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4-23-2020

## **Generosity of Spirit: Faith, Democracy, and Grace in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead**

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### **Recommended Citation**

DellaRova, Elisabeth, "Generosity of Spirit: Faith, Democracy, and Grace in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead" (2020). *Research and Creativity Symposium*. 56.

<https://scholar.umw.edu/rcd/56>

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# **Generosity of Spirit: Faith, Democracy, and Grace in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead**

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Honors Senior Capstone Project  
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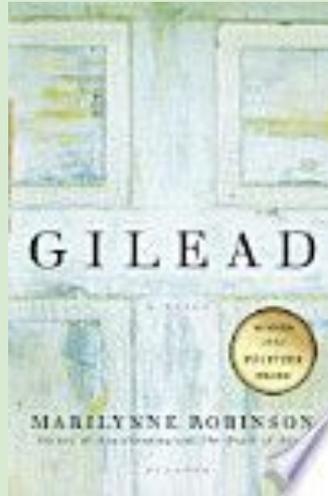
# Marilynne Robinson

- American novelist and essayist
- Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *Gilead*, 2005, as well as several other awards
- Retired professor at the Iowa Writers Workshop

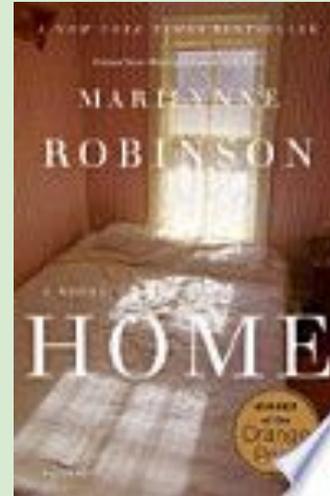


# The books

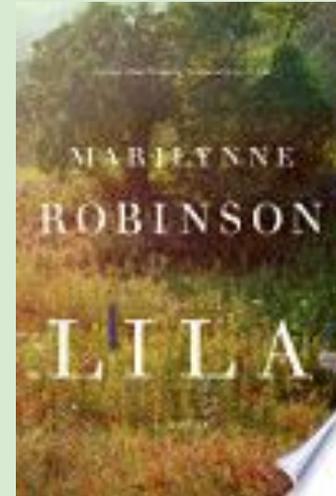
- Set in 1956 in Gilead, Iowa (a fictional place, based on a real town)
- Ames family
  - **John Ames**, Congregationalist minister
  - Lila Ames, his wife
  - Robby Ames, his son
- Boughton family
  - Robert Boughton, Presbyterian minister
  - Glory Boughton, his daughter
  - **Jack Boughton**, his son



2004



2008



2014

# My Question

What is Robinson saying about the American experience through these books, and why?



- She connects the Christian concept of grace and the American tradition of generosity
- This connection is exemplified in Robinson's work through her characters, especially John Ames

# Extending grace

- **John Ames & Jack Boughton**
  - Ames applies the grace he has preached about his whole life when he forgives and blesses Jack at a bus stop
  - Generosity--extending grace like an undeserved gift



**Through her Gilead books,  
Robinson presents a picture  
of a gracious--or graceful--  
American experience.**

# Robinson on the Generous American Spirit

“I had always thought that the one thing I could assume about my country was that it was generous. **Instinctively and reflexively generous.** In our history, and with the power that has settled on us, largely because of the tendency of the old Western powers to burn themselves down and blow themselves up, we have demonstrated fallibilities that are highly recognizable as human sin and error, sometimes colossal in scale, magnified by our relative size and strength. But our saving grace was always generosity, material and, often, intellectual and spiritual. To the extent that we have realized or even aspired to democracy, **we have made a generous estimate of the integrity and good will of people in general,** and a generous reckoning of their just deserts” (“Value” 176).

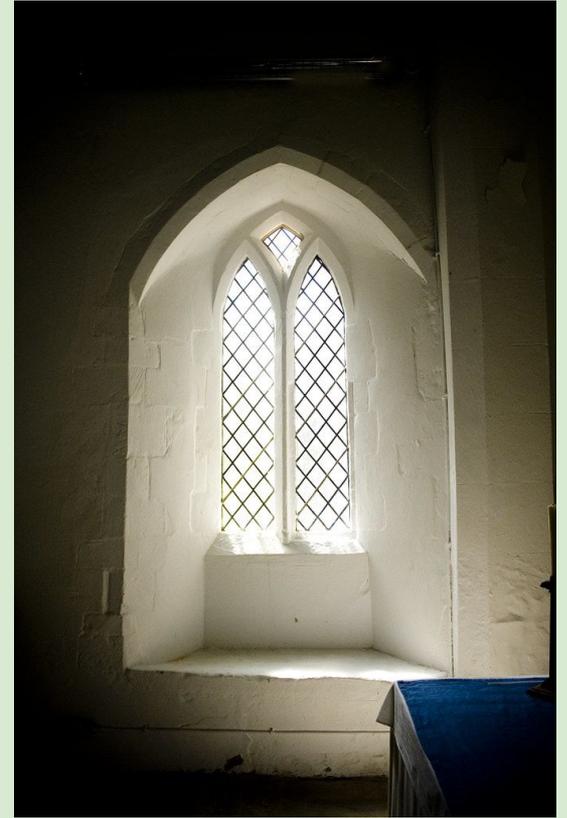


**“Love is holy  
because it like  
grace--the  
worthiness of its  
object is never  
really what  
matters.”**

***(Gilead 209)***

Robinson displays through her characters' perspective the wondrous miracle of life as we can experience it--of light and of the grace that we are able to extend to each other.

The American experience, then, is to Robinson a tangible, understandable example of the freedom available to all of us, the ability to connect with each other despite our failures and differences.



**Questions?**