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# Multiple Factors of “Insideness” and “Outsideness”: Exploring Why Gilead Is Both a Place of Insideness and Outsideness for Ames and Jack

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Dr. Deardorff  
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**“Multiple Factors of “insiderness” and “outsiderness”: exploring why Gilead is both a place of insiderness and outsiderness for Ames and Jack”**

“I’m writing your begats, and you seemed very pleased with the idea. Well, then. What should I record for you? [...] I, John Ames, was born in [...] 1880 [...] At this writing I have lived seventy-six years, seventy-four of them here in Gilead, Iowa.”

~Ames (Robinson, *Gilead* 9)

From the very opening of *Gilead*, narrator John Ames begins his narrative to his son, Robby, by articulating his connection with his hometown of Gilead, Iowa. It is significant that he mentions Gilead right after his own name, for he cannot see his individual identity as divorced from his physical setting, this location called Gilead that is beautiful and precious to him, despite its flaws and antiquity.

As central as “place” is to *Gilead*, no critic has yet talked about Marilynne Robinson’s view of place as manifested in the novel. This is understandable, given that the novel was published only recently, in 2004. There are many reviews on the novel, but only a handful of literary critiques written in response to the text. R. Scott LaMascus confirms this reality, stating, “Only a few scholarly articles have yet appeared which focus on *Gilead*” (“Toward a Dialogue” 198-199). The little that has been written on *Gilead* focuses on aspects of the novel like Calvinism, religion, racism, theology, human communication, imagery, and Ames’ keen sensory perception as a dying man. Thus, in light of this lack of literary conversation on the topic of “place” in *Gilead*, there is a great need for just such a literary critique, and hence, the creation of this paper.

When one acknowledges that Robinson focuses on the concept of place, one can then use theorist Edward Relph's theory of "place" to gain a deeper understanding of this novel. In *Gilead*, Robinson uses the "insider" character Ames and the "outsider" character Jack to demonstrate her belief that circumstances are often the weightiest factor that determines one's "insiderness" or "outsiderness" with one's place. Ultimately, both Ames and Jack end up as "outsiders" in Gilead, due to circumstances beyond their control.

Before delving into the text itself, however, one must first define the inside-outside binary that Robinson incarnates in her protagonists and that Relph so clearly articulates. The inside-outside binary is basically the idea that one can be either "inside" a place or "outside" a place. This dual reality is intrinsic in the human condition, as Relph states: "The inside-outside division [is...] a simple but basic dualism, one that is fundamental in our experiences of lived-space and one that provides the essence of place" (Place and Placelessness 49). He asserts that man tends to have a two-faced relationship with place, stating, "the essence of place lies [...] in the experience of an 'inside' that is distinct from an 'outside'" (ibid). In other words, according to Relph, there are two ways one can experience one's physical place: as an "insider" or an "outsider." One is either inside their physical place or outside it (Cresswell 44). Both conditions of "insiderness" and "outsiderness" give an individual a distinct perspective which, in turn, influences the way in which that individual experiences their place.

Relph defines insiderness as "the degree of attachment, involvement, and concern that a person or group has for a particular place" (Seamon and Sowers 45). To be inside a place is to feel "at home" in it. He calls those who feel insiderness with their physical place "insiders." Relph describes the insider's perspective, saying, "from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it"; "to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and

the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place” (49). For an example of an insider, consider someone who has lived in New York City their whole life. Their experiences with that place would be characterized by an intense familiarity with it, having lived in that setting on a day-to-day basis, viewing it as the backdrop for their relationships, activities, and experiences. They would be used to large crowds, bright lights, exhaust fumes, and the noisy din of traffic and other human activity. Most likely they would feel at ease in big cities, yet uncomfortable and out of place in smaller, rural towns.

Outsideness, on the other hand, is the opposite of insideness. Relph defines outsideness as the *lack* of connection an individual may experience with their physical place. To be outside a place is to feel like a stranger within that place. As Relph puts it, “from the outside you look upon a place as a traveler might look upon a town from a distance” (ibid). An example of an outsider would be someone who grew up in a small rural town in Maine, then immigrated to New York City to live. Unlike the insider mentioned above, this person would experience New York City as a detached observer. They would view the city from a perspective colored by their “backwoods of Maine” upbringing that consisted of fewer people, a more pastoral environment with woods and mountains, and a great deal less noise and pollution. Because they just arrived in the city, they do not have a long-standing relationship with the place, and thus, they do not feel at home in NYC or as strongly attached to it as the NYC native does.

The inside-outside division is not as clear as it first appears, however. Relph recognizes that there is a “blur” in the binary, when he admits, “the dualism of inside and outside is not quite as clear as it appears at first sight” (49). For one thing, an individual’s condition of insider or outsider is prone to change. To use Relph’s example, consider a person who leaves town, then comes back to it. They are an insider of their town, yet they become an outsider for the time that

they are outside their town's boundaries. They become an insider once again, when they are return to their town and are once again physically inside their town's boundaries (ibid). To use another example, consider the person from Maine that moves to NYC. From the people of Maine's perspective, that person would be a former insider of Maine who is now an outsider of it, due to their emigration from this state. On the other hand, from the people of NYC's perspective, that same person would be an outsider who is becoming an insider of NYC.

Not only can an individual's status with their physical place change, but there are imperfections within the status itself. Most people are a mixture of insider and outsider. It is more accurate to think of the inside-outside binary as a spectrum of different degrees of insiderness, as Relph does in *Place and Placelessness*. The two extremes that anchor the ends of this spectrum are the statuses of "existential insider" and "existential outsider" (51, 55). In short, the existential insider is totally inside their physical place, while the existential outsider is totally outside their physical place. To continue with our previous scenario, one could say that the NYC native is an existential insider of NYC, while the person from Maine who just moved to NYC is an existential outsider of NYC.

These extremes are ideal statuses, however. As Relph acknowledges, usually people are not perfectly "insider" or "outsider," but land somewhere on the spectrum between these two points. An example of this would be if the NYC native that has the insider status, still feels out of place within NYC, despite having lived there all of his life. His feeling of detachment from his place would contradict his status of insider, so he would be an insider who is somewhat of an outsider. Another example of a complicated status with place would be if the outsider from Maine arrives in NYC, and instead of feeling out of place in the big city, he feels immediately "at home" there, as if the place was made for him in particular. His feeling of insiderness with

this new place would contradict his status of outsider, so he would be an outsider who is somewhat of an insider. Thus, due to the changeability of one's status of "insider" or "outsider," as well as the varying intensities between these two extremes, it is more accurate to perceive the inside-outside binary as grey rather than black-and-white.

Relph believes that the primary reason for the binary's blur is each person's unique "mix" of individuality. There are many different factors that shape an individual's insiderness or outsiderness with a place, which, in turn, shapes an individual's image of that place. According to Relph, the three main factors are personality, intentions, and circumstances (56-57). This is the specific theory at work in the novel that one can use to analyze Ames and Jack's bond with Gilead and to explain their "blurry" statuses within it.

Robinson shows insiderness in *Gilead* by embodying it in Ames. At first glance, Ames perfectly incarnates the "insider" type. He is the ideal "native" figure in the story for he has lived in Gilead for seventy-four out of the seventy-six years of his life (9). Gilead is the main physical setting for his narrative. The structure of the novel interweaves the threads of Ames' reflections on Gilead itself with the threads of his reflections on Gilead's people and events. His default tone towards Gilead is that of an "insider" who loves his place and is connected to his dying day; his last words in the novel are his declaration that he wants to be buried in Gilead, as "a last wild gesture of love" (247).

Ames is so intensely inside Gilead that one can say that he incarnates the "existential insider" type, as Relph terms it. Simply put, this is the most extreme form of insiderness that a person can have. Relph describes it as "the insiderness that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region, when they know the place and its people and are known and accepted there" (55). The condition where a person "is part of that place and it is part

of him.” “[It is] knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong—in all other places [you] are [an] existential outsider [...] no matter how open [you] are to their symbols and significances” (ibid).

Robinson shows outsidership in *Gilead* by embodying it in Jack. At first glance, he perfectly incarnates the “outsider” type. Although Jack grew up in Gilead, he leaves town and lives elsewhere for about twenty years (149). When he does come back to Gilead, he does so more as a visitor than as a native. People in Gilead hardly remember Jack, save for some negative memories which involve him. When Jack’s sister Glory first mentions him on page 18, Ames does not even remember who Jack is, at first (18). People hardly talk about Jack, save for Glory and his father Old Boughton who ask when he is coming “home;” they view Jack as the lost prodigal. Jack is outside of Gilead until about one-third of the way through the novel, when he finally returns to this town and materializes on Ames’ front porch (91).

Jack feels so disconnected with Gilead that one can say that he incarnates the “existential outsider” type, which is the opposite end of Relph’s insidership spectrum. This type is the most extreme degree of outsidership that a person can have with a place. As Relph states, an existential outsider is an individual who has been rejected by a place and has been “condemned always to observe as though from outside” (51). An outsider’s behavior is characterized by “a selfconscious and reflective uninvolvedness [with a physical place], an alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging” (ibid).

Although Ames and Jack incarnate the insider and outsider types, they do show imperfections within their type; neither man is perfect insider or perfect outsider. This leads to the next part of the paper. Robinson’s portrayal of the inside-outside binary is clear; she personifies the binary in these two characters, so the reader can see, hear, and feel what these two

different conditions are like. At surface level, the novel seems to be about the binary itself. At a deeper level, however, the novel revolves around the *blur* of the binary. Thus, the rest of the paper shall explore how Robinson wrestles with this blur in the novel, via Ames and Jack.

Ames and Jack prove the greyness of the binary primarily by their lives. They illustrate Relph's specific theory that personality, intentions, and circumstances affect not only one's status with place but also the imperfections within one's status with place (56-57). As previously stated, this three-part lens is perfect for analyzing both characters' relationships to Gilead.

First, consider Ames. The first Relphian factor that influences Ames' status with Gilead is personality. Ames has a personality of "empathetic insider" that exacerbates his existential insider status with Gilead. Empathetic insideness is the most intense *quality* of insideness that an individual can attain with a place. Empathetic insiders experience the essence of a place, whereas other people experience just the surface of it (50, 53). They are not just attached to the land, via a general love for it (what Tuan would call "topophilia"), but they know the land and bond with it as strongly as if it were another person. To them, "[the] identity [of a place] is not just an address or set of appearances, but a complete personality with which [they are] intimately associated" (55).

To Relph, empathetic insider is just a category, but for Ames this phrase is the core of his personality. It is Ames' empathetic insider personality that allows him to have such a poetic view of everyday life in Gilead. It explains his deep delight in both the people and landscape of this place. Ames' intense perception, due to his personality type, results in his intense connection with the place that he perceives. As Relph puts it, "the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place" (49). So, in short, Ames is attached to Gilead largely because his personality readily and deeply attaches itself to his physical environment.

Ames' empathetic insider personality comes across primarily in his tone. Critics have praised Ames' celebratory narrative voice. His tone is reminiscent of American Transcendentalists like Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson. Consider Ames' sense of wonder and detailed delight in his frequent depictions of Gilead's landscape and residents: "I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world once and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again" (57). His vivid, poetic diction crops up again when he describes the young couple and the wet tree branch scene:

On some impulse [...] the fellow jumped up and caught hold of a branch, and a storm of luminous water came pouring down on the two of them, and they laughed and took off running, the girl sweeping water off her hair and her dress as if she were a little bit disgusted, but she wasn't. It was a beautiful thing to see, like something from a myth.

(27-28)

He is so enamored with Gilead that, at one point, he likens the most glorious nature scenes to moments of transfiguration: "Sometimes...the Lord breathes on this poor gray ember of Creation and it turns to radiance—for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again, and to look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light" (245).

Although Ames experiences a temporary loneliness in Gilead, due to his widowhood years, but his insideness with Gilead enables him to experience this circumstance as a blessing rather than as a curse. He calls the solitude of this time "a balm for loneliness" (18-19). Many other scenes depict him "just enjoying the quiet" (195). He also sees these years as a bittersweet affliction that prepared him to marry his current wife, Lila (55). His attitude toward these years is ultimately a positive one, as he indicates on page 71: "When I speak of the long night that

preceded these days of my happiness, I do not remember grief and loneliness so much as I do peace and comfort—grief, but never without comfort; loneliness, but never without peace.” It is more accurate, then, to say that Ames is contentedly set apart in Gilead, at this time, rather than despairingly lonely. In summary, Ames is a peaceful introvert who appreciates the solitude of his widowhood and the quiet connections that he does have during these years with the people of Gilead and Gilead itself, as I will mention later on.

Another Relphian factor that influences Ames’ status is his intentions. As Relph articulates, “the process of identity construction [of a place...] consist[s] of a complex and progressive ordering and balancing of observations with expectations [...] until a stable image is developed” (59). In other words, intentions greatly shape one’s perception of a place and either strengthen or weaken one’s attachment to that place.

Ames’ intentions solidify his insider status. His primary intention in the novel is to have a family of his own and to live peacefully with them there in Gilead. He most blatantly articulates this vision of family on page 242, saying it was “just that kind [of hope] the place was meant to encourage, that a harmless life could be lived here unmolested.” He then cites Zechariah’s prophetic vision of family, paraphrasing it with his own, Gilead-esque version of it: “To play catch of an evening, to smell the river, to hear the train pass. These little towns were once the bold ramparts meant to shelter just such peace.” Ames calls this intention “marvelous,” especially in the context of “this sad world” (ibid). The fulfillment of this intention largely affects how intensely he feels inside Gilead.

Whether Ames’ intention to have a family of his own in Gilead is fulfilled or not is best seen by comparing his past and present circumstances, which is the third Relphian factor. First, consider Ames’ past. Ames grew up in Gilead, Iowa, in a Congregationalist family with a solid

religious tradition, as he affirms: “My mother’s father was a preacher, and my father’s father was, too [...] That life was second nature to them, just as it was to me” (6). Ames grew up with this traditional Christianity that steeped his hometown. As Ames’ father put it, Ames lived his whole life “within the limits of notions that were very old and [...] very local” (235). So, during childhood, Ames had a family of his own, and despite the disagreements with his grandfather and father that he relates in the novel, he ultimately felt connected to them.

Even as an adult, he is still connected to his biological family, via memory. It is this memory of them which binds Ames to Gilead. Note his frequent mentioning of stories about his male ancestors. Ames opens his narrative with the story of how he and his father trekked through the wilderness of Kansas to find his grandfather’s gravesite (9-15). He voices respect for his fire-singed grandfather’s militant abolitionist vision, despite his eccentricities and how difficult he made life for Ames’ family, while he lived with them. He also relates his father’s pacifist vision and his many resulting conflicts with Ames’ grandfather. Another memory he shares is his father’s conflict with Ames’ atheist brother Edward that lasts many years.

Ames is also rooted to Gilead via the memory of his female ancestors. For instance, Ames tells how his sickly grandmother showed up in Ames’ grandfather’s church one day, an incident which forced Ames’ father to overcome his conflict with the grandfather and start attending that church again. Ames also relates how his mother stared his grandfather down and how she intercepted his father’s burning of the grandfather’s old, bloodstained war clothes and, instead, gave them a proper washing and burial. It is this memory of his biological family that gives him an intense connection with Gilead, since he views it as the physical setting of these precious people and their experiences.

Even though Ames's personality and family circumstances help him achieve insideness, however, he is an imperfect insider. Although he sees Gilead as the location for his past family, he also experiences it as the empty location for his present family. This occurs during the long-lasting circumstance of his widowhood. Ames tells us that his first wife and child died, via his wife's complications in childbirth and he does not marry again after this. Instead, he largely isolates himself in his house. He refers to this long season of familylessness as, "My own dark time [that lasted] most of my life [...] The time passed so strangely, as if every winter were the same winter, and every spring the same spring" (44). He further expresses the pain of this "hope deferred" season of his life, when he says, "I had no old wife and no promise of a child. I was just getting by on books and baseball and fried-egg sandwiches" (54). As much as he exults in the peace and solitude of these years, he still experiences the pain of not having a family. Without family, Ames cannot have this perfect insideness that he desires. Here, Robinson portrays that perfect insideness with a place necessitates having such close relationships in that place. I will expand upon this later on, however. For now, just know that Ames' intention of having a family in Gilead is *not* fulfilled for many years and, at this point of Ames' life, one must conclude that he is an *imperfect* insider with Gilead.

Ames' pain of not having his own family signifies some degree of alienation with the people of Gilead, which in turn challenges his insider status with the place of Gilead. Ames' hope deferred manifests itself in the form of envy towards those in Gilead who do have families of their own. This is seen most blatantly in his envy towards his best friend Old Boughton and Boughton's son Jack.

He admits his envy towards Old Boughton on page 134: "[I suffered] a good deal at the spectacle of all the marriages, all the households overflowing with children, especially

Boughton's—not because I wanted them, but because I wanted my own.” Sometimes this covetousness was so bad that he could not even stand seeing Old Boughton's family: “Boughton [would] come here, to my house, because his house was full of children [...] I used to dread walking into his house, because it made mine seem so empty. And Boughton could tell that” (65). Right after this, Ames expresses his hope deferred in the same words that Jack does on page 219, “I have a wife, too, I have a child, too” (65).

Ames' pain of not having a family also surfaces in his envy of Jack's fatherhood. Even though Jack's fatherhood is an illegitimate one, Ames is angry with him for abandoning the wife and child he had, when he himself had lost his own wife and child due to death. Ames states, “That one man should lose his child and the next man should just squander his fatherhood as if it were nothing [...] I don't forgive him. I wouldn't know where to begin” (164). This covetise solidifies Ames' estrangement from Jack.

As his envy towards Old Boughton and Jack portrays, Ames' bitter attitude towards his unfulfilled intention isolates him not just from the people of Gilead, but from the place of Gilead. He views Gilead during this time as the place of others' fulfilled intentions, but *not* his. He sees the people of Gilead as inseparable from their physical place and his estrangement from them results in his estrangement from the place. Thus, his bitter perspective enforces his ultimate status of imperfect insider with Gilead.

Although Ames' alienation from human relationships during his widowhood appears to totally alienate him from Gilead, as well, it alienates him from Gilead only somewhat. Ultimately, his alienation with the *people* of Gilead causes him to draw closer to the *place* of Gilead. Ames has substitutionary relationships that give him some degree of insideness with Gilead that outweighs the degree of outsideness he experiences within Gilead due to his

familylessness. In his isolation, he cultivated the few significant relationships he had at this time, with the three “characters” of Gilead, memory, and language. These substitutionary relationships are the reason why the solitude of this time was painful, yet ultimately a “balm” for him. The degree of insideness that stems from these relationships strengthens his overall bond with Gilead, giving Ames the overall status of insider, despite the circumstance of familylessness that temporarily challenges his insideness.

The first substitutionary relationship is Ames’ relationship with the physical place Gilead. His relationship with Gilead goes along with his empathetic insider personality, as previously stated. He loves the land as he would another person and is familiar with its unique features: “I love the prairie! [...] Here [...] there is nothing to distract attention from the evening and the morning, nothing on the horizon to abbreviate or to delay. Mountains would seem an impertinence from that point of view” (246). In addition, he comments on the “*human* beauty” of the Gilead landscape, and the world as a whole, in the scene when he walks by some oak trees and remembers a windy night when they were shedding their acorns: “I have been thinking about existence lately [...] and I thought, It is all still new to me. I have lived my life on the prairie and a line of oak trees can still astonish me” (56-57).

Place-writer Barry Lopez affirms that Ames’ absence of family greatly influences him to build a relationship with Gilead during these years. He asserts that people often build relationships to their physical place as a coping mechanism against loneliness: “If you open yourself up, you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy may come a sense of belonging, a sense of not being isolated in the universe” (Lopez “A Literature of Place”). Lopez poses questions that Ames himself could have spoken while becoming so deeply acquainted with Gilead: “How can you occupy a place and also have it occupy you? How can you find such a

reciprocity? The key [...] is to become vulnerable to a place.” Ames also manifests Lopez’s three characteristics of someone that has a close relationship with their place: “paying intimate attention [to a place]; [having] a storied relationship to a place rather than a solely sensory awareness of it; and living in some sort of ethical unity with a place.” Ames’ narrative definitely embodies this close relationship to place that cements his insider status.

Thus, despite Ames’ temporary phase of familylessness in Gilead, his connection with the land itself gives him an ultimate status of insider in this place. The resulting insideness from this relationship is why he does not leave Gilead at this time. He continues to stay there for the rest of his life (9).

Ames cultivates another substitutionary relationship with the “character” of memory. As mentioned previously, the history of his ancestors roots him to that physical location, despite the transitory loneliness of widowhood that he experiences. Ames is as closely acquainted with memory as if it was a person. As Lopez puts it, “If you’re intimate with a place [...] whose history you’re familiar, and you establish an ethical conversation with it, the implication that follows is this: the place knows you’re there. It feels you. You will not be forgotten, cut off, abandoned.” The critic Yi-Fu Tuan agrees that memory is a significant tie that roots an individual to their physical place, when he states, “The appreciation of landscape is more personal and longer lasting when it is mixed with the memory of human incidents” (Topophilia 95). Also, in Tuan’s words, Ames has a “native” perspective on Gilead:

[For the native,] landscape is personal [...] history made visible. The native’s identity—his place in the total scheme of things—is not in doubt, because the myths that support it are as real as the rocks and waterholes he can see and touch. He finds recorded in his

land the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings from whom he himself is descended, and whom he reveres. The whole countryside is his family tree.

(Space and Place 157-158)

Ames' loyalty to his family's memory roots him to Gilead, the physical place, despite his father and brother's attempts to take him along with them to Florida: "[My father] told me that looking back on Gilead from any distance made it seem a relic, an archaism. When I mentioned the history we had here, he laughed and said, "Old, unhappy far-off things and battles long ago." And that irritated me" (235). Later on, he says, "[My father] thought he could excuse me from my loyalty" (ibid). Ames did not want to leave Gilead because he had a deep connection with the memories that the land contained. Unlike his father, Ames' perspective of his family's memory is ultimately a positive one that gave him a sense of identity and place in the world.

So, in summary, Ames' loyalty to his family's memory affects his loyalty to the land itself, because he views it as the physical setting that was the backdrop of this retrospectively remembered drama. Memory is a huge factor that causes Ames to feel inside Gilead, because these past familial connections are rooted in the land itself, and give Ames yet another layer of intimacy with his hometown.

The final substitutionary relationship that Ames' pursues during his widowhood is the "character" of language. He views literature as a person, when he refers to it in the novel. In one scene, he blesses the books he read during his widowhood, similar to how he blesses his human congregants via baptizing or christening them: "Thank God for them all [...] and for that strange interval, which was most of my life, when I read out of loneliness, and when bad company was much better than no company. You can love a bad book for its haplessness or

pomposity or gall, if you have that starveling appetite for things human” (39). His sermons also kept him company during this time. He viewed the hours he spent sequestered in his study, writing them, as hours spent building a relationship: “For me writing has always felt like praying [...] You feel that you are with someone” (19). He wrote each sermon down “word for word” (18). So, just as Ames’s relationships with the land and memory root him to Gilead, his relationship with literature is another substitutionary connection that gives him insideness with Gilead during his widowhood.

Ames intention of having a family is finally fulfilled at the present time, when he is writing his novel in his late 70’s. This happens through the scandalous miracle of his marriage to a younger woman named Lila. He never dares to hope that she would love him, especially due to their thirty-years-apart age gap, yet the romance works out and Ames is blessed with a son of his own, Robby. These last years of Ames’ life are the season of hope fulfilled.

The joy during the brief years of having his own family outweigh the sorrow he experienced during the longer period of his widowhood. He expresses his thankfulness for his wife: “That there should be such a voice in the whole world, and that I should be the one to hear it [is] an unfathomable grace” (209). He also expresses his gratitude for his son, Robby, when he tells him, “I could never thank God sufficiently for the splendor He has hidden from the world [...] and revealed to me in your sweetly ordinary face” (237). Ames notes that his house no longer feels empty, like it used to, and he now feels at home in the world (4). The increased degree of insideness that Ames experiences during this time is directly tied to his having a family, as we will expound upon later on. At this point of Ames’ life, however, one could say that Ames’ change in circumstance causes his status to switch from “imperfect insider” to “more perfect insider.”

Not only can one use Relph's three-part theory to critique the insider Ames, but one can also use this lens to critique the outsider Jack. Jack's factors of personality, intentions, and circumstances combine in a different way than Ames', which results in his feeling outside Gilead. The first Relphian factor that influences Jack's status is personality. Just as Ames' personality has an insider bent, Jack's personality has an outsider bent. He is a loner by nature, a "wilderness unto [himself]" (119). Loneliness characterizes Jack, ever since he was a child: "That boy was always alone, always grinning, always intent on some piece of devilment" (Ames, on 181). It is his loneliness that spurs Jack to play the mean pranks he did when he was a kid, like setting Ames' mailbox on fire and hijacking a Model T (180-181). As Ames notes, "How lonely would a child have to be to have time to make such a nuisance of himself?" (182).

Even as an adult, Jack still has this loneliness about him, as seen when he returns to Gilead. He comes back alone, with no friends or family by his side. Ames says he "could just feel the loneliness in him;" "my first thought was that nobody ought to be as lonely as he looked to me walking along by himself" (231; 240). Even though Jack is "the most beloved" Boughton child, he somehow does not "get" how deeply he is loved (72). Ames refers to Jack as "a stranger to him [Old Boughton] and to all of us" and notes how odd it was that Jack felt so lonely when he was so loved (189; 183). As much as his biological family loves him, his loner personality type contributes to the sense of loneliness he has in Gilead, which solidifies his status of "outsider."

Another factor that exacerbates Jack's outsideness with Gilead, due to his loner personality, is Jack's intentions. Unlike Ames, Jack's intention is two-fold. His first intention is the "dishonorable" intention with Annie Wheeler that he had in the past and that he lived out,

with negative consequences (156-157). This is not Jack's primary intention in the novel and Ames has no similar point of comparison, but it does deserve a brief mention, nonetheless.

Jack's past dishonorable intention helped to push him outside Gilead. As Ames relates, "Jack [...] had no business in the world involving himself with that girl [Annie Wheeler]. It was something no honorable man would have done" (156). Jack himself acknowledges his past guilt of fornication, when he speaks with Ames and admits, "I am not a gentleman [...] I know what the word means Reverend" (221-222). His fulfilled dishonorable intentions greatly triggered Jack's departure from Gilead, because he does not want to bring further shame on his father. His forced emigration results in his physical detachment from Gilead and he eventually settles in St. Louis, his present place of residence. He lived on his own, physically outside Gilead, most likely for eight years, as the text implies, since he later confesses that he has had a family of his own in St. Louis for this length of time. So, the shame of Jack's transgression enhances Jack's already outsider status with Gilead.

Not only does Jack's shame contribute to his outsideness, but one could say that Gilead itself contributes to his outsideness, via its people's judgmental response to his past involvement with Annie Wheeler. As previously articulated, outsideness results when a physical place rejects a person, "condemning" them to "always to observe [that place] as though from outside" (Place and Placelessness 51). Tim Cresswell supports the reality that a place can reject an individual who commits an inappropriate action. He states that an individual can act "out of place" when they "transgress" the moral boundaries of their location which have been established by the people in power there. As a result of their acting "out of place," the people of that place exclude this individual (Place 27). This alienation is what happens to Jack in his relationship with Gilead. The general social gossip and the negative memories of this place not only force Jack to

leave town, but when Jack returns, the memory of his past “transgressions” and his resulting sentence of “outsider” prevail in that place. He therefore views Gilead from what Relph would call an “incidental outsider” perspective, seeing it as “the background or setting for activities [that is...] quite incidental to those activities” (Place and Placelessness 52). Ames notes the pain that these negative memories causes Jack, when he comments, “[Jack] is here [in Gilead], where things went on that still might cause him suffering, maybe shame” (201). Thus, Jack’s past dishonorable intention and the people of Gilead’s resulting ostracism of him solidifies his outsider status in that place.

The primary intention that Jack has, however, is the same intention that Ames has: to have a family and to stay with them in Gilead. Ames recognizes that he and Jack share the same vision, when he articulates, “I saw in young Boughton’s face [...] a sense of irony at having invested hope in this sad old place, and also the cost to him of relinquishing it. And I knew what hope it was [...] that a harmless life could be lived here unmolested” (242). This current intention plays a greater role than his past intention did in determining his outsideness with Gilead.

As with Ames, one can best see whether or not Jack’s intention is fulfilled in Gilead, and what his resulting status is, by comparing his past and present circumstances. First, consider Jack’s past. All through his growing up years, Jack had a solid, loving family. His father, Old Boughton, was a gracious pastor and their home was generally a happy, wholesome setting to grow up in. His family was a reputable, cornerstone family in the town.

Even when Jack comes back to Gilead, as a middle-aged adult, he still has this indirect insideness with Gilead, through his biological family. He stays with his father Old Boughton

and his sister Glory, while in Gilead, and interacts with them. He is also connected to his other siblings, whom are on their way to visit Gilead in the very near future, in light of their dad's imminent funeral. Relph's term "vicarious insideness" applies here (52-53). One can extend his definition of the term to mean the indirect insideness one experiences through other insiders, not just through works of art, which is the primary illustration he gives for this term (ibid). In summary, then, Jack's intention of having a family in Gilead is somewhat realized through his biological family that resides in Gilead. His connection with them gives him a vicarious insideness with the town which renders him an *imperfect* outsider.

Even though Jack is an imperfect outsider, however, because he does have some degree of attachment with Gilead via his childhood family, he is ultimately an "outsider," because his intention is never *completely* realized in Gilead. Like Ames during his widowhood, Jack sees Gilead as the location for his past family, yet he ultimately experiences it as the empty location for his present family. Unlike Ames, however, the season of Jack's unfulfilled intention is much longer and more permanent than Ames.'

Jack's unfulfilled intention causes him to feel a hope deferred which overarches everything he does and experiences at the present time, both in St. Louis and in Gilead. As previously indicated, he spends about eight years in St. Louis and the text implies that he lived alone during this time. Jack calls this familyless time "a fairly low point" in his life, in which he was "not [...] accustomed to being treated like a respectable man" (222). The fact that he does not speak much about the loneliness testifies that the pain is still too near to speak of.

Hope deferred also prevails when Jack returns to Gilead. At this time, Jack now has a family of his own, yet they are not there with him in Gilead. Thus, Jack's intention is only half

realized in this place, since his complete intention was to have a family *in Gilead*. The first manifestation of Jack's unfulfilled intention is when Jack first visits Ames. It is only Jack that visits; there are no friends or family with him (91). The second manifestation of this is when Jack tells Ames that for the past eight years he has had a wife and son, Della and Robby. Not only does Jack have a family, but he has a bi-racial one, which complicates the fulfillment of his intention in Gilead. He admits that he has lived with them inconsistently, due to the anti-miscegenation laws of their day that perpetually separate them despite their attempts to stay together (220).

It is the racism of his day that currently separates Jack from Della and Robby, as well as the prejudice of his wife's family and discriminatory laws that perpetually tear them apart. While he is in Gilead, his family is in Tennessee with Della's parents'. As Jack says, "I have had considerable difficulty looking after my family. From time to time they have gone back to Tennessee, when things were too difficult" (220). This personal experience with racial inequality is the main reason why Jack comes back to Gilead. He comes back, not to get married officially there, in a place free of anti-miscegenation laws, but to see if he could keep his family together there, as he articulates on page 229 (220).

The racism of Jack's day, however, complicates the fulfillment of his intention. Robinson sets the novel in the late 1950's, the era right before the Civil Rights era. Racism prevailed at this time in the U.S., manifesting itself in anti-miscegenation laws in many cities. Gilead did not have such laws. This is why Jack hopes that he can stay here with his family and live in peace. Soon after arriving in Gilead, however, he discovers a latent racism in the town which severely challenges this hope. Even after the Civil War ended, Gilead does not live up to its state's epithet of "the shining star of radicalism;" total racial equality was not achieved for *all*

of its citizens (220). While the war achieved emancipation for black Americans, it did not achieve the ultimate abolitionist goal of establishing total equality for them.

Ames' grandfather realizes this failed ideal of racial equality, in his letter to Ames' father. He asserts, "No good has come, no evil is ended. That is your peace" (85). He experiences hope deferred that stems from this racial inequality that prevails in Gilead, when he states, "Disappointment. I eat and drink it. I wake and sleep it" (84). Jack personally experiences this failed abolitionist vision, when he returns to Gilead and witnesses other Gileadites living there in peace, but only because they are Caucasian. He realizes the peace he had been hoping in is *not* for everyone. In summary, then, the prevailing racism of Jack's day infiltrates Gilead and impedes the fulfillment of his intention in this place, because it labels him and his family "outsiders."

Jack expresses the pain of his unfulfilled intention, due to racism, in the text itself: "He said, controlling his voice, 'I haven't had any word from my wife since I left St. Louis. I have been waiting to hear from her. I have written to her a number of times [...] 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' [...] I have even found myself turning to liquor for solace'" (221). At this point of the novel, Jack does not know if he and his family can stay in Gilead. However, I will leave off here and come back to Jack's circumstances later, to show the outcome of his intention and how it determines his final status with Gilead.

Ames and Jack's different degrees of insideness with Gilead result in their different images of it. As Tuan asserts, "The ways in which people perceive and evaluate [the earth's...] surface are [...] varied. No two persons see the same reality. No two social groups make precisely the same evaluation of the environment" (Topophilia 5).

The first image of Gilead is Ames' "this is home" image of it. Ames has this perception of Gilead, first of all due to his personality's insider "bent," as previously mentioned. As Relp puts it, "for the existential insider [...] there is a gradual and subtle development of an identity with and of his place that begins in childhood and continues throughout life" (60). It is Ames' insider personality that naturally gives him a sense of belonging with Gilead and colors his view of it as "home." As previously stated, his personality triggers him to build the substitutionary relationships with the land, memory, and language, which enhance his natural bond with Gilead.

When one re-examines Ames' relationship with memory, however, one realizes that it signifies something deeper than just the surface level reality of an individual feeling "at home" in a place because it is the setting of their ancestors. Memory points to the main reason why Gilead is "home" for Ames: because "his people" are there. In other words, Gilead is "home" for Ames, only in so far as it is the physical locale that contains the human relationships he holds most dear. Note how Ames' degree of attachment to place shifts when comparing his widowhood phase with his "now I have a family" phase. He articulates how his house felt empty to him during his widowhood: "In those days [...] I thought this was the worst of them all, the draftiest and the dreariest"; "It's a perfectly good old house, but I was all alone in it then. And that made it seem strange to me" (4). His house felt empty because it lacked a family of his own. Furthermore, he says he did not feel "at home" in the world during this time. Now that he has a family, however, he states that both his house and the world feel like "home" (ibid).

In the previous passage, Robinson asserts the universal reality that certain human relationships, particularly the ideal close relationships of family, give a physical place meaning for an individual. If these relationships are absent, then the place has *no* meaning for that individual. Yi-Fu Tuan agrees with this, stating, "The value of place [is] borrowed from the

intimacy of a particular human relationship; place itself offer[s] little outside the human bond” (Space and Place 140). Ultimately, Gilead is significant to Ames not in and of itself, but only because of the specific human relationships that it contains.

The converse of this is also true, as Jack illustrates. This is where the second, very different image of Gilead arises in the novel: Jack’s image of Gilead as “this is not home.” Although Jack says Gilead “feels familiar” to him, he does not call it “home” (199). For Jack, Gilead is not the location of his deepest relationships (i.e. Della and Robby), but rather, the void of them. This is why Gilead, as a whole, has no meaning for Jack. As Tuan puts it, “In the absence of the right people, [...] places are quickly drained of meaning so that their lastingness is an irritation rather than a comfort” (Space and Place 140). Jack’s view of Gilead parallels Saint Augustine’s view of his hometown, Thagaste, after his childhood friend had died. The place felt different for him, due to the absence of his friend, as he articulated:

My heart was now darkened by grief, and everywhere I looked I saw death.  
 My native haunts became a scene of torture to me, and my own home a misery.  
 Without him everything we had done together turned into excruciating ordeal.  
 My eyes kept looking for him without finding him. I hated all the places where  
 we used to meet, because they could no longer say to me, ‘Look, here he comes,’  
 as they once did.

(Augustine, qtd. by Tuan in Space and Place 140)

Like Augustine, Jack definitely experiences his hometown Gilead as this void of intimate relationships, which solidifies his “outsider” status with the place.

Furthermore, Jack’s negative experiences with Gilead also contribute to his negative image of it. As previously indicated, Jack’s past involvement with Annie Wheeler still haunts

him and it colors his image of Gilead. On page 199, he refers to it as “the scene of the crime.” Ames himself realizes how painful returning to Gilead has been for Jack, on page 201. Jack’s present negative experiences with Gilead’s racism compounds his negative image of Gilead as “not home.” Because of Gilead’s racism, his family cannot stay there as he had hoped. He views Gilead as the place of others’ fulfilled intentions and resulting insideness, but not his.

Jack’s overall negative image of Gilead may explain why Jack leaves it, at the novel’s end, very likely going back to St. Louis, as he implies on page 199. This was more “home” for Jack than Gilead was. Even though he didn’t “have” Della and Robby in this place, and probably would not “have” them there in the future, as evidenced by his comment “I think I’ve lost them,” he at least would have had the positive memory of them in this place. This attachment to place via memory would give him a degree of insideness with St. Louis that he did not have with Gilead.

Ames and Jack clearly illustrate how an individual constructs an image of place based on how their experiences in that place combine with their expectations of that place (Relph 59). In summary, Ames views Gilead as home because his intention of having his own family and living with them peacefully there is fulfilled. Jack, on the other hand, views Gilead as “not home” because it is the place where this same intention is unfulfilled.

As previously stated, Robinson affirms Relph’s theory that personality, intentions, and circumstances greatly impact one’s insider or outsider status. She expands upon this theory to portray her belief that circumstances are the weightiest of these three factors in determining one’s status with place. It is the novel’s ending that reveals her ultimate view about whether an individual can attain the perfect insideness they seek. One must investigate the novel’s ending to see what Ames and Jack’s final circumstances and resulting final statuses are.

Both characters face final circumstances beyond their control which determine their final status with Gilead. First, consider Ames; he faces the unchangeable circumstance of imminent death, due to his weak heart condition, angina pectoris (4). This condition hastens Ames' end and fuels his pen to finish his narrative for his son before he passes away. At first he objects to his own imminent death: "I don't want to be old. And I certainly don't want to be dead" (141). As the novel progresses, however, he gradually accepts it as something that he cannot change. His condition crops up frequently in the text, such as in the scenes where Ames is too weak to play baseball with Robby or to help Lila move his study downstairs. He is often falling asleep in the middle of everyday conversation and activities.

The final circumstance of Ames' imminent death changes the fulfillment of his intention of having a family in Gilead. He has had a family in Gilead up to this point, but death shall soon force him to leave them. Ames' painfully realizes the imminent *unfulfillment* of his intention, when he says, "I always envied men who could watch their wives grow old [...] it is [...] true that I will never see a child of mine grow up and I will never see a wife of mine grow old [...] I have felt as though a great part of life was closed to me" (54)). This is Ames' hope deferred, as Jack has his own hope deferred with regards to his family.

Ames' imminent death also changes Ames' status with Gilead. Not only must he leave his family, but he must also leave Gilead itself. Thus, death undercuts the intimate bond he has built with Gilead all of his life. As much as the novel, as a whole, is the narrative of an "insider," it is also the narrative of an "insider who is becoming an outsider" in the only place he has ever called "home" (9). Laura Tanner affirms this in her article "Looking Back from the Grave." She says how Ames' role is increasingly that of an observer and his imminent death intensifies his observations of life: "The pressure of mortality serves as the lens through which

his vision distills the sensory data of experience into the essence of the image”; “[his] impending death [...] renders his every sensation an emotional and aesthetic composition” (236; 234-235). It explains Ames’ keenly detailed and emotional depictions of his day to day experiences that pervade the novel. Tanner alludes to one such scene, the passage where Ames looks out the window and witnesses his wife and son blowing bubbles: “Weakened by his heart condition and his advancing age, he can watch but not participate in a scene made all the lovelier by virtue of his distance from it” (235-236).

Ames himself realizes his detached, “observer of life” status which results in his sense of outsidership, as he articulates: “[I] feel as though I’m failing, and not primarily in the medical sense. And I feel as if I am being left out, as though I’m some straggler and people can’t quite remember to stay back from me” (142). He does not always hear people when they talk to him, not because he is not listening, but he is unable to respond. Tanner references the scene on page 142 of the novel: “This morning you came to me with a picture you had made [...] I was just at the end of a magazine article, just finishing the last paragraph, so I didn’t look up right away. Your mother said, in the kindest, saddest voice, ‘He doesn’t hear you.’ Not ‘He didn’t’ but ‘He doesn’t’” (Robinson 142; Tanner 246).

In conclusion, then, the final status that the reader must leave Ames with is outsider. At novel’s end, he is insider only at the emotional level; in every other way he is dislocated from Gilead. Robinson stages Ames just outside Gilead’s bounds, already taking his first steps towards the unknown place of immortality.

Jack, on the other hand, faces the insurmountable circumstance of Gilead’s racism that is subtly, yet deeply engrained in the town. Only Jack sees Gilead’s flaw of racism for what it is. No other Gileadite speaks of it and still fewer Gileadites recognize it. This is due to Jack’s

outsider perspective. As Tuan states, it is only the outsider, or “visitor,” that can have an objective perception of a physical place (Topophilia 63-65). As Tuan puts it, “the visitor is often able to perceive merits and defects in an environment that are no longer visible to the resident” (65).

Because Jack has this “visitor” perspective, he has a keen awareness of Gilead’s racism which contrasts with Ames’ blind perception of it. Jack is sensitive to Gilead’s racism because he has had direct experience with racism in general. For the past eight years, he and his bi-racial family have attempted to evade the discriminatory laws set against them. Ames, by contrast, is aware of this issue yet indifferent to it, because his family is Caucasian and thus is not affected by the racism of the laws. Note Ames’ subtle, yet ingrained racism in his response to seeing Jack’s photograph of his family: “I was slightly at a loss [...] You see, the wife is a colored woman. That did surprise me” (217). Ames manifests racism a second time in his view of Negro church that burned down in Gilead, a while back. When Jack asks Ames’ advice if he could possibly stay in Gilead with his family, he brings up this event. Jack bluntly states the ugly reality for what it is (i.e. racism), “there was a fire.” Ames, however, only refers to this event as “a little nuisance fire [that] happened many years ago” (231).

Despite Ames’ personal racism, Ames is Jack’s acquaintance and, as such, Jack hopes that Ames will use his influence to subvert the racism of Gilead society and advocate for him and his family’s staying there. However, Jack learns that Ames will not live long enough to be able to use the influence he has in Gilead, as Ames himself admits the circumstance of his imminent death (231).

Jack also discovers that racism is so entrenched in Gilead that Ames cannot assure Jack that his own father, Old Boughton, would accept the news of his bi-racial family with affirmation. Jack hopes his father would accept his family and wants to introduce them to him, saying, “I would like him to know that I finally have something I can be proud of” (229). Both Ames and Jack know this is impossible. Even a charitable and gracious pastor like Old Boughton was not immune from harboring the prevalent racism of the times.

Furthermore, Boughton’s physical and mental frailty due to old age would exacerbate the likely racism that he had held all of his life. Jack articulates his new-found realization of the extent of his father’s frailty and how it might impede his acceptance of his new family: “But now I see how feeble my father is, and I don’t want to kill him” (229). He does not tell his father about his bi-racial family, because he does not want to risk killing him with this potentially offensive news.

Ames also notes Boughton’s frail condition which prevents Jack from safely telling his father about his family. He refers to Boughton as sitting in a chair of “decrepitude and crankiness and sorrow and limitation”; “the clouds have settled over his mortal understanding” (238; 243). Ames laments: “If [only] he [Jack] could be like ancient Jacob, the cherished son who had been lost to him bringing for his blessing the splendid young Robert Boughton Miles [...] There was a joy in the thought of how beautiful that would have been, beautiful as any vision of angels” (Ames, on 244). “If he could be” implies that Boughton was *not* like that and “how beautiful that would have been” implies that it could not have happened at this time. The 1950’s was not “ripe” for the affirmation of bi-racial families and the establishment of racial equality that emerged during the 1960’s, with The Civil Rights Movement.

Racism is the ultimate reason why Gilead was not and could not be a place of insideness for Jack. This is why he shows up on Ames' porch one night, to look in his windows and imagine what insideness felt like (200). At best, he is only somewhat of an insider, a vicarious insider, as Relph would put it, for he experiences insideness vicariously through those that have it (i.e. Lila and Ames) (Place and Placelessness 52). This is the closest he gets to experiencing what it is like to have a family *in Gilead*.

Jack's final status of outsider due to his unfulfilled intention, also explains why Jack leaves town before his sickly father dies and his siblings and their families arrive for the funeral. Jack's sister Glory does not understand his motive for leaving, but Ames does: "The house will fill up with those estimable people and their husbands and wives and their pretty children. How could he be there in the midst of it all with that sad and splendid treasure in his heart?—I also have a wife and a child" (237). Jack realizes the impossibility of staying in Gilead with his family, so he chooses to leave. He is the most poignant incarnation of "hope deferred" that appears in the novel: "I saw in young Boughton's face [...] a sense of irony at having invested hope in this sad old place, and also the cost to him of relinquishing it" (242).

In closing, both Ames and Jack ultimately end up as outsiders in Gilead, to some degree. Ultimately, through these two characters, Robinson concludes that there is no perfect, permanent state of insideness in this imperfect and transient life. These imperfections are most often circumstances beyond one's control that affect both one's intimacy with a physical place and one's image of it. As Ames and Jack depict, circumstances can affect an individual's degree of insideness in two ways; either 1) an individual may not attain insideness and a sense of place in this imperfect world, due to insurmountable circumstances like 1950's racism, or 2) if an

individual does attain insideness, they might have to give it up due to insurmountable circumstances like death.

Even though Ames and Jack do not attain a perfect, permanent state of insideness with Gilead, they both still have the *hope* of that total insideness. As Ames puts it, “hope deferred is still hope” (247). Both characters portray the universal reality that total insideness is impossible to attain in this imperfect and transient life, but this ideal can sustain an individual and enrich their experience of human existence.

Jack manifests hope deferred at his final outsider status with Gilead. Racism prohibits him from having his family there with him in Gilead, and thus, prohibits him from having the resulting perfect insideness with Gilead that he longs for. Nonetheless, Robinson depicts that there is also a sweetness to this hope, despite the bitterness of its unfulfillment. Ames calls Jack’s dream of living together with his family in one place “[a] sad and splendid treasure in his heart,” a vision “[as] beautiful as any vision of angels” (219, 237; 244). Jack’s unfulfilled intention for perfect insideness with a place is still hope and it gives an aesthetic beauty to his life. Ames testifies to this reality when he tells Robby about Jack, not to “warn” him of his past misdeeds, but rather “to let [him...] see the beauty there is in [Jack]” (232).

Ames also manifests hope deferred at his final outsider status. As previously mentioned, Ames mourns the fact of his departure. He will not live to see wife and child grow old and feels an outsider who is shut off from this “great part of life” (54). Towards the end of the novel, he finds himself in Jack’s shoes, and resonates with the reality of being estranged from one’s family due to circumstances:

If I’d [had a large family...] I’d leave them all, on Christmas Eve, on the coldest night of the world, and walk a thousand miles just for the sight of

your face, your mother's face. And if I never found you, my comfort would be in that hope, my lonely and singular hope, which could not exist in the whole of Creation except in my heart and in the heart of the Lord.

(237)

Even if he could never see Lila and Robby's face and be with them, he says "[his] *comfort* would be in that hope" (ibid).

It is this bittersweet hope deferred that Robinson leaves us with, the imperfect hope of attaining perfect insideness with a physical place. One may never have a sense of total belonging here on earth, yet it is worth pursuing a close attachment to place because the process of attaining it is something that brings personal comfort, gives an aesthetic beauty to life, and enriches one's experience of existence.

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