

EDITORIAL

IN A SERMON ON THE EVILS OF ADULTERY, a character in Henry Fielding's novel *Amelia* (1751) proclaims that "domestic happiness is the end of almost all our pursuits, and the common reward of all our pains." This statement is clearly directed at the men in the audience rather than the women, for whom domesticity was more often a punishment than a reward, and it is no coincidence that the speaker also describes women as the property of their husbands and warns that the "poisoning" of this property inevitably leads to the destruction of the family. The idea that domestic happiness was based on the moral purity of women was later encapsulated in Coventry Patmore's famous description of women as "angels in the house" (in his 1854 poem of the same name), and in order to maintain this purity women were not supposed to have any sexual needs other than the need to reproduce.

Some of the earliest expressions of dissatisfaction with the cult of domesticity were heard in the late 19th century following the rise of the "new woman"—a term that referred to a new generation of educated, emancipated, and financially independent women who rejected their role as "angels in the house." After the turn of the century a more modern attitude towards domesticity was evident in Rebecca West's claim that "domesticity is essentially drama, for drama is conflict, and the home compels conflict by its concentration of active personalities in a small area." Instead of being synonymous with peace and harmony, the domestic sphere was thus increasingly seen (particularly by women) as a site of social, political, and economic conflict.

Our autumn issue features a special section that reflects similarly ambivalent attitudes towards domesticity in both a historical and contemporary context. For example, Jason Brown's story "The Wreck of the Ipswich Sparrow" depicts two women—one from the 19th and one from the 21st century—who both seek to escape the confines of the domestic sphere. This longing inspires them to pursue adventures outside the home, yet the former is restricted by her financial dependence on her husband and the latter

commits an act of infidelity that ultimately leads to the collapse of her marriage. S. C. Bayat's story "Where the Fault Lies" also features a woman who rejects domesticity by abandoning her husband and two daughters, one of whom grows up to abandon her own daughter in the same house where she grew up. The family is thus shown to be constantly on the verge of collapse, like the house in which they live, yet domesticity is not so much a prison to be escaped as a site of conflict that must be constantly renegotiated by each new generation. Louise Carson's poem "Grief" shows how this emotion is indelibly linked to the home as the place where memories of lost loved ones are most profoundly felt, and Nicola Winstanley's story "The Feeling in the Flesh" similarly describes the story of a woman who is grieving the loss of her mother at the same time that she gives birth to her own daughter. Memories of her mother's domestic perfection feed her growing sense of inadequacy, which manifests in the form of a mysterious abdominal pain, and the story thus vividly illustrates how the impossible expectations placed on women often undermine their sense of well-being. Cyndi MacMillan's poem "Violation" interprets Edward Hopper's etching of an evening wind blowing into a woman's bedroom as symbolically unleashing pent-up sexual desires that "violate" the perceived sanctity of the domestic sphere, while Elliott Gish's story "What Brings You Back There" presents a more explicitly horrific image of such violations by describing the home as a site of violence and abuse. Jade Riordan's poem "Daylight Savings (An Hour Lost)" also describes a walk through a house at night, during which ordinary domestic objects are invested with a sense of mystery by hinting at memories that are now lost or beyond reach, and C. S. Reardon's story "Grace" similarly depicts a series of mysterious nocturnal encounters that evoke a sense of everpresent danger in a seemingly quiet and uneventful neighbourhood. The theme that connects all of the pieces in this section is therefore the notion of domesticity as an arena of struggle between conflicting forces, which fundamentally challenges the ideal of domestic happiness and the subjugation of women on which this ideal depends.

Our autumn issue also features an interview with American poet Peter Campion as well as two new chronicles: Roberta Barker's review of the new radio adaptation of Henry James' novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Christopher Elson's review of recent jazz concerts and recordings.