In 750-1,000 words, record your response to Robinson’s novel. Again, you may pursue your own interests, or if you need some assistance, consider the following prompts.

I would like to discuss some of the philosophical implications the novel presents. More specifically, its apparent commentary on social contract theory and Thomas Hobbes’s concept of the state of nature. The novel certainly establishes a stark dichotomy between insiders and outsiders. Where the insiders are those who participate in the social contract and find themselves at ease with the status quo. The outsiders of course are the antithesis of this: those who ignore the social contract and are not at ease with the status quo.

Homeownership is a central symbol of status and success in postwar American life. Discuss the symbolism of the house and its relation to family in this book.

Sylvie struggles to adapt to the role of substitute mother that circumstance has thrust upon her; she clearly has not planned for this possibility. How do you assess her performance as a parent? On balance, is she an irresponsible mother, or does her eccentric view of the world open Ruth up to alternative possibilities in a positive way?

In true transcendentalist style, Robinson represents the natural world as a gateway to the spirit. Discuss the power of nature in this novel.

From the naming of the protagonist/narrator to the appearance of archetypal floods and fires, the book takes on a biblical feel. How do you interpret the biblical intertext here?

What is the status of “truth” in this novel? Lucille questions the truth of Sylvie’s marriage, and Sylvie dismisses her need for verification. How does this link to your understanding of postmodernism’s incredulity towards truth-claims?