

# بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



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# شبكة المعلومات الجامعية التوثيق الالكتروني والميكرو فيلم



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# جامعة عين شمس

## التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

### قسم

نقسم بالله العظيم أن المادة التي تم توثيقها وتسجيلها  
على هذه الأقراص المدمجة قد أعدت دون أية تغيرات



## يجب أن

تحفظ هذه الأقراص المدمجة بعيدا عن الغبار



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## **American Domesticity in Selected Novels by Richard Yates and Maureen Howard**

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(Ph.D. in American Literature)

by

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## Abstract

American domesticity in the second half of the twentieth century witnessed many changes. This is reflected in the family fiction of both Richard Yates (1926 – 1992) and his contemporary Maureen Howard (1930 - ). This dissertation has answered several questions: first, to what extent does family fiction document social, economic, and cultural conditions especially in post-WWII America? Second, whether the genre of autobiography adds credibility to the authors' novels or limits their scope? Third, how differently do these American authors tackle feminist domestic issues like women's work, marriage, and abortion? Fourth, what are the narrative techniques employed by each novelist to depict the American domestic milieu of their age? Finally, are the domestic dilemmas investigated in the novels of Yates and Howard restricted to the American society or are they universal?

In each chapter, a certain domesticity-related theme (marriage in the first chapter, singlehood in the second, and problems of single parents in the third) is tackled in two novels by Yates and Howard. All in all, three novels by each author are selected, namely, Yates's *Revolutionary Road* (1961), *The Easter Parade* (1976) and *Cold Spring Harbor* (1986) compared with Howard's *Expensive Habits* (1986), *Bridgeport Bus* (1965) and *A Lover's Almanac* (1998).

**Keywords:** American Domesticity, twentieth-century novels, Richard Yates, Maureen Howard, sociology

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## *List of Abbreviations*

Page references to the published works of both Richard Yates and Maureen Howard are indicated in the text using the following abbreviations, which refer to the listed editions.

### **Richard Yates:**

**CSH:** *Cold Spring Harbor* (1986) New York: Bantam Dell-Random, 2008.

**EP:** *The Easter Parade* (1976) New York: Picador, 1976.

**RR:** *Revolutionary Road* (1961) New York: Vintage-Random, 2009.

### **Maureen Howard:**

**BB:** *Bridgeport Bus* (1965) New York: Penguin, 1980.

**EH:** *Expensive Habits* (1986) New York: Penguin, 1987.

**FL:** *Facts of Life* (1975) Boston: LB, 1978.

**LA:** *A Lover's Almanac* (1998) New York: Penguin, 1999.

## **Introduction**

The film adaptation of Richard Yates's first novel *Revolutionary Road* was the inspiration for this thesis. A movie that has proved to be relevant not only to Americans but also to an Egyptian woman like me has pushed one to find the book and read it first. Afterwards, one started a search for other novels written by the same author. In the case of Yates, a common line of thought, namely American domesticity, links several novels together. This led one to another field of study like sociology. Thus, this study is interdisciplinary, involving two branches of humanities: American fiction and sociology. Further, it is comparative to highlight the differences and similarities between the works of Yates and a female contemporary counterpart who also wrote a bulk of domestic novels: Maureen Howard.

Domesticity involves all types of relationships between inhabitants of a single home. These home mates may be a husband and a wife, parents and their children, or a single young lady and her sister. As they live under one roof, they face challenges and try to reach a compromise, or decide to have different approaches to cope with life. A family is just a microcosm of the whole society. It reflects cultural, social, and economic conditions. Thus, to analyze a certain community, one should examine some family case studies.

This can be done through sociology, especially family sociology which is "the oldest organized intellectual discipline" (Zimmerman 87).

Literature, particularly fiction, is also loaded with examples of families that represent their society. Writing family fiction is considered one of the best methods for social documentation. In these novels, authors depict people within their families "continuously adjusting to a physical and social environment" (Groves 285). Family values and predicaments are represented in a way that changed along with the shifts that occur in society.

In a book entitled *Contemporary American Fiction*, Kenneth Millard tackles family values as best exemplified in American fiction:

Since Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) the family unit has been used to examine the particular conditions of the wider culture to which it belongs. More precisely, American novelists have often used the histories of children and adolescents as a means to offer social criticism of American life. (9)

Millard discusses six novels that foreground the parent-child relationship and clarify instances of emotional or physical abuse.<sup>1</sup> Only a few novels of these are canonized mainly because their authors are men; still, many have gone underrated.

Also, in *The American Novel Now: Reading Contemporary American Fiction since 1980*, Patrick O'Donnell dedicates part V "Relations Stopping Nowhere" to the discussion of American family fiction:

This novelistic tradition continues vigorously in contemporary fiction, during an epoch when the formations of family, class, community, and nation are undergoing vast changes: the family is no longer “nuclear,” in any falsely idealized sense; communities exist as heterogeneous, mobile assemblages in both the material and virtual realms; the concept of "nation" is being radically transformed during the age of globalism. (173)

American families are neither “nuclear” nor extended any more. Each family member starts a new community of friends and acquaintances rather than sticking to relatives centered in one place. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, American domestic life has been transformed rapidly.

As elaborated in Peter Bromhead's book *Life in Modern America*, Americans are used to travelling leaving behind their home towns for better chances in different lands:

an American whose income rises as his career makes progress soon looks for a better house, in a better district, with more land, a better view, a bigger and finer swimming pool. He may be attached to the

house which is his home for the time being but this does not imply that he has roots there. Today's job, today's home, today's friends and neighbourhood: all these are part of an American's (and his family's) identity...nothing is regarded as permanent; the American hopes and expects to exchange them all for something better, and he finds no difficulty in identifying himself with the new. (200)

Thus, in the context of the study of domesticity with its emphasis on home and its inhabitants, one can trace a profound ironic situation. Home is no longer a physical non-changeable entity to be located in a certain spot. Home has become the environment where the American lives a better blissful life in materialistic terms.

The history of American domesticity can be classified into several stages. The researcher is concerned with locating the selected novels by Richard Yates and Maureen Howard in a timeline of the development of American domesticity. During the nineteenth century, Americans were equally concerned about broad national causes as well as private issues. According to Amy Kaplan in her article "Manifest Domesticity," nineteenth-century domesticity is defined as "both familial and national" (602). On the other hand, late-twentieth-century America was "shaped by political retreat, a turn to personal preoccupations, and narcissistic self-indulgence" (Zaretsky 187).

Throughout the twentieth century, in the aftermath of the two world wars, American families started to be concerned about their own domestic predicaments rather than national ones.

In a dissertation by Christina Hunter Felix, the twentieth-century American domesticity is juxtaposed to that of the nineteenth century:

Domesticity, as the art and science of managing a home, came to mean an ideology that suggested... that woman's only and proper or "natural" place was the home... Since the 1970s, feminist critics have exposed the falseness of nineteenth-century domesticity. (1)

The compliance-vs-resistance conflict of American women is manifest in domestic novels. The traditional division of labour within the American family was altered gradually. American women are no longer restricted to the private sphere of their homes while men enjoy the public realm of work outdoors. The title of Glenna Matthews' book *"Just a Housewife"* suggests American women's revolt against being limited to mere domestic chores. In mid-twentieth century, Matthews clarifies, "the suburban, middle-class housewife was doubly isolated: physically, by the nature of housing patterns, and spiritually, because she had become merely the general factotum for her family" (xiii). As clarified by Josephine Donovan's reference on American feminism, "in the domestic sphere, while women have been able to carve out