

Finding the Self Within: Feminist Perspectives on Home and Identity in *Little Fires Everywhere*

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ABSTRACT

*This study explores the emotional and social challenges that affect female self-actualization within the domestic sphere and examines the ways in which women resist and redefine traditional roles in order to claim their identity. The problem lies in socially constructed gender expectations that associate female fulfilment with domestic order, often limiting women's autonomy and personal growth. This qualitative research is grounded in Sara Ahmed's feminist theory, particularly her ideas of the feminist killjoy, wilfulness, and institutional walls. Through a close textual analysis of Celeste Ng's novel *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), the study reveals how female characters navigate the demands of motherhood, conformity, and emotional labour within a suburban setting. The novel presents a contrast between two women, Elena Richardson and Mia Warren, who follow different paths in search of meaning and selfhood. As the narrative unfolds, acts of quiet resistance and emotional honesty emerge as key to self-actualization. The findings show that personal transformation becomes possible when women question dominant norms and create space for emotional truth. This study contributes to feminist literary discourse by reimagining the home as a space of both conflict and possibility in the journey toward self-actualization.*

Keywords: Self-actualization, domestic life, feminist theory, emotional labour, Sara Ahmed, Celeste Ng, motherhood, identity

INTRODUCTION

The domestic sphere has increasingly served as both the locus of containment and resistance in contemporary feminist literature. Historically constructed as a site of security and care, the home has also been positioned as a site where gendered norms are most firmly rooted (Ahmed, 2017). Women are often conditioned and taught that they must act in certain ways, based on social expectations of what it means to be a mother and a woman. Indeed, modern literature has just started questioning these roles showing how much shackles domestic life could become in terms of personal growth for women. Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) provides a rich examination of this tension, following female characters as they negotiate—and critique—the borders of the domestic sphere in their pursuit of self-realisation. Featuring two women with parallel but remarkably dissimilar lives and beliefs, the novel calls into

question the assumption that domesticity will secure fulfilment, rather offering it as a battleground where an individual identity is fought for, compromised, and reclaimed.

The novel takes place in the suburb of Shaker Heights, a place of control, order, and appearances. In such an environment, domestic life is romanticised, but also controlled. Ng points out how such environments can hide deeper anxieties and inequalities — especially for women. Elena Richardson, the novel's image of suburban perfection, prances along the path you would hope for from a mother and a wife and a rule-follower; Mia Warren, the peripatetic artist and single mother, thumbs her nose at those same societal lines and vaunts creative and emotional freedom. The battle these women are fighting is a metaphor for a larger battle—of assimilation versus independence, of privilege versus marginality, of tradition versus self-definition (Gross, 2021). By setting these two women at odds, Ng undercuts the notion that the home represents a bastion of righteous female empowerment, making the home a site that always reinforces social and gendered boundaries.

Domestic space and female subjectivity as feminists arrive at greater legitimacy as scholars, they have been able to insist on the importance of the domestic setting in the formation of the female self. According to Rosenman (2020), the home is no longer viewed as merely a physical location but as an ideological construct that disciplines women through normative expectations. In *Little Fires Everywhere*, this construct is evident in the way Shaker Heights residents judge and measure one another—particularly women—based on how well they perform domestic roles. Elena, for example, believes that stability, planning, and adherence to rules define success and moral superiority. Yet, her internal dissatisfaction and strained relationships with her children reveal the emotional cost of conforming to these ideals. Mia, on the other hand, disrupts this narrative. She rejects permanence and predictability, choosing instead a lifestyle that allows her to pursue art and raise her daughter according to her own values. Her choices reflect a form of feminist resistance that aligns with recent scholarship on alternative maternal practices (Aronson & Neysmith, 2022).

This contrast invites reflection on what it means for a woman to actualize herself in a world where domestic ideals are still embedded in everyday expectations. Self-actualisation, first theorized by Maslow (1943) and later developed in feminist psychology, refers to the process of realizing one's full potential, often through personal growth, creativity, and autonomy. In patriarchal societies, however, the path to self-actualisation is rarely straightforward for women. It often requires negotiating conflicting demands—between care and independence, motherhood and selfhood, community norms and personal dreams (Gilligan & Attanucci, 2021). In Ng's novel, both Elena and Mia struggle with these tensions, albeit from different positions of privilege and ideology. While Elena's life seems secure, her identity is built on external validation and social conformity. Mia's life, though unstable, offers her a degree of freedom that Elena cannot access. Through their journeys, Ng shows that self-actualisation requires not only internal resolve but also the courage to challenge societal scripts.

Recent critical work on Ng's novel has also emphasized its nuanced portrayal of motherhood, race, and class as intersecting dimensions of female identity. As noted by Hsu (2021), the novel “destabilizes the myth of the good mother by revealing the racial and economic conditions that determine who is allowed to mother freely and who is scrutinized.” This perspective is essential in understanding how female agency is shaped not only by gendered expectations but also by structural inequalities. Mia's experience as a working-class single mother of colour differs radically from Elena's white, upper-middle-class maternal role. The community's acceptance or rejection of each woman is deeply tied to these social markers. This aligns with intersectional feminist theory, which argues that true autonomy for women cannot be examined in isolation from race, class, and social capital (Crenshaw, 1991; Carastathis, 2016).

Moreover, the novel's symbolic use of fire as destruction and rebirth reflect the transformative nature of self-actualisation. As Izzy, Elena's youngest daughter, rebels against the constraints of her household, she aligns herself with Mia and eventually becomes the literal and metaphorical agent of rupture in the Richardson family. Her decision to set the house on fire represents a radical rejection of imposed norms and a yearning for authenticity. In this sense, fire doesn't only represent rebellion, it is used as a potent metaphor to how one can break domestic boundaries and free oneself. As Gentry (2023) suggests, Ng's fire is "what is left, that which women could not sacrifice to the fire; it is what remains after their ruined houses," and the violence of the breaking free from normative femininity in order to rebuild anew according to one's own terms.

The emerging trends in the academic response to *Little Fires Everywhere* show its significance for contemporary discussions on gender, identity and the home. The novel leads its readers to ask what female fulfilment looks like, who gets to enjoy it, and at what price. It also interrogates the idea of generational warfare, as daughters like Izzy or Pearl (Mia's daughter) absorb or reject the lessons bequeathed to them. The shifts reflect larger cultural changes: New forms of identity and family structure call into question traditional values. As contemporary feminist thought concentrates more on fluidity, hybridity and intersectionality, Ng's storytelling opens up a space to examine these changing thoughts (Wilson, 2020).

This study is important due to its examination of the struggle for personal freedom and social conformity, be it domestic or gender as it still resonates in literature and in gender politics. In attending to both characters and themes throughout *Little Fires Everywhere*, the study offers insights for feminist literary criticism as well as for the place female fiction has in challenging and conforming to society's demands placed on women. Literature, for them is not mere entertainment or contemplation but a space of resistance—a place where other possible narratives of women's lives can be created and narrated (Showalter, 2021). So Ng's is not just a story about family and community, but a radical investigation into what it means to break free within — and beyond — the home.

This study considers how Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* uses women's self-actualization as an affront to the rigid, traditional domestic spheres set for women. The research question guiding this paper is:

How does *Little Fires Everywhere* portray the struggle for female self-actualisation within the constraints of domestic life?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism in contemporary literary criticism has moved beyond simply highlighting the oppression of women; it now interrogates the deeper structures of power embedded in gender, race, class, and space. Feminist theory has especially turned to fiction as a site where these structures can be represented, challenged, and reimagined. Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* has become a central text in this discourse, offering a layered portrayal of domestic life, motherhood, and self-actualisation. Scholars since 2020 have explored the novel's engagement with popular feminism, intersectionality, emotional labour, and spatial politics, revealing its continued relevance in today's cultural landscape.

Recent feminist scholars have examined *Little Fires Everywhere* in light of intersectional popular feminism, especially following its televised adaptation. Shelley Cobb (2024) argues that the casting of Kerry Washington as Mia Warren in the TV version adds racial depth to the character and exposes the

boundaries of white liberal feminism. Cobb draws on Lauren Berlant's concept of the "intimate public," suggesting that the show and novel both tap into shared emotional experiences among women, yet foreground how race and class disrupt the supposed universality of maternal identity. In so doing, the adaptation foregrounds the questions which post feminism raises and problematizes for more inclusive feminist politics, focusing on the collective voices of women but also critiquing exclusionary norms.

This preoccupation with control and exclusion can also be seen in recent considerations of suburban surveillance in feminist critique. Based on the idea of the panopticon in the philosopher Michel Foucault's work, critics have interpreted Shaker Heights, the fictional town where the novel is set, as a symbolic surveillance apparatus. Its fixed plans and social order are instruments of repression, oppressing women who don't fit its suburban model. This order is cracked apart by Mia's intrusion, for she refuses to conform to either the spatial permanence or the behavioural normality that community requires. Meanwhile, Elena Richardson is living the internal gaze of the panopticon, where we measure our success by being seen, by what is socially acceptable. Academics point out that the psychological impact of such surveillance also demonstrates the broader limits on women's freedom in this, the domestic sphere.

Temporal discipline Aspects of the emotional cost of being a woman is a central concern in contemporary writings. The idea of emotional labour, initially proposed by Hochschild has been revisited by Davis et al. (2021), who highlight that invisibility of domestic labour weighs even on privileged women such as Elena. In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Elena enacts motherhood and domestic perfection by suppressing her own emotions. Her equilibrium relies on her skill at "managing" the appearance of things, but her relationships — especially with her daughters are ruined. Mia's unusual status as a domestic role model centres emotional honesty over performance, embodying a feminist revision of caregiving not as duty, but as a practice of atonement.

The house as a gendered space has also been revisited through feminist geography. Scholars such as McDowell (1999), whose work is recontextualized in the 2022 piece of research in *Cultural Geographies*, contend that space is in fact gendered, with the home and the neighbourhood both reflecting as well as enforcing patriarchal norms. Shaker Heights, in this view, is not neutral; it is constructed to maintain gender and class boundaries. Mia's refusal to settle in one place, her transient lifestyle, and her rejection of material permanence all function as a critique of this spatial ideology. Her mobility symbolizes her resistance to the roles and expectations attached to women in suburban spaces.

Motherhood remains a central theme in feminist interpretations of the novel, particularly through the lens of Adrienne Rich's distinction between the institution of motherhood and the lived experience of mothering. Hsu (2022) explores how Mia's maternal identity is delegitimized by the dominant white, middle-class standards upheld by Elena and the community at large. While Elena represents institutional motherhood—structured, rule-bound, and publicly approved—Mia embodies experiential motherhood, prioritizing emotional bonds and moral autonomy. The novel thus critiques the racial and classed hierarchies that determine who is seen as a "good mother" and who is not.

This disparity in maternal legitimacy also intersects with class dynamics and the distribution of cultural capital. Building on Bourdieu's theory, feminist scholars have noted how characters like Elena benefit from not only economic privilege but also symbolic power that grants them authority. Mia's artistic talent and emotional intelligence, while valuable, are not recognized as forms of capital in Shaker Heights' value system. A 2023 paper presented at the Feminist Literary Society argued that the novel reveals how class-based definitions of success and morality marginalize alternative ways of being a woman and a mother. Mia's struggle is not just personal; it is embedded in structural inequality.

Narrative structure in *Little Fires Everywhere* has also drawn critical attention. Scholars like Wilson and McCarthy (2021) highlight how the novel's multiple points of view resist a single authoritative voice. This polyphonic narrative style aligns with feminist literary strategies that emphasize complexity, contradiction, and multiplicity in women's lives. By offering readers access to the inner thoughts and motivations of both Elena and Mia—and even characters like Izzy and Pearl—Ng avoids a simplistic moral framework and instead presents the varied and often conflicting paths toward female self-realisation.

Finally, the novel's use of fire as both literal and symbolic rupture has been analyzed as a feminist act of resistance. Gentry (2023) interprets Izzy's decision to burn down her family home as an act of creative destruction—a radical rejection of the suffocating domestic environment in which she feels trapped. Rather than framing the act as madness or impulsiveness, Gentry sees it as an assertion of agency, aligning with feminist calls to reimagine the home not as a place of obedience but of transformation.

Taken together, these recent studies illuminate how *Little Fires Everywhere* critiques the domestic sphere as a site of gendered expectation and control while offering possibilities for resistance, reinvention, and liberation. Through its nuanced characters and layered narrative, the novel engages with key feminist concerns such as maternal identity, emotional labour, racial and class inequality, and the politics of space. In doing so, it affirms fiction's vital role in reflecting—and reshaping—the social narratives that govern women's lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach rooted in feminist literary criticism. It seeks to explore how Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* portrays the struggle of women to achieve self-actualisation within the constraints of domestic life. The qualitative nature of the study allows for an in-depth textual analysis focused on meaning, ideology, and emotional nuance, rather than quantifiable outcomes. This methodology is particularly suitable for literary analysis, where the aim is to uncover hidden narratives, challenge dominant discourses, and interpret the symbolic functions of character, space, and structure within the text.

The primary method used in this study is close reading. This involves a detailed analysis of language, imagery, narrative structure, and character development in selected passages from the novel. Close reading is a foundational technique in literary research and allows the researcher to explore how specific textual features contribute to larger thematic patterns. In this case, particular focus is placed on scenes that involve emotional conflict, domestic routine, resistance to social norms, and moments of transformation. Through this method, the study identifies key textual markers that reflect the lived realities of women under patriarchal structures and illustrates how those realities are challenged or upheld by the characters in the novel.

The theoretical framework guiding this analysis is derived from Sara Ahmed's feminist theory, particularly her concepts outlined in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). Ahmed's work explores how women experience institutional pressures through their bodies and emotions, and how acts of resistance—whether subtle or overt—can be read as feminist interventions. Her notions of the “feminist killjoy,” “feminist snap,” and “institutional walls” are particularly relevant to the characters of Mia Warren and Elena Richardson, who represent opposing models of womanhood. Mia is analyzed as a feminist killjoy who refuses to conform to the expectations of her suburban environment, while Elena embodies the “promise of happiness,” a social narrative that encourages women to find fulfilment in traditional domestic roles, even at the cost of personal dissatisfaction.

The data for this study includes both primary and secondary sources. The primary data consists of Celeste Ng's novel *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), from which relevant scenes and dialogues are selected for analysis. The selection is based on the thematic relevance to the research question, particularly in areas dealing with motherhood, identity, space, and self-definition. Secondary data includes scholarly articles, feminist theoretical texts, and recent literary criticism published after 2020, ensuring that the analysis engages with current academic conversations. These sources are used to contextualize the primary text within broader feminist debates and to support the application of Ahmed's theory.

Data analysis is conducted through thematic interpretation, guided by the theoretical framework. Specific themes such as emotional labour, maternal identity, spatial regulation, resistance to conformity, and symbolic rupture are examined in relation to both character behavior and narrative structure. For instance, Mia's artistic lifestyle and transience are interpreted through Ahmed's concept of "wilfulness"—a refusal to be shaped by institutional norms. Similarly, the domestic setting of Shaker Heights is read as an example of "institutional walls," where order and discipline reinforce gender roles. Elena's internal conflict and eventual unravelling are viewed as signs of the limitations of the domestic ideal. The act of arson by Izzy, the youngest daughter, is treated as a moment of "feminist snap," representing a decisive rejection of imposed norms.

The interpretive nature of this research also requires an awareness of the researcher's positionality. Feminist methodology acknowledges that the act of reading and analyzing literature is never entirely objective. Rather than attempting neutrality, this study embraces subjectivity as part of the interpretive process. The researcher's own engagement with feminist thought, academic context, and cultural understanding informs the way the text is approached and understood. Sara Ahmed emphasizes the importance of discomfort, personal reflection, and lived experience in feminist work, and these values are central to this research.

In conclusion, this study combines close reading with a feminist theoretical lens to analyze how *Little Fires Everywhere* challenges domestic boundaries and illustrates the complex path of female self-actualisation. The methodology is designed to highlight not only what the text says about gender roles, but also how it says it—through narrative form, symbolic structure, and emotional detail. By applying Ahmed's theory to Ng's novel, the research aims to contribute to feminist literary scholarship and offer a deeper understanding of how fiction critiques and reimagines the roles assigned to women in the home and in society.

DATA ANALYSIS

Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere* provides a compelling portrayal of women navigating the constraints of domestic life, revealing the emotional labour, surveillance, and rebellion embedded within suburban motherhood. Using Sara Ahmed's feminist concepts—such as the "feminist killjoy," the "promise of happiness," "wilfulness," and "institutional walls"—this chapter analyzes selected textual moments to explore how women challenge traditional domestic roles in pursuit of self-actualisation.

Elena Richardson's worldview is shaped by her deep faith in order and routine. Ng describes, "Rules existed for a reason: they brought order to the world. They made society safe. Elena Richardson had always lived her life by the rules, and the Shaker Heights rules most of all" (Ng, 2017, p. 31). This line illustrates what Ahmed (2017) terms the *promise of happiness*, where conformity is equated with moral goodness and fulfilment. Elena's identity depends on social approval and predictable structure, yet her inner dissatisfaction reflects the emotional cost of pursuing happiness through obedience.

In contrast, Mia Warren disrupts this order. When advising Pearl, she says, “Sometimes, just when you think everything’s gone, you find a way... a scrap of something to hold on to” (Ng, 2017, p. 162). Mia’s resilience and transient lifestyle embody Ahmed’s concept of *wilfulness*—the choice to deviate from life paths imposed by social norms. Mia refuses the traditional script of stability and instead finds meaning in emotional truth and artistic expression. Her alternative way of mothering and homemaking challenges the dominant values of Shaker Heights, where ownership and permanence are idealized.

This ideological clash comes to the forefront during Mia’s confrontation with Elena: “You can’t play God, then wash your hands of the things you’ve created. Sooner or later, you’re going to have to answer for them” (Ng, 2017, p. 292). Here, Mia acts as the *feminist killjoy*, disrupting Elena’s self-image and forcing her to confront the consequences of her control. According to Ahmed, the killjoy exposes the violence of norms that are otherwise invisible. Mia’s critique pierces through Elena’s moral superiority and reveals the cracks in her supposedly perfect life.

Izzy Richardson, Elena’s youngest daughter, represents the embodiment of suppressed emotion and eventual rupture. Ng writes, “Izzy had burned the house down. She’d snapped” (Ng, 2017, p. 314). Izzy’s act of arson is symbolic of what Ahmed (2017) calls the *feminist snap*—a moment of emotional rebellion against systemic silencing. Her destruction of the family home is not just rebellion; it is a rejection of the entire system that failed to see or support her. The snap is not irrational but the inevitable outcome of being persistently unheard, a reaction to being confined within a space that never welcomed her difference.

Elena’s internal conflict is further exposed in a moment of reflection: “Elena had always done what was expected. She had planned her life. She had followed the rules. And yet here she was, still not satisfied” (Ng, 2017, p. 276). This confession highlights the emotional emptiness that can accompany the performance of ideal femininity. Ahmed’s concept of *institutional walls* is particularly useful here—Elena has lived within these walls, shaped by their values, only to find that they have limited her emotional life and capacity for empathy. Her failure to understand her children, particularly Izzy, stems from her inability to step outside the frame of her suburban ideals.

In contrast, Mia encourages emotional honesty and ethical reflection. Speaking to Izzy, she says, “Sometimes, when you’re struggling to see someone else’s point of view, you have to meet them where they are. Understand what they’re feeling” (Ng, 2017, p. 219). This gentle advice contrasts with Elena’s rigid authority and illustrates a feminist ethic of care. Ahmed emphasizes that feminist living involves building relationships grounded in empathy and emotional understanding, rather than discipline or domination. Mia models this relational ethic and creates space for Izzy’s pain to be heard, offering an alternative model of maternal guidance.

The physical environment of Shaker Heights further reflects the novel’s ideological control. The town is described as meticulously planned and color-coded, “with streets named for English poets and covenants to prevent eyesores like parked cars or unmowed lawns” (Ng, 2017, p. 23). These aesthetic rules mirror the gendered and racial expectations that govern behavior. Ahmed’s concept of *normative space* is relevant here: institutions and communities are structured to make some bodies comfortable and others unwelcome. Mia’s status as a renter, a single mother, and a woman of colour puts her in opposition to the community’s expectations, making her presence a disruption to spatial and social order.

In another moment, Pearl reflects on the contrast between the Richardsons’ home and her own life: “Everything in the Richardson house was planned and organized. In her own home, things just happened” (Ng, 2017, p. 73). This observation highlights the emotional openness in Mia’s lifestyle compared to the

controlled artificiality of the Richardson household. Pearl experiences a more spontaneous and intimate domestic environment with Mia, one that allows for mistakes, vulnerability, and self-expression—values missing from Elena’s version of motherhood.

Throughout the novel, fire becomes a central symbol for transformation. From the title itself to the final act of burning the house down, fire represents both destruction and renewal. Ng writes, “The firemen said there were little fires everywhere” (Ng, 2017, p. 3). These small flames signify moments of resistance, emotional outbursts, and ideological challenges that build beneath the surface of an ordered life. In Ahmed’s terms, these fires are the heat generated by trying to live differently in a world that demands sameness. They are the result of emotional friction caused by pushing against institutional norms.

In conclusion, the selected passages from *Little Fires Everywhere* demonstrate how domesticity, often idealized as a space of comfort and femininity, is revealed as a site of discipline, emotional tension, and rebellion. Sara Ahmed’s feminist theory helps uncover how the characters experience the burden of institutional expectations and how their resistance takes the form of emotional expression, spatial disruption, and symbolic rupture. Through characters like Mia, Izzy, and even Elena, Ng illustrates that self-actualisation is not simply a personal journey but a confrontation with the structures that define and confine women’s roles in family and society.

CONCLUSION

The main concern of this research was to explore the representation of the female experience of self-actualizing in relation to home in Celeste Ng’s *Little Fires Everywhere*. Inspired by feminist theory, particularly Sara Ahmed’s concepts of the feminist killjoy, wilfulness, and the promise of happiness, and focusing on her account of institutional walls, this study examined the domestic sphere as not the safe, caring, good moral centre that many have depicted but rather a site of ideological control, emotional labour, and resistance. By closely examining important points in the text, we see that female self-actualisation is neither easy to attain, nor is it socially sanctioned, rather we must battle for it at immense emotional and social cost.

The analysis shows how Elena Richardson embodies a woman who has played the game by all the right rules: she is organized, upstanding, and motherly in the most traditional sense. However, her loss of internal harmony with herself and becomes detached from her children suggests the limits of the “promise of happiness” (Ahmed 2017)—that compliance with social norms brings happiness and satisfaction. Although Elena’s life looks perfect on the outside it lacks true spirit and inner warmth, and ultimately, she finds it is all empty and shallow, showing the inability of domestic traditional living to create for her any internal progress or development.

By contrast, Mia Warren represents feminist opposition. Owing is not in her nature, and she will not be owned by the institutional walls of marriage, suburban respectability, or things. Instead, she lives an itinerant, artistic life driven by emotional integrity, compassion and authenticity. Mia’s obstinacy her unwillingness to fit in is at the heart of her journey and her capacity to lead others such as Pearl and Izzy toward emotional reality and self-realization. The community is disrupted not through aggressive action on her part, but by her simple refusal to harbour any of its values. This shows, in Ahmed’s words, one of the reasons why we need the feminist killjoy: she names the discomfort, names the injustice, and by doing so, opens up the possibility for something different.

The moment of feminist rupture that most stands out in the novel is when Izzy burns the family home down. It represents the “feminist snap” which is to say, the boiling over after years of being rendered

voiceless and heartbroken. Instead of a rabid explosion, it is a metaphor for a new paradigm that tears the skin of an oppressive paradigm from its body. Izzy's insurrection signals that structural change is not only necessary, systemic change is critical meaning the structures that deny a voice, agency and feeling must also be folded away.

What this study finds are that the domestic space is not depicted in *Little Fires Everywhere* as either neutral or fundamentally nurturing. On the contrary, it depicts it as a domain thoroughly embedded in power, ideology, and social expectation. In between the polar opposites of Elena and Mia, and woven in the discovering difficult arcs of daughters including Izzy and Pearl, Ng uncovers that achieving female self-actualisation cannot happen without a challenge against these domestic confines. For some Elena that confrontation is crisis and disappointment; for others Mia and Izzy it becomes the opportunity for freedom and a new definition of life.

Whether the novel is true to this premise is revealed as part of the answer to the research question, evident in that Ng's novel conceptualizes the home as a limit but also as a potential source of change. Self-actualization is depicted, not as a journey end-point but, instead as a battle a battle to say no, to stay emotionally honest, to turn away from heirs apparent. Ultimately, the story operates as a feminist manifesto and asserts the idea that we only lead fulfilling lives when we reject the rules instead of conforming to them, and that those outside of our comfort zone are actually the best places to dwell.

It is a feminist indictment of the perfect domestic home and of the ways in which it is constructed, tearing down the policed white suburb through closed doors and threat of unpublished rumour, lending voice to darker experiences of moral policing and conformity that erase the self, and shows that while resistance may be disruptive, it is always the first half to complete liberty. It is a novel that asks us to reimagine the home not as a place that holds us hostage but as a place from which feminist living, emotional honesty, and self-transformation proliferate.

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