I. Lea, 1850): i, ii. Women’s education was necessary so that they might set a useful example for their family, “to render themselves suitable companions for educated and intelligent men,” vi. Her reason for improving her mind ties directly back to her domestic obligations.

29. Hope Leslie, “Home,” in Godey’s Lady’s Book, 2 (Philadelphia: L. A. Godey and Co., January 1831), 8. All references are to this edition.

30. Leslie, “Country Lodgings,” in Godey’s Lady’s Book, 3 (July 1831), 48. All references are to this edition.

31. Anonymous, “Advice to a Bride by a Lady,” in Godey’s Lady’s Book, 5 (July 1832), 288. All references are to this edition.

32. Anonymous, "The Appropriate Sphere of Woman," in The Token, 1 (1850),

19. All references are to this edition.

33. Sir. T. Monroe, "A Tender Wife," in Godey's Lady's Book, 3 (July 1831), 1.

All references are to this edition.

34. Anonymous, "My Wife: A Whisper," in Godey's Lady's Book, 3 (July 1831),

231. All references are to this edition.

35. The opposing male perspective is outlined in a very short essay that glorifies the wife's role in ministering to her husband's needs: "The solicitude and the anxieties, and the heaviest misfortunes of life are hardly to be borne by him who has the weight of business and domestic cares at the same to time to contend with. But how much lighter do they seem, when after his necessary avocations are over, he returns to his home, and finds there a partner of all his griefs and troubles, who takes for his sake her share of domestic labors upon her, and soothes the anguish of his anticipation." Anonymous, Godey's Lady's Book, 6 (December 1832), 86. This essay politicizes the value of the domestic sphere seen as a partnership in that no man is capable of competing successfully in the world of commerce without sanctuary. Without solid homes with prescribed roles that are willingly and lovingly—and moderately—filled, the business world would cease to function.

36. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Mrs. A. and Mrs. B: or, what she thinks about it."

In Stories, Sketches, and Studies (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 112. All references are to this edition.

37. As Voss points out, “the story is one of the most artful developments of the Harte formula and the best of his many variations on the theme that immoral and even criminal men are capable of generous and virtuous acts” (73).

38. Bret Harte, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” in The Portable American Realism Reader, ed. James Nagel and Tom Quirk (New York: Penguin, 1997), 14. All references are to this edition.

39. Many critics attest to Irving’s influence on the genre. Voss calls The Sketch Book “the first notable advance in the development of the short narrative” (5). Pattee credits Irving with giving the short story “emotion” while stripping “it of its obvious moral, and [reducing] it from the general to the particular” (The Development of the American Short Story, 20).

40. Pattee, Voss, Current-Garcia and others are all in agreement concerning Irving’s importance on the genre. An especially informative and thorough critique of Irving can be found in Current-Garcia’s “Irving Sets the Pattern,” 25-41.

41. Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle,” in The Sketch Book (New York: New American Library, 1981), 39. All references are to this edition.

42. Current-Garcia, 27.

43. Patee gives Hawthorne credit for giving new credibility to the genre. Because of Hawthorne, “the short story had no longer to apologize for its existence and live a vagabond life in the corners of weekly papers and the pages of lady’s book and annuals” (110).

44. Voss, 24. Like Pattee, Voss gives Hawthorne praise for his artistic contributions: “Until the middle 1830's when Nathaniel Hawthorne’s first tales of

literary significance began to appear in magazines, no stories of much literary merit aside from Irving's were published" (13).

45. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," in Tales and Sketches. (New York: Viking, 1982), 277. All references are to this edition.

46. Herman Melville, "The Piazza," in Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, and Billy Budd. (New York: Viking, 1984), 621. All references are to this edition.

47. Henry James, "The Jolly Corner," in Tales of Henry James, ed. Christof Wegelin (New York: Norton, 1984) 313. All references are to this edition.

48. Thomas E. Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), 63.

49. Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills," in Life in the Iron Mills, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Boston: Bedford, 1998). All references are to this edition. This story was first published in The Atlantic, whose former editor, James Russell Lowell, as Pattee sums up, "did more than any other person to raise the new short-story form to a place of dignity and to give it reality and substance. As the editor of the first seven volumes of The Atlantic, he was able to touch and mold the new literary generation at their most plastic moment" (167).

50. Rose Terry Cooke, "Mrs. Flint's Married Experience," in How Celia Changed Her Mind and Selected Stories (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 99. All references are to this edition.

51. Kerstin W. Shands, Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

52. In an essay written a decade after the publication of her story, Gilman explains her reasons for writing “The Yellow Wallpaper”: “For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia—and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure. . . . I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over.” “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’?,” in The Forerunner 4 (October 1913): 271. The story serves as both testimonial and warning to other women to resist control and to act rather than rest.

53. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” in Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings (New York: Penguin, 1999), 166. All references are to this edition.

54. Doreen Massey, Space, Place, and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 116. She also makes the interesting point which is especially relevant in regards to “Up the Coolly” that typically the one who left was male, “setting out to discover and change the world,” and the one left behind was typically female, “most particularly a mother, assigned the role of personifying a place which did not change” (166). The extreme contrast in both his mother and the memories that he has of the farm make his homecoming even more grim.

55. Hamlin Garland, “Up the Coolly,” in Main-Traveled Roads (New York: Harper, 1956), 87. All references are to this edition.

56. Theodore Dreiser, "Old Rogham and His Theresa," in Free and Other Stories (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), 208. All references are to this edition.

57. Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction, 70-71.

58. Stephen Crane, "The Dark Brown Dog," in The Portable Stephen Crane (New York: Penguin, 1977), 83. All references are to this edition.

59. Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, in The Portable Stephen Crane, 15.

60. Voss makes the definitive statement that only a few writers prior to the war between the states had worked to produce a "pronounced regional flavor" to their writings (70).

61. Kathleen Kirby, Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 73.

62. Massey, 168, 169.

63. As James Nagel has pointed out, "the writers of Realism and Naturalism humanized American fiction, using common characters, colloquial language, and normative situations for the creation of literary art. This era, 1865 to 1918, saw the development of the short story as a major genre." James Nagel, "The Literary Context," in The Portable American Realism Reader (New York: Penguin, 1997), xx.

64. Nagel, The Portable American Realism Reader, xxii.

65. Sarah Orne Jewett, "Mrs. Todd," in American Women Regionalists 1850-1910, ed. Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse (New York: Norton, 1992), 206. All references are to this edition.

66. Fetterly and Pryse, 305. Voss gives Freeman credit for being more of a realist than many of the other New England "local colorists" and describes the method of her

story telling as “objective and detached” (96). Freeman writes in a way that offers her characters grace and dignity as they face a myriad of oppositions.

67. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, “A Mistaken Charity,” in A Humble Romance and Other Stories (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915), 235. All references are to this edition.

68. Massey, 151.

69. Voss, 99.

70. Grace King, “The Balcony,” in Balcony Stories (Ridgewood: Gregg Press, 1968), 1. All references are to this edition.

71. Kate Chopin, “The Storm,” in Kate Chopin: Complete Novels and Stories (New York, Viking, 2002), 929. All references are to this edition.

72. Ellen Kimbel, “The American Short Story: 1900-1920,” in The American Short Story: 1900-1945, ed. Philip Stevick (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 33.

73. Kimbel, 33.

74. William Peden, The American Short Story: Front Line in the National Defense of Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 13, 12.

75. Peden, 14.

76. James Watson, “The American Short Story: 1930-1945,” in The American Short Story: 1900-1945, ed. Philip Stevick (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 107.

77. Kimbel, 63.

78. Kimbel, 62.

79. Kimbel, 112.

80. Sherwood Anderson, “Mother,” in Winesburg, Ohio (New York: Viking, 1966), 39. All references are to this edition.

81. William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily," in Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), 119. All references are to this edition.

82. Ernest Hemingway, "Soldier's Home," in The Short Stories (New York: Scribner, 1995), 146. All references are to this edition.

83. Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," in The Short Stories, 167. All references are to this edition.

84. Katherine Anne Porter, "The Grave," in The Collected Short Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 363. All references are to this edition.

85. Massey, 171.

86. Peter Taylor, "Miss Lenora When Last Seen," in The Collected Stories of Peter Taylor (New York: Penguin, 1986), 522. All references are to this edition.

87. Shands, 93.

88. Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried," in The Things They Carried (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 8, 9.

89. Susan Minot, epigraph to Monkeys (New York: Washington Square Press, 1986). All references are to this edition.

90. Breece D'J Pancake, "A Room Forever," in The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake (New York: Holt, 1983), 54. All references are to this edition.

91. Bobbie Ann Mason, "The Retreat," in Shiloh and Other Stories (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 132. All references are to this edition.

92. Raymond Carver, "A Serious Talk," in What We Talk about When We Talk about Love (New York: Random House, 1982), 105. All references are to this edition.

93. Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction, 22. As Kennedy continues, “action or inaction is often the key to identity in Dubus’ fiction. . . . This is, of course the existential challenge: to define oneself or to be defined” (23).

Chapter 3

Negative Containment:

Domestic Space and the Women of Andre Dubus

The issue of home and a woman's autonomy within it has been a constant theme in the short fiction of Andre Dubus. Thomas Kennedy states that "each of Dubus's women face . . . a challenge to self-knowledge as a stage in the bridging of human isolation, or in succumbing to it, in being lost to hunger, or progressing beyond hunger to love as higher state of existence."¹ Many such stories can be termed Naturalistic in that the women protagonists are bound by their environments or restricted by their biological or sociological limitations to the point that they do not recognize that they have sovereignty in matters that affect their own lives. These women are best defined by their containment, spaces of fear or control, depression or despair. Each victimized by a trauma in her life, these women either struggle in vain or they surrender to their hopelessness, unable to see any possible chance for change. As Steve Yarbrough has pointed out, for most of Dubus' fiction, the "focus is not on what is going to happen to the characters; it is instead on what has happened to them, on what has made them the people they are."² In "Leslie in California," "Rose," and "Anna," women struggle within confines of negativity. The homes in these stories are a long way from the domestic ideals of the fiction of the 1850s. In postmodern America, the home is in crisis, and the resulting chaos

is the theme of these stories. In “Waiting,” “Killings,” and “They Now Live in Texas,” women protagonists have either been traumatized by domestic experiences beyond their control or they wait passively for transcendence from their pain, a deliverance that they do not seem actively able to pursue. In “The Pretty Girl,” though Polly attempts to create a new life for herself that expands beyond the boundaries of her past limitations, she is trapped by the passivity her beauty affords her. How all of these women survive within such negative limits becomes one of the central issues of these stories.

Just as Caroline Kirkland wrote of the fears that dominated many women of the 1800s who moved out west from the safety of their homes back east, Dubus’ story “Leslie in California”³ deals with a young woman who moves westward, leaving behind her father and friends to begin a new life with her husband, Kevin. Leslie expects her new life to be full of positive opportunities; however, when she begins her marriage with Kevin, she finds that the same fears that dominated the women of Kirkland’s times are still present in the 1970s. Not only does Leslie have to live in poverty without modern conveniences, she also lives in fear for her life.

Not limited to a threatening surrounding environment, Leslie is primarily dominated and characterized by the overwhelming threats that define her domestic space. She lives in fear of her husband, whose treatment of her grows more violent the longer they are together. Though married less than a year, Leslie already has begun to wonder if she is going to be one of those women she has read about who end up “dead in her kitchen” (373).⁴ As Phyllis Rosser has pointed out, “art in the [nineteen]-seventies revealed that for many women home had become a war zone of violence and abuse. Male violence was creating psychological trauma in its victims that was identical to the

‘shellshock’ experienced by soldiers in war, says Harvard psychiatric professor Judith Lewis Herman.”⁵ Leslie, like Ernest Hemingway’s Harold Krebs, has been reduced by a paralyzing fear that renders her unable to make decisions necessary in her life. As Madonne Miner has pointed out, “Leslie presents herself and her situation quietly, flatly, without emotion as if she and the woman she describes are two different people. That distancing, I would argue, is right: it represents exactly the feelings of a woman who comes face-to-face with the fact that her husband is a batterer--and she, a battered wife.”⁶ Though she knows that she should flee, she is only able to transcend her negative containment by temporary expansion of the mind through memory and wishes.

When Leslie married Kevin, she took her vows and moved out to California with the same sort of determination with which women centuries before her had moved west. Their families and friends celebrated as she and Kevin married on a fishing boat on “the way out to sea” (372), the “clear blue Sunday” sky bright. The metaphors surrounding the memories that Leslie has of her wedding day are in stark contrast to the dark, cold images of her California home. The light and the water work together to suggest a hopefulness, almost a rebirth, as Leslie is born into a new life with Kevin. From her entrapment in California, however, she reflects back on her wedding day, and though Leslie remembers the details of what they served the guests to eat and drink, she fails to recount any memory of Kevin or any interaction between them. His absence from her recollection of the day is a telling omission. It begins the trend of Leslie avoiding Kevin, even in memory, and she becomes defined by her inaction. The only confrontation is one single statement: “‘I wish you didn’t hit me last night . . . and the two before that’” (374). All

Leslie does is wish and dream. In fact, the only action she takes during the course of the story is whatever it takes to move Kevin peacefully out of the door.

What becomes evident during Leslie's first-person narrative is that though she is contained by her fear of Kevin, she is also unable to act because she does not recognize herself anymore. In five short months, her husband's violence against her has left her blank on the surface. In order to create meaning in the chaos of her life, she retreats into her memory, back into the safety of the past. Like Charlotte in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "A Mistaken Charity," she uses her memory to extend past the violence of her present life into an oasis of peace and security. Her memories always include her father, her male protector, lost to her now as she is divided from him by thousands of miles. Each of the memories of her father is in stark contrast to how she and Kevin live. However, she can only reach this positive space through memory. Perhaps her reluctance to contact her father is due to her unwillingness to disrupt or disappoint him: "Dad has a new wife" (373). Leslie seems disinclined to invade his happiness with her own troubles.

As the details of the October day come back to Leslie, she is standing months later in her dark kitchen in California.⁷ Though Kevin had been employed back east as a harpooner, in California, neither can find work. Back home, she was a waitress, a job that has prepared her to serve food to people she does not necessarily know. Throughout the story, her distancing from Kevin suggests that she no longer knows the man for whom she is preparing breakfast. Her husband has managed to get only part-time "body work" (373), an interesting choice of words for Leslie to use since every time he gets drunk, it is her body that he ends up working over. The opening paragraph ends with a simple but overwhelming fact: "Now it's February, a short month" (373). The bills that they cannot

pay will come sooner than usual, and it is this lack of money that Kevin uses as an excuse to drink, perhaps resulting in Leslie's life being equally short. In addition, February is a cold month, and the frigidity of the morning has invaded her house, which is as powerless against the weather as she is against her husband's violence.

As in many of Dubus' short stories, each detail of the opening paragraph works to set up the conflict. In the descriptions, Leslie's connection to her home and her lack of autonomy is made clear. The first sensory detail is an alarm ringing to awaken her to a morning "black and grey" (371) that pervades her house, as dark as her hopes have become. The alarm, though seemingly a harmless detail, is actually a portentous warning. The horrors unfold in the second sentence as the narrative moves to her descriptions: "I smell Kevin's breath and my eye hurts and won't open" (371). The fact that the details of her husband's breath and her injury are given in tandem is revealing, setting up that whenever Kevin drinks, Leslie gets hurt. The third sentence likewise combines a description of his movements with the smell of beer: "He gets out of bed, and still I smell beer in the cold air" (371). Like the animal he has become, Kevin is "naked" (371), a Naturalistic detail that is carried throughout the story.

Though Leslie layers herself against the cold, attempting vainly to warm herself by putting on a robe, she must go "by flashlight to the kitchen" (371). The detail is casually dropped, as if all women waking to the morning move through their homes by flashlight. Only later is the fact made clear that they cannot afford electricity. Though living without power might be enough to worry any new wife, Leslie has more serious things to occupy her thoughts. Her own lack of power is mirrored by her home, a rented place as unfamiliar to her as her present existence.

Still moving through the first paragraph, Leslie's desire to distance herself from her surroundings becomes evident. She has cut herself off from nature, not able to connect with her environment: "Birds are singing, or whatever it is they do" (371). Without hope for a better day than the night before has promised, Leslie cannot understand what is worth singing about. Her sense of dread has made any expansion into her yard or the surrounding landscape impossible. Therefore, she is as cut off from others as those frontier women who feared the "geographical isolation" that severed any possibilities for a network of strength that a community provides.⁸ Afraid and cut off from this sense of community, Leslie escapes her present dilemma through mental journeys. She moves as rapidly as a bird's flight, an imagistic pattern used throughout the story, into memories very different from the harsh reality of her present life with Kevin. She moves back in time to "New England mornings with the lights on and a warm kitchen and catching the school bus" (371), a warm and safe scene radically different from her California home. Like Miranda in Katherine Anne Porter's "The Grave," Leslie's memory offers her rich experiences of home that give her a positive expansion. In addition, she uses her remembered stories like the children of Grace King's "The Balcony" or Katherine Anne Porter's "The Grave," carrying into adulthood fortifying connections of home.

Leslie's mind continues to move from the frightening reality of her present life with Kevin to the safety of her previous life. When she thinks about Kevin being gone from the house, she moves into thoughts of her father and the happy promises and hopes that he had for her marriage: "Dad was happy about us going to California; he talked about sourdough bread and fresh fruit and vegetables all year" (371). Her father imagines

nurturing, healthy foods suggestive of a enriching life. Yet the disfunctional details of her present living conditions suggest otherwise. She is brought back into the reality of her life when she has to reach into a cooler for the bacon and eggs she prepares for Kevin: “A can of beer is floating, tilting, in the ice and water; the rest are in a paper bag for garbage. I could count them, know how many it takes” (371). Before the first paragraph is over, the truth of Leslie’s life is revealed. Though she came out to California with the same positive hopes her father had for her, the life that she is leading only four months later has been full of violence. She has become familiar enough with her husband’s battery that she knows exactly how many beers it takes before he hits her. In the last sentence of the opening paragraph, she hears him coming into the kitchen, and she stands “at the stove so my back is to the door” (371). From the very beginning of the story, her body language reveals that she will not leave her marriage. His violence has so dominated her life that she is immobilized by fear and shock, unable to leave, unable to see even the possibilities of a way out, her back “to the door” (371). She is trapped and retreats by falling into her role as wife, moving to the stove where she starts her husband’s breakfast.

The journey that Leslie took with Kevin, their cross country trek from the east to the west, though remembered in short detail appeared to be a good start. They drove “across country in an old Ford he worked on till it ran like it was young again” (372). To save on hotels, they took turns driving and sleeping and “only had to spend motel money twice” (372). Their journey west was hard, but the two worked together in order to reach their new home, saving as much as they could on expenses. However, four months have passed before Kevin finds work; now he has found a job on a boat that is “going out for sharks. They will be gone five days, maybe more, and if he comes back with money we

can have electricity again,” Leslie thinks (371). Though Leslie trusted Kevin enough to marry him and to travel cross country with little more than his old car, her faith in him has diminished as she is left to wonder, though he has found work, if he will provide for her. The possibility that he might be gone longer than five days gives Leslie a hope of reprieve from the violence that she has been experiencing every time he gets drunk. However, when he does come back, she doubts that he will bring any of his paycheck with him. Though Kevin is able to leave home to work, Leslie has no job and with no telephone or car, no means of looking for employment. Kerstin W. Shands makes a relevant comment regarding spheres of space typically relegated to men and women:

The very division into public and private spheres has been seen as a tool for upholding patriarchy itself, with one sphere seen as an expansive male territory and the other sphere a female domain of constriction. . . . In barring free movement, confinement in the home spells powerlessness, while the expansiveness of the male territory carries associations of power.⁹

Helpless, Leslie must wait at home while Kevin can create a separate community. The atavism used in her descriptions furthers this sense of power in Kevin and adds to the fear that she has of him. His beard is “damp, his eyes are bloodshot, and his mouth opens as he looks” at the damage he has done to Leslie’s face (372). Physically, he is stronger than Leslie, a characteristic that adds to his dominance over her

Though trapped in her home with her violent husband, Leslie continues to expand her domestic space the only way she can. She looks out of the windows above the stove, extending into the landscape, but she ends up describing the hills as “dark humps against

the sky” (372). The descriptions match the lumps that cover her face, her bruised cheek, her swollen eye. Her details of the landscape become an extension of the violence she suffers at home. Likewise, when she moves from the present hills into a memory of her father, “Dad liked the Pacific,” she finishes out the memory by coming back to the fact that “we are miles inland and animals are out there with the birds” (372). The helplessness of the birds against the dangerous animals she imagines mirrors her physical weakness against Kevin’s predatory strength. In addition, though her father had high hopes for his daughter, she and Kevin have stopped short of the coast. Water is often used symbolically to suggest redemption or the start of a new spiritual life; however, here Leslie’s home is “miles inland” (372), far from the healing waters of the Pacific.

Leslie’s house as well as her landscape is dangerous: “One morning last week a rattlesnake was on the driveway. Yesterday some men went hunting a bobcat in the hills. They say it killed a horse, and they are afraid it will kill somebody’s child” (372). All of the memories of her childhood to which her mind keeps returning drive home the fact that Leslie is “somebody’s child,” and though the men are hunting the dangerous cat, “they didn’t find it” (372). The fear of the bobcat and especially her recognition that what is dangerous and life-threatening cannot always be brought down work to suggest the foreboding that she has that Kevin eventually will kill her and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Though she can mentally escape into thoughts of her childhood and memories of her father, the harsh landscape and the violence of her home prevail. Shands makes an interesting point that is especially relevant in regards to Leslie’s desire to return home: “Our fundamental need for home is denied or neglected in the . . . infinite and restless semiosis which marks the plastic postmodern landscapes that are totally lacking in resting

points.”¹⁰ Leslie’s rootlessness disempowers her, so she must turn back to her father, her connection to a sense of place in order to feel any peace.

The most revealing detail in the dangers that surround her home comes in her observation that the bobcat killed a horse. Her mind fixes on a memory of her younger sister, whom Leslie remembers watching in a competition: “My little sister took riding lessons in New England; I watched her compete, and I was afraid, she was so small on that big animal jumping” (372). The narrative placement of these details, coming so soon after Leslie’s atavistic descriptions of Kevin, reveals that now her fear has transferred to a concern for her own life. She is “so small” and defenseless in her marriage, a ride more dangerous than her sister’s horse competitions. The paragraph ends with the revelation that Leslie’s inability to size up what is actually dangerous is a carry-over from her childhood. When she was a small child, she put herself in a dangerous situation, ironically also in California, the same state where she now fears for her life: “Dad told me I tried to pet some bobcats when I was three and we lived at Camp Pendleton. Two bobcats were at the edge of the camp . . . and I went to them saying here, kitty, here, kitty” (372). Just as Leslie was unable to recognize the cat as dangerous, she did not foresee the potential for violence in Kevin. When she was a child, her father was there to rescue her: “Dad called me back” (372). Though she cannot escape from her own present danger, the reoccurring memories of her father reveal Leslie’s desire for him to call her back from her life with Kevin. She wants to go home where she can be “somebody’s child” rather than the wife of an abusive animal.

Leslie’s apprehension is compounded when she moves outside to pour off grease from the bacon she has been cooking for Kevin’s breakfast. Afraid of what lies outside,

the possible rattlesnake that might bite and kill her, she looks down at the steps “before I go out” (373). If danger is everywhere outside, real or imaginary, important or not in comparison to the ever present and potentially fatal violence that lies within her own home, she will be too afraid to move down those steps and out across the lawn, where other potential dangers lurk. Though she sees light at the top of the hills, a symbolic suggestion that there is hope beyond this life with Kevin, over the hills, beyond his reach, she is trapped by her own imagination. To move out into those hills, she has to pass the rattlesnakes and bobcats.

Perhaps aware of her own limitations, Leslie has a flash of power, looking down at the skillet in her hand. The kitchen, typically a woman’s sense of space, serves as the backdrop for most of the action. As Leslie cooks and serves the meal, the kitchen should be her fortress as it might provide her with a weapon to use against Kevin. Yet rather than imagining using them in her defense, she accepts defeat: “I see he’s wearing his knife, and I think of all the weapons in a house: knives, cooking forks, ice picks, hammers, skillets, cleavers, wine bottles” (373). Though she wields a hot skillet, she is no match for Kevin, and even her own domain turns against her, becoming an arsenal of weapons that he could use against her as she wonders if she will “be one of those women . . . dead in her kitchen” (373). Her present fear numbs her to what lies ahead in her life. Just as earlier she distances herself from her present pain by moving into her past and the safe memories of her childhood home, she even distances herself from what she imagines as her own violent death. When Kevin touches her, reaching out to “do something for that eye” (373), she moves away by turning back to her present job of cooking for him so that he can eat and leave. Her only defense is to go through the domestic actions of a wife

helping to get her husband off to work. As Kevin moves to the table, waiting for his breakfast, Leslie responds by habit in her role as wife to Kevin's needs: "I know his mouth and throat are dry, and probably he has a headache. . . . He likes carbohydrates when he's hung over" (373). While Leslie falls into the expected behavior of a wife getting her husband off to work, Kevin believes that he can use his position as provider to bargain his way back into her favor. He offers to buy her a sweater or a blouse and to take her "out on the town" (374). In his promise is a reminder that he is in control of both the money and Leslie's movements. Essentially, he has complete power over her every need. Shands summarizes Simone de Beauvoir's conclusion that women become constricted by marriage: "When women marry . . . they have to leave the open spaces of girlhood behind—the whole countryside, 'the forests' . . . in order to become confined to a restricted space of subordination and limitation. For women, the interior therefore assumes a different significance."¹¹ Leslie is dependent upon Kevin, and her entrapment within her home leaves her powerless to move beyond the constrictions of her role as wife. Though she dreams of being defined by her more positive and protective role as daughter, she accepts her new title without recourse or retaliation.

Leslie's perception of her environment shows that she has no faith in her life with Kevin. Walking through her house, she moves out of the kitchen into her "living room," an area that she says is full of the "smell of beer and ashtrays" (374), an odor that has permeated both her house and her life. Just as the passion has gone out of her marriage due to the reoccurring violence, the smell of ashes is equally revealing and can be compared to Carver's use of the metaphor in "A Serious Talk"; the aftermath of the flame suggests her marriage, as "grey now" as the room she describes. She focuses on the arm

of a chair where an empty beer can sits, the evidence of Kevin's problem all around her. She goes next into the bathroom "where it is darkest, and the seat is cold" (374), the cold and darkness suggestive of her own life. She hides out, lingering in the bathroom until she hears the car horn and knows that Kevin will be gone shortly. Only then does she mention that she notices "the first light from the sky" (374), a little bit of hope moving into her home as her abuser gathers his things so that he can leave.

Though he is finally gone, the way that she processes the sensory details of her surrounding landscape reveals that she has little hope for her life, even with Kevin away. The colors of the morning are not hopeful as there is "only a little green," overshadowed by the "red over the hills, and there's purple at their tops" (374). Leslie is so consumed by pain that even the details of the landscape suggest her bruises, lumps that have colored by now to the violent hues of red and purple.

Leslie moves through the final paragraph of the story, vacillating between what she wants to do--what she wishes she had the courage to do--and what she begins to know she will not do. She wants to do something productive, to clean up her life: "I go through the living room and think about cleaning it" (374), moving the aftermath of Kevin's drinking into the garbage along with the other beer cans that are already there from the night before, dumping out the ashtrays and cleaning out the smell as she wants to clean her heart and spirit that have been overwhelmed by the reality of her domestic entrapment. What she really wants to do is leave. As she moves from her living room to "open the front door" (374), she stands there, looking "out through the screen" (374). Just as Leslie can see out, knows what it takes to get out, she is held back by the screen just as her ties to Kevin and her fear of him keep her within the confines of her marriage. She

knows that there is hope beyond this life with Kevin, that she can be called back into safety from danger that she did not recognize just as earlier in her life she was called back from the bobcats by her father. In fact, she sees a “shadow” on the lawn now, a darkness slowly covering her pathway to escape, as time passes, the morning slipping away from her. She knows in her heart that she must leave now. The longer she waits, the weaker her resolve to leave will become.

Her one hope of help, the houses that she knows are up in the hills, houses that are not her own and that might hold someone willing to help her get back to her father are mentioned but then quickly passed over. She knows that they are there, these “other houses,” other lives that are not violent like her own. In fact, she knows from her personal experiences that homes do not have to be violent places. However, “I can’t see any of them” (375), unable in her pain to connect with anyone outside of her house. Doreen Massey makes the point that the movement that categorizes postmodern society has made it difficult for people to “retain any sense of a local place. . . . An (idealized) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent . . . communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption.”¹² Leslie’s disconnection from her landscape and consequently her neighbors has added to her lack of autonomy. Because she has no community, she has no one to reach out to for help. In fact, though she knows that the road could take her to safety, her mind slips back into fear as she thinks about where else the road leads and the possibilities of violence at the end of the line: “The road goes winding up into the hills where the men hunted yesterday.” The men searched for a bobcat, an animal that killed “someone’s child” (375). Leslie’s connection to her father

identifies her as “someone’s child” who likewise is being stalked by a predator who might eventually kill her.

The remaining images of the paragraph reveal Leslie’s desire to leave and her inability to do so. She thinks of her body and thinks of giving it nourishment, rather than letting it suffer anymore under Kevin’s hands: “I think of . . . filling the canteen and walking, maybe all morning. I could make a sandwich and bring it in my jacket, and an orange” (375). This journey would distance her from her cold and grey house, away from her darkening lawn and up into the light of hope. Yet her next thought finalizes her inability to leave: “Soon the road will warm, and I think of rattlesnakes sleeping on it, and I shut the screen and look around the lawn where nothing moves” (375). Leslie perceives danger everywhere. Nothing moves on the lawn just as Leslie cannot bring herself to leave her house and journey down the road towards help. Rather, her fears send her back into her house, the grey and cold landscape to which she has been resigned.

Dubus continues his concern for women who do not recognize their own power and worth in “Rose.”¹³ Though Leslie still has the presence of mind and perhaps the power of her youth to enable her to tell her own story, Rose’s history is filtered through a first-person narrator, a regular at a neighborhood bar. He is, as Thomas Kennedy calls him, a “student of the human spirit,” and the narrative is about another one of those reoccurring characters in Dubus’ fiction who does not understand the power of her own possibility.¹⁴ Like Leslie, Rose has reached a point in her life where she is powerless to change, powerless to understand or to accept her underlying strength. She is shaped by a past event that has made her give up on herself.

During an interview at his home, Dubus revealed that he chose to tell his story through the outside narrator because he was “fascinated by the silent partners [like Rose] who do so often show up in the news, but I had to get a very distant narrator who heard it from somebody who was a silent partner years ago because I could not get close inside or be anybody who would do that.”¹⁵ In spite of this distancing, Dubus continued, “I think now and then it dips into their points of view.” In an effort to come to terms with Rose and her unwillingness to believe in herself, the narrator creates a past for her. Though Leslie has the strength of her childhood to draw on, positive memories of home into which she can retreat when the horrors of her present life become too strong for her, Rose does not offer her storyteller any clue as to what her earliest experiences were. And just as Leslie has been transformed from “someone’s child” (372), someone loved and cherished and protected, to someone she can imagine “dead in her kitchen” (373), the narrator in “Rose” is not so naive that he does not understand that she might have had a positive upbringing herself. From interactions with customers who attend the local private college, he has come to realize that the privileges of wealth, be they spiritual or material, do not always guarantee safe passage through a world with such power to corrupt and change and ultimately damage. “Sometimes,” he begins, “when I see people like Rose, I imagine them as babies, as young children” (198). He goes on to imagine her as he says all people might envision the sad characters who enter into their lives, searching “the aging skin of the face, the unhappy eyes and mouth” for a clue as to the beginning of their downfall, the answer to the riddle of their misery (198). This frame sets up what becomes the story of Rose’s life and is especially effective in its ability to emphasize the narrator’s belief that all human beings are products of their environment.

In setting up the one defining story of Rose's life, the one experience he knows has shaped her and brought her to the bar Timmy's as a regular to drink alone or at best to make quiet talk with the person who happens to sit next to her, the narrator moves first though the years that he believes shaped her, made her, determined her sense of self. She evaluates and defines herself by her past, never able to rid herself of doubt: "Her face, sober or drunk or on the way to it, looks constantly watched, even spoken to, by her own soul. Or by something it has spawned, something that lives always with her, hovering near her face" (199). In her judgment of herself, she concludes that she is guilty and deserves the very worst as perhaps others have deserved the very best. The narrator spends a great deal of time insisting that the audience empathize and feel through its own pain the heartache that Rose has suffered and continues to endure.

In a side story that the narrator tells in order to set up the principle narrative, he speaks of a Marine recruit who failed basic training in spite of the fact that when he was sleep walking he was capable of all of the feats of strength that defeated him when he was awake. It is "consciousness," the narrator concludes, that was his enemy (204). His awareness of his thin body made him believe that he could not overcome what the sergeants put before him though many small-framed young men made it through. Authority beat him because he never believed that he was capable, of having the strength to withstand whatever they expected of him. He left without knowing that he failed only because he did not know the truth about himself, that he had the physical capability to succeed and that his view of himself created his failure.

These same lies make up the whole world, the narrator concludes, and lull people into believing that money or beauty or physical strength can save by giving the

confidence it takes to withstand whatever those in authority expect. The rest, those without money or beauty or physical strength, are left without even the lies to pull them through whatever expectations or obstacles confront them. This is Rose's story, and she tells it to the narrator one January night at the end of the week, just as she is reaching the end of what she believes to be her failed life. She is never aware of her possibilities and believes that the resolve that pulled her children to safety was only temporary. Like the Marine, she does not see her own power.

On that evening in Timmy's when Rose tells the narrator her story, he buys her drinks, and she gives over to what he knows is "the state when people finally must talk" (207). Driven by that "need" (207), she faces the narrator across the corner of the bar. The way that she comes to stand near his spot reveals an aspect of her character that seems to define her movements since the fateful night of her past. She is moved over, propelled down the bar to the corner from the center by people pushing her out, squeezing "in beside her," and "wedg[ing]" (207), and so she gives in to them, gradually making it all the way down to the end. This simple description becomes a metaphor for a complex series of events that wedge her out of her own life, that strip from her everything that means anything and which leave her believing what she has all along, that she is too weak to fight or too undeserving even to stand up to try. In this failure to believe in herself, to accept being pushed aside, she loses her home and family and, consequently, herself.

Just as her passivity is revealed in the patrons' ability to move her down the bar, in the three hours the narrator and Rose talk, Rose talking, the narrator listening, the seemingly little details of her tastes and preferences add up to make a composite of her past. She hates fights, likes "peaceful" crowds, and "always felt safe at Timmy's because

. . . they didn't allow trouble in here" (207). Timmy's has become a sort of home for her, a safe community against the dangers of the outside world. Having lost her family, she has no friends, no one to confide in, except the bartender, who becomes the one person she trusts enough to tell her story, at first speaking "as though we were talking in symbols" (208). At first she speaks of her fears, about fires in winter," about "the sirens" that go by all "the time in winter" (208), about how easy it is to slip and break a bone. Sirens and fire, broken bones and fear—all of these clues begin to mount up. "'They remind me,'" she tells the narrator. "'Sometimes it isn't even the sirens. I try not to think about them. But sometimes it's like they think about me. . . . The flames. . . . I'm not doing anything. Or I'm at work Or I'm going to sleep. Or right now, just then, we were talking about winter. I try not to think about them. But here they come, and I can see them. I feel them. Little flames. Big ones. Then--'" (209). Here, memory serves very differently than it does in "Leslie in California." For Leslie, memory works as a place of domestic safety, an extension that moves her from the violence of her present life, drawing her back into the past where memories of her father wait: the security in his New England kitchen, of happy mornings getting ready for school, of celebrations with family and friends, of protection even in the face of potential danger. For Rose, domestic memory is awash with the flames of heartache and despair, of failure at home even in the face of what is to the narrator obvious victory. But just as the mind can work in two very different ways, it can also serve to deceive, to make one believe that she is not capable of sustaining that moment of triumph as the dreamer stays asleep to her possibilities, unaware of her inner strengths.

The narrator identifies with Rose due to his own past pain of having lost a child in a car wreck. Rose, too, feels that she lost her children through some sort of inner weakness that failed her. She knows that she saved their lives for the moment and that her actions were monumental: “‘It’s the only thing I ever did. In my whole fucking life. The only thing I ever did that was worth a shit’” (210). What the narrator comes to understand first through Rose telling her story and then in his retelling is that in her thirty minutes of action, she redeemed herself. Nevertheless, she cannot believe in herself enough to accept that the one act that brought her children to safety at risk of her own was evidence enough that she had the power and the strength to stand up to authority even when it tried to label her unfit. Shands makes reference to a telling point:

The public sphere has been seen as an arena open to state regulation and control, whereas the private sphere is supposedly an area of freedom from state interference, but as Nancy Duncan has argued, “‘The private is a sphere where those families who are not dependent on the state for welfare have relative autonomy. Those who are dependent, however, are often subject to unwarranted intrusion and surveillance.’”¹⁶

Because Rose is dependent upon the state in her defense, her financial weakness adds to her inability to withstand its authority. Therefore, she is doomed to drink alone, to live alone, to jangle with fear when she hears sirens, drawn back in time to the flames that essentially consumed her. Without the narrator translating her guilt, the story would never be told fairly, for Rose “could not see . . . and still cannot” that she “redeemed herself, with action” (232, 231). Dubus has said that he “heard Rose speak, telling her story,” and

“the real truth for me was that she was redeemed; she just didn’t know it. She had been made to feel powerless by forces that were too much for her: hard work, hard living, no future. But finally she did the right thing, she defied her husband, she saved her children.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, when the moment is over, she goes back to her powerlessness. She lets the state take her children, and she never forgives herself.

The narrator begins telling the account of the night of Rose’s “redemption” by moving back to what he sees as the beginning of the night’s climax, back through the years of their three children’s births to the months of her and her husband’s courtship. He hopes to explain why she remains so passive in her home rather than stopping her husband the moment the abuse against her children begins. In contrast, Rose begins with the shocking details of Jim breaking her son’s arm then setting fire to their apartment, leaving the two youngest, two little girls, helpless and frightened, holding onto each other while they watched for the flames to enter their room. The narrator never blames her for that night or for her previous inaction on the nights before that fateful night, for he sees in her that she blames herself beyond reason:

If there is damnation, and a place for the damned, it must be a quiet place, where spirits turn away from each other and stand in solitude and gaze haplessly at eternity. For it must be crowded with the passive: those people whose presence in life was a paradox; for, while occupying space and moving through it and making sounds in it they were obviously present, while in truth they were not (212).

The narrator understands the fear that held her at her kitchen sink, washing her children’s favorite drinking glass, creating a moment of peace, an island of quiet, in the midst of her

confusing and frightening life with Jim. Like Leslie, she retreats into her role as wife, into her domestic responsibilities. Also, like Leslie she “was young” (213). The narrator offers the excuse that she was new in her role, and the disappointments of their marriage as well as Jim’s abuse of the children make her weak, passive.

Her inexperience does not become an excuse but more a reason as to why she waits until Jimmy’s arm is broken to finally stand up to her husband. The narrator constructs details from the first four years of her Catholic marriage, years producing three children; he catalogues the diapers and the out-of-sync routines that overwhelmed Rose’s days. He recreates her walks to the laundry, sitting with three tiny children through the daily ritual of washing diapers and then waiting for them to dry, of trying to manage three children as she grocery shops on a slim budget that is never tight enough to see them from one week to another. He sees in her activity her attempt to do her best within the limitations of her domestic space. However, Rose lacks the imagination necessary to see the importance of the daily activities required by her role. As Dubus has commented,

a really harmonious person can be walking through the supermarket,
picking up a head of lettuce for the family and be absolutely fulfilled
and peaceful in the realization of the moment that this is an eternal
sacrament, and was not simply walking through a supermarket . . .
but that this is the feeding of flesh and that has been going on and on
and on forever. And it’s not an errand anymore. The clock isn’t
running anymore. This is very precious.”¹⁸

Though she provides for her family and husband by searching out the best bargains and keeping their clothes cleaned and making her house run, she focuses on what she cannot

or does not do. She looks at her home and her husband's discomfort when he is home as proof of her failure. By trying to understand the demands of Rose's day, the narrator comes to see more of her to value than she sees in herself.

Before he begins any of the details of that night, before he gives any history of Rose's early years with Jim, he focuses on the clock at Timmy's, pointing out that it is always set twenty minutes ahead. Though the bartender can manipulate the hour by simply moving a clock's hand, Rose's most challenging opponent as she struggled to be a good mother had been her inability to construct time. She knows that if she had that extra hour at the grocery store, that extra time that she knew her children needed, she would have had the patience to answer the questions that they asked, to deal with them toddling off from the grocery cart to pick up a colorful box or can to bring to their mother to include in her purchases. But Rose did not have time between the laundry and the schedules that were never on track: "And each day she felt that the other women, even those with babies, with crawling and barely walking children, with two or three children, and one pregnant with a third, had about them some grace, some calm, that kept their voices soft, their gestures tender; she watched them with shame, and a deep dislike of herself" (214). She felt that she was the only mother who did not measure up to what it takes to move three children gracefully through the world. She felt like a failure and that everyone was watching her fall short of her responsibilities. However, because the narrator knows better, he recreates the steps of her bone-tired days so that when the night of the sirens comes, he understands just how tired she was.

Rose and Jim began to change the longer they were married. He began to see his family's demands as more than he could meet. When he came home to his apartment, he

saw the clothes drying on the curtain rod and backs of chairs as accusers, pointing out his failure to provide the basics such as a clothes dryer. He tried to create order by removing the clothes and finding a place to rest, until “he stood in some corner of the bedroom, the bathroom, in the last place in his home that was his” (215). Without a place to fortify himself against the demands of the outside world as well as the demands of his family, he began to drink more and more until, like Kevin in “Leslie in California,” he began to lash out: “He struck the boy first, before contraception and the freedom and new life it promised” (215). He reacted against his three-year old son as he blamed his children for the negative changes in his life.

Rose was in the kitchen when she heard the first slap. This space works to define her role as wife and mother as she was preparing her family’s supper. She escaped into her role, performing the required actions as deliverance from her painful life. When she went to see what had happened, she saw the accusing look from her son that she would come to believe, that because she was his mother that she was responsible for him even against his father. In that moment, the change in Rose began as “she felt something fall between herself and her son” that was “infinite, and she could never cross it again” (216). She was distanced from her son just as Elizabeth Willard is from George in Sherwood Anderson’s “Mother.” In spite of her desire to establish a relationship, her weakness separated her from her boy. No longer connected by her role as his mother, Rose lost the strength necessary to stop further abuse and turned instead to what her role as mother still offered her, fulfilling the immediate and necessary needs of her other children. She turned from the room and went to her comfort her youngest, taking action, though she knew that she had lost part of herself in not acting differently by defending her oldest.

The anger accelerated when Jim was alone with the children. Rose had to shop at night when he could babysit. When she was away from home for her children were helpless against their father's chronic anger and disappointment. After a long day's work, Jim seemed incapable of dealing with their demands. For several years, Rose forgave him his violence, for she recognized in him the same failures that she saw in herself, her growing impatience, her "fatigue" brought about by the demands that overwhelmed her. With no means of expanding in any positive way and with Jim having no peace at home, the two became caught. When they were able to afford a babysitter and leave the children for a night together, they no longer danced; instead, they had become passive observers, watching the band, the other dancers. In fact, Rose "could no longer feel love, or what she had believed love to be" (220). The activity of their courtship that included trips to the beach, volleyball, softball games, and dancing were lost to the mind-numbing demands of their rituals. She and Jim simply went through the motions until the cycle of their days had spun out of control. Their marriage became as routine as the stale relationship between Grant and his wife in Hamlin Garland's "Up the Cooly." Their negative containment made temporary moments of expansion unfulfilling.

Jim breaking her son's arm became the catalyst that forced Rose to act beyond the passivity of the observer. When the abuse occurred, Rose was again in the kitchen, this time washing up after dinner. She had heard his anger mounting but tried to tune it out by focusing on her role as mother, caretaker, washing the glasses, thinking about taking the clothes from the line, attempting to restore order to her home through positive action that would justify her not getting involved in her husband's dealings with the children. She picked up her children's favorite drinking glass, readying it for their use again: "She

washed it slowly, and was for those moments removed” (222). However, when she heard the noise of her son’s body hit the wall, she reacted, speaking out against Jim. Her “voice grew, its volume filled the world” (223) until Jim turned on her, slapping her.

When a neighbor came to the door and told Jim that he was calling the police, Jim told Rose to lie, to tell them that her son had fallen. Rather than speaking, she took action, methodically picking up her son to take him to the hospital. When she secured him in the car, the new safe place as the home had become something from which to flee rather than a place of refuge, she made up her mind to get her daughters, whom she had to rescue from their father. To do so, she had to fight Jim in the yard, hitting him with the same gasoline can that he had just used to set the apartment on fire after leaving his daughters behind. Rose had to enter the burning apartment to save her girls, fighting off the neighbors who tried to stop her from entering. Though they wanted to help, they actually conspired against her by holding her back from the burning building. Like the neighbors in “A Mistaken Charity,” they believed they knew best. Yet Rose broke free from them, finding a strength that had been asleep within her all of these years: “She smelled her burned hair, sensed that it was burning still, crackling flames on her head. It could wait. She could wait. She was running down the stairs, and the fire was behind her, above her, and she felt she could run with her girls all night” (228). Her last act was to save them again when she used the car to run over Jim again and again when he tried to stop her from leaving with the children.

Once she was released from the hospital, she no longer had the necessary strength to fight for her children. Displaced from her home, living with her sister, she felt that she had no role and, like Mrs. Gold from “Mrs. Flint’s Married Experience,” that she

consequently had no power: “Long before the trial, before she even left the hospital, she had lost the children. . . . They all went to the same foster home. She did not know where it was” (230). Insight into Rose’s dilemma comes by comparing her to an observation by Shands: “The spatial boundaries affecting, defining, or determining women’s lives are thus both material and metaphorical, involving both the literal, concrete confinement of women in actual domestic space and conditions that are measurable in society at large, that is, legal and economic forms of discrimination that keep women in certain spaces.”¹⁹ Rose gave over to the state and lost her children, shattered by “the life she chose [which] slowly turned on her, pressed against her from all sides, invisible, motionless, but with the force of wind she could not breast” (231). Her negative containment so overwhelmed her that she resigned herself to watching rather than reacting, a habit of passivity that she practiced for so long that she did not believe herself worthy of her children when she finally brought herself to act. Rather than remembering her courage in standing up for her children at the greatest time of crisis, she focuses on each and every disappointment of her time as their mother. In this, she is defeated, losing her family and her home to her inability to see the redemptive power of her final actions.

Dubus reemphasizes the tremendous impact of one’s relationship to home in “Anna,” which focuses on a young woman who, like Rose, is afraid to act. Anna’s negative containment is due in part to her commitment to her boyfriend, in spite of the fact that she knows he has little ambition. Wayne flips burgers at Wendy’s and is not committed enough to his job to buy more than the one white shirt required by management. Therefore, she makes sure every night that it has been laundered or at least set to air so that he can wear it the next day. Anna takes on familial duties in an attempt to

turn her apartment into a home, a place where she and her partner can start to make positive goals for expanding their limited futures. While Wayne is floating through life, entertained by what is in front of him with no plans for much else, Anna wants to extend the satisfaction she feels when she is at work into her life at home. Judith Fryer states that in “America, there is a long-standing tradition that describes the tension between [private space and public space] and that defines the private space as the realm of the imagination, the public place as the realm of behavior.”¹⁷ Anna feels confident and in control at work, and she wants to extend these powerful feelings of autonomy. Anna’s negative connection to her apartment set against her job and Timmy’s, a local bar, reveals that she dreams of a place as nourishing to her self esteem as her public space has been. By the end of the story, Anna admits her dissatisfaction, but whether or not she is capable of moving ahead on her own rather than continuing to follow Wayne is not resolved.

As in many Dubus stories, the opening paragraph reveals important points about the protagonist. Anna’s last name is “Griffin,” a mythical beast that is half one thing, half another. In addition, her hair is changing color and is now part blonde, part brown. The description of her face is divided into a left and right side. Even her first name can be divided into two mirrored parts. These details given together work to create the composite of a woman who is in the process of change, who is emerging into a new self. Though dissatisfied with her looks, she will not color her hair because she wants to wait to see how it will turn out. Anna does not seem to realize that she is pretty, that the divisible parts of her face come together in a way that is pleasing; instead, “the light of her eyes, the lines of her lips seemed bent on denial.”²⁰ Her lack of confidence makes her unable to

see that she has the power to recreate herself as well as her domestic space. Rather than leaving, she seems content to wait to see how things will turn out.

Anna is still young, only twenty, but her life with Wayne is aging her fast as evidenced by her reaction to her apartment when she gets off of work everyday. When she leaves her job at the Sunnycorner convenience store, she feels a negative shift from the happiness her job provides. Though she is filled with energy after the physical restrictions of standing behind a counter all day, sometimes “she felt something else too, as she stepped outside and crossed that line between fatigue and energy: a touch of dread and defeat” (264). She comes home to an apartment of other people’s “leavings,” a few pieces of furniture that are mismatched and old (264). Along the way, she passes the same things every day, and she details the scenery, the cooking smells that inhabit her apartment building, which “bother her because it was a daily smell” (264). Already at twenty Anna is bored by the empty domestic routines of her life. She and Wayne live day to day rather than working towards a future. When she awoke in the mornings, she

saw the place clearly with its . . . tossed clothes, beer bottles,
potato chip bags. . . and sometimes later, during the day or
night, while she was simply crossing a room, she would suddenly
see herself juxtaposed with the old maroon couch which had been
left . . . by whoever lived there before she and Wayne. . . . and she
felt older than she knew she ought” (264).

Anna’s apartment is a reflection of her life with Wayne, seemingly temporary and thrown together without much evidence of hope for change.²¹ Though Anna may want more than robbing drugstores with Wayne, she hesitates to articulate her own plans or to let him

know directly how she feels. Instead, like Rose and Leslie, she goes through the motions, playing her role while making the best of what she has before her, passively waiting to see how her life will turn out.

When she agrees with Wayne to rob the drugstore, there is a shift during the robbery that moves Anna from her childhood into a new, more adult role as Wayne's partner. In agreeing to wait in the car while he holds up the druggist at knife point, she moves into a stage in her life that helps her to see herself more clearly in the moment. While she sits in the car, watching Wayne through the snow, she feels "doomed": "Stripped of history and dreams, she knew only her breathing and smoking and heartbeat and the falling snow" (265). Her connection to Wayne and the empty life that they live have made her, like Leslie, unable to see a way past the moment. Madonne Miner sees in these details that "Anna acts in the present tense, without any awareness of past patterns or future ramifications. . . . Without past or future, she is a woman for whom self-imagination proves difficult, for whom self-vision is restricted to the present tense and present physical situation."²² She is left to come to terms with what her behavior says about her domestic life.

When the robbery is over, Anna wants to go to Timmy's, a nearby bar where she knows the bartender and most of the regulars and where she has created a home for herself. She feels happy for a while when she drinks with her friends and leans against Wayne: "It was the only place outside of her home where she always felt the comfort of affection" (268). She shares a good feeling of togetherness with the regulars at the bar just as she shares a strong physical connection to Wayne, in love with him and attracted to him. Nevertheless, she is weakened by her passion as she is not willing to sacrifice what

she feels for him in order to make more of her life. This conflict in feeling is mirrored by Anna's actions at the bar as she constantly thinks of doing one thing but ends up doing another, from the simple decision to go to the bathroom to whether to smoke another cigarette or to finish a shot. Though she would like to work at Timmy's, where she might combine the satisfaction of work with the affection of friends, she doubts that she could learn to be a bartender. Her self-doubt cuts her off: "I don't think I could remember all of the drinks" (269). In fact, Anna often does have a hard time focusing, seeming to act without thinking or thinking about something other than her actions. Her manner reflects her inability to confront the issue of the dead-end life that she has with Wayne.

Though her job at Sunnycorner does not provide her this connectedness she so desires, she does feel a confidence in herself, and she is very much aware of her actions while she is at work. When she is clerking, she pays attention to each detail, careful not to make a mistake and proud of herself when she does not. Unlike when she escapes by drinking at Timmy's, Anna feels control at work that allows her to dream of a life different from the one she has with Wayne. When the bank tellers come in to the store, she imagines the homes that they have: "She gave them large, pretty apartments with thick walls so that they only heard themselves; stereos and color television, and soft carpets and soft furniture and large brass beds; sometimes she imagined them living with men who made a lot of money, and she saw a swimming pool, a Jacuzzi" (263). Unlike the apartment that Anna has with Wayne, these women live in comfortable places that reflect their autonomy, providing them a confidence that Anna does not feel. By comparison, thoughts of her own residence weaken her so that "when the tellers were at

the counter, she was shy” (263). She sees these women empowered by their homes while she feels defeated by comparison.

After the robbery as Anna stands in front of the stereos and televisions, she is one step closer to having the apartment that she had envisioned for the bank tellers. Nevertheless, when it comes time to make the purchases, she is not interested. That she is not a thief by nature is clear when she remembers to take money to work with her so that she can buy coffee and donuts and cigarettes in spite of the fact that no one is working with her to know if she took them without paying. In fact she is honest and finds a great deal of satisfaction in her register balancing at the end of her shift. Anna knows the value of a hard day’s work, so when she and Wayne go shopping with their stolen money, she feels bloated by spending. Her desire to be like those women only extends so far as wishing that she could be. If she has to steal to have what they have, then she would rather do without: “She was sad. She watched Wayne and remembered him running out of the drugstore and . . . she was ashamed that she was sad and felt sorry for him because he was not. . . . She wanted to cry” (276, 277). In the mall, she feels cut off from Wayne, who selects the stereo, the television, the records, while Anna is powerless to voice her unhappiness. As Miner has pointed out, “just as she cannot put herself into the deep-carpeted apartments she imagines for the bank tellers. . . she cannot put herself into a . . . discussion about guarantees. Instead, she puts herself imaginatively in her own apartment, sees herself cooking and sweeping. Within the confines of this picture, she is finally able to generate a statement of desire.”²³ Her only involvement comes in her asking for a vacuum cleaner, evidence of her longing to put things right, to improve one of the daily rituals of her domestic life though she does not seem to know how to change more: “She

did not know what she was waiting for, but standing on the sidewalk as Wayne's head and shoulder went into the car, she was anxious and mute" (278). As he reaches in to remove the items to bring them upstairs, Anna never speaks of her feelings. Instead, she retreats with him into the apartment and feels the same "sorrow" that had overwhelmed her in the mall. She has begun to realize that what they have together is not indicative of a mature relationship; just as their new purchases are bought the easy way with stolen money, they are not putting forth the hard work necessary to make her proud of their union or their home.

When they leave the apartment to go to Timmy's, where Anna might recreate a more positive sense of affectionate space, she looks into Sunnycorner and makes a comparison which separates her from her present life with Wayne. She remembers back on the morning and not making any mistakes at the register in spite of her hangover, and she feels "each step like flight from the apartment" (279). She knows the same power of control that Georgeann feels in Bobbie Ann Mason's "The Retreat." When she is working the cash register, remembering the layout of the store and where customers can find specific items, she is in charge and happy, just as Georgeann finds a new satisfaction from mastering the controls of the video game. Both experiences offer the women positive moments of expansion that give them visions of themselves in control. For Anna to move ahead into a life as fulfilling as her job can be, she must break out of her negative containment and either redefine it or leave altogether.

What Anna will do is not revealed. She begins the next day "out of habit," the routine of her life reflected in her early rising in spite of the fact that she has the day off. Her apartment is cold, and she is confronted by the vacuum cleaner and feels "suddenly

tired.” She retreats by going back to bed, “away from memory of last night’s striving flesh,” their sex as unfulfilling as her reaction to the new day. Before she gives in to sleep, she remembers their conversation after their failed attempt at making love when Wayne names other things they should have spent the money on. But Anna knows that “‘There’s too much to get. There’s no way we could ever get it all’” (281). Trapped by the negative domestic containment of her life with Wayne, Anna does not see that she could extend the power that she feels on her job into other decisions that affect her life. Instead, she retreats in sleep or wakens to the actions set by the routine of her role.

The final scene shows her fulfilling her obligations as Wayne’s partner, doing the laundry that she takes on as part of her responsibilities. By this time, she has listened to the records, escaping in the music just as she had earlier escaped into sleep. With this action, she has moved over into acceptance of her part in the theft, her participation in the music suggesting that she has accepted her place in her life with Wayne or is at least waiting to see how it will turn out. As she watches two older women fold clothes on a long table, the question becomes whether she will eventually join them, their connection suggested, Miner posits, by place, “specifically a working-class woman’s place. . . . For the moment, Anna remains somewhat separate from the other women.”²⁴ Yet Miner goes on to say that in a few years, Anna will be just like them, her childhood behind her, trapped in the confines of her working-class life and that the “flatness of the story reflects the future flatness of Anna’s life.”²⁵ However, this is only one possibility.

In fact, the final action is ambiguous.²⁶ Perhaps as Anna sits in the laundry mat, watching her clothes and Wayne’s “tossing past . . . like children waving from a ferris wheel,” she is waving goodbye to a naivety that has kept her grounded (282). Through

the actions of the robbery, Anna has confronted her present life and has seen and been affected by its cheapness. In fact, Kennedy sees Anna's realization that "acquisitions do not bring the satisfaction they were seeking" as "a note of hope" of "the first step in Anna's self-definition of her existence."²⁷ She has seen that she cannot be happy with what she has not earned; however, just as she reconciles herself to her discomfort and ends up playing the records and eventually enjoying the music, Anna may find that the only enjoyment possible will come from a readjustment of her domestic expectations, settling on waiting around with Wayne.

"They Now Live in Texas" focuses on a woman in a moment of spiritual crisis. She wants to feel the same power of positive transcendence that her friend has felt in his recent religious experience. This connection, this personal relationship with God, has transformed her friend's life. He had redefined himself and found the strength to do it by his healing relationship with God. At a party one evening, the protagonist hears the story of her friend Stephen's religious experience. What becomes the focus of the story is the protagonist's desire to extend her own sense of space and the domestic roles that restrict her by experiencing a religious epiphany. However, her fear of the uncertainties of faith limit her, and she rejects expansion, choosing instead to retreat into the comfort of the well-defined, her role as wife and mother.

How the protagonist perceives herself becomes clear when she arrives home from a party where Stephen had shared with her the details of his religious conversion. Her actions immediately establish her in her domestic scene. She pays the babysitter and goes through the other motions of a mother and wife coming home. She watches her daughters sleep, visiting each room and staying awhile. The oldest sleeps with the stuffed animals

of her own childhood, the history and love between parent and child suggested by this connection. Besides the obvious love between the woman and her girls, her husband is affectionate towards her. He is obviously thoughtful, as she remembers that he brought two movies home the other night “because he liked her to have a choice.”²⁸ She appears to be a happily married mother of two daughters, four and six, but when she moves into the living room from her kitchen where she has been drinking tea and waiting to sober up before getting into bed, she reveals that she is missing something in her life. Waiting for more than the liquor to leave her system, she is receptive, wanting something to connect with her as it had with her friend Stephen. Her home becomes a backdrop for her wait for transcendence.

The movie playing in the background works to suggest the fears that she has in her role as wife and mother. The mother in the movie serves as an extension of the protagonist: she is divorced and must protect her children from an alien force that threatens to consume them: “Something no one could see attacked the mother in her home” (285). The absence of the father figure suggests that the viewer realizes that this crisis is something she must manage on her own. As the movie progresses, the attacks become more vicious to the point that the mother is raped. Finally, the mother and her children flee their house forever. Like the unnamed narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the mother’s doctors do not understand her case nor appreciate how serious it is. The plot of the movie is filtered through the watcher’s point of view, and she is the one who labels the woman as mother. She is the one who focuses on the children’s dependency on their mother against the dark power that threatens to consume them. She notices that their house turns against them, becoming a place of fear

rather than refuge. By making these observations, she identifies with the fear that the character in the movie is undergoing.

The siege on screen works to suggest the spiritual uncertainties at work in the story. Just as the force attacks the woman and endangers her children, making her flee from her own home, the protagonist feels threatened by the unknown of not believing or having a spiritual connection that would provide her with the same confidence that she envied in her friend Stephen earlier in the evening: “There was much that he did not need to know, and she envied him now, and many other times, or perhaps only longed for his certainly” (286). What she wants is freedom from having to know; rather, she wants the faith that Stephen has, the faith that comes without having to question. She wants deliverance from the sadness that comes on her while she watches the woman on television “fearfully closing her eyes for another night” (285). She wants to experience a spiritual transcendence that would empower her against the uncertainties of the darkness of unknowing.

With this spiritual strength, she could use her new confidence to aid her daughters and be a better wife to her husband. She knows that she has a good marriage. In a long passage, she lists her husband’s positive feelings for her and her own for him, for themselves and their daughters, their work. She is secure, but at the same time feels threatened by her religious uncertainty. As she watches the movie on television, she lowers the blinds against the darkness outside. She acts out the role of nurturer by protecting her home from the outside, trapping in its heat, shuttering her family against the cold. Yet she is careful not to cut herself off from the view of the lawn, covered in snow: “She and her husband had built on this hill so they could look at the sky, and the

woods and meadow across the road in front of their house” (285). This reference to nature and its transcendental power works to reinforce her desire to connect spiritually. Her home offers her the possibility of a view, of positive expansion. The suggestion is that she has about her the reinforcing domestic space to make her spiritual connection possible.

What she wants is a spiritual journey. Much as it does in stories from early American fiction, the motif of the journey works to suggest a character’s sense of development. As Dubus has confirmed, “she is waiting for faith, a spiritual experience. . . . It’s spiritual hunger.”²⁹ Though she wants to make the journey, to make the leap of faith, she is stuck, “staring beyond the road at the meadow and trees and stars. She was looking out the window and reaching beside her for another cigarette, when suddenly, she knew she was waiting” (287). Rather than surrendering to her desire for faith, as her friend explained he had done, “surrendering himself to the gift he was receiving” (285), she instead shifts the scene. She stands up and moves quickly into the kitchen to take her cup back to the sink, choosing to shatter the opportunity. Rather than giving into the moment, she misses her chance for deliverance by moving into her already defined role as the keeper of her house. She accepts her inability to reach spiritual transcendence. She chooses instead what she already knows, her secure roles of wife and mother. However, the reoccurring fear remains, uncertainties waiting to attack.

Like the unnamed protagonist in “They Now Live in Texas,” Juanita Jody Noury Creehan in “Waiting” also wants to give in to the power of transcendence, yet her desire is to surrender to the pull of suicide. Having lived with the grief of her young husband’s death for twelve years, Juanita cannot seem to create any meaning in her life. Instead, she

lives alone in a small apartment, sleeping as late as she can so that she has only a little of the day to make it through before evening, when she goes to work as a waitress in a local bar. She lives near Camp Pendleton, near the Marine base at which her husband was stationed. But when he was killed in Korea, she was left behind in California with few friends and no will to make more. Instead, Juanita's life has collapsed into a series of meaningless days and nights that run together without the hope for change. Her solitude and isolation lead her to contemplate killing herself.

In the years following her husband's death, Juanita has lived with the memory of her husband, Patrick's, death. Though she could not know exactly how he died, she has pieced together what facts she has and embroidered them with details that fill her mind as she drifts off to sleep every night. She gets as much information as she can from her husband's Marine friend, Starkey, and what he cannot tell her, she creates for herself: "Some nights she descended further into the images."³⁰ Sleep and the memories of her husband, whether real or imagined, become the escape she needs from the stifling confines of her life. Alone in her apartment with her grief, she feels incapable of anything more than the artificial smiles she puts on when she meets her customers at work.

On the evening of the present action, Juanita reaches out to a man who has watched her most of the night at her job. At work, she goes into the bathroom to study her reflection in the mirror, his intent looks prompting her to take a long study of herself. From there, she agrees to his following her home, and for the first time in her life "she woke with a man and had to remember his name" (42). For the first time since her husband's death, she has reached out to another man. They had shared drinks at her kitchen table the night before, Juanita opening her house as a way to connect beyond the

memories of her husband, as a way to avoid the sleep that she usually desires. However, when morning comes, she is uncomfortable with him there and does not want to extend their connection. In fact, she breaks it by getting up and leaving her house in the dark and driving to the ocean.

For Juanita, the beach has become another way to escape or to fill her meaningless days. With no roles, no routine beyond the night job of waitressing, serving people in temporary moments of connection, inconsequential domestic actions that are not enough to create any lasting meaning in her life, she uses swimming and body surfing and walking on the beach in the cold weather as a way to pass the time. However, on the particular morning when she has awoken beside and escaped from the sergeant major who sleeps in her bed, she spends most of her time at the beach thinking of her high-school friend who had killed himself years before. Just as she had for her husband's death, Juanita had created details surrounding the suicide, seeing him "in a dirty and disorderly room, sitting on the edge of his bed and reaching that moment when he wanted more than anything else not to be Vicente" (43). The apartment she created for him in her mind reflected how she saw his life, lacking a nurturing caretaker until it was overrun, as he had been, by hopelessness. Telling her husband about her friend's death, she had wondered if he had thought about the next day and if that might have helped him: "The word tomorrow stayed in her heart. She saw it in her mind, its letters printed across the black and white image of Vicente sitting on the bed with the pistol" (43). To rid herself of the pain of the news, she had reached out to her husband, and she had undressed him in their house, combating death by making love.

However, on the summer day in 1962, as she walks on the beach and remembers Vicente and her husband, the only connection available to her is a man whose name she has to struggle to remember. As she walks on the beach, she steps into a “shallow pool left by the tide” (43). Metaphorically, this action works to suggest Juanita’s life. She has been playing on the edges of her life, stepping into the shallows of memory that the death of her husband has left her with. As she steps in, she is looking out into the sea. Stepping out, she has a memory of her first year of sleeping after her husband’s death, of waiting for the pills that she used every night to take effect, “the first signals in her fingers, her hands: the slow-moving dullness, and she would touch her face, its skin faintly tingling; going numb, then she was aware only of the shallow sound and peaceful act of her slow breathing” (44). The pill brings rest, and her descriptions of falling asleep coming at this point in the narrative work to suggest her desire for permanent sleep as, in the next present action, she is riding a wave, its colors the same black and white as her image of Vicente’s death. The descriptions suggest her giving over to the effects of the sleeping pill: “Breaking it took her with head down and outstretched arms pointing, eyes open to the dark and white foam” (45). The wave moves her onto the shore, but it also recedes. Kennedy also sees the importance of Juanita’s connection to the sea as “a symbol of the oblivion that will one day be granted her, for which she waits not without a shade of welcome, perhaps not without an intention to hasten that day’s arrival.”³¹

Left with only the shallow pools of memory to define her life, Juanita has given up hope. She had been a passionate girl, meeting the priests in the confessional with stories of “petting” and losing her virginity, knowing that “young and hot and pretty, she could not imagine committing any sin that was not sexual” (44). Yet in her grief, she has

lost the idea of herself as a sexual being, letting herself go, coming home instead to an empty apartment with no plans to redefine herself beyond the acceptance of loss: “There was no one to tell that sometimes she could not bear knowing what she knew: that no one would help her, not ever again” (44). She had for years defined herself by her relation to boys and then men, half of her name, she points out to herself, coming from two men, her father and her husband. Without this frame of reference, Juanita has been left with an emptiness to which she has been resigned for twelve years.

The shift in the story comes with the realization that Juanita will probably kill herself. She has spent years surfing in the tide, riding out her emptiness on the beach, meeting customers with whom she makes meaningless connections. She shifts away even from the man whom she has brought home during the present action of the story, who has waited for her to return. Unlike Calixta from Kate Chopin’s “The Storm,” who is able to connect sexually with a man, Juanita feels nothing for the man she has brought home, the man who is so insignificant that he remains unnamed, in spite of her having taken a chance with him. They lie in her bed without touching while she gives him the details of her life, facts that catalogue her history in the same way that she had read the facts about Vicente in his obituary when she learned about his death. She tells her companion that she feels as if she does not belong on earth: ““Like I sneaked into the movie and I’m waiting for the usher to come get me”” (46). Death will come for her; the question becomes if she will have a chance to see the end of the show or if she will leave in the middle, escorted out by her own pain and inability to redefine herself to extend beyond the shallow pools of memory into the possibilities that lie ahead.

The final image of the story suggests that Juanita will move beyond the only sin, sex, that she has ever believed herself possible of committing into a new and final one. In fact, it is the absence of sex and passion and meaningful connection with another human being that would help her, save her from suicide. Yet as she admitted to herself years before, she is not capable of help anymore. In the final scene, she surrenders to sleep, and in what she calls a “near-dream,” a more willed action than simply dreaming, she sees herself standing naked in the water, the sexual imagery suggesting that this is the only fulfillment her body is capable of anymore: “She saw herself standing naked in the dark waves. One struck her breast and she wheeled slow and graceful, salt water black in her eyes and lovely in her mouth, hair touching sand as she turned then rose and floated in swift tenderness out to sea” (46). She sees herself giving into the waves and their caresses, riding them out to death. She sees herself surrendering to death as she has surrendered to grief. Unable to redefine the possibilities of “tomorrow” (43), she will give in, letting the negative containment of her life finally overwhelm her.³²

Ruth Fowler from “Killings” is likewise unable to deal with the grief she feels in the wake of her son’s murder.³³ Home from college for summer vacation, Frank, her youngest son, had taken a job life guarding at the beach where he met Maryann, the ex-wife of Richard Strout. Aggravated by anyone spending time with his kids and ex-wife, Richard first beats up then later kills Frank while the young man is visiting Maryann. In the aftermath of the shooting, Matt Fowler, Ruth’s husband, from whose point of view the story is told, recognizes that though he is trying to move forward with his life, his wife has been overwhelmed by her son’s death. She is trapped in her negative containment of grief, an overwhelming emotional shutdown from which she cannot ever

expect to break free. Rather, she simply exists in a vacuum, rarely leaving the house, unable to experience the positive expansion of healing in spite of her husband's good intentions.

As is the case for Rose and others, Ruth's grief is compounded by the government's involvement. Though Richard has been arrested and brought to trial because of complications with the system, he is out on bail through the present action of the story, going on with his life tending bar, seeing his girl, living out his life, while Ruth has to face that fact that her own son is dead. She has seen Richard around town when she was in the drugstore buying aspirin and cigarettes, purchases that suggest that she is having trouble with nerves and headaches. Afraid of him, of being near him, she had hidden in the back aisle of the store until Richard left. As Matt tells his friend, "'she sees him too much. . . . She can't even go out for cigarettes and aspirin. It's killing her'" (49). Matt knows that Ruth has become a prisoner in her home, hating to leave due to the chance that she might see Richard again. Though she would love to confront him, "'would shoot him herself, if she thought she could hit him,'" she is not his match physically (49). Therefore, she is thwarted in both the legal system that has set him free as well as by her own physical inability to take the law into her own hands. She knows that he will serve less than twenty years, that her state's liberal laws will turn against her grief and set her son's killer free. The best she can do is remain shut up with her fears, confiding in Matt as the only relief she has from the grief that overwhelms her.

Ruth has the saving grace of being able to talk with her husband about her fears and feelings. This emotional relief is the only outlet she has to express the sorrow in her life: "At nights in bed she would hold Matt and cry, or sometimes she was silent and Matt

would touch her tightening arm, her clenched fist” (54). For a while, she is hopeless in her sorrow, believing that no justice will be served against her son’s murderer. However, the more of her grief that she shares, the more she begins to see that Matt is willing to kill Richard to restore some sense of peace to their lives. When her husband leaves one evening to carry out the murder, she gives her consent by saying nothing. Passively moving through her life, she cannot verbally confront what her husband is willing to do for her though she accepts that he has always been there for her, protecting her.

In turn, Ruth has provided a comfortable place of retreat for her family. At first, Maryann is nervous about being around the Fowlers, aware that they know more of her history than she would like them to know, that her home had not been the peaceful, trusting place that the Fowlers have. Rather, her marriage was broken by infidelity and brutality on her part as well as Richard’s. However, in Ruth’s house, out on her lawn grilling steaks or having drinks, Maryann begins to relax and feel a part of the family. Before her grief, Ruth had the expansive power to reach out to others; afterward, she is shut up in herself with only Matt to confide in. Her home has become a place to which she escapes, coming out only to run the errands necessary to keep her house going.

Unlike many of the marriages depicted in postmodern fiction, Ruth and Matt have a strong bond between them. He has been able to continue the motions of his life outside of home primarily because he has the nurturing Ruth provides to return to every evening. Likewise, he has his protection of his wife to carry him through. The fact that she needs him gives a purpose to his days. In turn, she feels protected, secure that he will do whatever he believes is in the best interest of his family. At night, the two talk in bed, “where she had during all of their marriage told him of her deepest feelings: of love, of

passion, of fears about one of the children, of pain Matt had caused her or she had caused him” (51). She cries in bed, telling him of the pain of seeing Richard around town: “‘It’s killing her,’” he knows (48). Because Richard has shattered the peace of their home, Matt vows to kill him himself.

Richard Strout shatters even this last and most nurturing comfort that Ruth has, her ability to share her feelings with her husband and for him to respond to her feelings, renewing their positive connection to one another by open communication. When Matt returns from the murder, she listens and tries to comfort him in the most personal way that she knows, through making love. As Lucy Ferris has pointed out, “for Dubus’ women . . . expression of love through another human being, whether erotic or maternal, is itself a kind of prayer or communion with the holy.”³⁴ That Ruth feels no remorse for what Matt has done is clear in her opening up to him, desiring to comfort him: “She was holding him, wanting him, and he wished he could make love with her but he could not. . . . Holding Ruth, his cheek touching her breast, he shuddered with a sob that he kept silent in his heart” (64). The two are separated by the gulf of their feelings. Ruth believes that he has done the right thing. However, she will never fully understand the suffering that her husband is left with in his guilt; therefore, she is cut off from the most sustaining power in her life.

Violence shatters the peace that Polly Comeau believes she has found in Dubus’s short story “The Pretty Girl.” Told from two points of view, the story begins with Raymond, Polly’s ex-husband. His first-person narration is confident in spite of the fact that he has been wounded and is still struggling to understand where he and Polly went wrong. He tells his own story directly while Polly’s third-person voice is fuzzier,

distanced by narration just as she is distanced from herself. While she has only a vague understanding of her place in the world beyond her ability to manipulate men with her beauty, Raymond lives in a world of absolutes with the energy and determination to make things happen. Strongly built and handsome, Raymond likewise is aware of the power of his body, the way it affects his life and makes negotiations between himself and the rest of the world go more smoothly. On the other hand, Polly is passively contained within her beauty with only a superficial participation in the action of her life. Nevertheless, they both know how to use the strengths of their physical frame to get what they want in the world. Just as Raymond's large body gives him autonomy, Polly's power is tied to her very beautiful face and attractive body. When she and her husband split and he cannot reconcile himself to the loss, he punishes her by bringing terror into her life just when she believes that she is on the verge of making something happen for herself. Though she wants to move beyond the negative containment of her life, she lacks the imagination to create a future for herself. Instead, she falls back on old habits, waiting and making herself attractive enough so that a man will do the work for her.

All of her life, Polly has been aware of her beauty and its usefulness. She has had friends in high school only to have something to do between the boys who make up her real interest. She believes that other girls and later other women do not really like or trust her, that her beauty has separated her due to their jealousy and her indifference. She has only "the friends you need to keep from being alone, and to go to places where boys were."³⁵ The superficial relationship that Polly has with her friends is actually no different than what she has with every other person in her life, from her parents and siblings to her boyfriends and even to her husband. In fact, Polly does not connect with anyone except

her father. She sees in her sister a beauty that is wasted as it is not “the sort that makes men change their lives” (86). Instead, Polly admires the power inherent in her own pretty face as she can use it to make people act in her stead. Defined by her physical beauty, Polly drifts through her life, using her influence over everyone, even the people she claims to love, to give her what she wants.

After Polly graduates from high school and wastes a year proving to her parents that she is a C-student not interested in college, she takes a job at a department store and later at her uncle’s jewelry store so that she can have money enough for her own apartment. Her days fall into a vacuous routine of work and the beach and going to Timmy’s, a local bar, to drink and talk to men. In the emptiness of her days, Polly is content for a while as no one demands anything of her. Just as she had stayed on the surface rather than engaging herself in the compositions that she wrote in college, she reaches the conclusion about life that “every topic was difficult if she began to immerse in it; but always she withdrew” (93). Connections take work that Polly is not willing to put forth.

However, in a rare moment of introspection, Polly makes the discovery that her life has no direction. Having lived with superficial values, demanding nothing more of herself than her own pretty face, Polly takes stock one afternoon in her apartment, confronting the vacuousness of her domestic containment. On her own, she makes the discovery that “this is the real world they always talked about” (95). Feeling the emptiness of her days, Polly is afraid as she sees for the first time that she has done nothing to prepare herself for a life of positive expansion. Polly knows that her routine is shallow, that she demands nothing of herself; though wanting “motion, she could not

define it, for it had nothing to do with place or even people, but something within herself: a catapult waiting for both release and direction” (96). Though Polly wants to change, to move forward meaningfully, she has never had to act on her own and has no idea how to go about living for herself.

Aware of the emptiness of her life, Polly attempts to fill the void by attaching herself more permanently to a man. She uses the passive power of her beauty to draw Raymond to her. Drinking alone one afternoon, she is on the upper deck of a marsh-side bar when Raymond and his friends come in from fishing. Recognizing him, she starts to call to him then decides to wait: “She wore a white Mexican dress and knew how pretty she looked standing up there with the sun on her face and the sky behind her” (96). Throughout the story, Polly defines herself by her clothing, containing her power within the carefully chosen dresses she knows will attract men to her. As she predicted, Raymond is taken in by her prettiness and his sexual attraction to her body. The longer he is with her, however, the more he begins to believe that there is something more to her than her good looks, something beneath the surface worth loving. When he and Polly go camping one weekend in a tent large enough so that she might have room to move around in, Raymond watches her domesticate their temporary space, creating a makeshift home out of rented canvas: “The way women turn places into houses, even motel rooms. There are some that don’t, but they’re not the kind you want to be with for the whole nine yards” (68). Raymond sees the possibilities of a positive marriage in Polly’s play, and for five years they make a life together. Polly feels changed by her marriage, more grounded now that she has a role, and her home makes her feel a positive connection to her community: “She felt both released and received, no longer in the town, a piece of its

streets and time, but of the town, having broken free of its gravity” (97). Her marriage feels familiar as it comes with the prescribed patterns of behavior into which she can simply fall without having to think what to do on her own.

However, while Raymond thought that he was settling down to a life like that of his parents, sharing the chores and the meals in the evenings, working together to create a nurturing home, Polly gets bored. Her life up until her marriage to Raymond has been defined by her ability to attract and hold attention. Though Raymond is committed to her, the tediousness of their routine starts to weigh her down. She wants the autonomy she believes she had when she was single, so she cheats on Raymond for “something to do, one of the small assortment of choices for a week night” (112). Just as she had married Raymond to fill a void, to give her direction, Polly once again turns to a man to give her meaning. When Raymond finds out about the affair, he beats Polly, who escapes to her parents’ house. The way she leaves, sneaking out the back window rather than going out the front door, works metaphorically to suggest her passivity in getting out of the marriage by cheating on Raymond rather than confronting him. She stays with her parents while she begins divorce proceedings, and she and Raymond are never together again except in the continuing violence that connects them.

Incapable of thinking of Polly moving around in the world happy while he is miserable, Raymond plots revenge. He makes positive expansion virtually impossible for her. He rapes her in her new apartment then beats her boyfriend, sending him to the hospital where he is reduced to a “bruise on the pillow” (84). This brings a fear into her life more real than any feeling she has ever known. Used to being able to manipulate men

to behave as she wants or needs them to, she is helpless against Raymond's unpredictability. He disrupts her domestic space, filling her life with fear.

Polly's ability to manipulate men is not confined to those with whom she sleeps. She also has power over her father, whom she calls after she is raped. He has authority that Polly depends on, not just a physical strength and a love for her which is comforting; he is on the local police force, and he comes with the law on his side. Polly transfers her pain to her father and expects him to make things better for her. Likewise, he turns to what he is familiar with to combat Polly's pain and fear; he buys her a gun and teaches her to use it. Dubus sees in Polly's relationship to her father a reason why she has not developed beyond the superficial:

I don't think there's anything wrong with the way [her father] loves her or anything he does to help her, but having his love and approval and having the looks, combined with whatever other elements in her character make her a bit spiritual slovenly. There were no demands. . . . She had what looks like good luck which when combined with her soul was dangerous. That no matter what she did she was loved at home and out on the streets she can make a man fall in love with her. Which in another character could be only blessings.³⁶

With nothing to prove to herself or her parents, Polly makes her way by using her gift, her beautiful face, without giving back to the world anything that she takes from it. Therefore, with no history of how to perform on her own, no reserve on which to draw, in trouble Polly has to turn to her father to protect her from the chaos she has started.

In the few days that Polly is at home with her parents, healing from the rape, she begins to take stock of her life. Back in the safety of her former home, she has time to think. On most of her afternoons before her marriage, she had spent little time reflecting. When she wanted to relax, she would go to a bar alone, perhaps making conversation or watching people or simply letting her mind drift, empty. In flashbacks of those afternoons or in present tense descriptions, she is defined by her appearance, the dresses she chooses, the make-up she wears. Though she tries to move into the social scene, she is limited by the superficial way in which she sees herself. She is an article of clothing, a skin shade. On these afternoons, she had never thought; rather, her “heart beat faster with a sense of freedom” (92). With nothing to reflect on but her own pretty face, Polly was content to sit and attract men to her. However, confronted by a fear she cannot control, she begins to think. In this deeper awareness of self, she confronts the vacuity of her life:

There was no single act or even pattern she could isolate and redeem.

There was something about her heart, so that now glimpsing herself

waiting on tables, sleeping, eating, walking in town on a spring

afternoon, buying a summer blouse, she felt that her every action

and simplest moments were soiled by an evil she could not name (100).

She simply knows that when she compares herself to her sister that there is something about Margaret that she herself does not have. In fact, Margaret’s sense of purpose will never be available to Polly, for she does not see the value in her sister’s disciplined routine, in her early morning runs to keep herself strong, in her virginity, her strong religious faith. Margaret’s choices call for deep connection, moving below the surface to a discipline that Polly rejects. Though she wants more in her life than the empty routines

into which her days have fallen, she does not know how to change for “ she did not and could not know what about herself she disliked and regretted” (88). She cannot know because she is unwilling to do the hard work it takes to figure herself out.

Like most routines in Polly’s life, she goes to mass every Sunday out of habit but does not make a spiritual connection. She feels that she lives in sin, though she cannot name it and so does not receive communion. She does not confess because she knows that any bad habit she has she is not interested in breaking: “She did not pray with concentration, but she did not think either, and her mind wandered from the Mass to the faces of people around her” (88). Polly watches, goes through the motions, but is not engaged in the ritual. Her superficial connection to herself carries over into her spiritual displacement.

As the story progresses, the more frightened Polly becomes, the more she begins to identify with her father. She bonds with him as he teaches her to shoot with accuracy and confidence, and as she moves into her father’s world, preparing herself against potential violence, she begins to feel more in control. When he takes her to get photographed for her gun permit, her shift in how she perceives herself becomes evident when she watches the photographer trim her picture, slicing through her breasts: “The black and white face was not angry or hating or fearful or guilty; she did not know what it was but very serious and not pretty” (101). In the shot, Polly sees herself stripped of her former power and moving into her father’s. She cannot control Raymond with her beauty anymore. In fact, her beauty is what she believes continues to draw him to her, refusing to let her go on with her life. She feels “dangerous with her slender body and pretty face” (85). Now, when she drinks in Timmy’s, she has what she perceives as an added strength,

the gun she keeps nestled against the lipstick in her pocketbook, a new addition to her arsenal of power.

Just as her beauty had been a way to get what she wanted, she now recognizes its danger, that its power draws Raymond to her with violent results. What she does not admit and only briefly recognizes is that ultimately her beauty has not been a power but a weakness. Never demanding more of herself than her good looks, she has escaped making her way in the world alone by jumping into a marriage with a man she does not really love. When she gets bored after five years, rather than leave her husband, she cheats on him. Rather than confront him when he rapes her through pressing charges, she hides behind her father and his authority.

Though Polly's parents insist that she give up her apartment and stay with them until they can be sure of her safety, she no longer sees her parents' house as her own. In an effort to create a new domestic space, she eases into her new environment by falling into her familiar pattern of using a man to get what she wants, shifting the boundaries until she is in control. Steve, the bartender at Timmy's, is the biggest man she knows and also the gentlest. He has a place on the lake that is vacant half the year when he goes north to ski and hunt. She sees Steve's house as the perfect transition, having him for the first week to protect her as she gets used to living outside of her father's safety then gone when she no longer needs him. However, even in her move to independence, Polly uses her body to get what she wants. Though she offers to pay her share of the rent, she knows that her good looks and her willingness to sleep with Steve "for release from carnal solitude" are what make her offer attractive. Polly takes on the role of Steve's wife, and they become like "a couple who have lived long together" without the restrictions of

marriage that made her restless (83). Gradually, control of the house shifts as Polly takes over the master bedroom while Steve moves his stuff into a tiny back bedroom, giving her the larger, cooler room with the view of the lake. This new view suggests the broader way of seeing offered to Polly, and taking over Steve's house appears to be the first step towards redefining herself. Actually, however, Polly is simply continuing the pattern of using men to accommodate her life, unaware or at least unconcerned with their sacrifice. Her relationship with Steve mirrors what she has with her father; she uses his compassionate nature for her own protection, getting what she wants and gaining control while knowing that he will make no demands on her.

Raymond uses his physical power to disrupt her peace just as she has violated his. Wanting to destroy her comfort, Raymond retaliates by doing damage to Steve's house, setting the yard on fire in the middle of the night. The damage to the house is small, but his action reminds Polly of how close he can get, and though she is safe when she is in the house with Steve, he will soon be gone. Unlike women before her who faced unknown dangers in their landscape, she knows who her enemy is. She watches the woods while Steve and the neighbors put out the fire: "Sitting between the house and the men, she still feels exposed" (84). Before the rape, before the fire, she had used her exposure to her advantage, drawing people's attention to her beauty and using it to get what she wants. Now, her beauty makes her a target.

Raymond rends Polly even more vulnerable by weakening her father. Consumed by anger, he confronts Raymond about the rape and the fire, going up to his cabin to threaten him. Raymond overpowers him, throwing his gun and his nightstick in the lake, stripping him of his already limited authority. Though he wants to kill Raymond, because

he represents the law, he can only go so far in his daughter's defense. However, he can train Polly to be ready, giving her agency to act where he cannot.³⁷ The scene is important not only to establish the law and her father's vulnerability, but also to show a shift. Raymond holds himself in check, never physically hurting his opponent, being content with verbal humiliation and enough force only to protect himself. Struggling to take the gun from Polly's father, Raymond notices that Mr. Comeau is "breathing so hard and is so red that I get a picture of him on the wharf and I'm breathing into his mouth" (109). Dubus said that this encounter sets up the change in Raymond and points out that he is no longer going to hurt Polly: "I think if he were that violent he would have harmed her father. . . . The whole time, isn't [Raymond] worried about [Polly's father] having a heart attack? This big, huge man with the older man that he strips of his arms does him harm—does it psychically—but he does not hurt his body."³⁸ Raymond's anger dissipates on the wharf, and the next time he goes to see Polly, he goes to her waitressing job, suggesting that he wants to meet her where she will feel safe, not threatened by his physical presence.

Whether or not Polly believes that Raymond has come to hurt her in the final scene is never clear. What is evident is that she is struggling to move on with her life, and she does not want to be bothered by him anymore. When he breaks into her house in their final encounter, he confronts her most vulnerable self. Weakened by the flu, she has spent two days in bed: "She does not brush her teeth or hair, or look in the mirror" (111). Sickness has reduced her physical power, weakening her body as well as her connection to her former beautiful self.³⁹ In this way, she is free to imagine new possibilities. As she heals, getting stronger, she imagines herself in the house alone. Mentally, she redecorates,

moving Steve's favorite chair into his room upstairs, making the place hers alone: "For the first time since moving in, she begins to feel that more than this one room is hers; not only hers but her: her sense of this seems to spread downward, like sentient love leaving her body to move about the three rooms downstairs, touching, looking, making plans" (116). Because of her illness, she is free to lie in the bed and think about her life. She sees herself in action, walking in the woods, ice skating: "Do it, she tells herself" (117).

However, though she wants to move forward with her life, she does not have the imagination to see beyond the six months to when Steve will return. She wants to be on her own, but she does not know where to go. Though she wants to make a new start, Polly has had little practice in thinking of herself in connection to the world. The superficial way in which she has seen herself, an empty but beautiful vessel, now limits her to simple actions, past habits that are familiar.

Thinking of her new house, she begins to feel a sense of contentment: "This doesn't have to end until it ends on its own, and she can lie here and decorate the house, move furniture from one room to another, one floor to another, bring all her clothes from her parents' house, her dresser and mirror. . . . Tomorrow she will smell trees and the lake" (177). She imagines herself at harmony in her new space, expanding into her surroundings, connecting with nature, walking "in the woods on brown leaves, under yellow and red, and pines and the blue sky of Indian summer" (117). She sees herself in the brilliant colors, at one with the landscape. Alone, her beauty will not be a weapon or an offer; it will simply be.

This is the new hopeful peace that Raymond shatters when he breaks the glass on the downstairs door and comes upstairs to wake Polly. He calls to her, telling her that he

is coming up, and she notes that his voice sounds “boldly apologetic” (117).

Nevertheless, she readies her gun. He tells her that he wants to talk to her: ““That’s all. That was an asshole thing I did, that other time”” (118).⁴⁰ He says he is sorry for scaring her then starts to ask her questions. He wants to know why she can live with Steve and be happy but not with him. His questions are direct, but without force. His curiosity is genuine for, as Dubus summed up, “he was in love.”⁴¹ However, the questions remind Polly of her limited past, and vulnerable, weak, she wants to try to stay connected to the strength she imagines in her new self. When he takes off his clothes, he stands before her, not a predator, but vulnerable: ““See. No knife. No clothes.’ He looks down. ‘No hard-on”” (119). When he comes to Polly this time, it is not for revenge but for understanding so that like her he can begin to move on. As Dubus said, “I wish she would have listened to him. He was making sense. . . . If he hadn’t drunk, gotten drunk—that did it. She shot him because she thought he was going to rape her. He wasn’t going to rape her.”⁴² Polly sees Raymond as an extension of her old self defined by her beauty. In addition to being afraid of Raymond, she reacts against the fear of being limited by her former life.

The final judgment against Polly comes not in her shooting but in her behavior afterward. Rather than calling an ambulance, she calls her father. She falls back into the patterns of her past, reaching out for protection rather than taking responsibility. Though Raymond imagined trying to save her father’s life were he to have a heart attack, she lets Raymond bleed to death. In this, she reverts to her former self, vulnerable, passive, not responsible. Her father had already promised her that no judge would hold her accountable. When she had been training, learning to shoot, she had felt as though she were “performing a strange ritual that would forever change her” (104). However,

Kennedy believes that she is not capable of change. He sees Polly as “unable to transcend the special treatment accorded her because of her pretty face, unable to develop a strength deeper than appearance.”⁴³ Nevertheless, Polly believes that she is different, and the realization makes her “suddenly tired” (104). If she has changed, she must construct new patterns of behavior, but Polly has no history of productive past action on which to draw. Furthermore, she is too self-centered to imagine anyone else and so cannot see that Raymond has also changed though she admits a difference in his manner. Instead, she shoots him and lets him die in a effort to save what she believes is a new Polly. Though Kathryn Nowicki Benzel attempts to defend Polly, seeing her shooting as an attempt to defend her new self, “a woman satisfied in her new identity and responsible for her life,”⁴⁴ Kennedy sees no redemptive qualities in her:

Polly’s sin is not an act, but a lack of action, an acquiescence to the exceptions American society makes for a young, good-looking woman, a failure to assume existential responsibility for herself because of moral laziness fostered by her good looks and by the way the world has responded to her surface prettiness. Her story ends with manslaughter, with a violence that reveals the pitiful depths of the woman’s moral vacuity.⁴⁵

She shoots to save what she believes are new possibilities suggested by her new residence that offers both secure containment as well as hope for expansion. However, when the shooting is over, she retreats into the trappings of her pretty body, once again losing agency by handing over responsibility.⁴⁶ As Shands points out, “feminine beauty ideals have involved immobility or restricted mobility.”⁴⁷ Though Polly wants a more

expansive self capable of moving into a positive relationship with the world, she ends up retreating into the containment of her physical beauty, her former weapon.

The Naturalism that Joyce Carol Oates says dominates much of Dubus' fiction is clearly evident in these stories of women who suffer lives of negative domestic containment. Their homes work as backdrops providing telling metaphors for the negative domestic experiences that they must endure. Though each character struggles to recognize or to maintain the possibilities of their underlying strengths, they are ultimately shattered by events outside of their control or are simply unable to tap into the power that fuels their dreams. Each one, due to her own limitations, is incapable of reaching her desire.

Their ineffectualness comes from myriad places. Leslie is frozen, unable to escape her impending death due to the fear and shock which have come to define her days. Physically and spiritually wounded by the violence of her husband's frustrations, Leslie remains trapped in her house, her only escape coming from memories of her father and her warm home in New England, sharp contrasts to the cold, dark house that has isolated her from her former hopes. Likewise, Rose endures the physical violence that her husband inflicts upon her children in part because she sees herself as a failure in her role as wife and mother. Her apartment has become a place of negative containment for Jim as it is a constant reminder of his failure to provide well for his family. Frustrated, he turns his home into a place of fear and violence which is eventually consumed by flames. Her one moment of action, standing up to her husband and rescuing her children, is not enough to sustain her, and she is reduced to the same shell of ashes that her former home becomes. Likewise, violence brought on by betrayal threatens to overwhelm Polly's

fleeting glimpse of herself in positive action. Though she wants to believe that she is capable of being more than just a pretty face and body, she lacks the conviction to stand on her own. Years of laziness and self-absorption condoned by her father leaves Polly incapable of change.

Grief brought on by the death of a loved one makes Juanita and Ruth unable to move ahead with their lives. Never able to recover from the death of her young husband, years later, Juanita is simply going through the motions, watching herself become old without living. She marks time, waiting for and finally receiving the resolve to kill herself. Though Ruth never contemplates suicide, the pain of losing her son has consumed her life. As he has always done, her husband attempts to protect her only to bring further grief into her life. The guilt that he feels over killing his son's murderer will so alter him that the two will ultimately be divided. Ruth will never be able to move beyond this new pain for which she has inadvertently been responsible. She will wait just as the protagonist does in "Now They Live in Texas" for a spiritual healing that will never come.

From physical violence to spiritual vacuity, these women struggle in vain or give in to the confines of their lives. Even when they do act as Rose does or have someone act for them as Ruth does, they are still left with doubts that end up conquering their temporary moments of transcendence. As these women of Dubus' short fiction struggle against the fragmentation of the postmodern landscape, they remain defined by their domestic space. When their homes do not provide them sanctuary or autonomy, they are doomed to fail.

Notes

1. Thomas Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 23.
2. Steve Yarbrough, "Andre Dubus: From Detached Incident to Compressed Novel" Critique 28 (Fall 1986): 19.
3. Andre Dubus, "Leslie in California," Selected Stories of Andre Dubus (Boston: Godine, 1988). All references are to this edition.
4. As Phyllis Rosser has pointed out, in postmodern America, reported "rapes more than doubled and sex-related murders rose 160 percent, with at least one third of these murders committed by husbands or boyfriends. Most women were murdered after filing for divorce and leaving home." "There's No Place Like Home," in New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action, ed. Joanna Fruch, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 68.
5. Rosser, 61-62.
6. Madonne Miner, "'Jumping from one heart to another': How Andre Dubus Writes about Women," Critique 39 (Fall 1997): 24.
7. In an interesting discussion of setting in connection to motif, Miner makes much of Dubus setting this story in California. She argues that the title of the story is important because it "locates this character in a landscape" which is "supposedly a golden land, haven for dreamers of large dreams" (25). She continues that this sort of setting accounts for Dubus' use of motifs from the fairy-tale genre. Yet Dubus refutes this idea, saying that he does not "think of California being the golden land." Instead, he admits to setting the story there because "that is where I got the letter from," the plea

from his daughter detailing the violence that she was experiencing in her own marriage. He said that the story came almost word by word from that letter. Also he said that the dangerous landscape of the hills of California added to the violence and fear in Leslie's life. Olivia Carr Edenfield, personal interview with Andre Dubus (February 23-24, 1993), Haverhill, MA.

8. Annette Kolodny, "The Domestic Fantasy Goes West," in Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticisms, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 791.

9. Kerstin W. Shands, Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), 65.

10. Shands, 85. Doreen Massey adds to this idea: In "the middle of all this flux [of postmodern life] people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet. . . . A strong sense of place, of locality can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub." Space, Place, and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 151.

11. Shands, 62-63.

12. Massey, 146.

13. Andre Dubus, "Rose," Selected Stories. All references are to this edition.

14. Kennedy, 45.

15. Edenfield, personal interview. Dubus reiterated this same idea in another interview regarding point of view in "Rose": "I think I developed the self-conscious narrative voice because the idea of harming children is so horrible to me that I could not write about it more directly, from the point of view, say, of the person doing it or even of the person who was letting it happen." Bonnie Lyons and Bill Oliver, "Passion Is Better," in Passion and Craft: Conversations with Notable Writers (Urbana:

University of Illinois Press, 1998), 150. Kennedy sees the narrator's voice as powerful and necessary as "the narrator's deviations are an essential part of this story's overall success." See Kennedy, 44.

16. Shands, 63.

17. Lyons and Oliver, 150.

18. Edenfield, personal interview.

19. Shands, 63.

20. Judith Fryer, Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 9.

20. Andre Dubus, "Anna," Selected Stories, 262. All references are to this edition.

21. Miner makes the point that "the story told in 'Anna' is that of crossing a line between energy and fatigue, between working-class female adolescence and working-class womanhood. It is a story . . . about the near impossibility of individualized desire on the part of someone like Anna" (20).

22. Miner, 22.

23. Miner, 22.

24. Miner, 23.

25. Miner, 23.

26. Perhaps the uncertainty of the ending reflects the shift that came in the middle of writing the story. Dubus discussed the scene in Timmy's after the robbery, as the moment "when I realized the most that they really loved each other in that scene. It wasn't supposed to be that. It was supposed to be a betrayal story. I got it out of the Boston Globe. A guy robbed a bank; he went to a phone and called his girlfriend in

Florida; she said, where are you? He told her; she told her boyfriend, and he called the cops in Boston while she kept him on the phone. So that was why I started that story. But in the bar scene I realized that these people loved each other, so, I said, I don't know what the fuck the story's about, and that's when it started to move." Edenfield, personal interview.

27. Kennedy, 16.

28. Andre Dubus, "They Now Live in Texas," Selected Stories. All references are to this edition.

29. Edenfield, personal interview.

30. Andre Dubus, "Waiting," Selected Stories, 42. All references are to this edition.

31. Kennedy, 15.

32. Dubus himself admitted that Juanita is going to kill herself: "She is going to commit suicide. That's her isolation. She says that she feels like she's sneaking into a movie. Well, she's going to commit suicide. . . . When a person who has tried a few times decides they're really going to do it, they get real peaceful. So that's why I call that 'Waiting,' because she's going to do it. I mean, you know, she went out in the goddamn Pacific at night." Asked if at this point in the story if Juanita is leaving death up to fate or chance, he said, "Yeah, I think so. Like unbuckling your seatbelt and driving too fast. I've read that we'll never know how many accidents are suicides. Car accidents. . . . The book that ['Waiting'] was in got a terrible review from a guy at The New York Times. He liked the story, he didn't understand it. He said she was coping." The story is also reminiscent of Chopin's The Awakening when Edna surrenders to the caress of the

sea, killing herself rather than continuing her unfulfilling life. Kate Chopin, The Awakening (New York: Avon, 1972).

33. Andre Dubus, "Killings," Selected Stories. All references are to this edition.

34. Lucy Ferriss, "Andre Dubus: 'Never Truly Members,'" in Southern Writers at Century's End, ed. Jeffrey J. Folks and James A. Perkins (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 236.

35. Andre Dubus, "The Pretty Girl," 1983 in Selected Stories, 89. All references are to this edition.

36. Edenfield, personal interview.

37. It is interesting that Polly's father is limited in his defense of her, overpowered by Raymond's strength as well as held in check by his role as a policeman, for her father is in part responsible for Polly's limitations. As Dubus said, "her father's approval of her allowed her to be lazy, to expect that something would happen because she was an American white high school girl who was just the prettiest girl in class, and that gave her an expectation." Edenfield, personal interview. Polly is in effect held back by her limiting role as the pretty girl, never expecting more of herself than that. By extension, her father is likewise limited in his defense of her.

38. Edenfield, personal interview.

39. An interesting side note is that this image of sickness is what first prompted Dubus to write the story: "One time I thought, I get the flu all of the time. I've never given a character the flu, so the next time I write a story, I'm going to have a character have the flu. . . . From the time I started that story, I thought, I don't know what's going to happen, but it will end at this lake with the flu on Labor Day weekend because it's so

shitty to have the flu in hot weather. And the story I did come from, there was a man terrorizing his wife, and somebody told me this story, and I wanted to write something with the tension of a suspense story, and I just wanted to see if I could do it. Of course, I did. Got introspective as always. But that's what I wanted to do. And feminists can grind their teeth on this one, I may be absolutely wrong, but I made a choice of a gender. I thought about having a man being the one who was being terrorized. That's not scary enough. You just tell him, hell, lift weights, buy a gun. . . . I wanted the biologically inferior one to experience for me, and for the reader to experience more terror."

Edenfield, personal interview.

40. Throughout the story, Raymond never uses the word rape. Instead he talks about getting to Polly, making her afraid. Dubus revealed an interesting detail about the rape scene: "The only thing that I really remember sharply from writing that section other than getting into the voice was how excited I was when I found out why he was sad. I learned something. That he was not sad because of memories of the past. The present had become unbearable because she had dumped him for no reason he could figure out, and she was happy in the same world he was. . . . So probably in that context he said it wasn't rape just as I've noticed throughout my life I think people really want to be good because most people try to justify what they did. You hardly hear people say it was a wicked, evil thing I did and I love it. They always say, he deserved it. Or everybody does it. Or it wasn't wrong. Or I did it because of this." Edenfield, personal interview.

Raymond all but admits to Polly that he knows it was rape. He just cannot bring himself to use the word. His awareness is important, however, as it indicates a change in Raymond, that he has gotten his anger under control.

41. Edenfield, personal interview.

42. Edenfield, personal interview.

43. Kennedy, 14.

44. Kathryn Nowicki Benzel, Sexual Difference as Narrative Technique: Cross-Dressing, Redressing, and Undressing Female Protagonists (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1987), 250.

45. Kennedy, 14. In his interview with Kennedy, Dubus adds to this: Polly “is maybe the only morally and intellectually lazy person I’ve ever written about. . . . She’s lukewarm because she did have what in many cases is the bad luck to be a pretty girl in a country which honors that. . . . It got her all the attention that she ever needed. All this business about her marrying and realizing that there are no more summer vacations and joining the world of the work were awakenings to her that should have not been awakenings. She should have known. I love Polly very much. My problem with her is that she has allowed the physical beauty of her face to dictate her direction and once she reaches the adult world where it is no longer a viable commodity . . . then all her expectancy becomes precisely what she earned: C’s. And her expectancies have a C-grade to them because they are shabby fulfillment. There is a time . . . that she has this vague sense of doing something immoral although it is not something the Church defines. It’s that she is not trying to fulfill herself as a human being, and I am not suggesting anything, marriage, vocation as opposed to job, anything, but I am pulling strongly for her to try to know herself, which she never does in the story. Which is why I think she ends up killing Ray and not knowing what to do because the poor bastard does bleed to death after she shoots him. She goes and calls her father instead of an ambulance” (106-07).

46. As Dubus revealed to Lyons and Oliver, “Polly grew, in part, out of my attempt to capture a feeling of vulnerability which is more obviously a part of women’s experience than men’s” (152).

47. Shands, 59. Massey adds to this idea: “Survey after survey has shown how women’s mobility . . . is restricted—in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at—not by ‘capital,’ but by men” (148). If women feel constantly threatened, as Massey and Shands propose, then Polly’s inertia becomes more tolerable.

Chapter 4

Positive Expansion:

Domestic Space and the Women of Andre Dubus

Not all of the women Andre Dubus writes about are restricted by their living arrangements. Though many women characters are temporarily held back or forced to make modifications in order to deal with a crisis, many do make the necessary changes to move on with productive lives. The conflicts women must face in Post-modern America are various and many, and though some women such as Leslie, Rose, and others are held back by Naturalistic limitations, others are able to redefine themselves and their environments. Dubus uses the motif of domestic space to show both the restrictions of negative containment as well as the healing power of positive expansion in a variety of stories from several collections: "Adultery," "Molly," "The Fat Girl," and "Miranda over the Valley." In each of the stories women must break ties with their families to create their own territory separate from those who have shaped them in the past. Though sometimes the break from home may be only temporary, movement becomes necessary as each of the women in these stories reaches a new understanding of herself and her place in the world.

In "Adultery," Edith has been married for eight years when she finally realizes that she must leave her husband in order to feel at peace in the world again. In the fifth

year of her marriage, she discovers that Hank is having an affair and that he plans to have more. Though she had never believed that she had anything to fear in her marriage, when he tells her that he will not be restricted to having only one lover, Edith must reassess her feelings for him as well as her place in her marriage. Bound by her roles as wife and mother, Edith decides to remain in the marriage and to meet Hank on his own terms, taking lovers of her own in the three years that they continue to stay together. However, during the two days of the action of the external frame, Edith is motivated to find the courage to redefine herself and leave Hank behind.

When the story first opens, Edith is characterized by her marriage to Hank and her life with her eight-year old daughter, Sharon. The actions of the opening scene reinforce Edith's role as wife and mother. She is feeding her family supper; however, rather than the meal just beginning, she is in the process of shutting down the kitchen, clearing the table, moving Sharon into her ritual of preparing for bed. She gives the right prompts to set her daughter smoothly into action, naming the story she will get to hear after her pajamas are on. There is limited exchange in this nightly ritual requiring few verbal prompts, for actions have become habits due to their repetition. On the surface, Edith and Sharon and Hank seem to be moving through the evening as a family, joined by their respected roles. However, just as the meal is over, so is the marriage though Edith is only just starting to realize it. In fact, she wonders "how long it will be before Sharon senses and understands that other presence or absence that Edith feels so often with the family is together."¹ What has invaded their family, or what has left, is an adjustment of the vows of the sacrament of marriage. Because Hank and then Edith took on lovers, the holiness of the union has been destroyed for her, and though she pretends for three years that she

can live with the infidelities, she knows that she has to have a commitment more meaningful than what she shares with her husband.

To set up the differences in their views of marriage, Dubus spends most of the story within the internal frame cataloguing the details of their relationship prior to their marriage and the eight years since. Edith meets Hank while he is a student. Though she is also taking graduate courses and doing well, she knows she is pretending “so she could be near Hank” (416). She never admits that she has any other choice in her life than to be someone’s wife; in fact, she never thinks of other options. She admits that husbands can die and that marriages can fail, but those are facts that she does not have to really worry about. The only thing she has ever wanted to be is “a nice girl someone would want to marry” (413). She makes up her mind to marry Hank and spends her year in graduate school making herself attractive to him.

Edith uses the comfort of her apartment and the routine that she creates for Hank as a way to make him need her in his life. Because she has money, she buys and prepares good food and serves it with drinks. Not having to work outside of attending classes, Edith has time to spend on the comforts of her home. She plays music at dinner, dresses up, fitting the image of what she believes a nice girl should be. She sells herself as a woman who finds fulfillment in providing a place of secure containment to the man she loves. After only a few nights, Edith and Hank settle into a ritual very much like marriage. Their routines are the same every evening as she stood “between the hot stove and the refrigerator and cooked while he stood at the entrance of the alcove, and they talked” (426). In the tiny apartment, they begin their habits that “all felt like a marriage” (416). The one difference is that though they make love, Hank does not stay the night.

Though Edith attempts to domesticate Hank, he defines himself exclusively as a writer, “whose only demand was that he write, and that he write well” (415). He breaks down his day according to his work schedule, not able to commit a full evening to his girlfriend because of the routine of writing that he has created for himself. What she sees in his explanation of why he cannot yet marry is that he often “confused like to with have to” (416). What is important in his life is immediately more demanding and fulfilling than any attachment. Though Edith uses her apartment and time to make a comfortable, essential place for another in her life, Hank’s activities at home are regulated for the primary aim of moving into the solitude of writing. She recognizes that he speaks “almost reverently” of his morning ritual. He is already defined by his work, a commitment by which he is already positively contained: “It was a matter of ritual, he told her. He had to do his work” (416), and it must begin in his own space.

Though Edith was initially attracted to Hank because he seemed to know who he was and what he wanted and needed in life, what she comes to learn early on in her marriage is that “one thing has to be said about men who have found their center: they’re sometimes selfish bastards” (419). Hank uses his career and its pressures as a reason why Edith must not put any limits on his life. In this way, he redefines the promises the two make to one another when they marry. He makes the decision after Sharon is born that there will be no more children. Although Edith would like another child and is willing to wait until he is established, he does not want the aggravation nor the distraction. In this and finally in all things, Hank’s work overrides Edith’s needs.

Edith has to redefine herself almost immediately after marrying Hank. Pregnant when they marry, she begins to see herself right away as his wife, not just his lover. She

is the one who drives to his university town to select their apartment. She is the one who “nests” and gets ready for the familial changes in their lives (414). She feels positively contained by her role that suggests permanency and connections. Her complete shift is due primarily to her pregnancy: “Her marriage had begun at the moment when she was first happy about carrying a child” (414). Therefore, from the beginning, Edith expands the way she sees herself to include not only her new husband, but her role as mother.

However, fear comes to her in a revelation about Hank:

Her life had changed, had entered a trajectory of pregnancy and motherhood; his life had merely shifted to the side, to make more room. But she began to wonder if he had merely shifted. Where was he, who was he, while she talked with her mother, bought a washing machine, and felt the baby growing inside her. . . .

Then at last she worried that he had not shifted at all but, for his own survival, had turned away (414).

Edith fears that he will never fully include her and their daughter. He will not have enough faith in marriage, a holy sacrament with fulfilling rituals of its own. Instead, he tries to construct his own rules.

In their fifth year when Edith suspects that he has been unfaithful, she uses the backdrop of her home to give her strength. She waits until after dinner to confront him, having cooked for him and put their daughter to bed. She uses her actions as a way to define her importance to Hank, a reminder of her place in his life: “He sat at the kitchen table, talking to her while she cleaned the kitchen. It was a ritual of theirs” (423). In her fear and apprehension about the future, Edith falls back on routines to give her strength.

However, when Hank tells Edith that he has a lover and that he must be free to take others in the future if he wants to, the rituals of her life become merely habits that have no meaning anymore. In the days that follow, she goes through the expected actions, cooking, cleaning the house, taking care of Sharon, all of the while hearing voices that make her wonder how much she really knows about the man she lets define her life. He tells her that he never believed in “monogamy” though he believes that he has been “faithful” in that he has been discreet, “kept his affair secret, had not risked her losing face. He loved her and had taken nothing from her” (425). While Edith feels that she does not know him, he never seems bothered by the fact that he so obviously does not know her or what gives meaning to her life. She has always been faithful to him, not only giving him everything that she feels a wife should, a comfortable home and a well-cared for child, but also remaining loyal to him as his lover. Yet Hank does not really see Edith. The center of his life is his work while his marriage has become more of an extension of his work rather than work an extension of his marriage. Because he sees himself first as a writer and then as her husband, he feels free to break whatever rules he must in order to find fulfillment in his craft. Ironically, it is in the eighth year of his writing that his first novel is rejected, and in the eighth year of his marriage his wife finally rejects him.

Since she first fell in love with Hank, Edith has defined herself by her ability to make a comfortable place for him. With each new role that she plays, she keeps Hank at the center of her life. Yet she recognizes that “with his work, he created his own harmony, and then he used the people he loved to relax with” (427). Edith needs more than what Hank has left for her; she wants the peace that she felt in the five years before she knew of his affairs. She needs to believe that her roles are meaningful, that her house,

her marriage, her connection to the man for whom she works to create a happy home is a sacrament, a ritual of faith. Instead, when she follows Hank into infidelity, the same home that had been her security and comfort begins to turn on her: "She would feel the house enclosing and caressing her with some fear she could not name" (437). She knows that she is behaving out of character, that she does not find happiness or satisfaction in her affairs and that she has them only to try to punish Hank. Her fear comes from the awareness that she is making a mockery of the sacrament of marriage, a sacred union she has believed in her whole life, that dominated every decision she made for twenty-seven years, a sacrament that has temporarily lost its meaning for her.

In contrast to the scene that opens the story is the life that Edith has created for herself and Joe outside of her marriage. In the opening frame, Edith is finishing up her duties as Hank's wife and Sharon's mother, yet she is preparing to go to her lover's house to prepare him dinner. How she and Joe met is never an issue in the story; instead, what she has meant to Joe and what she has learned from his need becomes the focus as her new understanding of herself and gives her the courage to confront the vacuity of life with Hank. As she has cooked for Joe at his apartment on other evenings, she has rediscovered in herself "what she once felt as a wife: that her certain hands are preparing a gift" (407). She begins to believe in the sacredness of her actions again, seeing the sacrament involved in preparing food for a loved one, her food nurturing the physical body, the love with which she prepares it nurturing the soul of both giver and receiver.

In fact this gift of food had once brought Edith and Hank together in a ritual that led to marriage. What she has missed since she first learned of Hank's infidelity is the confidence that comes in understanding the sacredness of the rituals that make up her life.

Hank has so shattered her sense of self that she has to be reminded of the importance of the role that she has taken on. Susan Saegert and Gary Winkel make reference to a study conducted in 1977, the same year that “Adultery” was published, that reveals that “women were more likely to think of the home as an expression or component of their own identity. Men responded to home more as simply a physical place.”² When Hank decides to take other women as lovers, he redefines Edith’s role to the point that she no longer recognizes herself anymore. Lost to her is the positive sense of containment that her marriage had provided her as she fulfilled what she had taken on as her responsibilities. Yet, in the redefinition of what Hank expects their life to be, she loses her role. It “was harmony she had lost. Until now her marriage had been a circle, like its gold symbol on her finger. Wherever she went she was still inside it. It had a safe, gentle circumference, and mortality and the other perils lay outside of it” (427). She has lost her faith in her marriage and needs more than the empty actions that her life with Hank has become. She had waited on him to sell his first novel so that she could ask for another baby. However, though his third novel does find a publisher, its acceptance comes with “the knowledge of defeat” for Edith that there is not room in Hank’s life for another child (419).

In her search for peace, she turns to God, trying at night to pray. She looks for meaning behind even the routine of cleaning her apartment, believing that God would understand. He would know her actions were sacred rituals of faith and love: “But she knew it was no use: she had belief, but not faith: she could not bring God under her roof and into her life” (428). Because Hank does not recognize the sacrament of her actions as his wife and the mother of his child, Edith begins to doubt their significance as well. The

hopelessness of her marriage overwhelms her every action, and she feels defeated by the previously easy tasks of her day. In shock at the disappointments of her marriage, like Leslie and Rose, Edith goes through the domestic routine, waiting for the “dread disconnection between herself and what she was doing” to end. Though she talks with Hank about her pain, eventually her heart is so broken that she finds herself at “the dead end of love’s grief” (427).

What Edith lacks in her relationship with God is the same connection that she misses in her marriage to Hank. She worships him, making her meaning from his life, yet just as she never connects with the Deity, she is aware of a place within her, “that core of her being that no one else knew,” not even Hank (429). What she wants is to know and to be known, to feel a connection that is outside of the empty rituals that her life has become. She wants meaning again, and though she tries for a while to connect with God, where Edith has belief, she lacks faith. Lucy Ferris makes the interesting point that “it is not necessary to have Edith commune with God in order for the act of lovemaking to do so; she only need to commune with Joe—lovingly and freely, free of Hank. Hank becomes, as it were, her false church, Joe her true” (437). Through Joe, she comes to understand how to achieve the faith that she has never experienced. She comes to love him with a certainty that she has been missing from her life for a long time: “Since Joe started to die, she has been certain about everything she does with him” (407). Because time with him is so precious, so limited by his approaching death, she begins to see every detail of her time with him as precious, sacred.

That Edith still believes in her role as Sharon’s mother is clear by the fact that she never takes her despair or impatience or anger out on her daughter. She separates herself

from other women she has known who blame their children for the negative containment of their lives. However, she cannot find complete fulfillment in her role as Sharon's mother. In fact, when she first learns about Hank's affair, her life seems to become "like something bitter from Mother Goose: the woman made the child, the child made the roof, the roof made the woman, and the child went away" (425). Sharon's conception had brought her parents together under one roof, and in that home, Edith's commitment to her family's security and comfort began to define who she was. Yet, she knows that her daughter will leave one day, taking with her the only meaning that Edith has left to her. Therefore, she chooses to expand beyond the confines of her previous roles. In Joe, she finds the spiritual connection that was missing in her other relationships.

Joe did not leave the priesthood out of lack of faith. Instead he simply saw himself shifting in his role as priest. In giving his message before the congregation, he became aware that he was speaking before a group but talking specifically to women. He comes to see that it is not just sex that he wants but connection to a woman. Watching, he comes to understand differences in women and men, that men are involved in "a world of responsible action; their sins were what they considered violations of that responsibility" while women "lived in a mysterious and amoral region . . . [where] sins were instinctual" (442). Attracted to this mystery, he begins to see the business of the church as male while "women were their own temples and walked cryptic, oblivious, and brooding across the earth" (443). This is a temple that he wants to enter and worship. Through loving a woman, he wants to feel an "earth-rooted love for God" so that he can "live with certainty as a man" (445). When he falls in love with Edith and she with him, the spiritual connection that he feels with her when they make love becomes its own sacrament. He

sees in their love-making a miracle at work: “He maintained and was committed to the belief that making love could parallel and even merge with the impetus and completion of the Eucharist” (445). Through the spiritual connection that she feels with Joe, Edith begins to believe in love again and sees that Hank is wrong. She recognizes that Hank is using their marriage as a comfort, as a roof under which he can indulge his desires, have a wife and child when it is convenient for him.

In the concluding frame, Edith awakes at Joe’s on the first and only night she spends at his house. In rushing home before Sharon wakes to find her missing, she feels “like a fugitive,” her split life making her afraid that she no longer has a home. In an effort to reconnect to her family, she cooks a big breakfast, feeling throughout the meal as “if she and Hank were new lovers, only hours new, and this was the first morning she had waked in his house and as she cooked breakfast her eyes and heart reached out to him to see if this morning he was with her as he was last night” (448). What he offers to Edith is what he had offered to her the night before, understanding that she wants to spend time with her lover. She sees in his acceptance of her betrayal that their lives would continue without the commitment to one another that Edith needs: “She breaths the smells of the batter, the bacon, the coffee” (448), taking in what she offers to her family as a gift, a sacrament as full of life and promise as the Eucharist. However, because Hank no longer or, as he claims, has never believed, the transubstantiation never takes place for him. He can accept the gift of food as no more than the pancakes and bacon and coffee that they are. The fullness of Joe’s love helps her see how empty her married life has become.

In the face of Joe’s death, Edith steps again into the role of nurturer, moving through her chores as quickly as she can and fleeing her house so that she can reach out

through domestic action to connect with her lover. She cleans his apartment, makes coffee, bringing order to his house and establishing her place in what remains of his life. She knows the futility of cleaning a space that he will have to leave that afternoon, but feels strength in the ritual of performance.

Once they are at the hospital, Joe asks for a priest so that he can confess and receive; in her understanding of the faith involved in Joe's receiving the Eucharist, Edith receives the gift of spiritual freedom. After Joe has confessed, she asks him if the priest understood. In his answer is the understanding that she has been seeking: "I realized he didn't have to. It's something I'd forgotten with all my thinking: it's what ritual is for: nobody has to understand. The knowledge is in the ritual'" (451). In this Edith understands what Hank has destroyed in their marriage by his breaking their promises to one another: he has tainted the ritual of lovemaking that should have been theirs alone to share.

Though Edith tried to keep the marriage alive by performing the actions of wife and mother, the meaning had gone out of them. However, just as Joe has come back to the church in the hours before his death, Edith has come back into an understanding that her routines, rituals have not been in vain, that because she still believed in her role and in marriage, she can also have faith that the union can work. What she must do is free herself from Hank so that she can prepare to meet someone like Joe who also believes and has faith in the power of marriage, in the vows and the healing connection of loving someone exclusively. Then the ritual actions become sacrament.

When Edith chooses to stay with Joe in the hospital until he has died so that she might comfort him through the pain, she is in effect telling Hank that she knows that their

marriage is over. She reminds him of their mortality: “‘That’s what we lost sight of’” (452). In the Existential understanding of the importance of life in the face of death, Edith comes to value herself and her gifts, experiencing a new faith in love. When Hank tries to stop her from going to Joe, reaching out to claim her sexually, touching her thigh, her breast, she moves away from him as she knows that his actions are not for the giving and receiving of a sacrament, but to establish ownership.

Edith will leave Hank, a loss that will tear her soul long after she has stopped grieving for Joe. In each action in the hospital, making a temporary home out of the impersonal room, Edith knows that “she is telling Hank goodbye, feeling that goodbye in her womb and heart” (453). He will be a loss that will be hard to bear, but through her sacrifice, she will gain a new life. She still believes and always did in her role in her family; she had only temporarily lost faith through her husband’s redefinition of marriage. Dubus admitted that he liked “the honesty Edith comes to.”³ Though she knows that what she has realized will be painful, that Hank is not capable of loving her as she wants to be loved, that their viewpoints on marriage are too different for them to find common ground, she makes the decision to break with him so that she can create a healing space for herself and Sharon.

In “Molly,” Dubus again takes up the issue of women and men who have married only to find that their diverse ideas about home and family are not compatible. Claire and her husband, Norman, are married only a few years when he decides to leave behind his wife and three-year old daughter, Molly, and move to the other side of the country to continue his work. He had never really connected with his wife. She admits that he was like one of those men who “could not be husbands and fathers, unless their wives and

children wanted little more than nothing, or little more than what money gave them.”⁴

Norman sees himself primarily as the provider, and his connection to his wife and child is limited to the brief time that they spend together in the evening after dinner, when they have drinks and Molly plays between them on the carpet. However, they never talk to one another, and Claire concludes that he is a “creature who needed almost nothing that she did” (118). While she enjoys her drink and looks forward to the dinner she has prepared, Norman eats the food that she cooks for him “as a pet dog eats its dry food, out of hunger” but with no real appetite (118). In fact, the longer they are together, the more she concludes that his only physical desire is sex, his need for her limited to that. Feeling shut out of his life, she drinks until she is drunk, while she talks “as though sober, . . . smelling the food on the stove and in the oven and wishing he would suddenly die” (118). She realizes that there is nothing worth saving in her marriage. Though early on she had hoped that her husband might begin to turn some of his attention home rather than spending all of his energy at work, she finally accepts that she and her daughter could “vanish, and his life would move on, move in the direction he believed was forward,” at least in terms of his career (119). When he finally leaves, it is with the understanding that mentally he left a long time ago.

However, Norman sends a check every month, and though Claire gets her own job, she never has to worry about money. She redefines herself after her marriage is over, training in real estate, selling houses, seeing in her work the business of bringing people into a hope for domestic happiness. Financial success keeps her independent so that she dates, but never feels she has to remarry. She provides security for her daughter, and unlike women before her who felt compelled by social pressures to marry in order to have

a role, Claire is content to be mother to Molly and to do her job well without it consuming her. She makes the conscious decision to be different from professional men she believes will do whatever it takes to make money, justifying their lies by calling it ““business”” (120). She is thankful that she has come into her profession late in life when she has had time to see how things are done and to make her own choices about how she will behave. She promises never to lie to her clients. She has autonomy in her career as well as in the domestic space that she creates for herself and Molly. This peace that surrounds the two brings them together as mother and daughter as well as friends.

Claire extends the sense of independence and control at work into her home. She reclaims herself and Molly by changing their last name back to her maiden name. She carefully limits her drinks in the evenings to two. Molly remains a part of Claire’s hour before dinner, moving from playing with toys on the rug to sitting across the living room, making conversation with her mother while the two drink, Molly having tea. In this way, the two meet every day at a set time, making conversation and coming to know one another, sharing, and making promises never to lie to one another. Just as Claire is determined to have an honest relationship with her clients in spite of the dishonesty she sees around her every day, she also decides that she will risk the hard truth with her daughter. She sees in Molly’s questioning eyes

their curiosity, their fascination. And gratitude too, for being able to talk to her mother, with the confidence that her mother would tell her the truth. So Claire felt blessed, sitting in candlelight, pleasantly well-fed, drinking wine; and oblivious of their soiled plates on the table and

the pots waiting in the kitchen to be emptied and cleaned, she sank warmly into the deep pleasure of motherhood (124).

In their time after dinner, Molly and Claire build trust so that when Molly approaches her teen years and her questions become more difficult, home becomes her ballast.

Claire never lies to Molly about her father, never pretends or makes excuses. Rather, she explains to Molly that two people can live together and be alone: “‘I was lonely when he was here, around the end of him being here. Because there were three of us, and we had a home. But the truth is there were only two of us, and we had a house and a two-legged pet I fed’” (124). In contrast, the space that Claire and Molly share becomes a home that shelters the love and friendship that grow between them. With Molly, Claire is never lonely.

Nevertheless, she admits to Molly that she “‘wants to be wanted’” (124), to be listened to by a man, to be connected to another person. For Claire, love makes a woman feel that she is not

“just one person among everyone. You’re one woman among all women. You’re you. That’s what it feels like to be loved. And when you’re not loved you become worse than part of a crowd. It’s like you don’t have a body anymore. You become abstract; just your voice inside you talking to yourself, and you feel like you don’t even occupy the space you’re standing in, like you’re weightless. You’re standing on a spot on the earth, but your feet are like air. You give me weight. . . . And I hope I give it to you” (125).

Regardless of her autonomy, she still believes that a woman needs love to feel truly complete. She explains this to her daughter, and her stories end with her asking permission to have her present lover stay over. In her request, Claire is careful to make sure that Molly is comfortable in having a man in their house, insisting that home ““is more important than me and Stephen, and how you feel about your home is more important”” (130). She wants her daughter to feel safe in the space that she has provided.

With this frankness comes Molly’s desire to be like her mother, to experience the world that she knows. She begins to smoke, wanting to share her mother’s sensations. Having listened to the stories, Molly transfers her own desires onto her mother’s past experiences. Later at a party she takes over the record player, singing Claire’s songs, the old jazz songs that had played in the background during all of her cocktail hours at home, songs with words she did not even know she knew. She sang them well. Metaphorically she takes up her mother’s voice, singing with joy and abandonment, expressing through the words and tones their shared language, in effect becoming her mother. Lucy Ferris makes reference to a passage by theologian Henri Nouwen: ““Becoming the beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfleshed in everything we think, say, or do. . . . To become the Beloved we, first of all, have to claim that we are taken.””⁵ Molly metaphorically celebrates her mother’s influence by singing her songs. She is open to experiencing sex so that her own and her mother’s experiences can be more closely joined. Just as she had wanted to know the sensations of smoking having witnessed her mother’s pleasure, she wants to understand for herself the words that her mother had shared with her: “*Yourself alone among everyone else. Your body and your heart*” (146).

However, after Molly fumbles through drunk sex, she feels “abused and unworthy” and misses her mother most keenly. The next morning, with Claire at work and the long summer day before her, she realizes for the first time how dependent she has become on her mother’s physical being to make her feel secure: “She had not realized how often she thought of her mother as the cheerful and pretty woman in the kitchen” (148). This nurturing, positive image is at odds with the disturbing flashes that have invaded her imagination. After experimenting with Bruce, Molly begins to conflate herself and her mother in the memory of her sexual experience, seeing Claire in place of herself.

Molly’s inability to separate her own experience from her mother’s results in a temporary distortion in regards to her feelings about sex and relationships. Just as she had taken on Claire’s voice the evening before, she takes on her mother’s feeling of abandonment, and for the first time she curses her father for leaving her behind, for making her mother suffer. She feels disconnected, used by sex just as she feels that her mother was used by her father.

In an effort to further identify with her mother, she spends the afternoon in the sun reading Claire’s favorite novel, For Whom the Bell Tolls. She moves to the patio, expanding, giving herself a view as Melville’s narrator does in “The Piazza.” This extension metaphorically suggests that she wants a new way of seeing. She has come to her mother’s favorite tale just as the children of Grace King’s “The Balcony” had been receptive to their mother’s stories in the expansive landscape of their balconies. What she learns makes her doubt her negative feelings about sex, as she witnesses positive sexual connection between the protagonists.

When her mother comes home later that afternoon, the peace that the story had temporarily restored is shattered. The two make drinks, setting up for their honest conversation as they have in the past. Though her mother's physical presence is comforting, Molly feels that the house is closing in on her, "its walls and ceiling and floor shutting her in" (151). She feels entrapped by her guilt of the night before. Molly's feelings suggests her confusion over having conflated herself with her mother while simultaneously longing to be independent of her mother's experiences. A bird catches her eye outside of the window: "The crow was restless, watching for something" (155). She sees the crow rise and fly away, out of her vision. The actions suggests that Molly wants to remove herself from total identification with her mother. She asks Claire, "What is going to happen?" (155), the question opening up unlimited possibilities. However, this progress is temporary as the visions of her mother and Bruce return. She filters through her mother the memory of sex, attempting to buffer her own negativity, a conflation that only makes the experience more difficult. The fact that she has come to see her mother's face in place of her own in her memories of Bruce suggests that she believes her own sexual fate it tied into her mother's.

What finally helps Molly move on is her ability to be honest. She falls back on her past, drawing on the strength of the familial relationship that Claire had built for her. In this comfortable arena, she finds her own voice and tells her mother about the empty encounter with Bruce. This trust gives Claire the opportunity to explain the difference in sex and the positive connection she knows her daughter is capable of.

Molly eventually comes to see that she is not doomed to disappointment in marriage, that her own experiences are not her mother's. After telling Bruce about For

Whom the Bell Tolls, she admits to knowing nothing about history, loving the characters but not understanding their political struggles. He tells her, ““Maybe it doesn’t matter. . . . Knowing about it. It had to be important for the people in it” (165). In this Molly sees that her understanding of her mother’s experiences can be a limited one. She does not have to absorb the details of her mother’s past. Understanding that Claire’s stories are important to her is enough. The confusion further dissipates as Molly recognizes that “she was his girl” (170). This identification erases the image of herself as her mother. As Ferris points out, when she connects herself to Bruce, it is a “naming of her status” which “creates a new identity for Molly.”⁶

The shift in Molly is evident as she and Bruce drive. Staring out the window, she finds peace in the memory of her mother who provided her with a view, a possibility for her own positive expansion. Grateful, Molly looks around at the houses set closely together and imagines “some predetermined life, some boundary to their dreams, enclosed as tightly as their bodies were by their lawns and small houses,” and where, “some routine of their lives—work, habit, or something of the spirit—held them at home as surely as it contained their hopes” (166). This conflicts with the nurturing, expansive love that her mother has given her, a domestic space that has been a place of positive containment for Molly through all of her remembered time. She sets her mother against the parents she imagines in these houses, parents “who at meals and in the evenings had nothing to say to [their children], nothing to teach them” (166). She recognizes that her mother has tried to help her not to make her same mistakes. Thomas Kennedy also sees that Claire’s influence has been positive in Molly’s life: “Claire strives to teach her daughter from her own experience, seeks to be wholly truthful with the girl that they

might have a fullness of love,” yet he goes on to concede that “Molly’s journey toward love must be a personal one. . . . [as] every generation must learn the difference between hunger and love, each under its own specific conditions.”⁷ Claire’s frankness for a while makes Molly confused as she conflates herself and her mother as a way to move past her first painful sexual experience.

A new awareness comes when she knows she is free to create her own history, her own future. Though it takes time for her to separate her mother’s experiences from her own and to move past her initial doubts with Bruce, in the final scene, as Molly thinks about the possibilities of her life, Dubus uses the positive symbol of light to suggest the power of her new vision of herself. She sees herself as separate, free to move beyond the confines of the space that she has shared with her mother into an expansion whose “brightness dazzled her eyes, her heart” (177). By recognizing herself separate from but sustained by her mother, Molly is set to move into her life.

Just as Molly’s mother had a profound influence over her daughter’s self-perception, so does Louise’s mother in “The Fat Girl.” However, though what Claire attempts to teach Molly is eventually positive, the influence that Louise’s mother has over her daughter’s self-esteem and her subsequent choices is profoundly negative. Set in Louisiana during the 1960s and 1970s, the story centers around Louise’s awareness that she does not have the physical frame to fit into her mother’s perceptions of what she should be. Her father is a financially successful member of his small-town country club. Though he loves his daughter in spite of her plump body, his eyes bathing “her with love” whenever he looks at her (240), he is a busy lawyer, out of his house most of the time, leaving her care to his wife. For most of her childhood, her father’s love helps to remind

her of her value. However, as she gets older she becomes aware that her mother's affections are tied into her perceptions about weight. With this awareness, she begins to wonder if her mother is right, that fat compromises a person's ability to be loved. Only later with the joy she feels through the birth of her child is Louise able to break free, extending her landscape by finally accepting herself.

Louise's mother is a tense, rigid woman who is always on a diet to keep her slender figure, her measure of acceptability. As her daughter reaches late childhood, her body fills out too much to suit her mother's taste, so she is put on a diet. If she is not slim when she gets to high school, her mother warns her, "the boys won't like [her]; they won't ask [her] out."⁸ Though dating might already be on her mother's mind, she can think only of her hunger as she is forced to eat "bare lunches" while her mother smokes and her brother and father eat whatever they want. The constant hunger that she feels becomes a metaphor for the craving that she has for acceptance; however, years later, in a place of her own and through a child of her own, Louise learns to love herself unconditionally, redefining the expectations of her role for herself and for her infant son.

The conditions in which Louise grows up influences her to believe that she is not as worthy of happiness as the slender girls she sees around her. As her family comes together around the table, she learns early on that the rules for her brother and for herself are different. Though the evening meal around the dining table is often a place for positive family connection, for her it is a place to be reminded that she does not fit in. Withheld from nourishment she is metaphorically stifled in her self-esteem as she comes to believe that until she is thin, she is not lovable. As Kennedy has pointed, "if she will not provide [her family] with the appearance they desire of her, they will not accord her

love or, worse, will look upon her with repugnance.”⁹ Though her father tries to take up for her, arguing to let her eat if she is hungry, his job keeps him away most of the time. Therefore, Louise’s mother controls their domestic space and consequently has the determining influence over how her daughter sees herself as she matures.

Louise turns to her bedroom as a way to create a place for herself. In her room, back on the shelf where she keeps the stuffed animals from her childhood, she starts to hide candy bars. In the same way the toys provided her with security years before, the candy fills her cravings and nourishes her desire for sweetness in her life. In fact, by eating candy in secret every day she actively rebels against her mother’s doctrine that only thin girls find happiness. Her unwillingness to let her mother control what she eats when she is in the privacy of her room gives her a temporary sense of power. Elizabeth G. Peck points out that

while being fat has traditionally been equated with being “out of control,” researchers have more recently recognized fat and compulsive eating as ways of gaining control rather than relinquishing it—despite their personal and social repercussions. Indeed, getting fat and staying fat is one way of saying “no” to gender expectations and sexist restrictions, one way of saying “no” to powerlessness and self-denial, and one way of refusing to bow to social control.¹⁰

In her room, away from her mother’s critical eyes, Louise is comfortable with herself, creating a secure space, housing just Louise and her view of herself separate from her mother and by extension society’s criticism. When she is alone, Louise knows who she is: “She was fat because she was Louise. Because God had made her that way” (234). When

she is alone, believing that God loves her, Louise can love herself for the way God made her. However, whenever she has to leave the sanctuary of her room and the peace that it provides, she is confronted by her mother's disappointment and doubts herself all over again.

Louise goes through high school and enters college having no close friends and making no connections. Yet when she enters the girls' college that she chose so that she would not have to confront and be rejected by boys every day, she rooms with Carrie, a girl who ends up helping her change. In their first year of rooming together, Carrie discovers that her roommate hides and secretly eats chocolate. One night, she asks Louise to eat in front of her and with this request makes clear that she does not judge her for being overweight. The two become close friends, sharing with one another their unhappiness at home. The girls redefine themselves in their love for one another, making of their dorm room a temporary place of security and acceptance. However, when Carrie meets a boy and falls in love her senior year, she reveals that she is a victim of the same socialization as Louise and her mother as she expresses her fears that Louise will never find a man to love her unless she loses weight. Not wanting to disappoint Carrie, Louise agrees to try.

She begins to starve herself, severely limiting her caloric intake and spending her spare time walking around the campus. Their dorm room becomes a sanctuary, a place of strength against the temptations that threaten her self-control. Except for class and walking to get exercise, Louise spends most of her time shut off in her place of security. However, this retreat comes at a price. Though the weight falls away, she notices a change in her temperament: "In all her life she had never been afflicted by ill temper and

she looked upon it now as a demon which, along with hunger, was taking possession of her soul” (239). She becomes nervous and irritable, shifting from the good-natured person she had always been to snapping at her friend, feeling the stress of the diet as well as the self-imposed isolation. Her room at home had been a place of comfort in that it provided her with privacy and a chance to indulge her appetite. At college, though her room still comforts her, she shares her space, and in effect has come to share Carrie’s mainstream perceptions about body size. Therefore, though her room is still a positive place, once her habits of eating in secret are discovered, she is never free from her physical self. She is constantly being perceived by someone and, therefore, is constantly aware that she does not reflect the ideal. As Kennedy phrases it, “she is how she looks: fat. That is her identity.”¹¹ The longer this awareness continues, in spite of her progress on her diet, the more irritable she becomes. In part, her crossness stems from an awareness that she is giving in to the pressures of her class, conforming and changing. She has left behind who she feels she really is or might have become, “that somehow she lost more than pounds of fat . . . that her soul . . . was in some rootless flight. She neither knew its destination nor where it had departed from. It was on some passage she could not even define” (240-41). Because she diets to please Carrie and not herself, Louise has starved out any potential of whom she might have become on her own terms. Rather, to please her friend, she buys into the same belief that Carrie is victim to, the same fear that her mother has held over her all of her life: if she is not thin, no one will love her. In making herself acceptable to love, she loses sight of herself.

After graduation when Louise is at home, inspired by her mother’s attention and validated by her relatives’ complements, she tries to find a place for herself. Her mother

takes her shopping and has her picture made, claiming her daughter for the first time, framing the image of the girl she had always wanted, hanging it like a trophy in her house. In turn, Louise begins to show off her new self, expanding her possibilities by swimming in the country club pool for the first time since she was a child: “The new clothes and the photographer made her feel she was going to another country or becoming a citizen of a new one” (242). In this new space Louise, like Molly, temporarily conflates herself and her mother. She marries the new partner in her father’s law firm, not because she loves him but “to give herself something to do” beyond her meaningless job (242). In fact, she sees giving Richard her virginity on Thanksgiving as the point towards which she had started when she and Carrie began her diet so many months before. She has spent a year making herself attractive and gives her body to Richard like a gift, a present she has been working on or a commodity with which to bargain. Having no interests other than keeping herself slim, she begins her new life having taken on her mother’s values. Therefore, she transfers the restrictions of her childhood into the new domestic space she creates for herself and Richard, aware that her trim body has bought her the keys to this kingdom.

Louise’s home with her husband becomes a backdrop for her emotions. In the five years that she lives with Richard before she becomes pregnant with her son, she stays in the shadow of her mother’s ideal, not knowing who she really is and sure that her husband does not. In fact, she feels as if she is living someone else’s life rather than her own. She looks back on her diet as the transformation that brought her to this new self that can gain entry to the places she was formally denied: “she thought of the accumulated warmth and pelf of her marriage, and how by slimming her body she had bought into the

pleasures of the nation” (243). At these moments, she feels connected to her house and her husband, who has provided her with friends and material comforts, vacations in Europe, and a life of relative ease. Yet, the moments of self-awareness are brief as most of the time she feels as if she has “taken a wrong train and arrived at a place where no one knew her, and where she ought not to be” (243). In fact, her diet suggests that she is starving emotionally. Hunger becomes a metaphor for the spiritual connection that she is missing in her life. Though she fixes large, appetizing meals for Richard that he eats without gaining weight, Louise eats very little. She forbids herself the pleasures of good food in the same way that she has denied herself the chance to find happiness on her own terms. When she transforms herself physically, she believes that she is changing in a positive way, providing herself with options. However, her expansion leads her away from self-knowledge: “On most days she went about her routine of leisure with a sense of certainty about herself that came merely from not thinking” (243). With no real connection to her husband or to herself, she goes about her domestic routines without really participating in her life.

When Louise becomes pregnant, more changes than simply her physical shape. She begins to eat again. When she is hungry, at first she denies herself food out of habit, but as time passes, fear begins to be replaced by satisfaction. At first, she returns to her old habits, hiding candy so that Richard will not find it and nag her about her weight as he does one night while she is eating pie. Yet a new defiance becomes evident: She “speared the piece [of pie] and rubbed it in the red juice on the plate before lifting it to her mouth” (244). She is tired of being hungry and denying her appetites. Just as she had dieted years before to please her friend, now she begins to eat to nourish her child. Yet, though she

initially is motivated by her baby, eating becomes a gift that she gives herself as well.

Rather than hiding within her acceptable frame, Louise begins to confront the truth of her marriage through her weight gain.

After the baby is born, Louise discovers what she has assumed all along, that Richard's love for her is superficial. As she begins to nourish her body, she likewise begins to nourish her self-acceptance. Indifferent to his anger over her weight, Louise begins to isolate herself from him and their friends, choosing instead to remain at home with her son. While Richard rides in the boat with people whom she knows see no deeper than her fat, Louise creates a positive bond with her son. In this love for her boy, for the first time since she was friends with Carrie, Louise feels loved for who she is and not for how she looks. In fact, she begins to love her body again: "She enjoyed her body through her son's mouth; while he suckled she stroked his small head and back" (245). Her body that disgusts her husband and frustrates her mother gives her boy sustenance. In this way, Louise begins to see that her body is sacred, capable of nourishing a life other than her own. Just as Louise was empowered by Carrie, she will learn to be strong again for her son, who, like Carrie, loves her unconditionally. In the final scene of the story, Richard yells at his wife for eating chocolate, his ranting waking the baby. Louise leaves the room, shutting out his anger in order to comfort her child: "Beneath Richard's voice she hears the soft crying, feels it in her heart. . . . She brings [her son] to the living room and sits holding him in her lap, pressing him gently against the folds of fat at her waist" (246). Her warm, soft body comforts her son.

She realizes as she has begun realizing since her pregnancy that she and Richard do not have a good marriage. In a visit during college to Carrie's house, she had

witnessed Carrie's unhappiness at her parents' loveless marriage. At that moment, Louise had "vowed that her own marriage would be one of affection and tenderness" (241). Yet she knows that what she and Richard have is empty. As Kennedy has pointed out, "in Dubus's fiction, to love is to know the beloved, not the body so much as the private reality of his or her existence. To seek an appearance instead of a person is to seek to circumvent the pain and complexity of love."¹² Richard and Louise never really know one another beyond their appearances. Just as he married her because she was "his slender girl, the daughter of his partner and friend" (246), she married him because he fit the pattern of her mother's world. Though for more than five years Louise pretends that her home completes both herself and her husband, when he refuses to touch her because of her extra weight, she accepts the truth. Most of her life, while either ignoring the world around her or working to fit in, Louise felt "like a spy" (243), kept out of the mainstream of life because she felt like a misfit, too overweight to fit into her mother's plan for to marry a man to take care of her. Louise realizes that with a child dependent upon her that she has to learn to take care of herself.

Though Richard will leave her, his expansion will free her. Louise imagines Richard gone and her whole life ahead of her: "This room will be hers soon. She considers the possibilities: all these rooms and the lawn where she can do whatever she wishes" (247).¹³ When Richard leaves, she will be free to live without criticism for being the way she believes God made her. In accepting herself, Louise creates a place of autonomy, a healthy space for herself and her son to grow: "She carries the boy to his crib, feels him against her large breasts, feels that his sleeping body touches her soul" (247). In her role as mother, she reconnects with herself through the unconditional love of

her son. The home that she will create will be the same empowering place of security that her girlhood room became for her, a place where she is free to love herself and her son on her own terms.

In “Miranda over the Valley,” Miranda must likewise break free of her parents and her boyfriend, Michaelis. The expansiveness open to Miranda at the end of the story comes at a price, the price of her unborn child. For the past eighteen years, Miranda has lived a content life with her parents and two brothers, learning the importance of love in shaping how she sees herself. Confident and in love with Michaelis, Miranda gives him her virginity the night before she leaves her Los Angeles home for college in Boston. Two months later, she is living in fear when she realizes that she is pregnant. Wanting to extend the positive connection that she has in her own family into a new life with Michaelis, Miranda decides to keep the baby and to accept his proposal of marriage. However, once she returns to California to tell her parents, she realizes that the life she has imagined for herself and her baby will never happen. When Miranda agrees to have an abortion to please Michaelis and her parents, she loses what she had felt with both her parents and her boyfriend and temporarily loses herself. By the end of the story, she is reconciled to being alone, moving into the expansive journey of adulthood and leaving both her parents and Michaelis, her first love, behind.

The memories of growing up in her parents’ stable home give her strength against the fear she feels when she first discovers that she is pregnant. Waiting for time to pass so that her parents will be home to receive her phone call, she thinks of her father and her mother, how both have always been constants in her life. She imagines her mother dressed up for the cocktail hour, her father dressed down from work, more casual in his

cardigan. Their evening ritual is so familiar to her that Miranda knows when she calls where her mother will sit, what drink will be in her father's hand. She sees the rooms of her parents' house, the pool in shade, the lawn, and finally "those glass doors that one morning when she was twelve she opened and, looking down, saw a small rattlesnake coiled sleeping in the shade on the flagstone inches from her bare feet."¹⁴ The memory works metaphorically to suggest that Miranda knows that outside the safety of her parents' house lurks the potential for harm. However, just as she had called for her father, who came running to protect her, she knows that she can call her parents to rid her of the dangers she faces now "in the fearful certainty of love" (6). What she does not expect is that her father will join with her mother to thwart her plans for a life with Michaelis and her baby.

The apartment that Miranda shares with a friend from home while she is at school in Boston works in contrast to the stability that Miranda felt in her parents' home and with Michaelis. Holly, Miranda's roommate, dates a boy who goes to a college several hours away. During the week, Holly cheats on him with Brian, a boy she knows at her school who is simply marking time: "there was no motion about him" (2). Miranda rejects the split life that her friend lives, sleeping with Brian while pretending to be committed to her boyfriend. Holly rationalizes her deception by saying that she wants to have a variety of lovers: "nobody owns me" (6). In contrast, Miranda wants to be connected to Michaelis, to marry him and to have his baby. She rejects the life that Holly lives and embraces the positive connection that she sees in her parents' love for one another. In this Miranda feels strong.

Like the boys in Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," she sees her new life with Michaelis trimmed down to what she can carry on her back. Michaelis is a law student with plans to work with poor immigrants, so Miranda knows that they will not have much money. However, the fulfilling life that she imagines with him, carrying her baby on her back while she marches in protest lines, gives her hope. She knows that she is strong, that the power of her parents' love for her and for one another has provided her with a foundation sturdy enough to withstand whatever dangers await her. Like the young girl in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," Miranda is ready to settle down.

What Miranda did not expect is her parents' resistance nor their influence over Michaelis. When she flies home to plan their future together, she sees that he "has not been living well with his fear" (9). Though he had immediately asked her to marry him when she had told him the news over the phone, she sees a shift in him. As they sit in her parents' breakfast room, the scene around the table lets her know that she is alone in her resolve to keep the baby. Kennedy notes that Miranda "sees herself surrounded by people for whom human relationships are a matter of convenience, or pragmatism."¹⁵ Her father holds a brandy glass, but never drinks from it as if by not partaking he can remove himself from what he is about to ask his daughter to do. On the other hand, her mother drinks and only pretends to listen, "hearing again lines she had played to for a hundred nights, and waiting for her cue" (8). Her mother acts out the part of someone who is still on her side, but Miranda knows that she is not, that her mother's "eyes and smile were telling her that making love with Michaelis was a natural but subsidiary part of growing up" (10). They tell her how hard being married is, that it is work that neither is ready for. They tell her that she has not had enough experience, and her mother brings up her own

past as evidence that Miranda has not lived enough on her own to be ready to settle down. As final proof that she was ready and Miranda is not she offers up the “confession” that she had had lovers before she settled down. Because Miranda has had only Michaelis, her mother believes that marriage will stifle her, that without a degree, a job, at least a handful of lovers, Miranda will not have had enough freedom to be happy.

Yet when Miranda looks at Holly, who without realizing it her mother has set before her as an example to follow, she feels disgust at the frivolous way in which her friend treats love. Knowing that what she had with Michaelis had ““felt like I was going to heaven”” (17), she rejects what she sees as her mother’s unfavorable plan of meaningless affairs and a job with no real connection. Dubus confirms the vision that Miranda has of herself as wife and mother:

Women now are getting a lot more like men. They are dying sooner, too. . . . I think it started when they began commuting and telling lies all day. That so-called practical male world out there is mostly lies.

It bothers me to see women joining that world . . . I think they got sold a bill of goods. . . . Instead of all the women carrying briefcases, the men should have learned to do domestic things. . . . That’s where the truth is. You feed a child, that’s a sacrament. You sell a piece of real estate, I’m not sure what that is. It’s a transaction.¹⁶

Her mother imagines Miranda and Michaelis trapped in a space of inequality where her daughter is ““a dumb little housewife”” while she is left further and further behind: “Out in the world, he’ll be growing, and all you’ll know is diapers and Gerber’s”” (9). Her mother cannot imagine a productive future for Miranda if she marries at such a young

age. Unable to see beyond her own experience and limited by stereotypes, she predicts unhappiness for her daughter.

Her father asks her, ““why suffer?”” (9). Yet, the grief that her father tries to protect her from comes on her full force when she realizes that she will give up her baby. Watching Michaelis, she understands that she has lost: “He was listening to them, and in his eyes she saw relieved and grateful capitulation” (11). Sitting in the kitchen with his body turned towards her mother, Miranda realizes that Michaelis has gone over to her mother’s side. She sees it in the way he “occupied space, quiet, attentive, nodding” (8). While he can agree to give up the baby and continue to love her as he has before, she cannot, and when he sides with her mother, he loses her forever.

When Miranda goes home with a friend rather than to her own home for Thanksgiving, she is already on her way to separating herself from her parents and Michaelis. Looking at her friend’s house from the lawn, she is confused for awhile, not able to remember who lives inside. She recognizes in this disconnection that she cannot “locate herself” (14), that by giving up her baby, she lost a part of herself that she cannot ever recover, a loss so great that she knows neither herself nor her connection to others. She uses a lover, feeling “wicked”: “Her body was quick and wanton; but her heart was a stone; her heart was a clock; her heart was a watching eye” (15). Her heart knows that empty sex leaves her feeling even more divided from herself: “I am not for this world, she thought. Or it isn’t for me. It’s not because I’m eighteen either. Michaelis is twenty-two; he will get brown in the sun talking to Chicanos, he will smell of beer and onion, but his spirit won’t rise; Michaelis is of the world, he will be a lawyer” (18). She remembers him

in the session with her parents, his willingness to see their side, his willingness to compromise.

By the end of the story, Miranda has moved away from her life with her parents and the future she had imagined with Michaelis. She expands into her own private landscape, away from the narrow way in which they see the world, confined by their determination that their daughter have the same experiences that they have had, the same experiences that they believe will bring her happiness. Her parents lose her because they lack the imagination to see her making her marriage work. They measure the success of their relationship in part by the ease in which they move through their days due to their money. They believe in the power of commodities in smoothing over the hassles of married life. In fact, to make the abortion easier for Miranda and Michaelis, the Jones offer the couple a trip to Acapulco: “They were giving her a honeymoon, her honeymoon lover in the Acapulco hotel after he had been sucked from her womb. She would have cried, but she felt dry inside, she was tired, and she knew the night was ended” (11). Though her parents think that they can buy her submission by giving her a trip, Miranda rejects their commodified view of love, still believing in the power that she knows is possible in a marriage where the most important fact is not groceries, “she saw brown bags, cans. That was not it” (11), but love.

Though Miranda is wounded for a while, she will recover. She will move on from Michaelis and away from the limited way in which her parents see her. She knows that she is capable of happiness: ““I want to do other things. I don’t know what they’ll be yet”” (19). Moving into a world of uncertainties, she embraces her new space without the compromises her parents expect her to make. Though she will never completely recover

from the loss of her baby, she finds a new strength in her independence, leaving her past behind her and moving into a “brave new world.”

The ability to move into the world by overcoming momentary setbacks allows Miranda as well as Edith, Molly and Louise to move beyond their conflicts. Though temporarily held back by crises, these women are able to draw on their varying strengths, which are tied into their vision of healthy domesticity. They reject their negative ties, redefining their respective spaces or leaving them behind all together. Imaginative and strong, these women find happiness due to their positive expansion. As each woman learns to define love on her own terms, she embraces new possibilities.

Notes

1. Andre Dubus, "Adultery," Selected Stories of Andre Dubus (Boston: Godine, 1988), 407. All references are to this edition.
2. Susan Saegert and Gary Winkel, "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles," in New Space for Women, ed. Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Morley (Boulder: Westview, 1980), 46-47.
3. Olivia Carr Edenfield, personal interview with Andre Dubus, February 23-24, 1993), Haverhill, MA.
4. Andre Dubus, "Molly," The Last Worthless Evening (Boston: Godine, 1986), 116. All references are to this edition.
5. Lucy Ferriss, "Andre Dubus: 'Never Truly Members,'" in Southern Writers at Century's End, ed. Jeffrey J. Folks and James A. Perkins (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 234.
6. Ferriss, 234. She sees this creation of a new self as a temporary thing in that Molly like her mother will never reach "transcendence" (233). Instead, she assumes that Molly confuses "dating status" with "true possession by a lover" and that this closes "off the possibility of sacramental love" and replaces "it with a series of love-encounters" (235). Yet Molly is only fifteen. Certainly, she should not be expected to have found "sacramental love" with a high school senior. In fact, Molly recognizes that what she feels for Bruce might not even be called love. That she is not tied into him as her one chance at happiness is testament to her good sense rather than a judgment against her ability to love someone completely. In fact, James Yaffee argues that the story "opens up the possibility for motherhood and family happiness in a young girl" and that it is finally

a “story of closure.” “The Last Worthless Evening” Denver Post Books 7 (December 1986): 150.

7. Thomas Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 19-20.

8. Andre Dubus, “Louise,” Selected Stories, 233. All references are to this edition.

9. Kennedy, 14.

10. Elizabeth G. Peck, “More Than Ideal: Size and Weight Obsession in Literary Works by Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, and Andre Dubus.” The Platte Valley Review 18 (Winter 1990): 71.

11. Kennedy, 14.

12. Kennedy, 19.

13. Peck sees the conclusion of the story as having “open-ended ‘possibilities,’” that whether or not Richard and Louise will remain together is ambiguous (75). In fact, Dubus never meant for the ending to be ambiguous. He admitted that “I always thought of [Louise] as the one who would end up owning the house, the car, the lake, having the boy, and eating Baby Ruths.” Edenfield, personal interview.

14. Andre Dubus, “Miranda over the Valley,” Selected Stories, 7. All references are to this edition.

15. Kennedy, 21.

16. Bonnie Lyons and Bill Oliver, Passion and Craft: Conversations with Notable Writers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 153-54.

Chapter 5

Containment and Expansion:

Domestic Space and the Men of Andre Dubus

In Andre Dubus' short fiction, men respond to their domestic space in a variety of ways. The postmodern American nuclear family suffers from problems brought about by a range of factors from violence to apathy. These stories pose the same question that Kerstin W. Shands raises, "whether there is some point at which hypertransgressive metaphors of unlimited movement actually become more limiting than liberating."¹ The men in Dubus' fiction who expand into betrayal or obsession with work ultimately come to see that their widen sphere has in fact reduced their ability to find peace with themselves or with the people whom they claim to love. Within the confines of their domesticity, male characters struggle to find their place. As roles shift, families break apart or come together, depending on each character's ability to reconcile himself to the conflict in his life. While some are able to create positive environments for both themselves and their children, others are held back by their inability to come to terms with crisis. Matt Fowler, from the short story "Killings," has his life torn apart when his youngest son is murdered. Unable to live with the idea of his son's killer getting off with a light punishment, Matt commits his own violent act, shooting Richard Strout to rid his wife, Ruth, of the pain of confrontation as well as to bring peace to his own life.

However, though he initially believes that his revenge will bring closure to his grief, Matt ends up more displaced, divided even from his wife.

Luke Ripley of “A Father’s Story” also must confront his conscience and break the law in order to restore his fractured family. However, unlike Matt, who acts against his true character, Luke reconciles his dishonesty not only with his own conscience but also with God. The best example of expansion resulting in a negative sense of containment is in the character Hank Allison. Appearing in three stories from separate collections, Hank’s growing awareness of spiritual isolation brought on by his selfish attention to work at the expense of his family dominates the three stories when read as a short-story cycle in the collection We Don’t Live Here Anymore. In the first, Jack Linhart risks his family’s security by temporarily taking on the self-fulfilling values of his friend Hank, who, in the third story is broken by the cumulation of his reckless treatment of people who have made up the shifting boundaries of his domestic space. From his isolated sense of betrayal, Hank finally recognizes that his life is an empty container and that without committed love, he will never feel peace. Finally, though Peter Jackman in “The Winter Father” struggles vainly for close to a year to make a new home for his children, he eventually is able to connect with them as they learn to be comfortable with one another again.² Though the children have been wounded by their parents’ separation, they will recover and move on in part due to their father’s determination to make a secure place that includes them in his life. In the uncertainties and violence that make up the landscape of postmodern America, Dubus’s male characters struggle with varying degrees of success to create or recreate homes for their families and for themselves.

In his efforts to recover, Matt Fowler of “Killings” destroys any hope of ever being at home in the world again. Like Kirkland and others before her who negotiated dangers present in the untamed landscape, fear has not dissipated but spanned the generations. Though earlier writers wrote with a hope for a more peaceable, civilized time, postmodern America has not provided that new Eden. Home is often the only respite from worry, a place to let go for a while. However, Matt “lost Frank in a way no father expected to lose his son, and he felt that all the fears he had borne while they were growing up, and all the grief he had been afraid of, had backed up like a huge wave and struck him on the beach and swept him out to sea.”³ Cut off from his former life, Matt decides to seek revenge against his son’s killer. In doing so, he embarks on a journey that takes him even further from himself.

Matt had always been a protective father who worried about his children’s safety every day. When they were small, he would watch fearfully as they would play in the snow, climb trees, swim in the ocean. Always, Matt was aware of the possibilities of accidents, of death taking his family from him. He “was relieved when he came home in the evenings and [his children] were there” (54). However, not wanting to transfer his fear, Matt would watch without warning, careful not to make them afraid of being alive. His home becomes a comforting retreat from the potential for violence and accidents.

Prior to his son’s death, the doors to Matt’s house is open to his children, welcoming to their spouses as well as to Frank’s new girlfriend, Mary Ann. Though both Ruth and Matt are apprehensive about Frank dating her, they trust their son too much to interfere. They had both heard the rumors that Richard and Mary Ann had run around on each other and that their marriage had been violent and ugly in spite of the fact that they

had two boys dependent upon them. Perhaps the same protective nature that so defines Matt also influenced Frank to approach Mary Ann, seeing her alone with her children at the beach where he was a lifeguard. Stepping into his father's role, Frank reached out to her and to her boys, becoming the constant in their lives that their own father no longer is. When Frank brings Mary Ann to his house to meet his parents, Matt is kind to her, noticing in her eyes a "pain that his children, and he and Ruth, had been spared. In the moments of his recognizing that pain, he wanted to tenderly touch her hair, wanted with some gesture to give her solace and hope. And he would glance at Frank, and hope they would love each other, hope Frank would soothe that pain in her heart, take it from her eyes" (53). Because he knows that Mary Ann has suffered, because he knows from his own boys what a bully Richard is, he wants his own kind son to bring her relief from her sorrow. This hope sets up a pattern of behavior when Ruth later grieves; Matt sees in his role the responsibility of soothing his wife and bringing peace to her life again.

After Frank's death, Ruth retreats to her home, staying shut up with her pain as much as possible. Ironically, however, because of the demands of her house and her role as homemaker, Ruth must leave the confines of her domestic space for the confusion and fear she feels whenever she must journey into the uncertainties of her landscape. Matt tells his friend Willis that Ruth keeps running into Richard Strout, who is out on bail awaiting trial and sentencing: "'It's killing her'" (48). Matt knows that she would shoot Richard herself if she thought she were capable, and this belief prompts him to start carrying a gun, ready in case "'there's ever some kind of a situation. . . where he did something to me. Where I could get away with it'" (49). The longer they talk, the more

Matt realizes that Richard has already done something to him and that if he plans the murder carefully enough, he can get away with it.

However, the loving and protective nature that motivates Matt to kill turns on him and makes him unable to resign himself to murder. When he is alone with Richard in the confines of his home, seeing the framed photographs, the neatly made bed, the tidy living room, he becomes aware of the enormity of his actions: “He was conscious of the circles of love he was touching with the hand that held the revolver” (59). He knows that Richard is a son and a father, a friend and a lover, roles that connect him to other human beings who love him. Richard is temporarily brought into focus for Matt, who has been blinded by despair to the enormity of what he is doing. He cannot look his son’s murderer in the face. Instead, he keeps focused on the gun, telling Richard lies to keep him packing so that he can get him back in the car and away from the space that reminds him of those who will suffer in their turn the same grief that he now feels.⁴

To give himself resolve to continue his plan, he concentrates on the peaceful scene that Richard had shattered on the night he killed Frank. Driving in the car with Richard, Matt thinks of his son, imagines him sitting on the couch with the two boys, watching a baseball game, imagining him “feeling young and strong, still warmed from the sun at the beach, and feeling loved, hearing Mary Ann moving about in the kitchen” (57). Just as Matt’s own house was a secure place for himself, Ruth, and his children, he extends his own experience of familial happiness into the final moment of his son’s life. The nurturing scene is embroidered by his imagining Mary Ann coming in from the kitchen with a plate of sandwiches, “smiling at [Frank], saying something the way that women do when they offer food as a gift” (57). He imagines his son happy, connected to

Mary Ann and her boys through his inherited desire to love and protect, accepting the sandwiches as a sacrament of love.

When Strout tries to break away, Matt shoots him in the back and then again in the head: “The gun kicked in Matt’s hand, and the explosion of the shot surrounded him, isolated him in a nimbus of sound that cut him off from all his time, all his history” (62). In committing murder, Matt is reduced to the same immoral killer that Richard is. Dubus concurred: “He doesn’t gain his life; he does something terrible. . . . At the resounding of the pistol shot, I think at that moment he knew that he had forever violated nature and he would never be in harmony with it. He has broken his own harmony with nature; he is isolated forever.”⁵ Though Matt had tried to believe that by killing Richard he was making some sort of sense out of the chaos, he ends up bringing even more grief on himself and his wife and well as his children, who must live believing that their brother’s killer got away. As Dubus has pointed out,

now the lies are compounded, and it’s just worse and worse. . . .

To commit a cold-blooded murder, you’d have to believe that you could get away with it. You have to believe there is no spiritual life. No God. No victim to live with. And you have to have something deeply cold in you. Matt doesn’t have that. Revenge and hatred and protection of children all feel very normal until you actually pull the trigger and kill somebody. It’s not something that Matt Fowler can do with peace.”⁶

In fact, as Thomas E. Kennedy has concluded, Matt’s strong morality will make him suffer all the more, that “there is not even a moment’s satisfaction of vengeance for

Fowler. . . . A profound lifelong isolation awaits him as a result of his act of premeditated murder.”⁷

Matt’s actions will bring further pain to his family, and the containment that seeks to destroy him and his wife will never be modified due to his lasting guilt. When Ruth reaches for Matt in the final scene, offering herself to him, wanting to make love to take on some of his pain, Matt cannot. Furthermore, he must lie to Ruth about the pain he feels. Because of his protective nature, Matt cannot bring himself to cause his wife any more sorrow. Like Krebs in Ernest Hemingway’s “A Soldier’s Home,” Matt will be isolated from everyone due to his inability to translate his grief into healing words. Matt “shudders with a sob he kept silent in his heart,” unwilling or unable to connect (64).

On the other hand, though Luke Ripley of “A Father’s Story” also breaks the law in order to protect a member of his family, unlike Matt Fowler, he is resigned to his actions. In fact, at the end of the story, Luke not only reconciles himself to his crime, but expects God to understand and accept without judgment as well. From his new point of view after covering up his daughter’s accident, he admits that he does “not feel the peace I once did; not with God, nor the earth, or anyone on it,” yet goes on to say that he “has begun to prefer this state, to remember with fondness the other one as a period of peace I neither earned nor deserved.”⁸ Prior to the night of Jennifer’s accident, he knew that his life might appear to be only what people saw from the outside: a divorced father of grown children who makes a fairly good living providing riding lessons and boarding horses. Yet he knows that his real life goes on underneath the surface of what people can witness, that the deep meaning of his days comes in his connection to God. Through the action of the story, Luke expands his previously tranquil though solitary domestic space by

stepping into his role as Jennifer's protector, redefining himself and his new role in his explanation to God.

Luke's family left him years ago, and the peace he was living in prior to Jennifer's accident had been difficult to achieve. He had had to learn to live in his home again, confronting mornings following his wife and children's departure. He had begun to carve out moments of connection, filling in the silence with music from the radio as he talked to God and readied himself at the start of each day. Later, as he grew used to the silence, he was able to do without the background noise as he woke to spend time in meditation, an hour in the "growing light before sunrise" watching the world outside his window open to the day. In this time, he dedicates himself to God: "I offer Him my day, every act of my body and spirit, my thoughts and moods, as a prayer of thanksgiving. . . . This morning offertory is a habit from boyhood in a Catholic school; or then it was a habit, but as I kept it and grew older it became a ritual" (458). This routine helped Luke work through his first months alone, and in the present action of the story, years after all of his children but Jennifer, now twenty, are already on their own, Luke continues to rise each morning "feeling the day, in silence" (459). As he readies himself to go out into the world to extend the peace he feels into the surrounding landscape, Luke fortifies himself with rituals of faith and with the blessings that he feels in each day.

Much of the story is given to Luke's reflections on his life prior to and immediately following his actions on the night Jennifer wakes him from sleep to tell him that she has hit someone with her car. Luke gives a long account of his days after his wife's departure with their four children to show the struggle of starting over. In the early months after his family left, he watched his house begin to change, losing its order under

his poor housekeeping. For three months he ate frozen meals that his wife left for him. Remembering the loneliness, he recollects that he “did not go into the children’s rooms except on bad nights when I went from room to room and looked and touched and smelled” (462). For two years, Luke cannot stand the silence of the house, the reminders of the children and his wife that permeate the rooms. His home becomes an entrapment from which he gradually frees himself as he learns to redefine his life, to live at peace with solitude, content finally with the discovery that it “is not hard to live through a day, if you can live through a moment” (463). Existentially aware of the importance of each moment, he gives himself over to routines, believing in the healing power of action that has become ritual.

Daily, Luke follows a pattern that extends him into his landscape and makes him feels connected to the life he has made for himself. On his morning horseback rides to mass, Luke watches the faces of people commuting to work, “their drivers looking serious” (460), and by comparison he feels grateful that he is “doing what [he chooses] to do” (461). When he receives the Eucharist each morning, he feels “excitement” and “spreading out from it . . . the peace of certainty” (461). His days have become a ritual that allows Luke to transcend the ordinary habits of praying and receiving and confessing to establish connection with God: “Ritual allows those who cannot will themselves out of the secular to perform the spiritual, as dancing allows the tongue-tied man a ceremony of love” (461). Faith’s ability to convert action into love transfers to Luke’s cover-up of Jennifer’s crime. When he breaks secular law, lying to the police as well as to Father Paul, Luke is responding to a higher calling that redefines him, “for when she knocked on my door, then called me, she woke what had flowed dormant in my blood since her birth,

so that what rose from the bed was not a stable owner or a Catholic or any other Luke Ripley I had lived with for a long time, but the father of a girl” (475). From that defining moment, Luke acts out of his new role as Jennifer’s protector.

Though he has always been a part of his daughter’s life, watching her and her friends change during the summer months and vacations that she would spend with him, he had up until that evening felt separated by their genders. Now, it is the differences of her womanhood that Luke feels justifies his action. For Kennedy, this is “a story about the demands of moral action and moral principle weighed against the even greater demands of love, parental love, specifically the love of a father for a daughter.”⁹ In this new “demand,” Luke has to redefine his place in the world, which up until Jennifer’s accident had been an extension of the spiritual connection that Luke has at church, set into motion each day in his morning meditations and in his surrounding landscape. As Doreen Massey has pointed out, space “is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale.”¹⁰ This highly complex connection that Luke feels in his response to Jennifer’s need is met in the same way that he worked out his sense of space following his wife and children leaving. Through his peaceful surrounding landscape and his faith that God understands him and believes in him, Luke has the power to act for his daughter, actions which he later justifies to God.

Though he will never feel the peace that he had felt prior to the cover-up, he prefers that which he has created in his role as his daughter’s protector for it permanently connects him to her through action. He feels neither “loneliness nor shame, but as though [God] were watching me . . . as I have watched my sons at times in their young lives

when I was able to judge but without anger, and so kept silent while they, in the agony of their youth, decided how they must act; or found reasons after their actions, for what they had done” (475). Just as Luke saw his boys struggle to find their way in the world, held accountable for and defined by their actions, he knows that God understands him. When Jennifer realizes what her father has risked in covering up the accident, the two come together in a new connection. She looks at her father “full in the face, as I had never seen her look, as perhaps she never had, being for so long a daughter on visits (or so it seemed to me and still does: that until then our eyes had never seriously met), she crossed to me from the sink and kissed my lips, then held me so tightly I lost balance, and would have stumbled forward had she not held me so hard” (472). This love that Luke feels from and for Jennifer will be enough to sustain him just as metaphorically it is Luke’s love behind his actions that transubstantiates what would otherwise be a crime into an act of love.

In the final scene in the story, Luke explains to God why he risks the tranquility that he had achieved. Sitting at his window, watching the day come into focus, Luke continues his ritual of giving thanks, talking to God: “Of course, He has never spoken to me, but that is not something that I require. Nor does He need to. I know Him, as I know the part of myself that knows Him, that felt Him watching from the wind and the night as I kneeled over the dying boy” (475). He knows that God has seen his actions but that He has also seen his heart, the love that turned his actions into a sacrificial ritual. In this, he is reminded of another sacrifice. He knows that God “would not lift the cup” of suffering from his own son, just as he, like God, “could bear the pain of watching and knowing my sons’ pain, could bear it with pride as they took the whip and nails” (476). Yet the final argument that he makes to God crystalizes his new role: “But You never had a daughter

and, if You had, you could not have borne her passion” (476). Rather than have Jennifer suffer the repercussions of her action, Luke risks his home to give her a safe retreat.

Though this sacrificial routine of his days, Luke receives a stronger connection with his daughter that makes up for his lack of peace. As Kennedy has pointed out, in Dubus’ fiction,

the fulfillment of life’s highest calling comes with parenthood, with a responsibility for others which requires man to rise, like Job, to confrontation with God: the highest state of dignity available to man, the one closest perhaps to God. The children in Dubus’s fiction look up through cloudy skies at God; the fathers converse with Him. The child chooses survival over love; the father chooses love over principle. The child’s concern is with his own safety and survival, the parent’s with the safety and survival of others, be it his or her own offspring. . . . This is the cycle of development that Dubus’s fiction portrays—a spiritual progress that rises through childish fear, through the hunger of isolation and isolation of hunger, the lures of sterile professionalism, the selfishness of freedom, moving in the direction of love and responsibility where the things and the words of the child are put away and replaced by those of a man.¹¹

By risking everything for his daughter, Luke shows through his action the faith of unconditional love as sacred as a holy ritual.

Through the first two stories of a three-part short-story cycle, Hank Allison appears to be a man who cannot be happy in a monogamous relationship. When Edith

asks Hank to leave at the end of “Adultery,” he spends the next four years in affairs primarily with students, young girls who want no more from the relationship than he does. However, when he learns in “Finding a Girl in America” that his former lover had aborted his child a year prior to the action of the third story, Hank is affected enough by the loss of potential life that he finally takes stock. He gradually begins to see that though he made a mistake of his marriage to Edith, he can start again with Lori, a girl whom he has come to love and with whom he feels connected.

However, before Hank reaches this new level of commitment, he spends years defined by a selfish attention to work and a lack of faith in the power of positive connection. His friend and colleague, Jack, tells Hank’s story as well as his own in “We Don’t Live Here Anymore.” Jack makes the point early in the narrative that he is “surrounded by painful marriages that no one understands” except for his friend Hank.¹² Though he does not have the conviction to sustain such selfishness, for a while, Jack takes on Hank’s philosophy in regards to home that a man should never be defined by his relationship to his wife: ““You live with a wife, around a wife, not through her. She doesn’t run with you and come drink beer with you, for Christ sake. Love, shit. Love the kids. Love the horny wives and the girls in short skirts. Love everyone, my son, and keep peace with your wife”” (27). From close friends such as Jack to even casual acquaintances, he challenges what he sees as limited self awareness in the men around him. He overhears a husband in a bar holding himself to one beer so that he can get home and start dinner for his wife: ““She works all day too, and I get home a little earlier, so I put the dinner on”” (25). Hank is so disgusted by the man’s domesticity and the attention that he gives his spouse that he purposely delays him. Jack watches, believing that Hank

is the only one to understand the complications of love. Bored with his marriage, Jack tries to imitate Hank's skill in taking advantage of the ones he claims to love without the headaches of remorse.

Jack has fallen out of desire for his wife, whose faults he observes and catalogues and thumbs through for the conviction to leave. Eleven years ago, Terry was the "prettiest girl [he] had ever seen" (2), yet now he focuses on the extra weight she carries and the fact that she does not keep the house clean, that most of her day is spent saying no to the limited, boring job of housekeeping. He justifies his growing distaste for her by pointing out her failures, focusing on what she does not do rather than all that she has done and continues to do for him and their children: "It was living that defeated Terry: the rooms where we slept and ate and the living room and dishes and our clothes" (47). He sees his wife only in terms of her place in their house. He even classifies his wife's weight gain as a betrayal, a broken promise that she would not get fat, seeing each of the eleven extra pounds as testament to her dishonesty. Making love to Edith or simply spending time with her, he justifies his deception by imagining his wife moving about their house in her daily domestic defeat: "Trying to plan her work for the day overwhelms her; it is too much" (9). He concludes that his house is a metaphor for his marriage, "dirty," and that just as his children return home every day "hungry," he also is craving more than his marriage can give him (9). Nevertheless, that he feels guilt at what he is doing to his family is clear in the way that he tries to make up to them by bringing home their favorite foods, luxuries like lobster and fixings for banana splits that he cannot afford on his teaching salary.

Jack has temporarily lost his faith in marriage and believes that his home is stifling him:

For some years now I have been spiritually allergic to the words husband and wife. . . . When someone says wife I see the confident, possessive, and amused face of a woman in her kitchen; among bright curtains and walls and the smell of hot grease she offers her husband a kiss as he returns from the day sober, paunchy, on his way to some nebulous goal that began as love, changed through marriage to affluence, now changing to respectable survival. She is wearing a new dress. From her scheming heart his balls hang like a trophy taken in battle from a young hero long dead (42).

He sees himself trapped, held captive by a woman who has used him so that she might fulfill her expected role of wife and mother. Yet he ignores the promise they had made prior to marriage that Terry would be able to keep her career. Now, her only job is the housework that she loathes. By not doing the work, she is in essence refusing to be defined by such a limiting role, prompted by her husband's unwillingness to admit his own dishonesty in not communicating to her that he understands the frustrations of her confinement. She wants a meaningful connection, the same outlet that Jack and Hank cannot live without. Nevertheless, she is restricted to her home and feels trapped by her husband's boredom.

Jack eventually rejects Hank's expansive view of marriage, choosing instead to stay with his wife though he is convinced he will live the rest of his life without the passion he craves. His decision comes when he takes his children sledding in the park. His daughter has overheard their fight the previous evening and questions her father.

Remembering Terry's grief the night before, Jack is able to break from the habit that he has taken on from Hank of considering only his own point of view, his own frustrations. Terry had told him, "all you ever see is the house, you don't see me. . . . I'm tired of being judged. . . . I don't keep a Goddamn Howard Johnson's for you, because I read a lot and, you know, think a lot, and I read somewhere that booze and suicide claim many of us, us housewives; did you know that? No other group in the country goes so often to the bottle and the sleeping pill" (35, 52, 58). After his wife's directness, he is finally honest with himself and his children. When he looks down into their faces, he tells the truth, unable to lie to his son and daughter though he has been pretending and lying to himself in an effort to justify his affair: "I stood alive again and breathed the rain-scented air and I knew that I would grow old with Terry" (68). His words bring a new chance for his family just as the rain brings healing nourishment to the landscape. He consoles his children, "Your mother and I love each other. She's a good and wonderful woman, and don't worry about anything you heard last night, people are all sorts of things, and one mistake is only a small part of a person" (68). He has begun to see that Terry should not be confined to one role and that like him, she is multifaceted, not simply a reflection of her domesticity. Later, when she and the children return home, he tells Terry that he will stay.

The Linharts' ability to reconcile their problems and reunite is seen in the family outings which occur in the final scenes of the first and third stories of the cycle. In "We Don't Live Here Anymore," though the children beg their mother to join them and their father on their sledding afternoon, Terry pulls back, staying home alone. However, in the final scene of "Finding a Girl in America," they are encompassed on a blanket spread for

their family at the beach. Their place there is evidence of the strength of Jack's commitment to stay with his wife and to work to regain an genuine commitment to her. As Kennedy has pointed out using Dubus' own words, "“there is always some pain, there is always misunderstanding, but those who are willing to experience the pain of love will experience joy and that is always better than emptiness.”¹³

This progression and understanding comes much more slowly to Hank, who undergoes a series of meaningless affairs until he is made to evaluate himself and his past actions by the guilt that he feels in his former girlfriend's abortion. Though Monica gets rid of the baby without Hank ever knowing that she is pregnant, he finally realizes that he is to blame for his baby's death due to the reckless way in which he has been living his life. He and Edith have been divorced for four year when "Finding a Girl in America" begins. Hank has kept a close bond with his daughter, Sharon. He prides himself on being a good father who is careful with his daughter's feelings, respectful and loving, wanting only the best for her. Yet her maturing body frightens him as he recognizes that soon his girlfriends will be younger than Sharon. More importantly, he realizes with conviction that he does not want his daughter to turn out "like his girl friends. Yet, by having four whom she's known in five years, and two whom she hasn't, that is exactly the way he is showing her how to live."¹⁴ He sees that the expansive life that he has always justified needs borders so that his child might better find her own way.

Hank decides to give his daughter a healthier example than the one he has previously set. On the first Saturday that he is with Sharon after learning of his former girlfriend's abortion, Hank feels an emptiness that overwhelms him.¹⁵ He has brought Lori with him for the day, and watching Sharon and Lori together, "he feels, in the empty

chair beside him, the daughter salined or vacuumed from Monica a year ago” (160).

Through the absence and the pain, Hank feels something else, something new, a responsibility for other people that is separate from his own commitment to his vocation work. As Kennedy has pointed out,

Hank now sees his own daughter growing up. He sees the promiscuity of the young as a drain on their possibilities, as trapping them into temporary episodes of loveless monogamy which limit their experiences of friendship with others in a way far worse than his generation had been trapped by the unwanted or perhaps merely unplanned pregnancies. He sees that Jack and Terry’s marriage has outlasted Jack’s restless desires and begun to thrive again, has grown to a family, and that Jack now cherishes Terry as a friend.¹⁶

Hank’s sadness is tinged with a new weight, guilt, and he turns first to Edith asking her, ““Forgive me”” for ““everything”” (166). By accepting responsibility for the years of pain that he brought to his wife due to his selfishness, Hank takes the first step in reconciling himself to the loss that he feels in the death of his would-be baby.

In Edith’s forgiveness is Hank’s redemption as he finds the courage to bring a woman into that part of his life he had always kept private or shared only with his closest male friends. He plans an afternoon for Lori, and though the two usually go Dutch, this time Hank provides the meal, bringing along a picnic. His seeing to her nourishment is in direct contrast to his earlier ridiculing and sabotaging of a man’s plans to get home from his drink in time to cook supper for his working wife. In taking on the role of providing

Lori with food, Hank metaphorically shows his new awareness of the importance of a shared sense of commitment and that he is just as responsible as a woman is for providing nourishment in a relationship. In his grief over his dead child, Hank confesses to Lori:

“I can’t do that again. Ever. With anyone. Unless both of us are ready for whatever happens. No more playing with semen and womb if getting pregnant means solitude and death instead of living. And that’s all I mean: living. Nobody’s got to do a merry dance. . . . So I can’t make love with you. I’m going to court you.

And if someday you say you’ll marry me, then it’ll be all right” (182).

He sees his recklessness as the primary reason that Monica aborted his child, and this admission breaks him so that he is no longer able to forget through work or exercise. He must confront this new pain, and the honesty makes him a more mature, committed man, less selfish and able to love completely.

In the final conversation, the trail Hank and Lori hike becomes a metaphor for his life. Running has been a way for him to release any problem he had, a way to let go rather than accept responsibility for his actions. He has never included a woman in this peaceful expansiveness. Now that he has suffered, however, he wants to feel connected and bound by a permanent commitment of monogamous marriage and to accept his responsibilities within that union. Immediately after accepting his marriage proposal, Lori remarks that they had stopped at the half-way mark on the trail. Earlier on, Hank had realized that he had come to the half-way point of his life, that middle-aged, he was half way to death. Now, at the mid-point of his life, he makes a permanent commitment to a woman he knows he can love completely, having come to understand that love is more fulfilling

than his vocation. The way home is down hill: “‘It’ll be quicker, going back’” (183). In this connection, his life will go more easily, hurrying past in the peace of belonging.

Just as Hank has had to struggle to find a place that nurtures and allows for healing expansion, so too is Peter Jackman of Dubus’ “The Winter Father” working to create a positive place for his children and himself in the aftermath of divorce. Though they had both left their marriage vows years before, Jack and his wife have been married for twelve years when they decide to separate. Having hurt one another through lies and disappointments, they still come together as partners when they consider their children’s welfare. Determined to make the best life possible for their son and daughter, Jack and Norma agree on visitation with the children’s best interest in mind. Though Kathi and David live with their mother, Jack gets both children on the weekends and every Wednesday night for dinner, and through the action of the story, which takes place during the winter and early months of summer, he and his children learn how to live together again in the new domestic space of divorce.

When Jack brings David, eight, and Kathi, six, home to his apartment for the first time, he understands the difficulty of maintaining intimacy with his children, a connection that he had taken for granted in the past. On his first weekend, he awakens on the Saturday morning that he is to collect his children hoping for a fever or any indication of illness that will get him out of his plans to bring them to his new living space. He is afraid of the hollowness that he feels when he is in his new apartment, a containment made up of “empty rooms” that metaphorically suggest the emptiness of separation from his family.¹⁷ Going into his apartment on the previous evening, he had felt “as though, with stooped shoulders, he were limping. . . . He wondered if he looked like a man who

had survived an accident which had killed others” (22). Spiritually and emotionally wounded, Peter is afraid that his vulnerability will spread to his children, making them even sadder and more confused than they already are about the break up of their family. Going to pick them up from their home, he feels physically connected to his old space: “Already the snow-plowed streets and country roads leading to their house felt like parts of his body: intestines, lung, heart-fiber lying from his door to theirs” (22). With the old attachment too strong to be completely severed, Peter feels “no release” and in fact does not want it (22). His greatest fear is that his former bond with his children will be severed by his displacement, and so he desperately wants to create a domestic space that works as a positive place of containment for himself and his children.

To make the children feel comfortable and to create a sense of intimacy, Peter and the children fix a meal. As they cut and wash and mix, their actions make a good memory at the same time that it distracts them from the difference of being with their father in his new home. As Peter goes through the motions, he is aware of “a presence to his rear, watching, listening. It was the wall, it was fatherhood, it was himself” (23). Peter wants so badly for his children to feel at home that he is unsure of his every move. His tentativeness is understandable as only his children’s happiness can absolve him of the guilt that he feels in leaving his family. As long as the three are busy with their kitchen tasks, they work in harmony. It is only when they stop and sit down to their prepared meal that they become aware of “the white silence coming at them. . . . the kitchen was multiplied by silence, the apartment’s wall grew longer, the floors wider, the ceilings higher” (24). Their new dwelling seems to grow, suggesting an expansion brought about by divorce. As Massey has pointed out, in postmodern America, “the disorientation of

present times is giving rise to a new . . . search for stability through a sense of place.”¹⁸

Though Peter can accept his own sense of fragmentation brought about by the divorce, what he struggles to overcome is his children’s feeling of displacement.

The story begins in winter, at the start of the new year. Metaphorically, this suggests the Jackmans’ new start as each family member begins not only a new year but a new way of living their lives, separated by a forty-five minute drive but still very much connected in their love for one another. Wanting the best for Kathi and David, even Peter and Norma have come to a new understanding. The winter months also metaphorically suggest the cold outside the containment of house and car, the bleak landscape a reflection of a possible fallowness in the relationship between father and child. This is what Peter struggles against, the encroaching cold and barren world outside. Fearing the silences he does not know how to fill, he begins to keep the children away from his new place, avoiding the apartment as the three learn to be a family separate from the familiar rituals of their former life. He understands the shift, the uncomfortable silences that make him feel accused, guilty:

When he lived with them their talk had usually dealt with the immediate. . . . Most of the time their talk was deep only because it was affectionate and tribal, sounds made between creatures sharing the same blood. Now their talk was the same, but it did not feel the same. They talked in his car and in places he took them, and the car and each place would not let them forget they were there because of divorce (30).

What he desires is a place where he and the children can let go for a while. He wants the comfort and ease of their former home. He wants to relax “together as a family” (30) instead of being constantly on the move due to his unwillingness to confront his children in the uncomfortable and awkward silence of his new space.

Temporary relief comes when he meets a woman who helps him plan activities that he and sometimes Mary Ann as well can do with the children. Distracted by jazz and cocktails in a night club designed for children, he is able to escape if only temporarily the fear that he and his children will never feel at home together again. They would forever be “three people cursed in an old myth” forever “thirty-three and eight and six, in this car on slick or salted roads, going from one place to another” (34). Because the apartment reminds both Peter and his children of the fact that their father no longer lives with them, the three are more at home together in the familiar containment of their automobile. Nevertheless, without the stationary comforts of home, without healing and rest that such a place can provide, Peter feels defeated. However, for a while at least, with Mary Ann’s guidance he is able to “put together a family for a day” (36). In spite of the temporary relief, Peter knows that he and his children must find a way to make a stationary home together, a place of refuge against this “foreign land” of divorce (37).

The shift in the story comes with the approach of summer. On the beach, with their blanket spread out on the sand, the corners tucked in for anchorage against the wind, the three feel connected for the first time since Peter left home. Unlike the uneasiness the three feel in his apartment, on the beach “they were no longer confined to car or buildings to remind them why they were there” (39). The beach and their makeshift home of blanket and cooler and umbrella act as a defense against the detachment that each has felt:

They lived as a family again. While [Peter] ran and David dug in the sand until he reached water and Kathi looked for pretty shells for her room, the blanket waited for them. It was the place they wandered back to: for food, for drink, for rest, their talk as casual as between children and father arriving, through separate doors, at the kitchen sink for water, the refrigerator for an orange. Then one left for the surf; another slept in the sun, lips stained with grape juice (39).

On the blanket, the family becomes a unit again through the autonomous movement of each individual. They have the liberty to move about unrestricted, an expansion that is nurturing due to the complementary sense of their connection to one another. The children returning to the blanket for sustenance metaphorically becomes a sacramental ritual, as sacred as the communal blood and body. In the final scene of the story, the children are rejoined to their father both physically and spiritually, holding his hands as they nap on either side of him.

Peter and the children feel a connecting sense of peace that will sustain them through the upcoming winter months when they can no longer come to their blanket home on the beach. Though the ties to one another had been threatened, Peter and his children are able to weather the bad days by staying in motion, fleeing his apartment that serves to remind them that they are no longer a family. Yet with the healing days of summer to bring them together as well as to provide them with means of individual expansion, the Jackmans will become a family again, a strength that will help them transfer the peace of summer to the winter apartment that waits for them, longing to be called home.

Though the majority of the male characters in Dubus' short fiction have autonomy, the choices that they make bring them to various crossroads. Characters such as Hank Allison and Jack Linhart risk everything in their expansion that brings pain into both their own lives as well as their families'. Their resolve to avoid the confinements of their roles as husband and father leave each of them temporarily struggling with feelings of guilt and remorse as they watch the painful effects of their expansion on the wives and children they had vowed to honor and protect. Likewise, in the aftermath of divorce and in the face of his children's unhappiness, Peter Jackman has to redefine himself. Though at first his apartment serves only to remind him of the fragility of family ties, by the end of the story, through the repetition of healing rituals, his family finds security again. On the other hand, Matt Fowler's attempt to relieve his suffering wife only drives a wedge between himself and Ruth. Unable to reconcile to the violence of his revenge against his son's killer, Matt will move even farther away from the peace he once knew. His home will no longer bring him the comfort he seeks as he isolates himself within his own pain. Luke Ripley, however, accepts the consequences of his decisions for he knows that he acts not for himself but for his daughter. Unlike Matt, who cannot move past his deceit, Luke justifies his actions to himself and to God, taking on the sin along with his new role as his daughter's protector. In the postmodern landscape of Dubus' fiction, men meet the myriad challenges of their domestic space with varying degrees of success.

Notes

1. Kerstin W. Shands, Embracing Space: Spacial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 4.
2. Dubus did admit that “Peter Jackman is an adult quasi-autobiographical character in that I made him into a divorced father and had him experience some of the things that I’ve experienced as a divorced father. But I took away from him two gifts that I have received and that is I took away his vocation, and I took away his spiritual life to see how he would struggle.” Olivia Carr Edenfield, personal interview with Andre Dubus (February 23-24, 1993), Haverhill, MA.
3. Andre Dubus, “Killings,” in Selected Stories of Andre Dubus (Boston: Godine, 1988): 54. All references are to this edition.
4. Dubus has pointed out that the murder was alright with Matt until “he’s in the same house with the man. . . . That’s why I knew, if [Richard] would just turn and say, kneel down and say please don’t, it’d all be over with. He’d never have shot him. As a matter of fact, if he hadn’t run, and I didn’t plan that, either. That comes out of the scene, and that’s the movement that did it. If he hadn’t tired to run. If he had stood there, neither one of those men would have shot him. They couldn’t have. They couldn’t.” Edenfield, personal interview.
5. Edenfield, personal interview.
6. Edenfield, personal interview.
7. Thomas E. Kennedy, Andre Dubus: A Study of the Short Fiction. (Boston: Twayne, 1988): 39, 40.

8. Andre Dubus, "A Father's Story," in Selected Stories, 475. All references are to this edition.
9. Kennedy, 75.
10. Doreen Massey, Space, Place and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994), 265.
11. Kennedy, 77-78.
12. Andre Dubus, "We Don't Live Here Anymore," in Separate Flights (Boston: Godine, 1975), 13. All references are to this edition.
13. Kennedy, 63.
14. Andre Dubus, "Finding a Girl in America," in Finding a Girl in America (Boston: Godine, 1980), 157. All references are to this edition.
15. Dubus admitted to the fact that "he never liked [Hank]; that's why I . . . broke him. I said, it's about time you feel some pain, that son of a bitch." Edenfield, personal interview.
16. Kennedy, 69.
17. Andre Dubus, "The Winter Father," in Selected Stories, 21. All references are to this edition.
18. Massey, 162.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Dancing After Hours

Andre Dubus' short-story cycle Dancing After Hours is an appropriate ending to a career that celebrates the healing power of the human heart in connection with another.¹ Years earlier, Sherwood Anderson wrote in Winesburg, Ohio of brief moments of transcendence from the ordinary and isolating events of living. In "Sophistication," in the quiet stillness of the town's grand-stand, George Willard feels at once wholly connected to his friend Helen White: "In that high place in the darkness the two oddly sensitive human atoms held each other tightly and waited. In the mind of each was the same thought. 'I have come to this lonely place and here is the other,' was the substance of the thing felt."² As in many of his stories prior to his final collection, Dubus like Anderson brings people together, connected in both their domestic space and in their landscapes that offer them rewarding moments of expansion. Unlike Anderson, however, Dubus moves past temporary moments to the complete and final fusion of people committed to one another by bonds strong enough to resist the temptations that work to divide them. In the LuAnn and Ted stories that make up the cycle, each reaches a place of peace after years of struggling to find ground in the confusion of the postmodern world. Each has been wounded by love; however, when they meet and marry, later having children and living happily together, their home affirms their devotion to one another and fortifies them to make successful journeys into their respective landscapes. Their love and

commitment sees them through their difficult times and gives them the strength to cure old wounds as well as ward off new ones. The satellite stories, beginning with “The Intruder” and ending with the title story, “Dancing After Hours,” work to reinforce the movement towards healing, beginning with a young boy’s violent and damaging defense of his home and ending with a mature woman’s determination to trust in love again.

These stories in tandem encapsulate Dubus’ career, which began with the publication of “The Intruder” in 1968 and ended with the same revelation in Dancing After Hours that many of his fellow short-story writers would make, a “recognition” of the “emptiness of a life that turns away from human contact and the possibilities of love.”³ Kerstin W. Shands has pointed out that during the 1990s, escape imagery was pushed “out of rooms and out to boundaries and borderlands, accelerating the movement metaphors to hypertransgressive speeds, while at the same time celebrating metaphors of flatness, dissolution, and instability.”⁴ Likewise, Dubus explores the myriad ways in which characters have to access their homes and their landscapes. Some have to collapse their formerly comfortable boundaries in order to expand into a restorative landscape while others must draw tighter circles on their limits of movement so that they might create spaces that provide them with more nurturing confinements. Shands asks if it is “not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward looking.”⁵ In fact, the cycle ends by answering this very question. Dancing After Hours is a testament to domestic space that provides positive, healing containment that allows for rejuvenating, affirming expansion.

“The Intruder,” the first of the satellite stories, deals with the tension felt between a thirteen-year-old boy and his sister’s boyfriend. He is a loner, awkward with his peers,

comfortable only with his family and with his daydreams in which he is always the hero, arriving to rescue those in peril. The story is set at the family lake house where the children and their mother spend the week, the father coming on weekends to join the rest. The boy “liked being alone, but, even more, he liked being alone with his sister” (5). Even with Connie, however, he believes that he must put up a front and pretend to be like her, popular and “talkative and well-liked” (5). He knows that their relationship is based on how he presents himself to her at home rather than how he perceives himself when he is with his peers, shy and on the fringes of action. This facade gives him the courage to converse with his sister on an intimate level that allows for secret sharing. The conflict comes on a night that his parents both go into the city, leaving Kenneth and his sister alone at the lake where the two await Connie’s boyfriend, who comes to visit for the evening. Already intimidated by Douglas’ athleticism and popularity, the tension that the younger boy feels is accentuated by his new feelings of sexual awareness brought on by puberty.⁶ Still uncertain and embarrassed by his urgings, he conflates his daydreams with his admiration for his sister and his resentment of her boyfriend, who takes her time and attention away from him.

The conflict is even further accelerated by the presence of a rifle in the story, the gun that Kenneth carries into the woods with him every day on his adventures into fantasy where he is the star, the savior, the knight. Kennedy gives the reminder that one of Dubus’ “great literary heroes, Anton Chekhov, once said that if a rifle appears over a mantelpiece in the first act of a play, it will have to be fired by the fifth act. And the facts that accrue about Kenneth’s one talent, his prowess with his rifle, lead to the moment where he seizes his opportunity to become a real-life hero.”⁷ His desire to protect his

sister from what he sees as a sexual threat is muted due to his shyness and self-doubt; nevertheless, when he is given the chance to act through his fantasy rather than confronting the “intruder” face-to-face, he can act without hesitation to defend her and his family home. Kennedy sees the intruder as

human sexual passion intruding upon the boy’s innocence, the intrusion of religion on the natural development of sexual passion, the intrusion of Douglas on the boy’s innocent relationship with his sister, the intrusion of Douglas’s and his sister’s sexual relationship into Kenneth’s consciousness, and finally, all of these things adding up to and taking form in the mistaken belief that “a large bearded man” (an image in itself suggestive of sexuality) is about to break into his sister’s room in the dead of night, affording Kenneth an opportunity—in a kind of semi-conscious living fantasy—to destroy the symbol of all that is troubling him (235).

These intrusions would be beside the fact, however, were the final conflict staged anywhere else. When Dubus sets the story at an isolated Louisiana lake house belonging to Kenneth’s family, the potential for violence is increased simply by the obvious associations to frontier life. Just as the settlers before him had to safeguard their homes against ever-present danger in their landscape, Kenneth sees himself as the defender against potential violence, against himself, certainly, but more importantly against his sister.

This newly felt sense of control in being temporarily the man of the house is threatened first by Douglas’ visit and later by the noise that Kenneth hears outside of his window. The placement of his bedroom further enhances the new role that he playing:

“His room extended forward of the rest of the house, so that, from his bed, he could look through the window to his left and see the living room and Connie’s bedroom” (15). Its jutting out from the rest of the house, extending into the landscape that he sees as full of potential danger, reinforces his sense of himself as sentry. In addition, these other rooms are even more important to him than his privacy where he plays out his dreams. The living room is the place where he and his family come together to share time; it is one of the few spots where he can be himself without fear of rejection. Likewise, for him Connie’s room is sacred in that it belongs to his sister, whom he worships. Douglas has already infiltrated their living room, and Kenneth feels inadequate against the strength and confidence of his sister’s suitor. He fails to stand up to what he sees as competition for her attention. Therefore, when the second chance comes to defend her in her bedroom, he does not hesitate this time: “Kenneth rose and moved away from the wall, standing close to his bed now; he aimed through the screen, found the side of the man’s head, then fired” (17). In the consuming guilt that follows the accident, he is comforted by his father, who seeks to protect him from the horror of what he has done. However, as much as he wants to protect his son, Kenneth is devastated by the truth of his actions.

The story sets up a pattern of perceived danger, both real and imaginary, altering one’s ability to find peace with the self or the world. In “A Love Song,” Catherine is irrecoverably wounded by her husband’s infidelity. He asks for a divorce while sitting in their kitchen, a room where she has for sixteen years performed the actions that have kept her family fed and cared for. In that moment, her landscape is so altered that she is left without any feeling of foundation: “The earth itself was leaving with her sad and pitying husband, was drawing away from her. Stars fell. That was a song, and music would never

again be lovely; it was gone with the shattering stars and coldly dying moon, the trees of such mortal green; gone with light itself” (21). The world outside has shifted. Her husband’s betrayal strips her of her role as wife, and she temporarily loses the ability to connect with those around her. At first and for a good while, Catherine is comfortable only with her daughters, playing out her role as their mother, where she is sure of her strength due to their unwavering love for her: “Their faces, their voices, their passing touch in a room or hall of the house, their ritual touch and kiss of the days’ greetings and good-byes, brought for an instant the earth back to her, and for an instant restored balance to time” (22). Fortified by their eyes that speak of their love for her, she is able to look outside of her window where nature is restored to her again, and she sees again the green in the trees and grass, the blue sky.

This ability to look beyond the window casements to take in vibrant scenery mirrors a tendency that Shands sees in feminism’s “exploration of spaces and boundaries” which “in many ways duplicates postmodernism’s similar positing of structures, spaces, and boundaries to be collapsed, displaced, or transgressed.”⁸ Little by little, Catherine’s home is restored to her as a place where she might through routine transcend the ordinary actions of the day to reach spiritual connection to her girls. Eventually, she does collapse her boundaries. She tills a garden, plants and harvests vegetables and flowers, seeking comfort in the earth around her. Yet though she is able to redefine her purpose by centering on her daughters and her home, she will never relive the role of wife. She dates, but she has been too damaged by infidelity to risk herself again. Part of moving forward, this story suggests, is knowing one’s limits. She recognizes that she cannot chance her new-found sense of peace for the uncertainties of love. Rather, she settles on a partner

who makes it clear that he never wants to marry and who lives in an apartment that “was not a place where someone lived; he ate and slept there . . . his home was like an ill-kept motel” (27). Part of his attractiveness to her is that he will never demand what she knows she is incapable of giving. In spite of her seeming ability finally to move forward, Catherine will never be restored to her former self. She watches her daughters’ marriages with hope for their future. Nevertheless, metaphorically she will not venture past her own property nor invite anyone over the line.

It is fear of betrayal and divorce that keeps Catherine from experiencing connection to another man just as fear of loss in a myriad of forms motivates the female protagonists in two other satellite stories, “Blessings” and “Sunday Morning.” Both stories take place early in the morning following two very different but catalytic events. Rusty is the mother of two grown children and the wife of Cal, a man with whom she has lived happily without threat or fear save for a few weeks of uncertainty when her daughter had pneumonia. Prior to Gina’s illness, Rusty had found herself blissfully contained in her home where, in the evening when Cal and her children were there, “she was awake and alert” to her life (44). Her connection to her husband is so deep that even in the solitude of her days she has imagined conversations with him while she moves through her routines. In fact, she even takes up the nickname her husband gives her, becoming Rusty, Cal’s wife and her children’s mother, rather than her birth name, Margaret. In effect she is reborn into marriage, and the only time she moves from the dual role of wife and mother is when she is with Gina through her illness at the hospital. Nevertheless, she is able to move back smoothly into her prior responsibilities once her daughter is out of danger:

During these days, Rusty's life drew her back into it: she became married again, she cooked meals, and received the praise of Cal and Ryan, who gave it to her by joking about their cereal and sandwiches and Chinese dinners while she was at the hospital. Three times she and Cal made love, and she guided him to long tenderness before she opened herself to him, and did not tell him that his lover's slow kissing and touching were exorcising the vapor of death above their bed, stirring her passion until it consumed her, and left no space in the room or bed or her body for the death of Gina (60).

In her familiar bedroom, she is restored to herself through the rituals of their love.

The present action of the story takes place one year to the day after her family's life has been spared. The four survive when their chartered fishing boat sinks and for forty-five minutes they successfully fend off sharks. Though both crew members are attacked and killed, Rusty's family is rescued. On the anniversary of the accident, they have gone to a lake, a less threatening version of the sea that almost overpowered them. In the hour before sunrise, she relives the accident and her determination to save her daughter against their threatening landscape. She remembers the details of the night after the attack, listening to her children sleep safely in their vacation home and is reminded of their "growing up when she woke hearing them walking down the hall to their room, their light footsteps only audible when the flushing that woke her had ceased and she could hear the moving weight of their warm bodies" (48). In the quiet of their rented space, she draws comfort from her children's movements within safe boundaries. A year later what Rusty has to learn to do is to let go of her fear that for a year has lived with her every day.

The release comes in her temporary expansion onto the front porch of the lake house. Unable to sleep, she leaves the peaceful stillness of the bed she shares with Cal to remember and be thankful for life's blessings. While she rocks and smokes and waits for her pill to lull her to sleep, she lets her mind move "back through the house, into bed and sleep" all the while battling the "cluttered" images of the accident. The nightmare scenes leave only after her witnessing a buck and doe that have come to their edge of the lake to drink:

The buck lifted its head. Then he stepped forward once, swung his head in an arc that started up the lake and ended with her. She stared at his nose and eyes and antlers, and did not move. He looked at the doe backing away from the water, raising her head; then Rusty saw the length of his body emerge from the woods, as if it were growing out of the trees, just fast enough for her to see. At the lake he stopped, his head up, listening.

Then he drank (69).

The scene that follows between Rusty and Cal mirrors what she witnesses at work in nature. While the doe drinks, the buck stands guard, his protective instincts allowing her to nourish herself. Rusty learns through her brief interaction with the buck to trust in the restorative powers of her landscape. When she leaves the porch immediately following, she holds onto the walls of the cabin to balance herself until she can make her way back to Cal. As she drifts off, replenishing herself in the same way that the doe is fortified by water, she is on her way towards healing, falling asleep to Cal's hand "smoothing her hair back from her forehead; he was talking, and his voice was gentle. She heard only her name, then was asleep" (71). The rented cabin further reinforces the temporariness of

living, an awareness which becomes for Rusty a blessing. Surrounded by possibilities of accidents that might befall, her family again becomes a blessed gift that makes living in the face of mortality endurable. Kennedy notes that the final story ends with a “recognition of mortality.”⁹ Indeed, each of the satellite stories makes reference to death, and part of the progression of the cycle is a movement towards characters who recognize the blessings in each day as they are conscious that they stand in the face of an ever-present threat to lose it all.

Unfortunately, this sense of trust that Rusty is able to reach again never happens for Tess, who lives daily with the fear that she will “grow old and die alone” (73). She longs for a husband and child, but with each passing day feels that time has become her enemy. Her biggest threat, however, is not her aging body but her inability to move past her friend’s violent death at the hands of her husband. In recounting the story to her newest lover, Andrew, she focus on the fact that the two had bought a home together, as if this move from an apartment to a permanent residence can ground a marriage in certainty. As she tells Andrew about her friend’s home, her eyes move to her own kitchen so small that there is not even room for a table. Her apartment has no view save of the adjacent building’s brick wall. Though her living arrangements suggest a smothering containment that she longs to expand through a positive marriage, there is an urgency and anger in Tess that has frightened former lovers. When she looks at Kenneth’s eyes, “she could see flight like birds” (81). This satellite story coming mid-way in the progression towards healing effectively jars any sense of complacency in regards to hope for postmodern relationships. Tess will remain confined, reliving her friend’s death that has frightened away her hopes. She is doomed to loneliness for she does not learn the lesson

that Rusty accepts, that faith in love can conquer fear even in the face of death. The allusion to the Wallace Stevens poem by the same title is in fact made ironically, for though the woman in Stevens' poem longs for permanence, she finds that death "is the mother of beauty."¹⁰ For Tess, death is the fear that severs her from the life she desires.

This is the realization that the poet's dying brother wants his sister to reach in "Woman on a Plane." He has come to a place in his illness that has rid him of fear, leaving only "goodness itself, as though death were stripping him of all that was dark and base, mean and vain, not only in him but in the world, too, in its parts that touched his life" (100-01). She learns through him to embrace her despair and to let go of her "heart swelling to be pierced and emptied" (101). For the first time in her career, she resents the pull of her job on her ties to her family, the demands of work that keep her from being with her brother. Simultaneously, she wants to extend her landscape into what she suspects comes only to those who know that their death is imminent, a peace that passes understanding that she sees in her brother's eyes: "She wanted it while her body was strong, while she was vibrant and pretty" (102). Afraid of flying, she no longer wants to be afraid of living. Waking in her apartment alone every day, she gathers her "scattered self" to face the uncertainties of every day. She wants to be able to draw together the "traces of herself . . . scattered in the world" (102), to pull herself in from hurt to a restorative faith.

Her desire is very much like Robert Townsend's of "The Colonel's Wife" after his accident leaves him broken and in intense pain. In his recovery, he is trapped in his house through which he can no longer navigate. Up until his accident, his marriage had provided him with a sense of place that allowed him to fortify himself against his duties

of being a Marine colonel. He justified to himself his infidelities with prostitutes while he was on tour by his false belief that his wife would never know. Furthermore, he dealt with the horrors of the landscapes of war by distancing himself from the deaths and accidents he witnessed in the field. However, his accident severs him from any certainly he formerly felt. In the weeks that follow and in the pain and quiet of his recovery, he comes to see his home and his connection to his wife from a new point of view that gives him new gratitude for the blessings of his life.

Prior to the accident, whenever he was away he would imagine his wife in connection to their house, seeing her in one of the rooms: "He had never had any feelings about the things of domestic life. In them he saw Lydia's choices, and his admiration was not for the objects but for her" (109). He has taken both his home and by extension his wife for granted. He had always seen their house, save for his den, as his wife's space. Now, however, his crushed legs make for limited access in his home. This isolation from the other rooms takes on metaphorical weight. He can no longer fit comfortably at the dining room table. He cannot by virtue of his pain sleep in the bed with his wife: "He could not finish a meal, he could not remain either awake or alert from morning till night, he did not want to smoke a pipe or drink a martini, and he could not feel passion for Lydia" (109). His view becomes restricted as he can see only from the dining room window, where the acres that surround their house confront him with his limitations. His bed is "narrow" (104). His grief is immense. His home becomes an intimidating place, limiting his access. Contained by his helplessness, he imagines it turning on him, catching on fire, burning him to death. The fire becomes a metaphor for the passion that he knows

his wife must still feel but which he is unable to fulfill. He sees his inability to connect with her engulfing him as flames and smoke.

The beginning in the shift comes when he starts to see value in the objects of his home, the pieces of furniture and the walls of their house that have been ballasts against the sifts and changes of life. Looking through the window to woods beyond, he must look past the mahogany table to which he sits parallel at every meal:

The table had traveled in moving vans back and forth across the nation. It had remained unmarked by children, and by officers and their wives from Hawaii to Virginia; it had stood amid family quarrels and silence and laughter, amid boisterous drinking and storytelling and flirtations, and here it was, in this house in the country north of Boston, without a scar. He had lived with it for decades, and now, lying helpless and in pain, he began to feel affection for the table. In the morning he opened his eyes to it; at night in the dark he looked at its shape in the pale light of the window as he waited for one drug to release him from pain and another to give him sleep (109).

The table takes on metaphorical weight, becoming their marriage that has weathered separation due to his job, their infidelities, and all the struggles that marriage brings. Nevertheless, he recognizes in the strength of the wood the power of his own marriage nurtured these long years by a wife he has not really seen before. He begins to appreciate his new understanding: "He liked this new way of seeing the house, as if the entire structure were female and he entered it to be at its center with Lydia; and she had made a place for him, his den, as she gave him a place in her body. A great tenderness welled in

him” (112). This feeling gives way to a new healing in their marriage ironically due to his accident.

In the final scene, Lydia had come back from her morning walk, a routine that she has followed through the long years of their marriage. When she enters the house, she brings the outside with her, but her “eyes were seeing something that was not in the room, some image or memory” (115). He fears that his confinement has led her to an affair that will break their marriage as he was broken by the accident. He keeps his fear through their lunch, going through the habitual motions of eating to keep his mind still so that he might distance himself from the truth as he had done over and over again on the battlefield. When the meal is over and he falls fitfully to sleep, he wakes in fear and cannot ground her: “He listened to the house. She was in it, but where was she?” (116). The grief that follows is intense but cathartic. When Lydia hears his sobs, she comes to him and holds him and he pulls her down to the bed with him: “She loved him; and if he had never known precisely where she was, she had finally always been here” (119). They lie on the bed together and make their future plans. They will remodel their house, removing the top floor down to ground level. They will widen the doors and give him new access to the rooms that have formally been defined as Lydia’s. He tells her, “I’m glad that damned horse fell on me. It made me lie still in one place and look at you” (121). In the images of sunlight illuminating the room, hope radiates and displaces the darkness of his fear. They will go to Arizona to her family’s lake house while their own house is made new, their marriage made over again as well by his new-found appreciation of his “golden-haired wife” (103).

Robert Townsend recognizes in time what never comes to Lee Trambate of “The Lover.” At fifty-five with three ex-wives, he is still searching for the absolute that he knows love can be but which has not found him: “In the arms of his passionate wife he felt a supreme earthly joy. It had ended and he had found it again with other wives and other women, and always its ending had flung him into a dark pit of finitude, whose walls seeped despair as palpable as the rain” (133). His apartment is a place that reminds him of his solitude, where writing he spends most of his time alone. He has dreamt of bringing his families together under one roof: “His images were of him and [his wives] and five children in living rooms, dining rooms, on lawns” (124). His need is so great that he feels their absence every day. Though his search for connection brings him together with a young woman who he is physically attracted to, he knows that he will not be with her in the way that he desires. Nevertheless, for a while she listens to him as he confronts his anguish, confessing his deep need for domestic connection. Crying, he asks her, “Where do I go for that? What street is it on? Where’s the door?” (137). His life makes him feel shut away by an existence that is never complete due to its failure to be grounded in another human being. He remains the lover, not the husband, a role that he craves to the point of despair.

Coming on the heels of “The Colonel’s Wife,” the pain that Lee speaks of is intensified by the stark contrast to the joy that Robert and Lydia are able to reclaim even in the face of supreme pain. However, what follows “The Lover” is a story of stark contrast. In “The Last Moon,” a woman, only twenty-five and married less than two years, has grown so bored with her marriage that she manipulates one of her high school students with whom she is having an affair to kill her husband. She uses her home as a

snare, trapping him into wanting her there, a grown up place to play house. In her bed she lets him believe that she wants money from insurance so that they can start over together, giving him a child's false sense of authority as he plays out a role that he is too young to fill. Though she remembers distinctly the day that she and her husband bought their house and furniture, she has moved so far away from her commitment to him that "she did not feel the bed holding her, or the room, the dead witness of its wall; she felt only her body" (140). She goes through the motions with her husband in their house, but her real living goes on inside her physical self, "in that place where she lived now" (143). She believes that her husband's death will provide her with the means for escape that will take her "through the night sky, her thumb and forefinger open to hold the moon" (144). Yet, as the title reveals, her plan will bring her to a final confinement..

Widowed by choice, she makes a mockery of the fear of loss suffered throughout her marriage by the unnamed woman in "At Night." Even as a young girl, she had seen herself "in a house alone, with photographs of children and grandchildren on a mantel over the fire" (169). She imagines a long illness for her husband and dreads his pain and suffering that she fears will come to him one day. Her own death is immaterial to her for "here she was each morning, with him" (170). Most of the three-page story gives details of their time together, the years after his retirement when they eat together, walk together, "and they went to the children and grandchildren, and the children and grandchildren came to them, and there was the house to keep, and the cooking, and their garden, and friends for a visit" (170). They live together in a home with nurturing moments that further unite them as a couple.

Death comes for her husband in their seventy-seventh year. He dies in his sleep next to her in the bed. She “knew before she turned to him, and she did not think of her children, or of being alone. She rolled toward him and touched his face, and her love went out of her, into his cooling skin, and she wept for what it had done to him, crept up and taken him while he slept and dreamed” (171). She imagines his spirit “wandering” and “maybe confused,” seeing her there, “lying beside his flesh, touching his cheek, saying ‘Oh hon--’” (171). Even in death, she sees her husband with her, his concern for her grounding him there in the room as she confronts what she sees first as his loss before she considers her own or her children’s. The powerful bond is rooted in her early knowledge that life is temporary, and though she lives with her husband for half a century, she imagines his death every day. The fulfillment her marriage has been only intensifies the loss when it does come.

Death fills every page of Dancing After Hours. Nevertheless, in spite of its portent or because of it, many of the stories radiate the protagonists’ desire to connect with life in a defining way. Each story deals with a character searching to find his or her place in the world, often wishing to reshape or redefine a sense of space. The satellite stories are particularly effective in moving the cycle to a positive place of healing where people are able to embrace their domesticity and defend it against threatening postmodern forces. These outside enemies come in a variety of forms, from self-doubt and abandonment to greed and selfishness. The cycle progresses towards the best of both worlds opening for stimulating expansion while moving back to the refortification of home. This journey towards embracing one’s place in the world is likewise impacted by the individual placement of the stories. “The Intruder” and “A Love Song” are followed by the first of

the Ted Briggs stories. In “Falling in Love,” Ted, too, is betrayed by his lover just as Kenneth feels abandoned by his sister and just as Catherine has to learn to live in the world again after her husband leaves her. Ted’s pain is intensified by his story coming on the heels of these characters’ similar conflicts. Likewise, LuAnn’s need in “All the Time in the World” to move beyond the temporary moments of connection with her job and her boyfriends is in part validated by the two stories that come before. Like Tess, LuAnn feels the pressure of time passing without her having made a meaningful life for herself, and like Rusty, she desires the peace of a protective partnership. The two stories coming prior to the first LuAnn story emphasize how easily these seemingly simple desires can be stripped away or never allowed to come to fruition. Rusty has to learn to trust in nature again, to believe that her family can withstand the dangers present in the landscape. This is LuAnn’s same charge when she first meets Ted, who literally helps her find her footing and starts her on her journey that leads towards home.

Ted Briggs in “Falling in Love” has come back from Vietnam having been physically wounded. He walks with a cane supporting his leg, and his injury makes him feel conspicuous. It reminds people he meets that he served in a war that most of them did not support, and he feels outside of their community, defined as a sort of enemy by his past involvement. In spite of his feeling of being left out of the social scene, Susan, a young actress he meets and falls in love with, comes to him at a party. She is a woman who defines herself by her work. High on the success of her present part, she is confident and happy: “She also knew this fulness would leave her, perhaps in three days, and then for a while she would feel arid and lost” (29). Though she gives herself completely to her work, finding fulfillment within her transference, she knows that these roles are

temporary shelters against the landscape. She loves the life she is presently living, and she fears death, feels its potential threat around her every day. Like Rusty in the story that follows, she knows that her blessings can be taken away from her at any moment, and perhaps it is Ted's resilience, his ability to overcome death and to survive with only a slight limp and need for a cane that draws her to him, his wide chest and strong frame testament to his power: "She liked the strength in his arms hugging her" (31). Secure in his embrace she wishes to expand these temporary moments of happiness into something more fulfilling. She feels love "pulling her up the three flights of stairs to her small apartment," emotion leading her home (34).

The death that Susan had feared does eventually work its way into her happiness, but it comes in the form of an accident that she had never imagined. When she discovers that she is pregnant, she feels her career threatened by new demands on her body. In order to transform into the roles that she plays on the stage, she has to leave herself behind, an impossibility now that she is with child. When she will not make the sacrifice of carrying the baby to term and giving it up to Ted, their bond is permanently broken, their hopes for a future together shattered by what she sees as entrapment. He is so wounded that for a while he cannot even trust himself. He cannot risk the pain that he opens himself to in his need to connect fully to a woman. What he feels working against this distrust, however, is an awareness of time passing and his age moving him into a space where sharing a home will no longer be an option.

Therefore, the title of the story in which he meets and falls in love with LuAnn takes on added weight. "All the Time in the World" works on two levels. Both Ted and LuAnn are conscious of time, of their having wasted too much of it in relationships that

leave them feeling empty. On weekend visits to her parents, their house gives her a perspective on her life, “where going to sleep in her room and waking in it made her see clearly . . . made her feel that, since her graduation from college, only time and the age of her body had advanced, while she had stood on one plane, repeating the words and actions she regarded as her life” (90). As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have pointed out, human beings “are all containers with surfaces and ‘an in-out orientation.’”¹ Later, Ted and LuAnn come to one another with equal desires to be filled by another, to reach out from their understandings of who they are as individuals to a redefinition of self. With this new feeling of complete connection to another, they are able to let go of their sense of urgency in regards to time.

After LuAnn graduates from college, she moves into a small apartment that gives her an independence that she did not feel in her parents’ home or even in college. She enjoys her work enough to like “having an office and a desk with a telephone and typewriter on it” (85). Her job gives her a more complete sense of herself in the world. Nevertheless she knows that she is unlike her boss, a twice-divorced woman who speaks of money “with love, even passion” (86). Certainly LuAnn appreciates work for its temporary moments of expansion into a landscape where she feels like a responsible adult. At the same time, however, she recognizes that work alone cannot offer her lasting happiness. Therefore, she takes on lovers with an optimism that “her next love would be her true and final one,” though the men she dates see marriage as “something that might happen” one day (87), each one talking about “marriage as a young and untried soldier might talk of war” (88). As Dorene Massey has pointed out, the “social relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions

as part of it.”¹² LuAnn’s awareness of her body aging in relation to her desire for a husband and family make her yearning for a permanent home more urgent. The man who ultimately helps her complete this need is the opposite of the boys whom she has loved before. He is a former soldier, wounded by war and by love, who like LuAnn still believes in the healing possibilities of love.

He meets her on the steps of her church following Sunday mass. Out of this landscape of possibilities walks Ted, who helps her extend that feeling of “harmony” she experiences “with the entire and timeless universe” beyond the six minutes following Communion (91). She wants to connect with another human being on the same spiritual level that she does each Sunday when she takes the eucharist and wine. Unlike Tess in “Sunday Moming,” the story immediately preceding, LuAnn’s Sunday is full of the same transforming promises present in the ritual of holy Communion. By taking in Ted and all that he offers, she experiences a new sort of transubstantiation that will not fade. Her crippled spirit is suggested by the broken shoe whose heel she holds in her hand as she sits on the steps of the church. Ted comes to her assistance, offering to fix her shoe and then inviting her to breakfast, where over a meal the two embark on a journey that will fortify them against any threat that awaits.

Home is a necessary defense against the harsh and threatening postmodern landscape just as the cabins of the frontier folk stood against the unknown dangers of their environment. LuAnn and Ted are brought together by their mutual understanding that commitment is the only lasting surety against the uncertainty of the postmodern world. He tells her over their first meal together, “I want a home with love in it, with a woman and children,” (95). His frank and determined belief in such an eventuality

makes her see him as a “gift.” In the days that follow, she wakes to a fresh sense of hope, feeling “her months alone leaving her; she was shedding a condition; it was becoming her past” (96). On her way to work that first morning, she sees people on the streets in a new way, as if she can see into their very souls, and at work goes through the actions of her job without a pressing need to find meaning in it: “She worked hard, with good concentration, and felt this, too, molting: this trying to plunder from an empty cave a treasure for her soul” (96). In the final scene, LuAnn goes on her lunch break with friends, and hungry with this new desire for her life, she orders a large meal, waiting “for all that was coming to her, from her body, from the earth, from radiant angels poised in the air she breathed” (97). She anticipates the blessings that she knows are coming to her through her new bond with Ted. She serves as a hopeful example of love’s possibilities. Unlike the woman in “Now They Live in Texas,” who waits in vain for spiritual connection, unlike Juanita in “Waiting,” who has given up on life and awaits her death, LuAnn moves into a life where “there was no time,” a space of eternal communion (96).

The final two Ted and LuAnn stories as well as the final story in the cycle bring a conclusion not only to the work but to Dubus’ career as well. In many of his early stories, his married characters are not able to resist affairs, moving into the terrain of betrayal. Some are successful in rebuilding a framework that will help them withstand the demands of restructuring a family. Others are too fractured to recover. New roles have to be created and accepted, and sometimes characters cannot endure the pressures put upon them by loss. Death and divorce bring postmodern concerns that are not unlike the difficulties faced in the earliest American short fiction. As the short story evolved, characters continued to struggle to reconcile their domestic space with the demands of their

landscape, whether they were negotiating the dangers of settling the west or dealing with the postmodern breakdown of the nuclear family.

When LuAnn makes the conscious decision to stop short of having an affair in “The Timing of Sin,” she demonstrates the power of free will. In the days after she almost slips into infidelity, she is most conscious of her life. She makes love with her husband often, connecting with him on the most intimate level. On the morning of the story, she is aware of each one of her children, kissing them before she leaves. Her attention is on the physical beauty of her surroundings, the smell of the trees, the woods that surround her as she drives with her friend in the early afternoon to play tennis. She notices the houses. She focuses on each and imagines living in one: “She loved her life and she knew she would love it in that yellow house, too.” She appreciates the solidity of her family’s connection to one another. She is attached to her home, “a big house on the country road and she loved being in it, and was grateful for the money they had” (148). She realizes the blessings of her life and is thankful for her family. That she defines people in reference to their homes is seen when she imagines the first settlers who also used the road on which her friend’s car now travels. She thinks of the wagons and carriages they had driven along dirt roads and of the houses that they had built long distances apart. Then, when she compares herself to her friend who has to work, she appreciates that she can stay at home to make a comfortable place for her husband and children. For her, people are best understood in relation to their domiciles.

LuAnn has no need or desire to labor for money though she gives her time to help people temporarily displaced, those who cannot afford homes and teenaged girls who no longer live in their own. She gives her money and time to help young women who have

been scattered try to find their place in the world. She understands the necessity of positive fortification, and she wishes that they could have ““just had ordinary parents . . . just ordinary, bumbling, mistaken parents, who loved [them] and made a home for [them], and fed [them], and sent [them] to school”” (151). Every day she is reminded that her children have blessed lives and that Ted’s good career and her attention to their home and their commitment to their marriage have given them blessings that many never imagine. Each story prior to “The Timing of Sin” sets up the potential for betrayal on some level. As the stories progress, they build towards the possibilities of healing. “At Night,” the story immediately following, is a brief reminder that love is worth any fear of loss that comes with it. Risking everything by almost straying into the negative expansion of an affair, LuAnn like Robert Townsend learns to appreciate her home and her role there, her family’s need as well as her own.

LuAnn’s marriage is saved by her definition of herself in relation to her home. What stops her in the car with Roger in the few seconds that they pull away from each other for her to remove her jeans is the image of herself walking into her house. LuAnn tells her friend, ““I saw myself walking through the kitchen and the dining room to Ted in the living room. I didn’t see Ted. Or Julia and Elizabeth and Sam in their beds. I saw my face and the front of my body, walking toward–me. Walking on the floor toward me. And I knew I must not do this”” (165). She stops, accepting both the blame of moving toward temptation as well as the blessing of the vision that makes her stop: herself framed within her own walls. As Shands has pointed out, because “rest has had oppressive or limiting associations . . . and because the essence of feminism has been seen as change, movement-as-change has, not surprisingly, been unquestionably promoted.”¹³

Nevertheless, for LuAnn and for the most peaceful of Dubus' characters, fulfillment comes in being able to withstand the temptations of an expansion that would threaten the foundations of home no matter how attractive the desire for new experiences might be. Confronted by herself, she is given a view of what makes her life meaningful, her role as a wife and mother. Her years of contentment are shaken from complacency by a temporary expansion that would have ended badly. She at last understands what Shands sees as hope for the troubles of the postmodern landscape: "The significance of place, linked to individual development and embracing both the present and the past family history, suggests that it is only when we accept our family roots and our need for a home that we can find a place in society and move into a more liberating and promising future."¹⁴ LuAnn believes that she was rescued by God, who gave her a temporary vision that led to a final understanding and which fortifies her against the horrifying danger in her final story, "Out of the Snow."

This new appreciation as well as her awareness of her own personal strength work in tandem to help her defend herself against two men who attack her in her home. The story takes place one year after "The Timing of Sin," when LuAnn is forty-four. She awakens to the day by taking stock of her home, watching her husband moving about their bedroom, feeling in the quiet of the morning "her children sleeping; it was as though she heard their breath and saw their faces on pillows" (172). Before she rises to face the day, she defines herself by her place in her family. She has made love with her husband the night before. She wakes her children "gently" (173). Each comforting action of her morning makes her conscious of herself, and she "was trying to focus on the present now, as she went downstairs, aware of her breathing, her leg muscles, the smell of coffee, the

electric light in the dining room and twilight in the living room” (174). She pays attention to her movements, cataloging every detail of making breakfast while letting her mind move into the future. She puts Ted safely in Baltimore, the journey that business requires behind him, her children asleep, herself in her livingroom. In the flashes of what is to come, she sees secure scenes of comfort, her husband eating a satisfying meal, her children in their beds, herself smoking cigarettes after giving into the temptation. Her will for her family to be protected against any potential threat is as real to her as the pull of nicotine. As she tries to resist smoking, she likewise tries to ward off feelings of apprehension: “Two images pierced her: Ted in a plane above the earth, and Julia, Elizabeth, and Sam disappearing in the gray light as they rounded the pine trees. She said, ‘There’s so much to fear’” (178). Her happiness comes with a price, and she knows that her dread springs from her having so much to lose. In a life that gives her both good rest and renewing journeys, she takes stock of the beauty present in her everyday landscape:

“One afternoon the bus was late with the children. My imagination was like a storm. I stood at the road, and I couldn’t get rid of all the terrible pictures. So I started thanking God for this fear, because it meant I love them so much. The sun was shining on the snow and pines, and I stood down there, thinking of what it would be like not to have that fear; not to love anyone so much that you couldn’t imagine living on the earth without them. . . . I looked at all that beauty around me, and I was grateful. I was still afraid, but the worst of it went out of me” (178).

When Ted leaves for his trip, she works through her trepidation in this same way. Just as she had earlier taken in the tree and snow and pines, she notices the contents of her house, moving from room to room and reestablishing order, straightening and smoothing, stopping for moments at a time to look out of her windows at the landscape beyond. She is secure in her home as well as blissfully connected to her surroundings, and she regains her peace through the rituals of her morning.

All that LuAnn has to lose is set up in these opening scenes. The security that she now feels has been the reward of her journey that started with Ted when he helped her find her footing on that Sunday morning so many years ago. Just as they had gone together to eat a meal as a way to connect with one another, images of nourishment brought about by the buying and preparing and serving of food continue metaphorically to suggest a restorative power. Though prior to her marriage she had preferred good meals in restaurants with her friends, after she falls in love and marries,

she wanted good dinners with Ted. He liked to cook, and on weekends they idly shopped together, and choosing and handling food with him was a new happiness: a flounder lying on ice was no longer a dead fish she must cook before it spoiled; it was part of the earth she and Ted would eat. Now that she was gathering food for Julia and Elizabeth and Sam, too, she saw it in the store as something that would become her children's flesh. As a girl she had learned about the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, all of them but one administered by a priest; the woman and man gave each other the sacrament of matrimony. Being a mother had taught her that sacraments were her work, and their number were infinite (181).

The simple tasks of her day transcend the routine and become rituals as sacred as those of the church. She sees the blessings of her life in the daily work of her days, and in this awareness is the blessing of peace with her place in the world.

LuAnn leaves the grocery store and moves into a landscape where she is aware of the potential for death that surrounds her. The snow brings with it a feeling of apprehension that she recognizes as the “old and faint dread that was always a part of her thrill when she saw falling snow, as though her flesh were born or conceived with its ancestors’ knowledge that this windblown white silence could entrap and freeze and kill” (182). The dark winter setting works metaphorically as a portentous backdrop to the violence that soon follows.

In this landscape of possibilities, she is confronted with evil contained in the eyes of a young man who looks at her and reduces her to a commodity, as if “he were deciding whether to buy her” (184). A new fear settles over her, and she watches them watching her, “afraid, and angry, too, and ashamed of her fear” (184). All these emotions follow her into her car as she drives home, aware of the beauty in the scenery around her just as she is conscious of the car following behind. The tranquility of the scenery and the portent of the trailing car work in contrast to mirror her earlier fear that the peaceful joy of her present life will be shattered by some outside danger.

In her resolve, she wins over her fear. Rather than running away from the men who follow her into her home, she faces them and uses her kitchen as an arsenal against the threat she had always dreaded, taking up first a kettle then a skillet and finally the phone after she beats them into submission. Though LuAnn’s attackers flee, she follows, memorizing the plates on the car that they had stolen. She never sees them again, but they

“remained part of her life” (189). They stand in her memory as a testament to her strength and her courage and determination to live: ““They collided with me: all this harmony I work for; this life of the spirit with the flesh. They walked into the kitchen and I said No, God; not like this, and I beat them with a skillet”” (192). LuAnn sees in her power to ward off these men a quelling of the myriad fears that have permeated her life up until this point. She understands that her place on the earth is grounded in her role as mother and wife, but she recognizes first and foremost that she fights to save herself. She tells Ted, ““I didn’t hit those men so I could be alive for the children, or for you. I hit them so my blood would stay in my body; so I could keep breathing”” (193). At first she speaks with a tone of confession, as if her actions make her part of that same selfish evil that she had overcome. Yet in the final action of the story is the redemptive answer.

As LuAnn and Ted sit next to each other, they reach across the isolation, moving close so that their “legs touched, their hips, their arms” (193). Like Helen and George, they have reached across the great expanse of loneliness to fulfillment in connection with another. What LuAnn and Ted have will not dissolve when the moment passes, however, for they have the fortification of years of struggling to make them appreciate and sustain their bond. For Shands, variance is necessary for a complete point of view: “It is from the safe and secure perspective of place that we can be conscious of the expanse of space as something inspiring or threatening, and it is only when we peer into the interiority of place from an outside space that we can attempt to define the concept of place at all.”¹⁵ Because LuAnn and Ted have such a secure sense of home, they recognize all that is at stake due to dangers present in their surrounding landscape. Likewise, it is because they

risk going out into the world that they are able to have perspective on what they might otherwise take for granted.

These same lessons are those that Emily Moore learns in the final story, "Dancing After Hours." At forty years of age, she is tired of living alone and has grown bored by her habit of turning fearfully away from life. She lives in an apartment where she simply goes through the motions of her days without connecting to anyone around her. Though she finds pleasure in the routines of her job as bartender in a town in Massachusetts, she came to the work primarily due to her pain of not being able to connect with the high school students whom she had taught for years. She had given up trying to reach them through language, accepting that their apathy was due to the frustrations of their adolescence. She had "taught without confidence or hope, and felt like a woman standing at a roadside, reading poems aloud into the wind as cars filled with teenagers went speeding by" (210). She sees them seeking movement as a way to escape from the limitations put upon them by their age and in turn feels isolated from them. Consequently, her lack of faith that things might have changed had pushed her to leave her career behind to work full time at a bar with no windows, suggesting her unwillingness to bond fully with the people around her. She has closed herself off to her coworkers and customers. Though always pleasant and productive, she keeps a part of herself hidden. As Kennedy points out, the bar is "a kind of limbo and a place of inner as opposed to external vision, a place where people go to numb with drink, music, and company their consciousness of mortality and the faltering of their capacities to experience human love."¹⁶ Emily makes only small, though kind gestures of connection towards those she serves. She listens to Rita talk about her breakup, asking her questions to let her know that she is concerned

about her welfare. She is aware of Kay's crush on Rita and hopes that the waitress will not be rejected and hurt. She worries about her boss, Jeff, and wonders how he manages in the aftermath of his divorce that a year prior sent him into a mysterious world of loneliness. She goes to extra lengths to see that Drew and Alvin, two visitors who stay until closing, are given the best service; chilling their glasses, she anticipates their needs. Going through the motions of running an efficient bar, Emily focuses on each of her actions, using the concretes of her surroundings to ground her in the moment as a way to forget her fear of the future.

She extends this habit of falling into predictable routines into the home that she has created for herself. She keeps a neat place, shops for and cooks healthy food, and brings an orderly sense of containment to her small living quarters. She spends an hour every day walking, connecting to her surrounding landscape. Underneath the comforting habits of her days, however, Emily recognizes that her life remains unfulfilling due to her solitariness:

All of this sustained her body and soul, but . . . also isolated her; she became what she could see and hear, smell and taste and touch; like and dislike; think about and talk about; and they became the world. Then, in her long nights, when it seemed everyone on earth was asleep while she lay reading in bed, sorrow was tangible in the dark hall to her bedroom door, and in the dark rooms she could not see from her bed. It was there, in the lamplight, that she knew she would never bear and love children; that tomorrow would require of her the same strength and rituals of today; that if she did not nourish herself with food, gain a balancing

peace of soul with a long walk, and immerse herself in work, she could not keep sorrow at bay, and it would consume her (203).

What she wants is a way to shed her fear so that she might accept the chances offered to her in meaningful connection to the people with whom she comes in contact every day. Her desire to live before her life is over is suggested metaphorically in the opening scene of the story, when she steps outside from her well-run tasks at the bar to catch a glimpse of the sun before it sets. She wants to establish a relationship with a man that will not end in the pain she has come to believe is the end result of love: “Emily wished she were not so cautious, or disillusioned; she longed for love but was able to keep her longing muted till late at night when she lay reading in bed, and it was trumpets, drums, French horns; and when she woke at noon, its sound in her soul was a distant fast train” (210). The passion of jazz brings out her own desires; however, like the far-away train, like her students she imagines rushing beyond her in their cars, she fears that her chance at enduring love has passed her by.

Perhaps because she wants so much to know security and company, Emily like LuAnn sees herself and her associates in connection with their homes. She imagines Rita learning to live alone again, her “walking into her apartment, listening to her telephone messages, standing at the machine, her heart beating with hope and dread; then putting a potato in the oven, taking off her shoes, turning on the television, to bring light and sound, faces and bodies into the room” (203). She sees Rita going through the same rituals that she has perfected in her own life as a way to overcome the empty hours of being alone. She listens to Jeff tell about renegotiating his life as he learned to come to terms with the days following his divorce. He seeks escape from his small apartment in

the same way that Emily does, falling into rituals at work and at home that provide him with temporary moments of escape from the pain he feels due to the break-up of his twenty-plus-year marriage. At the bar he makes connections with his customers by meeting their needs, cooking their steaks and hamburgers, “potatoes and clams or fish in the fryers,” making “sandwiches and salads,” feeling brief moments of peace in the routines of preparing and serving meals.

Jeff and Emily finally come together over their similar desire to feel connection to another expressed in their complimentary actions of serving others’ needs. Just as the drink and food that they prepare brings levity and sustenance to their customers, likewise will their willingness to trust one another bring nourishment to their own lives. Though each has seen the importance of a work environment on their sense of well-being and though each has maintained these routines that nourish their bodies and keep them strong, what they both lack is movement into their landscape that allows for connection that leads back home. What Emily learns by the end of the action is that she has to overcome her fear and learn to believe in love again.

She gains this wisdom through her encounter with Drew. He has been confined to a wheelchair for fifteen or so years since his accident when he was only twenty-one. Emily recognizes that in spite of his disability and its subsequent limitations, Drew has not withdrawn from life. He meets his fears head on, jumping from an airplane, going to the coast every year to confront the same waves that broke his spine, reaching his hands out to a beautifully vibrant young woman who dances with him in the bar after closing time. Each day he must depend on Alvin and other health care professionals to meet his most basic and private needs. In her first encounter with him, Emily notes that someone

“took very good care of this man” (197). In the scene in which he is introduced, he is described three times as smiling. He is a man who has made peace with his restrictions. When he dove, blindly, faithfully into the sea, he was broken, but later mended by his leap from the plane and the leap that he makes every day in his chair, giving himself, smiling and warm, into the care of another human being. Emily responds to the level of trust implicit in this good man’s willingness to face his new limitations with the best that he can give. He rises every day in good spirits with a routine established through a positive connection with Alvin. Their many rituals are made easier by Drew’s sure sense of peace. In spite of the blow that life has dealt him, he continues to trust and to make healing, restorative journeys into his landscape. In the hours after closing time when Drew and his companion, Emily and her coworkers sit in the domestic tableau around sandwiches and drinks, he tells her of the thrill of skydiving: “‘It felt like fear,’” but “‘it was adrenaline. . . . And I had this rush, like nothing I had ever felt. Better than anything I had ever felt’” (221). Drifting down in the quiet sky, he believes that he can hear people talking, and he briefly connects with those unseen but heard. Though he is damaged from the jump, both of his legs shattered in the fall, he does not regret having made the leap. Emily sees in his bravery that she has been cheating herself of the highs that life can offer by her fear of being hurt and broken.

Her jump comes when she takes Jeff’s hand and dances with him, connecting with him through the rhythms of the music and their bodies pressed together. She gives into his lead, trusting him: “He turned her and dipped—she was leaning backward and only his arms kept her balanced; he pulled her up and held her close” (226). As they dance, he tells her how he escapes from the empty routines of his present life by fishing on the

ocean, losing himself in the water and sun. He uses these moments of expansion as a way to help him face the emptiness of his home. He feels refortified by fishing, and his bearing his catch home to clean and cook brings the feelings that he has on the ocean into his living space, if only temporarily. What he wants is a way to sustain these affirming moments in his daily rituals just as Emily wants to feel the same peace in her home life that she is able to reach when she listens to jazz. The descriptions of his journeys onto the water are followed by Emily's awareness of the music around her. The two dance together in a new harmony brought about by their complementary desire to find fulfillment in their lives through love and faith in another human being.¹⁷ "Time hurries by, we're here / And gone," Emily sings. Immediately after, having vocalized her fear through the medium of music, which she has used for emotional release for so long, she moves from behind the bar and brings Jeff a scotch, sitting next to him around their table of friends. Their legs and arms touch one another, reminiscent of the way Ted and LuAnn connect in the final scene of "Out of the Snow." Emily and Jeff close down the bar with a promise for the next day.

Rather than waking to a Sunday of empty routines and meaningless rituals, the two decide to meet at Jeff's for lunch. They are to cook the bluefish he had caught and to make plans for Emily going out fishing with him on Monday. In their moments of connection through dancing and drinking and eating together in the hours following closing time, the two have found each other. As they leave the bar, they feel a beauty in the night sky due to their new promise for the future. Though before this night they had not known where the other lived, by lunchtime the next day, the two will have come together in Jeff's home, extending his previous emptiness into a positive and healing

landscape, a recovery suggested metaphorically by their plans to grill the fish on his balcony that extends from his kitchen. Over a meal, the two will come together in a blessed hope that overshadows their past disappointments. Kennedy agrees, believing that they are “transported . . . from a state of emotional shutdown to one where real human contact again becomes possible.”¹⁸ Their hands touch before they say goodnight, and Emily drives east into the dawning of a new life.

“Dancing After Hours” brings positive closure to Dubus’ career. The story works to suggest what most of his characters in all of his earlier collections had struggled to understand with varying degrees of success. Though they risk the chance of being hurt by the many variables present in the postmodern landscape, in order for life to have any meaning, men and women must let go of their fears. In order to feel any sense of liberty, he or she must have a secure place that nurtures and sustains them when they suffer the perils of the outside world. Some of the struggles take place within the home, sometimes against the very people who have promised to be nurturer or provider. Other dilemmas are brought about by sojourns into affairs. Others come about by work overpowering one’s commitment to home. Whatever the unfavorable influence, Dubus’ writing ends with a healing promise. However dangerous love can be, those who are willing to trust in the power of human connection can build fortresses that allow for personal growth.

The motif of domestic space that runs throughout Dubus’ fiction and the positive conclusion that he reaches link him to other American short story writers who use the household as a backdrop for characters’ limitations and achievements. Oftentimes a man or woman’s ability to negotiate his or her landscape depends upon the autonomy that he or she feels at home. Characters safely able to negotiate the confines of their domiciles

will more than likely be able successfully to extend into their landscapes. Beginning the with the Indian captivity narratives that use the home as a fortress against the dangers present in the new world, the motif of domestic space has been a central issue in the development of the American short story.

In the earliest conceptions of this motif in short fiction, the home is typically portrayed as vital in shielding one against a myriad of antagonistic forces. The wilderness is an unknown landscape full of potential dangers against which the dwelling stands in stark contrast. One's home becomes sacred and desirable due to its very vulnerability. The motif is played out in a range of stories, beginning with establishing the nation's many settlements. As in the works of Caroline Kirkland and Harriet Spofford, writers stressed the importance of creating a comfortable defense against the hard terrain of the American west. Once the land became more settled, magazines and ladies' books became popular as women began to know a bit of leisure, having time to entertain themselves with a story or poem, a moral essay or a humorous sketch. Wives who worked hard to make comfortable retreats for their families found themselves reflected in the female protagonists who made up the fiction that dominated the 1850s. Though many of these stories are not considered important beyond their sentimental value, some writers of this time did endure as their talents went beyond the average. For instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Bret Hart's influences on the short story are many. Each had a fresh voice that sought verisimilitude, and as the country grew and developed its distinct flavors, readers grew hungry to know how its citizens were shaping themselves. Short fiction became a mirror of the vastly different scenes played out across the American landscape. The home remained a focal

point as writers continued to play up its importance in defense against the variables present in the outside unknowns.

Washington Irving as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne would bring a level of respectability to the short story. Their use of the home would echo their contemporaries', who saw in its myriad presentations an opportunity to show their protagonists' limitations or possibilities. From the very beginning, with "Rip Van Winkle" or "Young Goodman Brown" as examples, the warning is made that the home must not be a place of oppression or loneliness. Families must be able to depend upon and trust one another. As Melville in "The Piazza" and Henry James in "The Jolly Corner" points out, one likewise needs a sense of connection to another human being. The importance of family connection becomes one of the first dominant themes in relation to the motif. A home must be a fortress of trust. Once it is broken, characters oftentimes cannot heal.

As fiction developed, the turn towards Realism persisted, and a character's connection to his residence remained a prevalent theme. Rebecca Harding Davis takes a critical look into the undercurrents of American industry. Factory workers are shown in the squalor and overwhelming hopelessness of their living conditions in "Life in the Iron Mills." Likewise, Rose Terry Cooke and Charlotte Perkins Gilman show how the church as well as the legal system can turn on a woman once she marries. Institutions are given close inspection, and oftentimes they are described as oppressive, cold, and antagonistic. Entrapment can come in a variety of ways, and Hamlin Garland likewise shows how the hard life of farming can seep into the walls of one's space and make one's home as dreary as the days' labors. Short story writers such as Stephen Crane would focus on very different landscapes than farmlands, illuminating the struggles of poverty in stories of city

life. His view is every bit as hopeless and oppressive as Garland's, the home the reoccurring backdrop suggesting the limitations of characters' lives. Its importance is played out in stories such as Theodore Dreiser's "Old Rogaum and His Theresa," where protective walls are exposed for their vulnerability. In its many and various scenes, the American landscape is complemented by the domestic sanctuaries scattered like fortresses against the dangers present without.

In contrast, walls can also be collapsed, spreading into a landscape with elastic borders, moving into affirming relations with neighbors and townspeople. Sarah Orne Jewette, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Grace King, and Kate Chopin often show the home in harmony with its surroundings. Characters are fortified by journeys into various terrains; they return to rest and relax, their residences metaphors for their peaceful lives.

With the move into Modernism, domestic space remained an important motif. Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway have stories that show how home can isolate and eventually suffocate its inhabitants. However, as characters strive for meaningful connections, what becomes apparent, suggested in works such as Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," is a need for stationary healing and rest as motion can lead to a sense of meaninglessness. In order to face the modern landscape, men and women must be able to have places where they feel completely at peace, places where they can meet on equal terms and establish lasting bonds of trust and love. In this way, home can also offer future generations the powerful bonds of heritage. Katherine Anne Porter and Peter Taylor address this issue again and again as their characters explore the importance of place in their lives.

As the family begins to breakdown in the chaos of postmodernism, home remains central stage. People becomes fragmented by divorce and feel isolated, facing their respective landscapes often without hope for change. Others, however, are able to overcome betrayals and learn to trust and to love again. Into this vast range of possibilities enter such writers as Tim O'Brien and Susan Minot, Breece D'J Pancake and Bobbie Ann Mason, Raymond Carver and Andre Dubus. Dubus like his contemporaries focused on the many possibilities of space, of entrapment and expansion, both negative and positive. Just as Dubus' career ended with a story that proclaims the healing possibilities of human connection, so, too, do many postmodern writers use home as a place of myriad opportunities. As Dubus' characters learned to heal and to reconnect, they reflected many of the same conclusions that writers are continuing to make as they celebrate scenes of domestic containment that allow for affirming, expansive journeys.

Notes

1. Andre Dubus, Dancing After Hours (Boston: Godine, 1998), 91. All references are to this edition.
2. Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (New York: Viking, 1919), 241.
3. Thomas E. Kennedy, "The First and Last Stories of Andre Dubus," The Gettysburg Review 14 (Summer 2001): 230.
4. Kerstin W. Shands, Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 11.
5. Shands, 147.
6. Kennedy makes clear that a "superficial reading of the story might lead one to believe that something is wrong with Kenneth, that he is maladjusted, odd. That might be so—he is an outsider of sorts. But the key to Kenneth's personality is his age—thirteen, the age of entry into puberty" (233).
7. Kennedy, 233.
8. Shands, 17.
9. Kennedy, 230.
10. Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," in The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1954), 66-70.
11. Shands, 38.
12. Dorene Massey, Space, Place, and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.
13. Shands, 4-5.
14. Shands, 110.
15. Shands, 38.

16. Kennedy, 229.

17. Kennedy sees the dance moving the couple “from an emotional closing to an opening of the heart” (232).

18. Kennedy, 229.

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