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In the last pages of *At Home in Nature* Gould discusses the links of homesteading in the categories of gender, class, nature and religion in the seventh chapter labeled *Ambivalent Legacies II*. The chapter begins with a quote by Miles Coverdale a character in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*, about artificial life and how we chose consumerism and traded less spiritual work for more materialistic lives.

The first section of the chapter is named with a question, *Back to the Land or Back to the Kitchen?* The section directs attention on the issues that arise about gender in the life of the average homesteader. The section starts with a brief history of how the homemaker came to be and eventually came to rest as the women decided to make a shift from producer to consumer. Myrtle Mae Borsodi is noted for her connection of the distribution problem in America to the homemaker's battle with consumption. Gender problems that exist on the homestead are expressed by writers Bill Coperthawite and Wendell Berry, who practice a simple lifestyle but do not homestead in the conventional sense. The gender roles on the homestead are not less predominant than in suburbia, women are seen as the ones to tend the garden and the children, and for the man to do the chopping of wood and repair work, much as in Kingsolver's *AVM*. Contradictory to Berry and Coperthawite's ideas of labor division among the sexes, Carolyn Robinson claims that men and women who work harmoniously to achieve all task will have a greater appreciation for one another and ultimately a better marriage. The Nearing's marriage then closes the section with a brief autobiography of Helen Nearing and her work as a writer for a popular magazine and the struggles her and her husband were unable to overcome. The

final note is about the sentiment homemaking has to the homemaker, how food made in the home for the family has greater value.

The second focus of the chapter is class in the section titled Class Acts: The Habitus of Homesteading. Gould defines the three aspects of homesteading that intrigue her most, “They are: the expression of one particular reading of nature, the potential for the commodification of homesteading, and the persistence of the very moral hegemony to which homesteaders object in both traditional religious institutions and in the industrialist and consumerist “cult of progress”(218).” This refers to the use of everyday things that differ when we are in nature, what nature wants (nature's ecological requirements) differ from what the individual wants. Some people are defined by what their environment requires they do, what maintenance they must perform, constitutes what is a sin, and if a person will eat as an omnivore or a vegetarian. The “better” way of living is interpreted by what is spiritually and morally right. Commercialization has given us the freedom to be the world’s greatest consumers, to harm the natural world (220).

Nature’s Meanings is the third component of the chapter recaps the topics of the changes in homesteading practices, tensions between contemplation and action, personal renewal and cultural reform, and “homesteader identity” in the true nature of homesteading (221). Gould has taken a close look at cultural locations of gender and class and now examines the “use” of nature. Overall it is stated that homesteading’s ultimate goal is getting close to nature yet, “nature remains a moving target (221).” Here she claims that we are removed from the resources themselves in this process of using nature for our commodities, therefore cannot fully appreciate their value (222).

Gould takes time to compare homesteading to religious practice both its similarities and its differences in the section "*Against Religion*. For people who have reformed their lifestyles away from the mainstream of dominant institutionalized religion and the culture of consumption, homesteading is like religion because it affects the life's choices that are made which have spiritual meaning (223). So homesteading is like religion but, "not religion in the formal sense (224)." It is comparable in the sense of the self as a part of a larger force in the world and seeking redemption from a prior sinful life of materialism and consumption (224), yet homesteaders are weary of institutional religion. Gould looks at transcendental writers such as Bourroughs and Therou as the forefathers of homesteading.

A synopsis of the sauna crew's conversation revolves around the definition of sacred. In her field notes she states that the discussion was, "an informative reminder of the community's own feelings about itself (225)." It examines the wariness of homesteaders toward institutionalized religion and the reasons for its rejection. There is a story about a young man who finds spirituality in a pond that illustrates how things can be sacred outside the setting of a church. The discussion ends with Ernest's story of taunting his parents at Christmas time with a list of ways Jesus was a communist (227). Gould concludes that while homesteaders practice spiritual rituals in the home, they more or less reject mainstream religion.

The fact that homesteading is not the conventional way American families live anymore is due to the distribution inequalities, which without, homesteading would still be practical. Yet those who chose to reject American dominant culture and seek redemption through homesteading would experience, "a life lived close to nature demonstrates the extent to which the quest for a spiritual life may go "underground" but will not go away (228). " It is not a

practice that could sustain all people and without industry, our technological advances would not exist.

In the last section of the chapter Gould wraps up the book by recapping her main points and explaining her research techniques, “I have discussed the ways in which the practice of homesteading both opposes and is located quite close to traditional religious practice, the ways in which homesteading is an act of dissent from dominant American culture, yet still implicated in that culture and, indeed, recognizably “American.” It is a practice of both engagement and retreat, of social reform and of individual self-forming, of getting close to nature and yet not too close. I have presented diversity in my analysis because the data demanded it (229).” How we think about nature is shaped by our practice, how we advance technology and what we choose to consume. Gould asserts her concern about the current American condition by stating, “Our ideas of nature shape our practices on and in it, and these practices, in turn, change nature in ways that shape our ideas...Making meaning through settlement, the conquering of nature, through technological prowess and unrestrained consumption has been the dominant strand in the American story (229).” Due to man’s desire to conquer nature, he has been pulled from the sense that we are apart of nature and rather than fit into it, he chooses to see it merely as a resource for his use. Living a life close to nature is not unlike the religious person’s choice to live close to God, it produces an intimate understanding of life and how to care about the natural world, “Such a stance toward nature serves as a counterpoise to the dominant stance of industrialism and consumerism that underlies the modern condition (230).”

After stating her discontent with the dominant cultural practices, GOULD presents a solution to the problem of living unsustainably by simply saying, Simplify! “While few may become homesteaders, some may take some aspects of homesteading into their daily lives

(231)” Gould is not in agreement with the lavish lifestyles of the modern day consumer and urges people to fight materialism in a resistance toward consumerism. “As my discussion of ritualization has illustrated, homesteaders are engaged in practices that intentionally further such “goods” as the resistance to materialism and environmental degradation on the one hand and the promotion of the value of home, community and “place” on the other (232).” Unlike the modern American family where our activities are defined by our consumption, a modern day homesteader rejects acquiring new materials that degrade the environment by keeping production close to the home and simple. “This good may not be a life devoted to God, but it is a life devoted to decentering the selfish interest and working toward a telos of ecological sustainability for future generations and for the health of the earth itself (232).” By not fulfilling the self through gaining possessions, the goal of the good life is to find self worth without the goods.

On the other hand, the goal of some homesteaders follows more of the farm life, like in Kingsolver. “Moreover, some homesteaders see themselves as restoring the particular tradition of “self-sufficient farming,” which almost has been driven to extinction by agribusiness (233).” The life of food sufficiency not only connects one with nature but lets the self be grateful for the material we waste most, food. Food- sufficient homesteaders battle consumerism from a different field in a righteous attempt to restore the environment with healthy farming practice and respect for the land.

II. The Appendix of Hoes and Huckleberries is the analysis Gould provides of her own research as well as all the sources she used. She mentions a few times that she does claim to have the entire story, “...I take all responsibility for any errors that remain (239).” . Yet I believe she has objectively analyzed the practices of homesteading, “This means not assuming that we are

“experts” reporting to the world on distant “subjects” (238).” She evaluates her own underlying messages about religion, class, gender and nature. “ I am asking readers to consider what seem to be relatively straightforward life choices through the lens of constructions of nature and the self and of religion and spirituality in a particularly American context (228).” Gould acknowledges that her inquiries could have caused uncertainty in her subjects since she was asking about their personal lives. “While I trust I have represented their words and actions fairly, not every homesteader I have written about would necessarily see his or her own story as a part of a broader story of religion and nature in American culture (239).” Although there could be inaccuracies and biases in her focuses, Gould has done a good job in exploring the life of a homesteader. “ Their visions of a sustainable future are rarely enacted, but they are ones from which all of us can learn (239).” She ends with crediting the large body of literature that have influenced her and helped shape her writing.

III. Gould engages the writer in the last chapter to consider some major questions about the individual’s consumer power. The context of gender problems do not escape with the modern world when one moves away from society, revealing that they are not problems of the society but of the individual’s perspective on gender roles. Gould presents solutions to problems of sustainability in relation to the culture of consumerism. The particular problem of distribution inequalities arises as an explanation of how the family home went from the farm to “underground,” driven away by industrial agriculture. Food still remains a major theme in the book yet the last chapter examined the ways in which homesteading compared to institutional religion and how homesteading is a deviation from the modern condition.