Constructing a Home: the Multiple-Role of a Housewife in Anne Ellis’ The Life of an Ordinary Woman

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Summary

- Anne Ellis’s autobiography
- The concept of home and housewives.

My argument:
- whether domesticity confines women or not
- how a woman re-constructs her story through the exercise of household management by telling her life issues.
Anne Ellis and her autobiography

- Anne Ellis (1875-1938)
- *The Life of an Ordinary Woman*: 1929
  - how women in mining camps live with and within home
  - transcend beyond the confinement of the ideal of womanhood
Women’s stories

- Are they trivial issues which are not worth mentioning?
- Women began to engage in paid work outside the home.
- Become an active participant in the Wild West.
The Concept of Home

- Victorian view of womanhood
- Women had to stay at home.
- “an oasis in the desert, a sanctuary where sympathy, honor, virtue are assemble, where disinterested love is ready to sacrifice everything t the altar of affection” (Cott 64)
The distinction of genders’ role

- Industrial revolution: assigns “distinctive roles to men and women” (Allen 13)
  - Women: stayed at home
  - Men: went to work
- Housewives functioned as an unpaid workforce at home
  - The exploitation of women’s “domestic labor by men was the most basic cause of women’s inequality” (Hayden 3).
Summary of Ellis’s autobiography

- born in 1875, a second generation of a mining family.
- Mining camp: a life which is different from the homestead: husbands move along with the camps.
- the financial crisis: Suffered grinding poverty and sorrow throughout her life.
- How did she guard her children?
Surviving in the West

- Financial crisis: Struggle to maintain her family.
- Exercise her domestic ability:
  - working in a bakery
  - running a board house
- Cooking: save her family
  no longer a family routine but the means to show her accomplishment.
A surrogated mother to the miners

- The role of surrogated mother
- cooking and doing household:
  - a way of overcoming the barriers of isolation.
  - a way of creating a community
Conclusion

- The household: a unpaid job
- Pioneer life: an opportunity for the frontier women.
  -- demonstrate her power
  -- re-constructed her life through the role of a housewife.