This essay examines the construction of home, as well as the treatment of the domestic and the adventurous, in L.T. Meade’s castaway novel *Four on an Island* (1892). Meade’s girl protagonist, Isabel, demonstrates how conceptions of both femininity and girlhood shifted in accordance with the emergence of the New Girl, the younger correlative of the Victorian-era New Woman, as a cultural construct. This essay argues that Meade’s novel provides readers with a couched critique of Victorian conceptualizations of home through the author’s depiction of Isabel’s creation of a domestic space by rejecting static domesticity while cast away. As a New Girl, Isabel attempts to navigate the interstitial space between present and future family domestic realms by creating a new type of home that allows space for both domesticity and adventure.

Victorian Robinsonades for girls, much like boys’ Robinsonades of this era, worked to create appropriate models of behaviour for their contemporary readerships. While much scholarship examines representations of masculinity in boys’ castaway novels, a relatively smaller amount of critical work explores depictions of femininity in adventure texts for and about girls. As Michelle J. Smith claims, late-nineteenth-century girls’ Robinsonades depict a “modern, capable girlhood” where girls need not depend on men for survival while cast away. Rather, these Victorian-era girl castaways demonstrate how pluck and courage, combined with traditional feminine attributes, potentially make for more competent successors of Robinson Crusoe.

---

than their male counterparts. L.T. Meade’s *Four on an Island* participates in the broader tradition that Smith identifies, and features twelve-year-old Isabel as the novel’s champion, instead of her older brother, Ferdinand. It is Isabel who successfully ensures the survival of Ferdinand, her two younger cousins, and their terrier Mungo, while cast away from their mainland home.

Meade’s girl protagonist demonstrates how definitions of both femininity and girlhood shifted in accordance with the emergence of the New Girl, the younger correlative of the Victorian-era New Woman, as a cultural construct. Megan Norcia explores changing conceptualizations of girlhood in *Four on an Island*, with the claim that Meade “patched together socially polarized archetypes – the masculinized adventure hero and the Angel of the House – thereby widening the sphere of agency and activity in which girls and women could act”. Norcia’s analysis primarily focuses on the ways in which Meade’s “Adventurous Angel” merges the domestic with the adventurous, which provides a pivotal grounding point for this analysis. My aim, however, is to show how *Four on an Island* provides readers with a couched critique of Victorian conceptualizations of home through Meade’s depiction of how Isabel creates home in accordance with New Girl ideologies by rejecting static domesticity on the desert island.

When *Four on an Island* was published in 1892, the concept of girlhood was relatively new, and several historical occurrences affecting both working-class and middle-class girls spurred its emergence. As Sally Mitchell notes, the girl of the period, or the New Girl, purportedly had novel freedoms within arm’s reach because of opportunities for work, education, and leisure activities when transitioning into womanhood. While it is clear that many young

---