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***HOUSES IN THE ENGLISH NOVEL: MODERNISMS,  
EKPHRASES, AND THRESHOLDS<sup>1</sup>***

**Keywords:** *houses and gardens; English novel; thresholds; ekphrases; Pliny; Wuthering Heights; Great Expectations; Middlemarch; The Awakening; Prelude; Howards End; The Rainbow; Saint Mawr.*

**Abstract:** *The paper analyses diegetic techniques in set-piece descriptions of houses and gardens in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels and stories (Wuthering Heights, Great Expectations, Middlemarch, The Awakening, Prelude, Howards End, The Rainbow, and Saint Mawr). It demonstrates how certain topics and tropes, dating back to classical antiquity, can be traced through this period, and how they record some of the great nineteenth-century and early modern concerns: urbanization, industry and industriousness, conspicuous display, alienation, gender roles, the resilience of romantic notions of nature, and, underlying all, a sense of mutability and precariousness undermining stability.*

In this paper I offer analyses of ‘set-piece descriptions’ of houses as well as their co-texts, these latter being descriptions of gardens or parks. The phrase ‘set-piece description’ constitutes a rhetorical trope, launching us back to the *laudes locorum* of classical antiquity. Accordingly I am going to push back the concept of ‘modernism’ to anything that is post-classical – in fact Pliny, with whom I start, is himself, as we shall see, almost a ‘modernist’. Further, the ‘classic realist’ nineteenth-century texts with which I am concerned were in their time ‘modernist’, implicitly owing allegiance to the tradition of, say, the post-Renaissance country-house poem: modernism always implies awareness of previous traditions. Moreover, these authors were self-consciously problematising the notion of describing. Using a variety of codes, they ‘told’ even as they ‘showed’ – in a manner that is analogous to works of high early twentieth-century modernism. This is why I have used the plural, ‘modernisms’, in my title.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented as a keynote speech at the International Conference of the English Department, University of Bucharest, in June 2010 (editor's note).

My second informing concept is ekphrasis. Originally this was, in the words of a fourth-century rhetorician, ‘an expository discourse which brings the object exhibited vividly into view’.<sup>2</sup> By dint of Renaissance exercises in writing, based on techniques of ‘imitation’, what was perceived was mediated by the models students were called upon to imitate. These became descriptions of (earlier) descriptions (or artefacts) – the modern meaning of ekphrases. (In this connection see, for example, the descriptions of paintings embedded in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*.) One result of this textualisation is that these passages are not simply descriptive but rather analytical and ideologically charged. They create what they convey: both houses and landscapes are not to be perceived in the mind’s eye but read by the conceiving brain. My chosen passages ‘portray’ homesteads and landscapes of the mind: they may therefore remind us of descriptions of paintings rather than of realities.

As always it is profitable to think of authors not thinking about houses but rather thinking with houses – and their co-texts. The passages are interrogative<sup>3</sup> of the best or right ways of living. Close reading will expose the ways houses are constructed – not architecturally but in texts. This means that in this historical-pastoral-structural analysis we shall be concerned with the morality of architecture, the iconology of houses. The culture they represent seems to be authenticated by adjacent presence of ‘nature’, often in the form of a garden or park. We read these elements of landscape. Houses are liminal: there is a threshold between ‘art’ and ‘nature’, inside and outside. The outside is often the realm of ‘nature’, the inside of ‘culture’ or civilization. Nature appears obviously not simply as a total of rocks and stones and trees but as an order, a system of values. In these contexts Nature tends to be idealized, presented as the permanent order of things. Culture in our texts, becomes a way of life, legitimated by being in contact with nature.

Many of these descriptions are versions of pastoral: all *loci amoeni* tend to be ways of talking about something else. In pastoral, descriptions of the country are codified descriptions of city ideals – or realities. In these passages, descriptions of the natural contain codified cultural agendas. Specifically, houses, and the gardens that surround them, are obvious focuses for binary oppositions: masculine/feminine, outside/inside, black/white, town/country, garden/ wilderness. Exteriors (house facades) may comprise a masculine domain, interiors a feminine one. (Fryer, 97) (Katherine Mansfield, as we shall see, reverses this.)

My first example comes from Pliny the Younger (61-113 AD), who gives us a long description of his Tuscan villa, one of his country houses, lingering, as he admits, on its components in the way Homer and Virgil lingered on details of shields of Achilles and Aeneas. In this part of the letter we find house and garden described as one phenomenon,

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<sup>1</sup> Aphthonius of Antioch. "Progymnasmata". 1997. 2010.

<<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> See Nuttall, A. D/

a locus amoenus, a place of proportion and a place where the components of nature – trees, shade, a cooling breeze, and (seeming) water – have been ‘methodised’.<sup>4</sup>

My house is on the lower slopes of a hill but commands as good a view as if it were higher up, for the ground rises so gradually that the slope is imperceptible, and you find yourself at the top without noticing the climb. Behind it is the Apennine range, though some way off, so that even on a still and cloudless day there is a breeze from the mountains ...It faces mainly south, and so from midday onwards in summer ... seems to invite the sun into the colonnade. This is broad, and long in proportion, with several rooms opening out of it as well as the old-fashioned type of entrance hall.

In front of the colonnade is a terrace laid out with box hedges clipped into different shapes, from which a bank slopes down, also with figures of animals cut out of box facing each other on either side. On the level below there is a bed of acanthus so soft one could say it looks like water... The whole garden is enclosed by a dry-stone wall which is hidden from sight by a box hedge planted in tiers; outside is a meadow, as well worth seeing for its natural beauty as the formal garden I have described; then fields and many more meadows and woods.

From the end of the colonnade ... can be seen part of the terrace and the projecting wing of the house, on the other the tree-tops in the enclosure of the adjoining riding-ground [a hippodrome, fashioned from plants]. Almost opposite the middle of the colonnade is a suite of rooms set slightly back and round a court shaded by four plane trees. In the centre a fountain plays in a marble basin, watering the plane trees round it and the ground beneath them with its light spray. In this suite is a bedroom which no daylight, voice, nor sound can penetrate [quod diem clamorem sonum excludit], and an informal dining-room where I entertain my personal friends ...<sup>5</sup> (Pliny, 5.vi.)

What is interesting, of course, is that the villa was to be not only admired but ‘read’: Pliny’s description is itself ekphrastic in the modern sense, a representation of a representation. Pliny contrived an ensemble in which the differences between art and nature were elided: the house is personified as a host hospitable to the sun itself, box trees form an animal topiary, the threshold of the garden, a hortus conclusus, is occluded and is designed to seem in accord with the ‘natural’ meadow beyond its walls. In fact his

<sup>4</sup> For the ideal landscape, see Curtius, 198.

<sup>5</sup> A conjectural plan can be found on

[http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/pliny/villas/chap3/tuscan-schinkel.JPG&imgrefurl=http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/pliny/villas/chap3/tuscan-schinkel.html&usg=\\_\\_rj3\\_fYwkjbhsLiDx2o9FRreEXyG0=&h=600&w=674&sz=45&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=6JdmCi9TsykT5M:&tbnh=141&tbnw=155&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dpliny%2Btuscan%2Bvilla%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG%26biw%3D1115%26bih%3D1068%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:1&itbs=1&iact=hc&vpx=311&vpy=107&dur=3795&hovh=212&hovw=238&tx=147&ty=103&ei=7Q5xTN-uAuKg4QbZ9fzeCA&oei=7Q5xTN-uAuKg4QbZ9fzeCA&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=32&ved=1t:429,r:1,s:0](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/pliny/villas/chap3/tuscan-schinkel.JPG&imgrefurl=http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/pliny/villas/chap3/tuscan-schinkel.html&usg=__rj3_fYwkjbhsLiDx2o9FRreEXyG0=&h=600&w=674&sz=45&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=6JdmCi9TsykT5M:&tbnh=141&tbnw=155&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dpliny%2Btuscan%2Bvilla%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG%26biw%3D1115%26bih%3D1068%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:1&itbs=1&iact=hc&vpx=311&vpy=107&dur=3795&hovh=212&hovw=238&tx=147&ty=103&ei=7Q5xTN-uAuKg4QbZ9fzeCA&oei=7Q5xTN-uAuKg4QbZ9fzeCA&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=32&ved=1t:429,r:1,s:0) (accessed 22 August, 2010)

sensuous prose in this epistle has prevented scholars from coming up with an accurate reconstruction. Christopher Chinn describes it as ‘a political metaphor delineating a Roman aristocratic lifestyle’.<sup>6</sup> It seems to me that in this instance the Apennines are not mentioned for their aesthetic qualities as they would be later, but rather as instruments of air-conditioning. We are told nothing of the labour that constructed and maintained this home: Rome was of course a slave culture. Ben Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst’ was also to pay scant attention to the labours of production, only to the pleasures of consumption.

We might compare Henry James on Washington Irving’s house, Sunnyside in the Hudson Valley, ‘which contrives, by some grace of its own, to be all ensconced and embowered in relation to the world, and all frank and uplifted in relation to the river, a perfect treasure of mild moralities’.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast we turn to *Wuthering Heights*, which, it can be argued, perhaps extraordinarily, is an anti-type of Pliny’s villa, or at least of Palladian and eighteenth-century ideals of house and garden:

*Wuthering Heights* is the name of Mr Heathcliff’s dwelling, ‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there, at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door, above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date ‘1500’ and the name, ‘Hareton Earnshaw’. I would have made a few comments, and requested a history of the place from the surly owner but ... I had no desire to aggravate his impatience, previous to inspecting the penetralium [innermost part of a temple or building].

One step brought us into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby ... they call it here ‘the house’ pre-eminently. It includes kitchen and parlour, generally, but I believe at *Wuthering Heights* the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter: at least I distinguished a chatter of tongues, and a clatter of culinary utensils deep within ... One end, indeed, reflected splendidly both light and heat from ranks of immense pewter dishes ... towering row after row, in a vast oak dresser, to the very roof. The latter had never been underdrawn [covered with a ceiling]: its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye ... Above the chimney were

<sup>6</sup> Chinn., 265-80; see also Ackerman, de la Ruffinière du Prey, McEntyre.

<sup>7</sup> James, 154. It is easy to find other ‘perfect treasures of mild moralities’: Mansfield Park, ‘Daisy Lane’ in Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor* (to which William and Frances retreat after a stint of redeeming self-help in their school in Brussels), Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*, Brideshead ... Their anti-types include Bleak House, Chesney Wold, the house of Mrs Clenham in *Little Dorrit* etc.

sundry villainous old guns ... The floor was of smooth, white stone: the chairs, high-backed, primitive structures, painted green: one or two heavy black ones lurking in the shade. In an arch under the dresser, reposed a huge, liver-coloured bitch pointer, surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies, and other dogs haunted other recesses. (Brontë, 50-1)

When we encounter this we have to remember that these are the accents of Lockwood and that the details are mediated through Lockwood's eyes. Instead of being part of a formal garden the trees here are distortions of nature. [(Firs and other conifers were not ranked highly by Wordsworth and others. (Cosgrove and Daniels, 52)] In contrast to Pliny's house, *Wuthering Heights* has nothing to offer the sun, only supplication. It appears as a cultural fortress, built against 'nature', a trope that anticipates the novel's plot.

The passage, an 'anatomy' of both building and society, reveals in code the method and contents of the novel. The house is seen from two points of view: by men as a fortress, by women as a prison. The mode of the house, with grotesque griffins and primitive furniture, matches the mode of the novel and the emotions it depicts. The attitudes of Lockwood – and perhaps Brontë – are profoundly ambiguous about all of this. The shameless putti and fecund bitch leads us to expect some sex; men's labour is again occluded, and the only work is women's work, which is marginalised and devalued by being associated with 'chatter'.<sup>8</sup>

Industriousness also figures prominently in a description of house and garden in *Great Expectations* (1860-1):

Within a quarter of an hour we came to Miss Havisham's house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred ... I ... saw that at the side of the house there was a large brewery. No brewing was going on in it, and none seemed to have gone on for a long time... [Estelle told me that its] 'name was Satis: which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or all three – or all one to me – for enough.' ...

[After Pip has visited Miss Havisham, Estelle sends him down to the courtyard.] To be sure, it was a deserted place, down to the pigeon-house in the brewery yard, which had been blown crooked on its pole by some high wind ...But, there were no pigeons in the dove-cot, no horses in the stable, no pigs in the sty, no malt in the store-house, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat.... In a by-yard, there was a wilderness of empty casks ...

Behind the furthest end of the brewery, was a rank garden with an old wall: ... but ... I could see that the rank garden was the garden of the house, and that it was overgrown with tangled weeds ... When I yielded to the temptation presented by the casks, and

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<sup>8</sup> We can contrast Charlotte Perkin Gilman's plans for cooperative housekeeping; kitchenless houses, which did not hide away women's domains, were fashionable from 1884 to 1925 (Fryer, 18).

began to walk on them, I saw her walking on them at the end of the yard of casks ... I saw her pass among the extinguished fires, and ascend some light iron stairs, and go out by a gallery high overhead, as if she were going out into the sky.

It was in this place, and at this moment, that a strange thing happened to my fancy ... I turned my eyes ... towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure all in yellow white, with but one shoe to the feet; and it hung so, that I could see that the ... face was Miss Havisham's ... In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror of being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all, when I found no figure there. (Dickens, 63-4)

This is a place where life, living, and industry might have coexisted but no longer do. Instead we find a divorce between living and working, *otium ac negotium*. (This theme is also registered in Wemmick, totally alienated from employment in Jaggers's office.) For Dickens, of course, labour was both a sacred vocation and the legitimization of a career open to talents. But no labour is possible in a place where production has been suppressed. The pigeon-house is awry, and the fermentation of beer, which, like pigeon-rearing, involves cooperation with 'nature', has ceased. The allusion to Hamlet's "'Tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely' enlarges the compass of the description to the condition of England.

Satis House, once was a moral ideal, is now a prison. No nineteenth-century prison was complete without a gallows: as the two children play, Pip's eyes rise above the barrels to imagine a fantastic apotheosis for Estelle, and a balancing vision of a hanged woman. This is Miss Havisham, a powerful woman who had singlehandedly destroyed places where people might work. Images of gallows and gibbets pervade the book. At the end of the book's first chapter, Pip offers a sight of a gibbet on the Kentish marshes, and Magwitch lies under the shadow of the gallows at the novel's end. The word 'terror' is repeated in this extract: it also occurs six times in one paragraph towards the end of Chapter 2 – Dickens' previous novel had been *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

A far less dystopian house and landscape appears in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-2):

The ride to Stone Court, which Fred and Rosamond took the next morning, lay through a pretty bit of midland landscape, almost all meadows and pastures, with hedgerows still allowed to grow in bushy beauty and to spread out coral fruit for the birds. Little details gave each field a particular physiognomy, dear to the eyes that have looked on them from childhood: the pool in the corner where the grasses were dank and trees leaned whisperingly; the great oak shadowing a bare place in mid-pasture ... the sudden slope of the old marl-pit making a red background for the burdock; the huddled roofs and ricks of the homestead without a traceable way of approach; the great gate and fences against the depths of the bordering wood; and the stray hovel, its old, old thatch full of mossy hills and valleys with wondrous

modulations of light and shadow such as we travel far to see in later life, and see larger, but not more beautiful ...

But the road, even the byroad, was excellent; for Lowick, as we have seen, was not a parish of muddy lanes and poor tenants; and it was into Lowick parish that Fred and Rosamond entered after a couple of miles' riding. Another mile would bring them to Stone Court, and at the end of the first half, the house was already visible, looking as if it had been arrested in its growth toward a stone mansion by an unexpected budding of farm-buildings on its left flank, which had hindered it from becoming anything more than the substantial dwelling of a gentleman farmer. It was not the less agreeable an object in the distance for the cluster of pinnacled corn-ricks which balanced the fine row of walnuts on the right. (Eliot, 131)

The passage seems not only to conjure to childlike memories of place and literary romance, but it is also aestheticised, distinctively painterly. It is like a Constable painting, notably 'picturesque'. In this context the word has two meanings, one from rhetoric (ut pictura poesis), the other from art history. It thereby becomes an ekphrasis of an ekphrasis. Specifically she incorporates picturesque ideals of sort to be found in Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight's poem *The Landscape of 1794*. (Cosgrove and Daniels, 59)

The picturesque was held to occupy a space between the beautiful and the sublime: it was an aesthetic based on contrast. (Nicola, 72-90) The arena of the picturesque provided an arena where George Eliot's competing desires for realism and idealism might be synthesized: to Ruskin she owed her drive towards exact and detailed naturalism<sup>9</sup> and perhaps to Wordsworth a faith in a moral order that might be deduced from the countryside – it is a paysage moralisé. The wonderfully conceited last sentence is concerned with what Henry James called 'The waste of growth', (James, 159) here forestalled by the 'budding' of farm buildings. Eliot shared with the Pre-Raphaelites the assumption that art should not only bring object described before the eyes of reader or viewer (sub oculos subiectio, the ancient concept of enargia) but also should contain 'added truth', (Murdoch, 319) should mirror the concerns of the age. So in this arena, a kind of park yet still a working farm, Nature is not hampered, the scene is not 'dressed'. Its order accords with a human cultural order through personification. The passage is summed up in the last line of Jonson's *Penshurst*: '... their lords have built, but thy lord dwells'

In another novel by a woman, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) the heroine, Edna Pontellier, finds her husband's house as oppressive as does Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

The Pontelliers possessed a very charming home on Esplanade Street in New Orleans. It was a large double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously

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<sup>9</sup> See her review of the third volume of *Modern Painters* (*Westminster Review*, 1856).

neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr Pontellier.<sup>10</sup> (Chopin, 99)

Chopin constructs a man's house, male space. It was designed to dazzle, not be decorous. The columns, to wrench a phrase of Henry James out of context, offer 'an intimation of annals'<sup>11</sup> (James, 330) – as well as being tactfully phallic. White suggests classical purity, green proclaims an affinity with nature. The garden is Edenic – Genesis 2.9 notes Eden contains 'every tree pleasant to the sight and good for meat'. But nature is collected and controlled and specimens are accumulated. This is a model home, illustrative of paradox set out by Fryer: 'exactly as women moved increasingly outside the home – becoming a cause of social disorder – the model home became a rigid construct imposed on a social situation as a means of establishing order and control'. The savage irony of the last sentence reveals how bourgeois culture has been reduced to a collection of artefacts. (Fryer, 28, 35ff)

In contrast here is a woman's house, from Katherine Mansfield's short story 'Prelude,' (1918). It describes the Beauchamp family home in Karori, Wellington, New Zealand.

When [Kezia] opened [her eyes] again they were clanking through a drive that cut through the garden like a whip-lash, looping suddenly an island of green, and behind the island, but out of sight until you came upon it, was the house. It was long and low built, with a pillared veranda and balcony all the way round. The soft white bulk of it lay stretched upon the green garden like a sleeping beast. And now one and now another of the windows leaped into light. Someone was walking through the empty rooms carrying a lamp. From the window downstairs the light of a fire flickered. A strange beautiful excitement seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples ...

<sup>10</sup> A painting of an appropriate house can be found on [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://rgr-static1.tangentlabs.co.uk/images/ar/97815655/9781565540729/0/0/plain/esplanade-ridge-vol-5.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/book/esplanade-ridge-vol-5/1113902/&usq=\\_\\_IMG6M\\_3Ao7PKxB-YznmnglOV88U=&h=400&w=299&sz=26&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=mfqbhjF9JKoWqM:&tbnh=150&tbnw=112&prev=/images%3Fq%3Desplanade%2Bbridge%2Bnew%2Borleans%26hl%3Den%26biw%3D1115%26bih%3D1068%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:10%2C480&itbs=1&iact=hc&vpx=321&vpy=70&dur=458&hovh=257&hovw=192&tx=102&ty=147&ei=Q1BxTIfpPNmP4galh9DeCA&oei=Q1BxTIfpPNmP4galh9DeCA&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=31&ved=1t:429,r:16,s:0&biw=1115&bih=1068](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://rgr-static1.tangentlabs.co.uk/images/ar/97815655/9781565540729/0/0/plain/esplanade-ridge-vol-5.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/book/esplanade-ridge-vol-5/1113902/&usq=__IMG6M_3Ao7PKxB-YznmnglOV88U=&h=400&w=299&sz=26&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=mfqbhjF9JKoWqM:&tbnh=150&tbnw=112&prev=/images%3Fq%3Desplanade%2Bbridge%2Bnew%2Borleans%26hl%3Den%26biw%3D1115%26bih%3D1068%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:10%2C480&itbs=1&iact=hc&vpx=321&vpy=70&dur=458&hovh=257&hovw=192&tx=102&ty=147&ei=Q1BxTIfpPNmP4galh9DeCA&oei=Q1BxTIfpPNmP4galh9DeCA&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=31&ved=1t:429,r:16,s:0&biw=1115&bih=1068) (accessed 22 August, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> compare James on New York villas, *ibid.* pp. 8-10.

Dawn came sharp and chill with red clouds on a faint green sky and drops of water of every leaf and blade. A breeze blew over the garden, dropping dew and dropping petals, shivered over the drenched paddocks, and was lost in the sombre bush. In the sky some tiny stars floated for a moment and then they were gone -- they were dissolved like bubbles. And plain to be heard in the early quiet was the sound of the creek in the paddock, running over the brown stones, running in and out of the sandy hollows, hiding under clumps of dark berry bushes, spilling into a swamp of yellow water flowers and cresses. (Mansfield, 24)

Two oppositions are at work here: the house, the women's domain, is separate from the house, here encircled by a drive that, as whip, is metonymically masculine. The house is alive, active while seeming passive, sensually asleep, a place of dreams, and auto-orgasmic. The garden seems to be only a demi-paradise: the description is dialogic, imposing elements of a picturesque English garden imposed on a New Zealand wilderness. ('Bush' designates the original rain forest).

E. M. Forster's description of *Howards End* (1910) also has something to say about non-masculine sexuality:

Henry [Wilcox] ... had taken her [Margaret Schlegel] over his property, and had explained to her the use and dimensions of the various rooms. [There had been a failure to invest in the estate, and the opportunity had been lost of turning the farm into a park] 'Mismanagement' [said Henry Wilcox] did it -- besides, the days for small farms are over. It doesn't pay -- except with intensive cultivation. Small holdings, back to the land -- ah! philanthropic bunkum ... ' But Henry saved it; without fine feelings or deep insight, but he had saved it, and she loved him for the deed. 'When I had more control I did what I could: sold off the two and a half animals ... pulled down the outhouses; drained; thinned out I don't know how many guelder roses and elder trees; and inside the house I turned the old kitchen into a hall, and made a kitchen behind where the dairy was. Garage and so on came later. But one could still tell it's been a farm. And yet it isn't the place that would fetch one of your artistic crew.' No, it wasn't; and if he did not quite understand it, the artistic crew would still less: it was English, and the wych-elm that she saw from the window was an English tree. No report had prepared her for its peculiar glory. It was neither warrior, nor lover, not god; in none of those roles do the English excel. It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness, and the girth, that a dozen men could not have spanned, became in the end evanescent, till pale bud clusters seemed to float in the air. It was a comrade. House and tree transcended any similes of sex. Margaret thought of them now, and was to think of them through many a windy night and London day, but to compare either to man, to woman, always dwarfed the vision. (Forster, 191-2)

The novel is structured around a binary, the men's world of telegrams and anger and the women's world of culture and vivacity. Wilcox had taken over the estate and his

'improvements' reveal a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards the natural. Not prepared to go along with those who find the good life by going back to land, his bourgeois viewpoint nevertheless defines itself against a romantic viewpoint. Yet he wanted to authenticate his house and his name by turning a working farmhouse into a 'country house' – of the sort to accommodate a member of the gentry. Its kitchen became a 'hall', women's work again being marginalized by putting the new kitchen out of the way.

Then comes Margaret's vision, which constitutes a connection between house and garden, man's order and woman's order, provided by a tree. (The motto of the novel is 'only connect'.) The tree has a healing force. Wych-elms could be witch elms (OED), and were, in literature, associated with farming interests and, since Virgil with sex (marrying vines to elms). (Cosgrove and Daniels, 50) This tree, earlier identified with Mrs Wilcox, has been appropriated for sexless sex: Forster was, of course, homosexual, and his ideal of comradeship is an attempt to suppress a sexuality that in his time was the love that dared not speak its name.

Finally, two passages by D.H. Lawrence. First, Lawrence's description of Will and Anna's cottage in *The Rainbow* (1915):

Tom Brangwen had taken them a cottage at Cossethay ... Will Brangwen's eyes lit up as he saw it. It was the cottage next the church, with dark yew-trees, very black old trees, along the side of the house and the grassy front garden; a red squarish cottage with a low slate roof, and low windows. It had a long dairy-scellery, a big flagged kitchen, and a low parlour, that went up one step from the kitchen. There were whitewashed beams across the ceilings, and odd corners with cupboards. Looking out through the windows, there was the grassy garden, the procession of black yew-trees down one side, and along the other sides, a red wall with ivy separating the place from the high-road and the churchyard. The old little church, with its small spire on a square tower, seemed to be looking back at the cottage windows. (Lawrence, *The Rainbow* 131)

Again the house is legitimated, by its proximity to the church and the old trees. As we might expect, work is not marginalized, and the kitchen becomes the centre of a family dwelling.

The tree that guards the New Mexico house of the wife of the New England trader in *St Mawr* (1925) protects a woman's felicitous space. The kitchen does not seem to be concealed, even if the garden is a bit fiddly:

It was the New England wife of the trader who put most energy into the ranch. She looked on it as her home. She had a little white fence put all round the two cabins: the bright brass water-taps she kept shining in the two kitchens: outside the kitchen door she had a little kitchen garden and nasturtiums, after a great fight with invading animals, that nibble everything away. And she got so far as the preparation of the round concrete basin which was to be a little pool, under the few enclosed pine-trees between the two cabins, a pool with a tiny fountain jet. ...

Her cabin faced the slow downslope of the clearing, the alfalfa field: her long low cabin, crouching under the great pine-tree that threw up its trunk sheer in front of the house, in the yard. That pine-tree was the guardian of the place. But a bristling, almost demonish guardian from the far-off crude ages of the world. Its great pillar of pale, flakey-ribbed copper rose there in strange callous indifference, and the grim permanence which is in pine-trees. A passionless, non-phallic column, rising in the shadows of the pre-sexual world, before the hot-blooded ithyphallic column ever erected itself. A cold, blossomless, resinous sap surging and oozing gum, from that pallid brownish bark. And the wind hissing in the needles, like a vast nest of serpents. And the pine cones falling plump as the hail hit them. Then lying all over the yard, open in the sun like wooden roses, but hard, sexless, rigid with a blind will. (Lawrence, *St Mawr and the Virgin and the Gipsy* 151-2)

Another sexualized tree: how do we interpret it? I think this is Lawrence being Freudian. Women are incomplete men, able only to project a hard but barren sexuality, a sexuality that might expose the living death of everyday existence, but which, without male fertility, is showy but doomed to extinction.

There are no shattering conclusions to be gained from these analyses of these texts. They are not pictures but diagrams, blueprints on which are inscribed codified moral and social statements. These artists purport to be showing, but are, as we should expect, telling. This sort of textual archaeology reveals the inadequacies of metaphors that, alas, are still too common: literature reflecting history, history as a background to literature. Rather it reveals inscriptions that record some of the great nineteenth-century and early modern concerns: urbanization, industry and industriousness, conspicuous display, alienation, gender roles, the resilience of romantic notions of nature, and, underlying all, a sense of mutability and precariousness undermining stability.

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