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Fraiman, S. (2017). *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins*. New York: Columbia University Press.

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In her essay *Professions for Women* (1931), Virginia Woolf shares her ambition to kill ‘the Angel in the House,’ Coventry Patmore’s now infamous image of idealised nineteenth-century femininity.¹ Serving as a symbol of purity and selflessness in the Victorian era, the Angel ‘never had a mind or a wish of her own’ but preferred to sacrifice herself for the well-being of domestic life (p. 141).² Woolf thus calls for resistance against the Angel, whose haunting shadow always lurks around, waiting to deprive women of their own voice. In *Extreme Domesticity* (2017), Fraiman likewise denounces this iconic image when she begins a discussion on the relation between women and domesticity.

Briefly going through the history of housewifery and feminist movements in America between the 1950s and 1960s, Fraiman highlights the post-war housewife as an epitome of conventional family values and gender roles. Thereafter, she explains how this fictional image was challenged in the eighties and nineties, either by scholars’ attention on women’s experience in the public rather than the private sphere, or by their re-evaluation of the domestic culture through a positive, appreciative lens. Identifying herself with the latter trend, Fraiman states that the aim of her book is to ‘sever domesticity from the usual right-wing pieties and the usual left derision’ (p. 3). Fraiman thus refuses to adopt the liberal bias which posits that domestic culture and housewives are naturally connected with middle-class morality, consumerism, and compulsory heterosexuality. Instead, she argues that the desire to locate a place called ‘home’ and ‘the finding of security and pleasure in domesticity is not necessarily conservative’ (p. 39). To support this point, she investigates a diversity of homemakers who are located outside the traditional domestic ideal, including queers and transgender homemakers, divorced women, working-class women and men, and global immigrants from ethnic minorities. With this focus, Fraiman explains her seemingly oxymoronic title: by ‘extreme domesticity’ she means the precarious status of ‘being “extra” to conventional domesticity’, due to ‘economic insecurity, physical vulnerability, and/or stigmatised identity’, but also to a sense of ‘being seen as immoderate or outlandish’ (p. 5). By reading the domestic details and everyday practices in fictional works (by, for instance, Leslie Feinberg, Elizabeth Gaskell, Edith Wharton) and non-fiction, such as memoirs and ethnographic texts (by Dominique Browning and Martha Stewart to name just two), Fraiman aims to explore alternative imaginations of home, as well as to recuperate the home and the work associated with home-making from its oversimplified association with triviality and conformity.

In the first chapter, Fraiman focuses on the housekeeping of Robinson Crusoe, as well as the housekeeping of Jess Goldberg, the transgender protagonist in Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) with her self-coined concept of ‘shelter writing.’ Indebted to Gaston Bachelard’s insightful ideas of domestic space,³ Fraiman defines shelter writing as an account of the interior which is constructed ‘against a threatening exterior’ and ‘the effortful creation of a private space by and for those who have been battered by the outside world’ (p. 35). To further distinguish her image of home from the conventional one denoting bourgeois propriety, Fraiman highlights the key features and focus of her instances of shelter writing, namely the instability of domestic space, the marginality of the homemaker, and the

¹ Virginia Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’, in *Selected Essays* ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp.140-145 (p.142).

² *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³ Fraiman makes clear that her conception of shelter writing derives from Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958): “Like Bachelard, I attend primarily to the house imagined as a ‘felicitous space’, a space that protects and consoles. [...] house is a poetics of the safe, snug interior; the house evoking a nest, cradle, or shell. [...] This sense of the house as refuge is only heightened when tested by the elements—by snow, for example, or by storm”. See Susan Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 32.

re-valuation of domestic labour and daily routines. By scrutinising the texts of both Defoe and Feinberg, Fraiman illustrates how home can be desirable, rather than entrapping, for those who suffer from the loss of a secure settlement, and how the seemingly monotonous, repetitive domestic practices like dusting, painting, and decorating can be read as creative, tactical acts for the purpose of self-expression.

Fraiman's investigation of domesticity, which examines households and householders outside of home's conventional markers, such as mid-class decency and heteronormative marriage, has been inspiring to my research project 'Representations of Queer Homes in Mid-Century U.S Fiction'. Similar to the thesis that Fraiman puts forward in *Extreme Domesticity*, my argument is based on the premise that home is not intrinsically tied with heteronormativity and reproduction. Rather, it can be read as a potential space for queer intimacy and rebellion against the hegemonic regime of gender and sexual norms. In contrast to Fraiman, who draws on Anglophone novels and non-fiction ranging from the eighteenth century to the beginning of the Millennium, I focus on American fiction from the mid twentieth century, considering that this historical period witnessed unprecedented dynamics and tension between personal preference and societal expectations regarding the concept of home and homemaking. While the Cold War ideology elevated the stability of family life to a national culture and made the suburban home a domestic ideal, writers such as James Baldwin, Patricia Highsmith, and Shirley Jackson interrogate the dominant paradigm of household in their literary works, re-imagining home as a queer space that is mobile, self-determined and pleasure-orientated. My analyses of these texts are also informed by Fraiman's shelter writing archive, which highlights not only the protection that home proffers, but also its unstable nature and the possible perils lurking behind. Much like the characters Fraiman studies, the protagonists of the novels in my project are mostly labelled as marginal and outcast-like either because of their ambiguous sexuality or their financial/social disadvantages. Thus, their effort to make home and maintain it is intricately struggling, concomitant with pressure from the heteronormative culture. Echoing Fraiman's point that the domestic comfort her 'unorthodox homemakers' secure 'is usually too temporary' (p. 52), the queer home in my research, though resistant to the hetero-productive family structure, tends to be volatile and even impossible to sustain, due to its susceptibility to the leading ideology and institutional values (for example Giovanni's room in James Baldwin's eponymous novel). While having a specific focus on the creativity of domestic practices and everyday routines, my project investigates the trouble, interruption, and threats that the queer characters are confronted with in their search for home and their experiences of housekeeping. In doing so, I avoid an oversimplifying or romanticising reading of queer home as a carefree and idyllically steady space.

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Yishi Pan is a PhD candidate in English literature at the University of Leeds. She obtained her master's degree at the University of Edinburgh, focusing on modern and postmodern literary studies. Her current PhD research 'Representations of Queer Homes in Mid-Century U.S. Fiction' is funded by China Scholarship Council – University of Leeds joint scholarship.