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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

HEARTLAND COSMOPOLITANISM: THE MIDWEST AND LITERARY MODERNISM IN THE WORK OF WILLA CATHER AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

by

MEGAN JESSICA LEBARRON

B.A., Loyola University Chicago, 2011
M.A., Boston College, 2014

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Approved by

First Reader

Carlo Rotella, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Boston College

Second Reader

John T. Matthews, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Third Reader

Anita Patterson, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Fourth Reader

Bruce Schulman, Ph.D.
Professor of History

For my father and my Shimpy,

my two favorite sons of the Middle Border.

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Mary Heaton Vorse made an astute observation in 1911 when she told the restless Sinclair Lewis that "the art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair." It was true then and remains true today. But it is also true that sticking to a chair in a room by yourself is much easier with a supportive community of readers and mentors in the world beyond. My deepest thanks and gratitude to Carlo Rotella and Tina Klein for answering the call, welcoming me into their home, and being my community. Their unwavering patience and generosity brought me back to my chair on more than one occasion of abandoned hope, and has kept my faith in the goodness of teaching and learning alive. Thanks are also due to Brooke Blower, Deb Jaramillo, Jack Matthews, Joe Rezek, Anita Patterson, Sarah Phillips, and Bruce Schulman for their insight and direction while formulating this manuscript, and to Julia Kline and Aimee McCarron for their moral support and camaraderie throughout my graduate career.

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HEARTLAND COSMOPOLITANISM: THE MIDWEST AND LITERARY MODERNISM IN THE WORK OF WILLA CATHER AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

MEGAN JESSICA LEBARRON

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2023

Major Professor: Carlo Rotella, Professor of English, Boston College

ABSTRACT

In 1922 Carl Van Doren noticed that a revolt from the village was taking place in modern American writing, especially when it came to the midwestern United States. According to Van Doren, where James Whitcomb Riley and Booth Tarkington's local color humor made the small-town Midwest the celebrated center of American values in the late nineteenth century, writers like Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis used modern literary techniques like realism and symbolism to make the region a peripheral site of resistance to the forces of urban-industrialization and globalization that were reshaping U.S. culture and society in the early twentieth century. Since the 1920s, this assessment of the Midwest's cultural parochialism has reinforced conceptions of the region's political provincialism, which emerged thanks to regional politicians' like Minneosta governor Joseph Burnquist and senator Frank B. Kellogg's efforts to privilege domestic issues and local concerns over foreign affairs. As a result of this parochial reputation, the region has been largely overlooked in studies of U.S. literary modernism, which is typically associated with metropolitan centers and transnational exchange.

By attending to Cather and Lewis's representations of the transnational communities and economies that structured the Midwest's growth in the Progressive era,

this dissertation rejects assumptions about the region's perennial parochialism to emphasize its historical cosmopolitanism. In doing so, it shows how Cather and Lewis mobilized the region's history of migration, settlement, and urbanization to critique the failures of U.S. political progressivism, and asserts the midwestern hinterland's participation in the development of U.S. literary modernism. Specifically, I argue that by representing the relationships between immigrants and native-born U.S. citizens in the modern Midwest's social and cultural institutions, Cather and Lewis subvert the progressive themes and consensus-building impulses of literary realism to critique the rise of U.S. commercial capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AS: *Arrowsmith*
MÁ: *My Ántonia*
MS: *Main Street*
OOO: *One of Ours*
TOTSL: *The Song of the Lark*

Heartland Cosmopolitanism: The Midwest And Literary Modernism in The Work of Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis

Introduction

When it was originally published in 1900, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* captured more than the hearts and minds of children across the United States. It expressed the new symbolic content of the twentieth-century American Midwest in the national cultural imaginary. For most of the nineteenth century, the United States' "Middle Region" occupied the national consciousness as a geographical, intellectual, and cultural frontier in which the wilderness of its open prairie and wooded forests was tamed by pioneers who chose to settle there and develop a provincial frontier culture. The region's association with the frontier necessarily made it an important part of the expansive, future-oriented ideology Frederick Jackson Turner declared central to American history, but it also denoted the region's geographic isolation, its economic and social primitiveness, and most of all, its cultural parochialism. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*—which L. Frank Baum wrote after attending the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the epochal 1893 event at which Turner also presented his frontier thesis—countered and upended those assumptions about the region's isolation, primitiveness, and parochialism. Baum combined prairie realism with the fair's utopian portrayal of the turn-of-the-century United States to craft a cosmopolitan vision of the twentieth-century Midwest, populated and traversed by diverse peoples who contributed to its unique culture and political economy.

Contemporary audiences are likely most familiar with MGM's 1939 film adaptation of the novel, in which Judy Garland appears in technicolor somewhere over the rainbow as Dorothy in the Emerald City of Oz. With the exception of its final scene, the film remains faithful to the novel's plot, in which Dorothy Gale arrives in Munchkinland only to find herself desiring nothing more than to return home to Kansas. In both versions of the story, Dorothy clicks her heels three times while thinking of Kansas to be transported back to her beloved farmstead. But in the 1900 novel, Dorothy makes her ultimate return to the Kansas farm not by waking up from a dream, as in the 1939 film, but instead by turning to run, wide awake and in full control of her faculties, toward a newly built farmhouse on the prairie horizon. Of the many inconsistencies that Oz scholars and buffs have noted between the film and Baum's original novel, this ending is often considered both the greatest liberty and the worst offense.[1]

But this change in ending is significant beyond the practical implications of a disappointing denouement. By dismissing Dorothy's journey through Oz as a dream, the film also radically revises both the conceptual and geographic relationship between the Kansas prairie and the Emerald City suggested in the original novel. Where MGM asserts that Oz and its alluring Emerald City are only a figment of Dorothy's imagination, no more real than a talking scarecrow or a flying monkey, in the novel, Dorothy's trip to the capital city of Oz is fantastical, but her adventure is not so easily dismissed as a dream. As an illustrated literary text, in which realistic images of Kansas bookend vivid pictures

[1] For the novel's publication and reception history, see: Michael Patrick Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), xiii - cli.

of the Land of Oz, the Emerald City in the novel emerges not as some imaginary entity somewhere far beyond the prairie but rather as an alluring, cosmopolitan cityscape that is contained within it. In doing so, Baum's book expressed the optimistic booster ethos common among middle-class progressives, especially in the Midwest's growing urban centers from Cleveland to Minneapolis, which touted the possibility of balancing economic success, global expansion, and family values in the modern United States. MGM's ending is lamentable, then, because in privileging the reality of Dorothy's Kansas homestead over the Emerald City of her dreams, the film recapitulates oversimplified twentieth-century narratives about Midwestern provincialism and the urban/rural divide in U.S. cultural history, in which wheat fields and barnyards are symbolic of either the mythical simpler times to which a world-weary, brow-beaten American citizenry longs to retreat, or an anti-intellectual wasteland that sophisticated urban progressives are eager to reform.

In his recent historiography of the region, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920-1965*, Jon Lauck explains that this bifurcated understanding of the Midwest's cultural conservatism is the result of the so-called "Revolt from the Village" in U.S. culture and society after World War I. Carl Van Doren first assessed the cultural phenomenon in his 1922 publication *Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920*, where he noted a revolt against the idealism associated with the small-town Midwest in the "New Style" of literary realism represented by the likes of Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*

(1920).[2] As this literary phenomenon dovetailed with a cadre of isolationist midwestern politicians' arguments against the United States' participation in the League of Nations, Lauck explains, Van Doren's critique tapped into "ready audience" for conceptions of the Midwest as a social and cultural backwater.[3] In light of popular assessments of the region's resistance to the national current of political progressivism, interest in the region declined among academic circles until, eventually, scholarly interest in U.S. regionalism turned to New England's "usable past," the West's youthful optimism, and the South's perennial alterity. Even the rise of urban studies in the late twentieth century did not return the Midwest to the center of celebratory scholarly interest. Rather, with the exception of studies of Chicago like William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), urban histories of the region transformed it into the Rust Belt in historical narratives that reinforced notions of midwestern parochialism by attributing its postwar economic decline to shortsighted policy makers and business leaders that resisted the forces of U.S. globalization.[4]

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[2] Carl Van Doren, *Contemporary American Novelists, 1900-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 132-175.

[3] Jon Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920-1965* (Davenport: University of Iowa Press, 2017), 15.

[4] See also: Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1981); Barry Checkoway and Carl V. Patton, *Metropolitan Midwest: Policy Problems and Prospects for Change* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Daniel J. Elazar, *Cities of the Prairie: The Metropolitan Frontier and American Politics* (New York and London: Basic Books, 1970), *Cities of the Prairie Revisited: The Closing of the Metropolitan Frontier* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), and *The Closing of the Metropolitan Frontier: Cities of the Prairie Revisited* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Don S. Kirschner, *City and Country: Rural Responses to Urbanization in the 1920s* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1970); Daniel Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); James Shortridge, *The Middle West and its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989) and *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland:*

The effect of the Midwest's provincial historical reputation in twentieth-century literary scholarship has been twofold. First, mirroring its exceptionalism in the region's history, literary studies of the Midwest in the late twentieth century focus primarily on the city of Chicago and its eponymous literary form, Chicago School realism.[5] Studies of Chicago School innovations to the literary realism first popularized by William Dean Howells has resulted in a vast body of scholarship on the city's representation in modern American letters. However, given realism's association with middle-class subjects, middle-brow audiences, generic conventionalism, and commercial reproduction, this work ultimately plays into historical conceptions of midwestern provincialism and anti-intellectualism. In doing so, scholarship on the Chicago School has tended to reinforce a problematic hierarchy in literary circles that sees novelistic realism as separate from and aesthetically subordinate to avant-garde modernism. This has led to the Midwest's general absence in studies of modernism in the novel, which is the second major consequence of the region's provincial historical reputation in literary scholarship. Until recently, studies of literary modernism and the Midwest have focused on Chicago's *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse* and other "little" magazines, or attended to the region's

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The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[5] On Chicago in American literature, see: Bernard Duffey, *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters; A Critical History* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1954); Carla Capetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Mary Hricko, *The Genesis of the Chicago Renaissance: Theodore Dreiser, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James T. Farrell* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009); Frederik Byrn Køhlert, *The Chicago Literary Experience: Writing the City, 1893-1953* (Copenhagen: Museum Tuscalanum Press, 2011); Mary McQuade, *An Unsentimental Education: Writers and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Carl Smith, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination, 1880-1920* (Chicago: Unviersity of Chicago Press, 1984); Lisa Woolley, *American Voices of the Chicago Renaissance* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

realist forms and symbolic function as fodder for modernist critique, as in the work of "New Style" realists like Masters and Anderson.[6] Not only has this contributed to conceptions Midwest as a modernist way-station or place of escape but, more problematically, it has created the impression that the midwestern hinterland did not participate in the development of literary modernism.

Alternatively, this dissertation locates the Midwest in the rise of literary modernism in the early twentieth century by showing how Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis subvert the formal and thematic tropes of Chicago School realism to stage critiques of the modern United States' political imperialism, cultural nationalism, and its expanding commercial capitalist economy. In doing so, it counters literary and historical conceptions of the region's parochialism in two related ways. First, by attending to the transnational economies and communities that are the subject of hinterland novels like *My Ántonia* (1918) and *Main Street* (1920), I argue that Cather and Lewis illuminate the cosmopolitan identity and community-formations that emerged as a result of mass immigration and the rise of consumer capitalism. Second, by analyzing how they subvert Chicago School tropes – such as migration to the metropolis as a metaphor for social progress and reportorial narrative form – to represent the Progressive-era Midwest's

[6] Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman have created an excellent primer on modernism in small literary magazines in *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), and Tom Lutz has traced the roots of modernist poetry in the midwestern publication *Midland* in his article "The Cosmopolitan *Midland*" in *American Periodicals* 15.1 (2005), pp. 74-85. On *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse* see: Ann Massa, "'The Colombian Ode' and *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*: Harriet Monroe's Entrepreneurial Triumphs," in *Journal of American Studies* 20.1 (April 1986), pp. 51-69; John Timberman Newcomb, "*Poetry*'s Opening Door: Harriett Monroe and American Modernism," in *American Periodicals: A Journal of History and Criticism* 15.1 (2005), pp. 6-22; Robin G. Schulze, "Harriett Monroe's Pioneer Modernism, Nature, National Identity, and *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*," in *Legacy* 21.1 (2004), pp. 50-67.

cosmopolitan identities and communities, my dissertation blurs the line between aesthetic realism and modernism in U.S. literature. In this way, my dissertation answers Lauck's call for a new midwestern studies that "draws on the older forms of agrarian and small-town regionalism" and "grapple[s] with the long-run consequences of farm mechanization, industrialization, suburbanization, and other gathering forces of the early twentieth century that transformed the region," such as immigration and the expansion of consumer capitalism.[7] Lauck has presented compelling evidence from Cather and Lewis's personal correspondences, papers, public addresses and essays to show their conviction of the Midwest's potential to inspire progressive political and cultural change in response to these gathering forces.[8] But this primarily historical argument falls short of his subsequent goal of proving that Cather and Lewis's appreciation for the Midwest's progressivism is also manifest in their literary works.

To this end, I argue that Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *My Ántonia* and Lewis's *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith* (1925) look to the midwestern hinterland and its associated literary forms not to bemoan the region's backwardness, but rather to mine its potential for political dissent and cultural critique. In doing so, I show how the narratives of Thea Kronborg, Jim Burden, Carol Kennicott, and Martin Arrowsmith's migrations to various cities subvert Chicago School realism's establishment of the industrial metropolis as a symbol of social progress in U.S. literature and culture, and make rural landscapes, small-towns, and provincial spaces the seedbed of the modern

[7] Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge*, 102.
[8] Lauck, 37-67.

United States' progressive politics and cosmopolitan culture. In this way, I show how Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis – two authors whose work is most associated with cementing conceptions of the region's provincialism – mobilized the Midwest's central literary forms, like Chicago School realism, rural landscapes, and small-town settings, and the region's function as a prime symbol of American domesticity to undermine the urban-industrial, commercial capitalist hegemony that drove the United States' imperial expansion.

Specifically, I argue that in *The Song of the Lark*, Cather re-engineers key Chicago School tropes such as ethnographic characterization and urban naturalism to establish a provincial, transnational paradigm for the production of modern art that looks to rural hinterlands for its content and creators. In *My Ántonia*, Cather subverts the progressive themes associated with the provincial migrant protagonist Jim Burden's relocation from the prairie town of Black Hawk, Nebraska to New York City in a modernist memoir that emphasizes his nostalgic desire to be reunited with Bohemian immigrant farmer Ántonia Shimerda. As Thea and Jim's experiences with the provincial landscapes and immigrant communities beyond the United States' urban centers give meaning to their lives and work in Chicago and New York, Cather uses midwestern literary forms like rural landscapes and pastoralism to critique the nationalist commercial culture and political economy which structured the growth of the modern metropolis. Similarly, in *Main Street* Lewis reverses the standard urban migration narrative popularized by Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) in Carol Kennicott's relocation from Minneapolis to Gopher Prairie to explore the impact of the United States' globally

expanding commercial culture on small-town life. In *Arrowsmith* Lewis constructs a typically realist professional development narrative as Martin Arrowsmith's transformation from a small-town medical student in Winnemac, U.S.A. to a world-famous doctor parallels the expansion of the progressive state. As Carol and Martin's participation in the industrial United States' transnational commercial culture and political economy leads to their disillusionment with their middle-class domestic lifestyles, Lewis mobilizes central midwestern literary tropes such as the realist representation of small-town settings and middle-class aspirationalism to undermine the ideological integrity of U.S. progressivism.

By revising the Midwest's central literary forms and symbolic content in this way, my dissertation's second major contention is that Cather and Lewis's work blurs the line between realism and modernism in U.S. literary history by representing the cosmopolitan identity-formations that emerged from the transnational economies and communities that structured the region's growth in the Progressive era. I consider Cather and Lewis's protagonists to be cosmopolitan rather than provincial subjects in these novels because of how their narrative form emphasizes Thea, Jim, Carol, and Martin's sense of self as a product of their affinities for and attachments to multiple communities and cultural forms, some endemic to their local environments but many of which are forged at great geographic and temporal distance from their hinterland hometowns. To this extent, my dissertation demonstrates how midwestern literature engages with contemporary conversations about "rooted," "actually existing," and "critical" forms of cosmopolitanism according to theorists such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, James Clifford,

and Bruce Robbins, and scholars of literary modernism like Amanda Anderson, Jessica Berman, and Rebecca Walkowitz.[9]

Unlike classical or "global" theories of cosmopolitanism in which the ideal of humanist universalism exerts a normative, moralizing pressure on political institutions and social organizations through conceptions of rights and justice, Appiah's notion of "rooted" cosmopolitanism takes seriously the modern individual's relationship to a variety of discrete communities that both give meaning to their experience of the world and to which they feel greater and lesser degrees of affinity and ethical obligation.[10] Similarly, and extrapolating from Clifford's theory of selfhood as culturally constructed, Robbins's concept of "actually existing" cosmopolitanism expands the social and cultural construction of individual identity to consider process by which individuals draw on a variety of experiences to construct unique worldviews that inform their actions and relationships toward the wealth of other individuals and communities they encounter in the course of daily life.[11] In modernist literature, formal innovations like a decentering

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[9] In this way, this dissertation builds on the work of cultural and literary theorists James Clifford and Bruce Robbins, whose respective "discrepant cosmopolitanism" and "comparative cosmopolitanisms" understand cosmopolitanism as a "process of worlding," where "more than one 'world'" or worldview "may be realized, where 'worlds' may be contested" (Robbins, "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms," 253). For more on this cultural orientation of cosmopolitanism, see: Amanda Anderson, "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity," in *Cosmpolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 265-289; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Bruce Robbins, "Comparative Cosmopolitanisms" in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 246-264.

[10] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 213-272.

[11] Bruce Robbins, "Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism" in *Cosmpolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1-19, 2. It should be noted that Robbins draws on Scott Malcomson's terminology in his essay, "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Existence," in the same volume.

first-person perspective, broken narrative structure, *bricolage*, and cultural appropriation construct cosmopolitan identities that oppose, resist, and otherwise critique the hegemonic view from the center supposed by political nationalism and imperialism, and their corollary aesthetic form of literary realism.

To this end, *Heartland Cosmopolitanism* posits the opposite perspective of Tom Lutz's *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value*, which argues for regional writing, particularly of the U.S. Midwest, as a universalizing space in which "the rural people and the urban people […] have discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism, and only we, the implied readers and implied authors who meet in a cosmopolitan compact, comprehend them all."[12] Instead, I adopt Rebecca Walkowitz's perspective that "[t]here is no critical cosmopolitanism without modernist practices," to attend to how Cather and Lewis's novels "focus attention on the contested histories of globalization [by representing] a new range of international actors," like Nebraska homesteaders, and small-town housewives in Minnesota.[13] In doing so, I demonstrate how *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *Main Street*, and *Arrowsmith* represent the process of cultural exchange and social transformation in the Progressive-era United States by using midwestern narrative forms and locales to expose the multiple local, national, and broader cultural communities that inform their protagonists' experience of the world. By showing how these discrete communities overlap and compete for meaning in the ostensibly homogenous social constructions of the self or the nation, I mean to extend

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[12] Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 36.

[13] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*: *Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

Walkowitz's argument that "cosmopolitan paradigms that emphasize ethical or political attachments" to particular communities or ideologies—such as Cather's complicity in the Homestead Act's advancement of U.S. settler colonialism, or Lewis's conviction of the United States' potential as a paradigm of liberal democratic society —"may contain antiheroic […] impulses, whose influence can be seen in more narrow kinds of efficacy" than conceptions of classical cosmopolitan universalism can support.[14]

In other words, in arguing for the critical cosmopolitanism of *The Song of the Lark, My Ántonia*, *Main Street*, and *Arrowsmith*, I do not also argue for their promotion of universalist, egalitarian, or utopian ideals. I do not want to flatten these texts' imperialist, anarchist, or otherwise uncomfortable ideological tendencies into an unobjectionably redemptive progressivism. Rather, I make the alternative claim that in their refusal to represent universalist, egalitarian, or utopian visions of American society, these texts undertake the much more critical but no less cosmopolitan task of formalizing the way in which egalitarianism and equality are fundamentally impossible dreams in the global capitalist social order that took hold in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

In undertaking this project, this dissertation joins an emergent body of scholarship that departs from the traditional considerations of midwestern writers' interest in cultivating a sense of place through the representation of rural landscapes by accounting for the city of Chicago's significance as a waystation for a variety of cultural producers

[14] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 17.

between 1890 and 1940.[15] For instance, Timothy B. Spears' 2005 volume *Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919*, emphasizes the significance of the Midwestern regional origins of hinterland migrants who populated and wrote about Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century even as he concedes that, for most of them, the city was merely a stop-over on their journey to larger cultural marketplaces.[16] In doing so, Spears demonstrates how the idea that "migration created the Old Northwest" – the land area that constitutes the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and the eastern most portion of Minnesota – also applied to the new "Middle West," which combined the Old Northwest states with Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, and North and South Dakota, in the American cultural imaginary in the 1910s.[17] Much like William Cronon's work in *Nature's Metropolis*, then, Spears' assessment of the Chicago Renaissance usefully locates the city in its regional cultural context, opening the space to consider migration and cosmopolitanism alongside urbanization as legitimate categories of inquiry in Midwestern history.

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[15] On the role of place and rural landscapes in midwestern literature, see: William David Barillas, *The Midwestern Pastoral: Place and Landscape in Literature of the American Heartland* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006); Matthew J.C. Cella: *Bad Land Pastoralism in Great Plains Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010); David R. Pichaske, *Rooted: Seven Midwest Writers of Place*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006); Ralph Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925); Ronald Weber, *The Midwestern Ascendency in American Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[16] Timothy B. Spears, *Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 259.

[17] Spears, *Chicago Dreaming*, xix. For the history of the regional terminology, "Middle West" or "Midwest," see: James Shortridge, "The Emergence of the 'Middle West' as an American Regional Label," *Annals of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (June 1984), 212. On migration to the region in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see also: Eds. Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf, eds., *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Midwest, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Kristin Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019).

More recently, literary and cultural historians such as Michelle E. Moore, Leisl Olson, and Kristin Hoganson have taken up the mantle in scholarship that teases out the global reach of the supposedly isolated, insular, parochial midwestern heartland. Olson and Moore offer compelling arguments to revise the notion that Chicago School realism is entirely distinct from the more obviously experimental forms and international scope of American expatriate or Southern modernisms by unearthing the vast interpersonal and institutional networks that connected Chicago to other modernist writers and artistic capitals like New York and Paris.[18] For her part, Hoganson's most recent volume, *The Heartland: An American History*, directly challenges popular and scholarly perceptions of midwestern provincialism by presenting a transnational history of Champaign, Illinois. As she explains how nineteenth-century farmers' decisions to raise Berkshire pigs over other breeds, for example, were tethered to the nation's foreign policy up to and including the Cold War, Hoganson debunks the idea that "[t]o be local […] has meant to be left behind" or overlooked in the United States' history of globalization.[19]

Together, then, Spears, Olson, Moore, and Hoganson, draw new maps that emphasize the Midwest's connection to the wider world through the circulation of capital, artistic forms, and ideas largely through the city of Chicago. As such, they have established the foundation for a radically new conversation about a region and literature commonly dismissed by or entirely left out of studies of U.S. literary modernism. While

[18] Michelle E. Moore, *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism: Cather, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald in Conflict* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Leisl Olson, *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017)

[19] Kristin Hoganson, *The Heartlan*d, 305.

Heartland Cosmopolitanism is indebted to these scholars' work, then, this dissertation nonetheless makes a significant departure in its interest in the Midwest beyond the city of Chicago. To this extent, this dissertation can be read as a literary accompaniment to Hoganson's work in *The Heartland*, insofar as it considers how Cather and Lewis's representations of the transnational economies and communities that structured the Midwest's growth show how the provincial American "heartland of myth can never be recuperated […] because it never existed in the first place."[20] Not even in the literary works that helped to write it. Just as Hoganson refutes the idea of a Midwest insulated from the modernization and globalization of United States culture in the twentieth century, in *Heartland Cosmopolitanism* I revise the prevailing understanding that modern novelists like Cather and Lewis cordoned off the region from either the nation or the world. Alternatively, I argue, texts like *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *Main Street*, and *Arrowsmith* emphasize the region's imbrication in the global forces that shaped the Progressive era nation-state. As they spotlight the region's connection to the wider world through representations of its immigrant communities, consumer culture, and social institutions, Cather and Lewis's novels resist the nationalist themes and commercial values typically associated with the U.S. Midwest in twentieth-century literature. In doing so, they register instead the region's cosmopolitanism, and their protagonists' modernist sense of disorientation from the United States' consumer culture and society.

Heartland Cosmopolitanism is divided into two main parts that analyze how Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis leverage midwestern history and literary forms to

[20] Hoganson, *The Heartland*, 305.

represent the transnational economies and communities that structured the region's development in the Progressive era. In Part I, "Queering the Nation: Naturalism, Pastoralism, and Trans-nationalism in the Work of Willa Cather" I show how Cather subverts Chicago School realism and midwestern pastoralism in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* to construct cosmopolitan protagonists whose affinity for immigrant communities and provincial locales informs their queer performance of modern U.S. femininity and masculinity and critiques the nativist construction national identity that emerged in the Progressive era United States. In *The Song of the Lark*, I argue that the hypersexualized attention to Thea Kronborg's body is not indicative of her exploitation of Chicago's commercial cultural machine. Rather, it is the result of Cather's use of Chicago School, ethnographic characterization to emphasize the cultural foreignness of her Swedish heritage. Further, as I read it, Thea's archetypal journey to Chicago to become a professional musician does not make her an equally archetypal American celebrity. Instead, it helps her cultivate an artistic persona that transcends national boundaries by catalyzing her circulation through the transnational cultural economy that launches her to world-fame. In *My Ántonia*, I argue that Jim's pastoral characterization of his Nebraska homestead does not underscore its mythical status as a virgin-land for him and other settler-colonists to develop. Rather, it reflects his dissatisfaction with his attainment of a normative middle-class lifestyle in New York City, and lays bare the prairie landscape's transnational history as a crossroads for itinerant Native Americans, European explorers, and religious refugees. To this end, in my reading the American-born Jim's reunion with Ántonia on her Nebraska farm is not a sign of his fetishized

desire to conquer or otherwise control an unruly Bohemian immigrant.[21] It is an expression of his resistance to the nativist construction of U.S. national identity and community in the Progressive era. As Thea and Jim's queer, cosmopolitan identities are forged beyond the metropolitan environments of Chicago and New York City, *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* subvert Chicago School realism's establishment of the city as a symbol of U.S. progressivism and, in doing so, illuminate Cather's critique of U.S. commercial culture and the nationalism and imperialism it supported.

In Part II, "Disillusioning the Empire: Realism, Romance, and Social Mobility in the Work of Sinclair Lewis," I show how Lewis juxtaposes Chicago School realism with literary romanticism in *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith* to construct cynical narratives about cosmopolitan Midwesterners whose privileged participation in the imperial United States' commercial capitalist economy, ironically, informs both their social success and ennui. In *Main Street*, I argue, the boredom and angst that results from Carol Kennicott's relocation to Gopher Prairie from St. Paul, Minnesota is not Lewis's critique of small-town cultural parochialism and anti-intellectualism. Rather, as she can import to Gopher Prairie the same foreign foods, books, and cultural artifacts that flavored her life in St. Paul, I argue that her discomfort in the small town is the realist register of Lewis's critique of the urban-industrial, -intellectual elitism and cultural hegemony that attended the United States' economic and political expansion in the Progressive era. As Carol

[21] As Sharon O'Brien comments in her introduction to the Norton Critical edition of the text, in the hundred years since its publication, *My Ántonia*'s critical reception has shifted "from a vision of the novel as a positive celebration of immigrant life to a vision of the novel as culturally problematic because Cather can achieve her celebration of Bohemian Ántonia only by excluding or belittling racial Others," (*My Ántonia*, New York and London: W.W.Norton& Co., 2015, xxiii).

travels to Chicago and Washington D.C. – respectively, economic and political hubs in the turn-of-the-century United States' commercial empire – it becomes clear that U.S. imperialism is the source of her existential crisis, not small-town provincialism. Similarly, I argue that Martin Arrowsmith's midwestern medical education and eradication of a plague epidemic on the Caribbean island of St. Hubert in *Arrowsmith* is not Lewis's celebration of Progressive-era scientific rationalism. Instead, as the narrative of Martin's professional development reveals the single-minded ambition and often inhumane behavior that leads to his emergence as a world-famous doctor, Lewis exposes the ideological inconsistencies that undergirded the rhetoric of U.S. progressivism, and the perpetuation of Western imperialism.

After showing how Cather and Lewis's work mobilizes midwestern literary forms to critique the United States' domestic culture of nationalism, imperialism, and commercial capitalism, my concluding chapter shows how sending Midwesterners abroad in *One of Ours* (1922) and *Dodsworth* (1929) exposes the failures of the progressive state's promise to protect the ideals of democratic liberalism in the wake of World War I. In doing so, "Midwesterners Abroad: Cather and Lewis's Critical Cosmopolitanism in *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth*" argues that *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth* appropriate conceptions of Midwestern naiveté and the realist trope of marriage as optimistic symbols of social progress only to undermine the potential for positive change in the representation of unconsummated, childless unions and divorce. In *One of Ours*, Cather the symbolizes the impotence of U.S. foreign policy in the lead up to World War I in the story of Claude Wheeler's unhappy marriage to Enid Royce in rural Nebraska, and his

death on the battlefield in France. In *Dodsworth*, the demise of the industrial power-couple Sam and Fran Dodsworth's marriage on an extended European vacation away from Zenith is Lewis's metaphor for the delimiting influence of commercial capitalism and consumer culture on identity- and community-formation in the modern United States' global empire. In these texts, then, Midwesterners go abroad not to signal the novels' celebration of the United States' emergence as the world's leading power after the first World War. Rather, Claude Wheeler and Sam Dodsworth's unhappy marriages and European expeditions signal the impotence of the United States' political and economic expansion in the Progressive era.

Part I:

Queering the Nation: Naturalism, Pastoralism, and Trans-Nationalism the Work of Willa Cather

It is in this great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West that we may hope to see the hard molds of American provincialism broken up; that we may hope to find young talent which will challenge the pale properties, the insincere, conventional optimism of our art and thought.[22]

In her 1923 essay "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," Willa Cather's characterization of the Midwest as a "cosmopolitan country" stood in opposition to the isolationist policies and cultural nativism promoted by a cadre of Midwestern politicians at the state and federal levels at the close of World War I. Where these politicians' resistance to the joining the League of Nations and closing ports of entry to all but a select few groups of immigrants bolstered east coast intellectuals' sense of the rural Midwest as a provincial bastion of American nationalism and commercialism, Cather calls out the absurdity of this position by citing the 1910 census to count the number of immigrants living in Nebraska in the early twentieth century:

> The total foreign population of the state was 900,571, while the entire population was 1,192,214. […] With such a majority of foreign stock, nine to three, it would be absurd to say that the influence of the European does not cross the boundary of his own acres, and has had nothing to do with shaping the social ideals of the commonwealth.[23]

The midwestern cosmopolitanism Cather describes in "Nebraska" is more than an ethical ideal of cultural hybridity opposed to post-war American nativism and xenophobia rooted in the state's immigration history. It is also a literary form that combines the realism of

[22] Willa Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle" in *My Ántonia*, edited by Sharon O'Brien (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), pp. 321-328, 326.

[23] Cather, "Nebraska," 325.

census data, the pastoral imagery of the landscape, and the nostalgic tone of the essay's critique of consumer culture to describe a transnational prairie that defies the binary classification of being either an "American" or foreign environment. First described in the "rolling, alluvial plain" like "the wheat lands of Russia," but lined and pockmarked over time by buffalo wallows, Indian game trails, railroads, and immigrant graveyards, Cather's sense of the region's transnational history of migration and settlement is finally embodied in the closing image of the contemporary Nebraska countryside "as open as an honest human face," its farms having "come together" such that they "rub shoulders."[24] As Cather laments the passing generation of immigrant farmers who created the Nebraska landscape "with [their] backs and with [their] hands" with their native-born American descendants who "want to buy everything ready-made," she constructs a midwestern worldview that critiques the rise of modern American commercial culture and society.[25] In doing so, she draws on the same critical cosmopolitan style that marks her early Prairie Trilogy, especially *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*.

In these novels, Cather's critical cosmopolitanism is manifest in the adaptation of midwestern forms to represent the transnational communities and cultural economies created by the United States' imperial expansion, accounting for how an individual's material experience shapes their sense of self and belonging in any given community. If, as scholars from Eric Sundquist to Timothy B. Spears have argued, the story of the twentieth century United States is a realist one about the provincial migrant's journey to

[24] Cather, 321 and 327.
[25] Cather, 327.

the city where s/he confronts all manner of human life in the cosmopolitan process of self-making, Cather works against the grain of modern realism in novels like *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Ántonia* to explore the possibilities for identity- and community-formation that existed beyond the imperial metropoles of Chicago and New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. To this extent, Cather not only represents the immigrant communities that peopled the Great Plains following the Homestead Act and the transnational cultural economies they helped to create. She also subverts the expectations of U.S. literary realism and literary representations of the U.S. Midwest to highlight the limitations of the United States' urban-industrial society and commercial cultural economy on the process of self- and community-making. For example, in *The Song of the Lark*, Cather emphasizes the malaise and ennui Thea experiences as a result of her journey to the city, and makes the novel's provincial settings like Moonstone, Colorado and the Anasazi ruins at Panther Canyon the inspiration for Thea Kronborg's artistic persona and her rise to world fame. In *My Ántonia*, Cather expands the modernist repertoire for representing the U.S. Midwest by using the broken narrative structure, pastoral imagery, and symbolism of Jim Burden's memoir of his friendship with Ántonia Shimerda to make rural Nebraska a site of resistance to modern commercial capitalism rather than its seedbed. In this context, Cather's representation of rural communities in the Great Plains states emerges as a regional form of critical cosmopolitanism that advances alternative models of identity- and community-formation which resisted the rise of U.S. nationalism and commercial capitalism in the Progressive-era.

As part of a broader trend in Cather studies to revise the author's reputation as a cultural conservative, contemporary scholars have begun to unpack how Cather's resistance to commercial culture and popular U.S. nationalization campaigns in the early twentieth century help to frame her artistic and political progressivism. For instance, Guy Reynolds and Melissa J. Homestead have demonstrated how Cather's regionalism signals her "commitment (and recommitment) to American spaces where a beloved community once existed."[26] In positioning her as a model of T.J. Jackson Lears's antimodernist Progressive, these scholars have demonstrated how Cather's nostalgic representations of rural environments are less about retreating from modern technology than embracing a more human and humane model of society.[27] But Cather's rural, transnational identities and communities are not only more humane models of modern society. They are also deeply critical of U.S. progressives' delimiting conception of industrialization and commercial capitalism on the process of national and individual identity formation. This is especially true in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*, which emphasize their provincial protagonists' affinity for the natural environment and immigrant communities to imagine transnational identities and communities that critique the nativist politics and commercial cultural economy that took hold in the early twentieth-century United States.

In *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* Thea Kronborg and Jim Burden are archetypes of white, middle-class progressivism who achieve financial success by moving to the U.S. imperial metropoles of Chicago and New York City after spending

[26] Guy Reynolds, "Cather as Progressive" in *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 19-34, 21.

[27] T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

their childhoods in the rural peripheries of Moonstone, Colorado and Black Hawk, Nebraska. Despite how their protagonists conform to the popular narrative of socio-economic mobility associated with learning to navigate the nation's urban-industrial landscape, these coming-of-age narratives express Thea and Jim's desire for and sense of belonging in immigrant communities notable for their members' geographic, ethnic, and cultural distance from modern American cities. For instance, irritated by the clamor of talentless but wealthy music students she is suffered to work alongside in Chicago, in *The Song of the Lark* Thea retreats to the caves and cliff dwellings of Panther Canyon in Arizona with her German-American lover Fred Ottenburg to discover her artistic talent. Similarly, as a means of escape from the theatrical social life his wife enjoys with New York City bohemians, in *My Ántonia* Jim recalls and rekindles his friendship with the Bohemian immigrant Ántonia Shimerda in rural Nebraska. Through their affiliation with these alternative communities, Thea and Jim cultivate transnational identities that are embodied in their queer and deviant gender performance and the emotional, anti-commercial capitalist ethics that govern their interpersonal relationships. In doing so, these narratives resist the standardizing influence of the urban-industrial United States' commercial capitalist economy, especially as it was associated with Midwestern cultural forms like literary realism and pastoral landscapes.

Further, given how Thea and Jim's happiness in the United States is contingent upon their relationships with a variety of transnational migrants, these narratives also trouble the native-/foreign-born binary conception of national identity and community. In this way, *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* are examples of how transnationalism

functions as an element of critical cosmopolitan style in Cather's oeuvre through which her fiction challenges the normative regimes of state and economic power that structured the rise of U.S. imperialism in the Progressive era. To this end, in the words of Jessica Berman, these novels demonstrate how "the trans in transnational is [the same as] the trans in transgender," queering the concept of national identity and community through the representation of affective relationships to regions and people beyond the modern metropolis.[28] In other words, Cather's characters' transnationalism in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* is not concerned with the exchange of literary forms, critical reception, or authorial production across national borders, though these are valid lines of interpretation.[29] Rather, it is invested in dramatizing how the experience of crossing borders – national or otherwise – enables the creation of self- and community-formations that critique the very idea of the nation itself. In the representation of the transnational cultural marketplace that shaped their protagonists' identities and interpersonal relationships, *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* narrate the emergence of cosmopolitan communities that cannot be contained within or explained by the political and conceptual boundaries of the nation-state.

The communities that result from Thea and Jim's friendships with immigrants like Andor Harsanyi, Thea's Hungarian voice teacher in Chicago, or Ántonia Shimerda can be defined as cosmopolitan not simply because they are transnational in nature. They

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[28] Jessica Berman, "Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?" in *Modernism/modernity* 24.2 (April 2017), pp. 217-244, 217.

[29] Guy Reynolds, "The Transatlantic Virtual Salon: Cather and the British," in *Studies in the Novel* 45.3 (Fall 2013), pp. 349-368; Susan Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

are cosmopolitan because they spotlight the multiple affiliations to people and places, both local and often at great spatial and temporal distances, that inform their self-concept. For instance, Thea rises to international fame only because of her ability to draw inspiration from the friendships and provincial landscapes that defined her youth in the western United States. Similarly, Jim is only able to cope with his life as a lawyer in New York City by embracing his nostalgia for the pre-industrial Nebraska prairie in which he grew up and reviving his childhood friendship with Ántonia who still lives there. Like the novels Berman discusses in her monograph *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*, then, *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia* emphasize the "overlapping webs of relation" that give meaning to Thea and Jim's experience of the world and stand as examples of Cather's "creative opposition" to the homogenizing impulse of modern U.S. identity which was signaled politically in the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and represented aesthetically in literary realism.[30] In doing so, these novels' critical cosmopolitanism undermine the national mythologies of rugged individualism and socio-economic mobility that are associated with homesteading, urbanization, and the development of literary realism in the U.S. Midwest.

[30] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15 and 3.

Chapter 1

"She Was Born a Cosmopolitan:" Chicago School Realism, Trans-nationalism, and the Commercial Critique of Thea Kronborg's Artistic Development in *The Song of the Lark*

As he lifted and undressed Thea, he thought to himself what a beautiful little thing a little girl's body was – like a flower. It was so neatly and delicately fashioned, so soft, and so milky white. Thea must have got her hair and her silky skin from her mother. She was a little Swede, through and through.[31]

In the opening scene of *The Song of the Lark*, Dr. Howard Archie of Moonstone, Colorado examines a young Thea Kronborg's body, and notices that "there was something very different about her:"

> As he pushed back the hair that had fuzzed down over her eyebrows, he felt her head thoughtfully with the tips of his fingers. […] He looked intently at her wide, flushed face, freckled nose, fierce little mouth, and her delicate, tender chin—the one soft touch in her hard little Scandinavian face, as if some fairy godmother had caressed her there and left a cryptic promise.[32]

The difference that Dr. Archie notes in Thea's body and attributes to her being a "little Swede, through and through" is an example of the ethnographic characterization that naturalist writers from Émile Zola to Theodore Dreiser used to distinguish national archetypes from transnational figures, especially immigrants and ethnic migrants. As these figures' hybrid political status was made explicit in their hyphenated national identities, ethnographic characterization in modern literature elaborated the material and cultural differences that made, for example, the Irish-Americans in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Street* (1893) distinct social classes more or less capable of being

[31] Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark*, 1915 (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2004), 5.
[32] Cather, *The Song of the Lark*, 6.

incorporated into a normative concept of the American middle-class.[33] Despite the middle-class status afforded to them by Mr. Kronborg's occupation as a pastor at the local Methodist church, Mrs. Kronborg's supplemental income from her family homestead in Nebraska, or even the family's whiteness as it is marked on Thea's body, Cather foregrounds the Kronborgs' ethnic, Swedish-American status through the ethnographic characterization of various family members. In addition to Thea's "hard little Scandinavian face," the narrator explains that Mr. Kronborg "had no natural, spontaneous human speech" while Mrs. Kronborg "spoke Swedish to her sisters" and only "a colloquial English to her neighbors," and describes Thea's Aunt Tillie as "more like the Norwegian root of the family," a trait reflected in her "queer, addle-pated" behavior.[34]

By making national identity a matter of physical embodiment in the narrative of Thea's transformation from a small-town music student to international opera diva, Cather engages in the "full-blooded" writing style associated with Chicago School realism. Scholars have interpreted Cather's use of this form as her attempt to expand her readership and reputation as a modern author.[35] But these readings ignore how Cather uses Chicago School realism in *The Song of the Lark* to critique both the commercial

[33] Michael Elliot, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 35-39.

[34] Cather, *The Song of the Lark*, 9 and 12.

[35] Amy Ahearn, "Full-Blooded Writing and Journalistic Fictions: Naturalism, the Female Artist, and Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*" in *American Literary Realism* 33.2 (Winter 2001), pp. 143-156, 143; Evelyn Funda, "'New World' Visions and Homegrown Art: National Authenticity in the Works of Willa Cather and Antonin Dvorák" in *Modernist Fiction Studies* 65.2 (Summer, 2019), pp. 264-284, 264.; Sharon Hoover, "The Wonderfulness of Thea Kronborg's Voice" in *Western American Literature*, 30.3 (Fall 1995), pp. 257-274, 271-2.

cultural economy that Chicago and its eponymous literary style had come to represent, and the nationalism that informed the development of the United States' culture industry in the early twentieth century. In the first phase of the Chicago Renaissance, writers like Henry Blake Fuller, Hamlin Garland, and Theodore Dreiser fomented a middle-brow demand for aesthetic realism and formal symbolism that spoke to their readers' experience of the United States' transformation from an agricultural to urban-industrial society. In narratives like *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893), *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), and *Sister Carrie* (1900) the story of Midwestern migrants' train journeys from their rural homesteads to Chicago – with its skyscrapers, department stores, factories, and boarding houses full of immigrants – became central to conceptions of American social and economic progress. Written by novelists and featuring protagonists whose business and artistic ambitions drew them to the city, these narratives made Chicago a symbolic site of cultural production and social uplift the Progressive-era national consciousness. In doing so, they also expressed underlying anxieties about the impact of such rapid social change on the experience of everyday life as a modern American citizen. This is especially the case with Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers*, a title which uses the extinction of human life in the cliffside dwellings of Anasazi Indians as metaphor for the potential catastrophe awaiting ambitious middle-class citizens living and working in the Chicago skyscrapers where the novel is set.

As Thea is inspired by the Anasazi cliff dwellings near her lover's ranch in Arizona after a trying year of working as a musician in Chicago, Michelle E. Moore has recently argued that *The Song of the Lark* registers Cather's critique of Chicago School

realism's commercial conventionalism in the contrast between the rejuvenating influence of desert landscape's natural beauty and the depressing effects of the dreary cityscape.[36] But Cather does not critique Chicago School realism in *The Song of the Lark* so much as she appropriates the genre's major formal tropes – especially, ethnographic characterization and urban naturalism – to decry the nationalist and imperialist impulses that undergirded the development of the city's transnational cultural marketplace.[37] Alongside Chicago School realists, civic events like the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the founding of cultural institutions revised the city's reputation as a provincial cultural backwater at the turn of the twentieth century. By supporting cultural ventures like the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, leading businessmen made Chicago a "world-class" city by providing the funds that imported architectural styles and artistic sensibilities from European cultural capitals like London, Paris, and Berlin.[38] In doing so, wealthy industrialists signaled their city's and the broader nation's economic and cultural power on the world-stage. By putting to new purpose the literary form most closely associated with this nationalist impulse in *The Song of the*

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[36] Michelle E. Moore, *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism: Cather, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald in Context* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 78.

[37] Throughout the Progressive era, wealthy American philanthropists sponsored the formation of public museums and educational facilities where U.S. audiences could encounter and, in some cases, learn European artistic techniques in the interest of raising both the national standard of artistic production and the nation's global reputation to as a cultural producer. In doing so, private collectors and civic institutions alike facilitated the United States' engagement in the early twentieth-century's transnational cultural marketplace and contributed to the expansion of the nation's commercial cultural empire. For more on this practice, see: Anne Higonet, *A Museum of One's Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (Pittsburgh: Periscope Publishing, 2009); Jeffrey Trask, *Things American: Art Museums and Civic Culture in the Progressive Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Gabriel P. Weisberg, Decourcy E. McIntosh, and Alison McQueen, *Collecting in the Gilded Age: Art Patronage in Pittsburgh, 1890-1910* (Pittsburgh: Frick Art & Historical Center, 1997).

[38] Frederick Byrn Køhlert, *The Chicago Literary Experience: Writing the City, 1893-1953* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011) 49-83; Leisl Olson, *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017) 79-90.

Lark, Cather resists the commercial cultural imperialism that attended the United States' political and economic expansion in the Progressive era.

This critique is represented throughout the text in the ethnographic attention to Thea's body. Scholars like Moore and Marilee Lindemann have argued that the hypersexualized representation of Thea's body that results from Cather's ethnographic characterization is a signal of her corruption by the modern United States' commercial culture and capitalist economy.[39] But, from the moment Dr. Archie's identifies her as a "little Swede, through and through" despite being born in the United States, Thea's body is less a sign of her lecherous nature than a cosmopolitan identity that defies the binary conception of nationality as a simple matter of being native- or foreign-born.[40] Early in text, Thea's cosmopolitan identity is forged through her relationships with a host of immigrant musicians and itinerant admirers. As she grows into her artistic talent, her cosmopolitan identity is developed in moments when the ethnographic description of her body emphasizes her queer performance of U.S. models of middle-class femininity, and the power of her voice to create affective connections between her audience and the characters she portrays on stage. As the transnational cultural economy that structures Thea's professional development enables her to embody what Jessica Berman has described as the "overlapping webs of affiliation" that define cosmopolitan identity and community formations in modernist literature, Cather not only demonstrates how "The

[39] Moore, *Chicago and the Making of American Modenrism*, 81; Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 54-61.

[40] Cather, *The Song of the Lark*, 5.

Trans in Transnational [is the same as] the Trans in Transgender."[41] She also subverts the alliance between national and artistic values in literary realism. In doing so, *The Song of the Lark* describes a cosmopolitan paradigm for making modern art that critiques the Progressive-era United States' commercial culture and economy by privileging the value of authentic expression and affective human connection forged across geographic space and historic time.

Queering Thea Kronborg: Naturalism, Trans-nationalism, and Anti-imperialism in "Friends of Childhood"

After the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, first generation Chicago Renaissance writers used the literary and journalistic realism popularized by W.D. Howells to represent the modern nation's second city as the natural center of production for its art, literature, and poetry. To this end, Henry Blake Fuller's seminal novel *The Cliff-Dwellers* used Chicago's unique cityscape of skyscrapers and elevated trains full of social-climbing businessmen and working women to show how contemporary urban space commodified and, as a result, corrupted the natural, affective relationships and social mores that defined earlier iterations of the human experience. Followed by works like Frank Norris's *The Pit* (1902), Robert Herrick's *Memoirs of An American Citizen* (1905), and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) Chicago School writers isolated specific urban forms like the skyscraper, the factory and bidding room floors, and the slum that

[41] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 15; and "Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?" in *Modernism/modernity* 24.2 (April 2017) 217.

provided a narrative of both who and what factors of U.S. society were being transformed by the rise of the industrial city and commercial capitalism. At the same time, contemporary sociologists like Robert Park and Ernest Burgess at the newly-founded department of Sociology at the University of Chicago drew on the naturalist tropes of journalistic realism and ethnography to create maps of the modern city that explained how and why these transformations took place. As these new maps worked alongside extant narratives to theorize diverse populations' potential to assimilate to middle-class American social norms, novelists and sociologists worked together to make the industrial city the symbolic site of the modern United States commercial capitalist society and cultural economy.[42]

In *The Song of the Lark*, Cather mobilizes naturalist tropes to relocate the nation's cultural and economic center from the modern metropolis to the rural periphery by drawing a map of Moonstone that describes its major landmarks and its socio-economic hierarchy:

> The main business street ran, of course, through the center of the town. To the west of this street lived all the people who, as Tillie Kronborg said, 'in society.' Sylvester Street, the third parallel with Main Street on the west, was the longest in town, and the best dwellings were built along it. Far out at the north end, nearly a mile from the court-house and its cottonwood grove, was Dr. Archie's house, its big yard and garden surrounded by a white paling fence. The Methodist Church was in the center of the town, facing the court-house square. The Kronborgs lived half a mile south of the church, on the long street that stretched out like an arm to the depot settlement. […]
>
> In the part Moonstone that lay east of Main Street, toward the deep ravine which, farther south, wound by Mexican Town, lived all the humbler

[42] Byrn Køhlert, *The Chicago Literary Experience: Writing the City, 1893-1953* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011). Carla Capetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Mary Hricko, *The Genesis of the Chicago Renaissance: Theodore Dreiser, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James T. Farrell* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2009).

> citizens, the people who voted but did not run for office. The houses were little story-and-a-half cottages, with none of the fussy architecture that marked those on Sylvester Street. They nestled modestly behind their cottonwoods and Virginia creeper; their occupants had no social pretensions to keep up. […] The people on Sylvester Street scarcely knew that this part of town existed.[43]

In this environment, the narrator further emphasizes Thea's transitory identity by explaining that the Kronborgs' house straddles the line between Moonstone's commercial and natural environments, "face[ing] the backs of the brick and frame store buildings and a draw full of sunflowers and scraps of old iron."[44] Moreover, by describing Thea's affinity for the working-class community of east Moonstone, "where the people never tried to have lawns or to grow elms and pine trees, but let the native timber have its way and spread in luxuriance," the narrative associates her with the more primitive cultural values of the unassimilated transnational migrant to the modern American metropolis.[45] As Thea's affinity for the natural environment aligns her with the rural-dwelling immigrant communities she encounters in Moonstone and beyond, Cather illuminates the sentimental rather than commercial ethics that inform her social relationships.

In this way, *The Song of the Lark* not only challenges prevailing conceptions of the industrial city as the center of the modern United States' cultural economy. It also advances a critique of the commercial capitalist values modern U.S. Americans were beginning to embrace. For instance, as Thea's friendships with Moonstone's transnational migrants – like her German music teacher A. Wunsch, the train conductor Ray Kennedy,

[43] Cather, *The Song of the Lark*, 19-20.
[44] *TSOTL*, 19 and 20.
[45] Cather, *TSOTL*, 20.

and the Mexican immigrant tradesman "Spanish" Johnny – give her access to cultural forms that inspire her artistic sensibilities, Cather makes foreign rather than familiar objects and landscapes, and affective rather than monetary value central to the novel's conception of artistic merit. Further, as cultural forms like gardens, homemade art objects, and personal narratives enable Thea imagine a world beyond Moonstone they also liberate her from the established conceptions of middle-class, domestic femininity, establishing the provincial outpost rather than the urban center as the key site in the evolution of the early-twentieth century New Woman. In doing so, Thea's emergence as a world-renowned opera singer at the novel's end cultivates a cosmopolitan paradigm for the production of modern art that is embodied in her queer gender and national identity, and acts as a trans-national critique of the nationalist attitudes which undergirded the development of the United States' arts and culture industry in the Progressive era.

For example, when the narrator describes her walk to her music lessons the journalistic exposition underscores Thea's identity as a trans-national migrant figure by characterizing her walk through the ravine as a walk to another country:

> She followed the sidewalk to the depot at the south end of the town; then took the road east to the little group of adobe houses where the Mexicans lived, then dropped into a deep ravine [.] Beyond that gulch, on a little rise of ground that faced the open sandy plan, was the Kohlers house, where Professor Wunsch lived. […]
>
> Mrs. Kohler seldom crossed the ravine and went into the town except at Christmas-time [.] She had never learned much English, and her plants and shrubs were her companions. She lived for her men and her garden. Beside that sand gulch, she had tried to reproduce a bit of her own village in the Rhine Valley. She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned.[46]

[46] *TSOTL*, 13-14.

For Thea, the Kohlers' German homestead becomes a place where she transcends the cultural boundaries of her native-born Moonstone through close contact with foreign art and artists, in the same way that it becomes a diasporic space of restoration for "the wandering music-teacher" Professor Wunsch.[47] In keeping with the tropes of ethnographic realism, the narrative emphasizes Thea and her music teacher's immigrant backwardness as the narrator explains that Mrs. Kohler "rescued" Wunsch after weeks of "sleeping in a dirty, unfurnished room over one of the saloons" in town, and made him "so clean and respectable that he was able to get a large class of pupils and to rent a piano," which he used to fill their house the music of German composers between lessons and sharing "friendly bottle[s]" of beer with Mr. Kohler.[48] In spite of the debauchery Moonstone's Ladies Aid Society associates with the immigrant's drinking habits, the narrator explains that Mrs. Kronborg, the daughter of a Swedish immigrant, lets Thea take lessons with Wunsch because she "was a strange woman" who understood that when Wunsch said "Thea had talent [,] it meant that she must practice four hours a day," while "to any other woman there, it would have meant that a child must have her hair curled every day and must play in public."[49] In this way, the narrator underscores the queer, trans-nationality that governs Thea's early artistic development.

The naturalist portrayal of Thea's trans-nationalism facilitates Cather's critique of the Progressive-era United States' commercial culture by foreclosing the imperial ambitions that undergird it. Early in the text, these imperialist ambitions are illuminated

[47] *TSOTL*, 14.
[48] *TSOTL*, 14.
[49] *TSOTL*, 15.

in her relationship with the restless freight train conductor Ray Kennedy, whose job shipping the raw materials and commercial products that fueled the United States' commercial economy identifies him as an agent of empire in the text. Moreover, like the heroes of popular Westerns and imperial romance novels, Ray's love for Thea inspires him to "dream the large Western dream of easy money, of a fortune kicked up somewhere in the hills—an oil well, a gold mine, a ledge of copper."[50] Similarly, in the vein of dime-novel heroines, Thea likes Ray because of his ability to "talk naturally" about "the large portion of the continent over which he had been knocked about," and to tell stories that reflect his "high standard of personal honor" and a "love for Mexico and the Mexicans, who had been kind to him when he drifted, a homeless boy, over the border."[51] As well as resonating with her affinity for foreign spaces and aesthetic forms like the Kohlers' garden, Ray's travelogues inspire Thea's ambition and highlight its relationship to the romantic American narrative of Manifest Destiny. After listening to Ray's stories one afternoon, for instance, Thea recalls "a great adventure of her own" to the Laramie Plain where:

> To the west one could see range after range of blue mountains, and at last the snowy range, which its white, windy peaks, the clouds caught here and there on their spurs. […] Every little while, eagles flew over.
>
> Coming up from Laramie, [her elderly guide] told them that he was in Brownsville, Nebraska when the first telegraph wires were put across the Missouri River, and the first message that ever crossed the river was 'Westward the course of Empire takes its way.' […] Thea […] told herself

[50] *TSOTL*, 34. On the theme of romantic love in imperial romance novels and popular Westerns, see: Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s," *American Literary History* 2.4 (1990), 659-90; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as a Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1950), 45-122; Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 47-68 and 157-178.

[51] *TSOTL*, 32-33.

> she would never, never forget it. The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles. For long after, when she was moved by a Fourth-of-July oration, or a band, or a circus parade, she was apt to remember that windy ridge.[52]

The imaginative liberation which follows from her appreciation for cultural narratives and natural landscapes takes physical form in the shape of a room to herself where she develops an acute awareness of and interest in her own body. As she begins to take on her own music students, for instance, the narrator explains how Thea uses her income to "fit up a little room for herself upstairs in the half-story," where she keeps always keeps a window open on Dr. Archie's suggestion that "a girl who sang must always have plenty of fresh air, or her voice would get husky, and that the cold would harden her throat."[53] After a trying evening of singing with the WCTU darling Lily Fisher, Thea takes refuge in this room, "frowning in the broken looking-glass at her flaxen pig-tails, at her white neck and arms. Her own broad, resolute face set its chin at her, her eyes flashed into her own defiantly. Lily Fisher was pretty, and she was willing to be just as big a fool as people wanted her to be. Very well; Thea Kronborg wasn't." Like the novel's opening scene, the narrative attention to Thea's body emphasizes her queerness in Moonstone. In this scene, however, this queerness is less the result of her ethnic identity and more a product of the deviant gender identity suggested by her refusal to perform neither her music nor her femininity according to the national standard represented by Lily Fisher. As Thea's gender queerness compounds her ethnic queerness

[52] *TSOTL*, 35.
[53] *TSOTL*, 36.

in this way, Cather crystallizes the trans-national identity that becomes the driving force of the text's critique of the modern United States' commercial culture.

For instance, following Wunsch's ignominious departure from Moonstone after an alcoholic episode, Thea replaces him as the local music teacher, prompting her parents' decision to end her schooling early and to build an addition to their house so that she can teach full-time. Even more than her skillset, it is Thea's queer gender performance that makes her father believe that "the sooner she gets at it in a business-like way, the better. […] Thea is not the marrying kind. […] She's too peppery and too fond of having her own way. […] A girl with that much energy has got to do something, same as a boy, to keep her out of mischief."[54] While the addition of a new practice room and a teaching income grants Thea the sense of independence which signals the liberating potential of the United States' commercial economy, her complaints about her students reflect Cather's disdain for modern commercial cultural production: "They're all so dumb. They've got no ambition […] Jenny Smiley is the only one who isn't stupid. She can read pretty well, and she has such good hands. But she don't care a rap about it. She has no pride."[55] Further, as Ray attempts to console Thea about her students by suggesting that she go to Chicago to take music lessons so that she can return to Moonstone and "wear a long feather and high heels and put on a few airs" only to realize how "dull and exacting" her life is, the narrative's realist representation of the nation's

[54] *TSOTL*, 66-67.
[55] *TSOTL*, 69.

growing commercial economy emphasizes its limitations on even the most liberated woman's experience.[56]

As Ray's chivalry affirms the relationship between the imperial United States' commercial economy and the oppressive domestic culture of middle-class femininity, the text forecloses the realization of his imperial dream of marrying Thea when he is killed in a train crash in the novel's greatest moment of irony and urban naturalism:

> When the train stopped for water that morning, Ray was at the desk in his caboose, making out his report. [The brakeman] decided that he would not go back to flag this time. If anything was coming up behind, he could hear it in plenty of time. […] In a general way, [this] reasoning was sound. […] But as it happened, a light engine, which made no noise at all, was coming,—ordered out to help with the freight that was piling up at the other end of the division. This engine got no warning, came round the curve, struck the caboose, went straight through it, and crashed into the heavy lumber car ahead.[57]

As Ray lays dying on a stretcher, the narrative underscores the palliative potential of Thea's queer, trans-national body when she kisses him on the cheek and becomes "conscious of that power to bestow intense happiness by simply being near any one" as he begins to dream of the life she will lead without him: "she was bound for the big terminals of the world; no way stations for her. In the dark he could see her […] in a box at the Tabor Grand in Denver […] with all the people looking at her through their opera-glasses."[58] Given how his death signals the insignificance of life industrial society and commercial economy, his comforting lucid dream of Thea's future as a globe-trotting,

[56] *TSOTL*, 70 and 71.
[57] *TSOTL*, 93.
[58] *TSOTL*, 97.

cosmopolitan artist suggests the reparative power of her trans-national identity in the United States' commercial cultural empire.

Thea's Trans-national Cultural Economy: Anti-commercialism in "The Song of the Lark," "Stupid Faces," and "The Ancient People"

In his desire to be the source of Thea's reprieve from Moonstone society, Ray leaves his life's savings of $600 to her and explains to Dr. Archie that she should use the money to pursue musical training in Chicago. Thea's acceptance of Ray's will has been read as an indication of her complicity in his imperial dream and the nation's commercial cultural economy.[59] However, as the realist narrative emphasizes Thea's malaise upon relocating to Chicago, the text devalues the logic of the commercial economy that facilitated the city's rise as a modern cultural capital. Moreover, as Thea's artistic development is fostered by the emotional connection she feels to the transnational communities and cultural artifacts with which she comes into contact in the city and beyond, the narrative opposes the nationalism and commercialism associated with Chicago School realism and establishes a cosmopolitan paradigm for the creation of modern art that critiques the delimiting influence of mass production, consumption, and , and market appeal on the production of art in the imperial United States' increasingly commercial society. This paradigm is manifest in the representation of Thea's body, which becomes the conduit for her connection to old and new friends in "The Song of the Lark," "Stupid Faces," and "The Ancient People."

[59] Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America*, 60.

As Theodore Dreiser did with Carrie Meeber, Cather sends Thea to Chicago to lodge this critique in order to exploit the city's emergence as a global cultural capital in the 1890s. In the wake of the Chicago fire of 1871, there was an unabashed connection between art and commerce in the city given the need for large amounts of capital to rebuild the civic infrastructure. The resulting booster ethos created a variety of cultural institutions including the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts in 1879, renamed the Art Institute of Chicago in 1882, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) in 1891, finally reaching an apex in the successful campaign for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. The fair's now-infamous White City signaled the nation's emergence as an imperial power and the city's status as a global cultural capital by both bringing the world to Chicago through ticket sales and expositions, and presenting Chicago and local civic institutions like the CSO and the Art Institute to the world. The CSO played the inaugural concert on the Exposition's opening day of 2 May 1893, and, thanks to an influx of funds from the Chicago Parks Department and the Fair Corporation, the Art Institute opened to the public on 8 December 1893.[60] As these institutions were established by partnerships between local artist collectives and wealthy industrialists who aimed to elevate Chicago's cultural reputation by showcasing European masterworks curated by up-and-coming artists like the American-educated Theodore Thomas, the CSO

[60] The Chicago Parks Department donated the land, while the World's Fair Corporation contributed $250,000 to construction costs for the Art Institutes building on Michigan avenue. For more, see: Josh Allen, "125 Years on Michigan Avenue: The Early Years," Art Institute Chicago, 4 January 2019, https://www.artic.edu/articles/726/125-years-on-michigan-avenue-the-early-years

and Art Institute were emblematic of the city's transnational cultural and commercial economy.[61]

If their programs signified Chicago's imbrication in a transnational cultural economy, the Art Institute and CSO's relationship to the city's commercial economy was exemplified in the buildings that housed them. Beyond its funding by the World's Fair Corporation, for example, the Art Institute's Beaux Arts architecture was in keeping with the White City on the World's Columbian Exposition's main fairgrounds and the building served as auxiliary exhibition site until its opening as a museum in December. A similar recognition of commercialism's role in Chicago's high-brow cultural pursuits emerged in the physical structure of the Chicago Auditorium Building, which was completed in 1889 just south of the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue, and housed the CSO for the first fifteen years of its existence. Designed by the Chicago architecture firm Adler & Sullivan, the Auditorium Building was conceived by the local real estate titan and project financier Ferdinand Peck as a "mechanism for producing opera" by integrating art and commerce.[62] Then the largest building in the United States, the Auditorium Building contained retail spaces where patrons could purchase Auditorium brand products ranging from cosmetics to coffee, offices, restaurants, and a luxury hotel in addition to the CSO's concert hall. In conceiving of this multifunctional space, Peck aimed to make the opera house a self-sustaining enterprise in which revenue from hotel fees, office space rentals,

[61] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, "125 Moments: Ignace Paderewski and the World's Columbian Exposition," CSO Sounds and Stories, 12 May 2016, https://csoarchives.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/125-moments-074-ignace-paderewski-and-the-worlds-columbian-exposition/

[62] Mark Clague, "The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago's Auditorium Building (1889-) as Cultural Machine" in *The Opera Quarterly* 22.3-4 (Summer-Autumn 2006), pp. 477-511, 480.

and retail sales would subsidize both the initial investment on construction and the future creation of music on site. In his successful venture, Peck raised six million dollars to break ground on a structure that became a symbol of Chicago's cultural and economic comeuppance by the turn of the century.[63]

In *The Song of the Lark*, Cather's critique of the commercialism that supported the city's most prominent cultural enterprises emerges through the ethnographic attention to Thea's body as a site of the artistic talent, trans-national identity, and cosmopolitan community she cultivates when she moves to Chicago. While living on the city's far north side and splitting her time between taking piano lessons and working as a funeral singer to afford them, Thea initially spends so much time navigating Chicago's commercial cultural economy that she is too exhausted to visit cultural institutions like the Art Institute or the CSO, much less find inspiration in them. Rather, as Thea finds refuge in domestic settings like the homes of German widows Mrs. Lorch and Mrs. Anderson and her Hungarian music teacher Andor Harsanyi, the narrative realism spotlights the provincial themes and contexts that encourage her artistic development. For instance, Thea revels the domestic comfort of her living arrangement with Mrs. Lorch and Mrs. Anderson, who live "in an old square frame house, […] set in a damp yard full of big lilac bushes [,] which had been left over from country times, needed paint badly" and had "a big back yard with two rows of apple trees and a grape arbor."[64] Similarly, while singing Bohemian composer Christoph Willibald Glück's *Orpheus* in the German

[63] Mark Clague, "The Industrial Evolution of the Arts," 487.
[64] *TSOTL*, 110.

she learned from Professor Wunsch for Harsanyi one evening after dinner at his home, the narrator describes his movement to the piano to accompany her:

> He kept his right hand on the keyboard and put his left to her throat, placing the tips of his delicate fingers over her larynx. […] What a simple thing it was, he reflected; why had he never guessed it before? Everything about her indicated it,—the big mouth, the wide jaw and chin, the strong white teeth, the deep laugh. The machine was so simple and strong, seemed to be so easily operated. She sang from the bottom of herself. Her breath came from down where her laugh came from, the deep laugh which Mrs. Harsanyi had once called "the laugh of the people."[65]

By emphasizing the power of her voice to create a literal, physical connection between herself and her teacher, the narrative realism transforms Thea into an exhausting cultural force in her own right, as Harsanyi "drop[s] into his chair and closed his eyes" when she leaves, exclaiming, "How tired I am. What a voice!"[66]

Following the realization of her singing talent at Harsanyi's house, Thea is emboldened to explore Chicago's cultural institutions and internalizes her individual potential as an artist in the modern United States. In doing so, Thea does not develop the "city consciousness" of so many Chicago School protagonists.[67] Rather, she identifies with the provincial subjects of the transnational artwork with which she comes into contact. At the Art Institute, for example, she is drawn to the image of Barbizon school French painter Jules Breton's *The Song of the Lark*, from which the novel takes its title, and the narrator describes her attraction to the painting's "flat country, the early morning light, the wet fields, the look in the girl's heavy face."[68] Similarly, when she attends the

[65] *TSOTL*, 123.
[66] *TSOTL*, 123.
[67] *TSOTL*, 126.
[68] *TSOTL*, 129.

CSO's concert of Bohemian composer Anton Dvorâk's latest work and hears the opening bars of "From the New World," the narrator explains how it "brought back to her that high tableland above Laramie; the grass-grown wagon trails, the far-away peaks of the snowy range, the wind and the eagles, that old man and the first telegraph message."[69] As Chicago's once intimidating institutions become "a place of retreat," and emerge as urban versions of the provincial, transnational settings of her youth, Thea determines that the commercial forces that "were lined up against her, […]were there to take something from her […] should never have it," and "presse[s] her hands upon her heaving bosom, that was a little girl's no longer" in a gesture that underscores the embodied nature of her individual talent.[70]

By calling attention to Thea's coming of age in this way, Cather crafts a moment of quintessential Chicago School realism—a young person standing still amid the chaotic movement of weather and people on a downtown Chicago street corner —that critiques the economic and cultural forces which structured the city's development. However, the narrative's emphasis on the artistic milieu that inspires this moment sets Thea decidedly apart from archetypal Chicago School heroines like Carrie Meeber. Where Carrie's enchantment by the cityscape and internalization of the logic of commercial capitalism combine to make her a symbol of New Womanhood in the urban-industrial United States, Thea's interest in and identification with such provincial sights and sounds as Breton's *The Song of the Lark* and Dvorâk's "New World" mark her and the text's interest in an

[69] *TSOTL*, 130.
[70] *TSOTL*, 132.

anti-urban, anti-commercial paradigm for artistic production in the modern era. In this way, *The Song of the Lark* does more than articulate Cather's interest in cultivating an antimodernist or "old world" aesthetic for American art.[71] It represents the transnational cultural economy that enables Thea to cultivate the queer, cosmopolitan identity that drives the novel's critique of the xenophobic nationalism that attended the United States' economic expansion in the Progressive era.

Attesting to the political power of this cosmopolitan paradigm, Thea returns briefly to Moonstone and attends a dance with Spanish Johnny in Mexican Town that realizes her artistic talent and her ethical opposition to middle-class American nativism. Thea entreats Spanish Johnny to write out the music for "Rosa de Noche," a Mexican folksong that he explains is "not exactly Mexican" but comes from "farther down; Brazil, Venezuela, may-bee."[72] As Katherine Boutry has explained, the contralto voice with which Thea performs the song coupled with the sexualized description of her effect on her Mexican audience suggests the transgressive power of her embodied talent, underscoring her deviance from normative models of U.S. femininity.[73] With the queer national and gender contexts that structure Thea's artistic identity in full view, Cather's critique of Progressive-era nativism comes to the fore. For instance, when her brother and sister chastise her for "singing with the Mexicans all night" while being "scarcely polite to the nice people here" – referring to the white, native-born members of both the

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[71] Evelyn Funda, "New World" Visions and Homegrown Art: National Authenticity in Works of Willa Cather and Anton Dvorak," 265; Julie Olin Ammentorp, "Thea at the Art Institute," *Cather Studies* V. 9 (October 2011), pp. 182-203, 182.

[72] *TSOTL*, 147.

[73] Katherine Boutry, "Between Registers: Coming In and Out in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*," in *Legacy* 17.2 (2000), pp. 187-201, 193.

Kronborg family and her father's congregation – Thea declares that she likes to sing for the Mexicans because they "are a talented people" who "have a perfect right to their own ways."[74] As Thea dismisses her siblings' nativist racism, the narrator explicates her subsequent realization that, although "[t]his place had always been a refuge, there was a hostility in the house that she could not shut out," thus "[t]his would be her last summer in that house."[75]

In addition to representing the political potential of Thea's trans-national artistic identity, the narrative affirms its romantic potential when she returns to Chicago in "Stupid Faces" and begins a relationship with Fred Ottenburg. As Fred and Thea's romantic partnership parallels their professional one as producer/manager and artist, their romance dramatizes the possibilities for interpersonal connection generated by art created in a transnational cultural economy. Like Thea, the German-American Fred is also a second-generation ethnic American whose trans-national identity facilitates his rejection of middle-class social norms, setting him apart from others of his class. Compared to Thea's all-American music teacher Madison Bowers, for example, who is the embodiment of commercial capitalist avarice and has inherited his New Hampshire forebears' "mean natures, and flinty eyes," Fred's trans-national, cosmopolitan identity allows him to form fast, affective bonds with everyone he meets: "Wherever people met young Ottenburg, in his office, on shipboard, in a foreign hotel or railway compartment, they always felt (and usually liked) his artless presumption."[76] Leveraging their shared

[74] *TSOTL*, 154.
[75] *TSOTL*, 155.
[76] *TSOTL*, 162 and 173.

trans-nationality upon meeting Thea, Fred reminds her that "we immigrants never speak any language well" and encourages her to communicate the feeling of Edvard Grieg's "Tak for Ditt Råd" rather than the pronunciation of its Norwegian verses.[77] As he accompanies her on piano, Fred initiates a trans-national alliance that makes Thea so comfortable singing that "[h]er whole back seemed plastic, seemed to be moulding itself to the galloping rhythm of the song," and makes Bowers stand "still, blinking like an owl at their two heads shining in the sun."[78]

Even more than the affective power of Fred and Thea's alliance, the imagist description of Bowers listening to their song suggests the musicians' ability to transcend the Chicago's commercial cultural economy and enter the symbolic realm of modernist art. Fred and Thea's next performance of the song underscores this transcendent quality when she auditions as a soloist. While she is eager for the paid work, Thea explains that the song "always makes me think about a story my grandmother used to tell" about a farmgirl in Norway who danced with her husband to her death on her wedding night.[79] Mimicking the Norwegian bride's spirited dancing, Thea uses her body to craft a – literally and figuratively – more moving performance as she continues her audition: "She laughed and drew herself up out of her corsets, threw her shoulders high and let them drop again. […] Ottenburg jerked his head and they began the song. The accompaniment sounded more than ever like the thumping and scraping of heavy feet."[80] By using her body to communicate the song's joyful recklessness, like the Henri Rousseau and Jean

[77] *TSOTL*, 174.
[78] *TSOTL*, 174.
[79] *TSOTL*, 180.
[80] *TSOTL*, 180.

Baptiste-Camille-Corot paintings the narrator notes hanging in the audition space, Thea elevates her grandmother's folksy narrative to the level of high art. Moreover, as that art works to connect her performance to a larger cultural-historical record, Cather's realist attention to the body and its environment emphasizes how Thea's artistic talents transcend the aesthetic and moral values of the United States' commercial cultural marketplace.

This technique culminates in "The Ancient People," when Thea accepts Fred's invitation to stay at his family's ranch near the Anasazi cliff dwellings in Panther Canyon to recover her health and talent after a heavy cold brought on by a damp Chicago spring. This section of the novel has been interpreted variously as evidence of Cather's imperialist fetishization of Native American culture, or her antimodern interest in indigenous landscapes as symbols of primitive and therefore more authentic social formations.[81] But these readings overlook how Cather's appropriation of Chicago School tropes to describe the Anasazi cliff dwellings makes Panther Canyon – decidedly, not Chicago – into the urban landscape that inspires Thea's artistic achievements. Like *Sister Carrie* and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*, for instance, *The Song of the Lark* mobilizes the built environment as a metaphor for Thea's artistic and social ambition when she arrives

[81] In addition to Marilee Lindemann's, *Willa Cather: Queering America,* 55, see: Sarah Clere, "Thea's 'Indian Play' in *The Song of the Lark*" in *Cather Studies* V.9 (October 2011), 21-44; Janice P. Stout, *Picturing a Different West: Vision, Illustration, and the Tradition of Cather and Austin* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007) 138-176; Susan J. Rosowski, *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); John Swift, "Willa Cather in and out of Zane Grey's West" in *Cather Studies* V. 9 (October 2011),. pp. 1-20.

in Panther Canyon.[82] However, where Dreiser and Garland use the increasing population density and building height seen during the protagonists' entrance to the metropolis by train, Cather's description of Thea's entrance to Panther Canyon by wagon relies on the landscape's sparseness to communicate its increased opportunities for self-making:

> The San Francisco Mountain lies in Northern Arizona, above Flagstaff, and its blue slopes and snowy summit entice the eye for a hundred miles across the desert. […] The great pines stand at considerable distance from each other. Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. They do not intrude upon each other. […]
>
> Thea seemed to be taking very little through the wood with her. The personality of which she was so tired seemed to let go of her. The high sparkling air drank it up like blotting-paper. It was lost in the thrilling blue of the new sky and the song of the thin wind in the piñons.[83]

Similarly, just as Henry Blake Fuller and Frank Norris use Chicago skyscrapers like the fictional Clifton building and the Board of Trade to reflect the peaks and valleys of economic success and human experience in *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *The Pit*, Cather's description of the cliff city at Panther Canyon emphasizes the literal and moral depths of an urban landscape hand-carved out of stone "two hundred feet thick."[84] Compared to Chicago's "damp and mouldy" apartment buildings, for instance, at Panther Canyon "[a]ll the houses were clean with the cleanness of sun-baked, wind-swept places, and they all smelled of the tough little cedars that twisted themselves into the very doorways," making "one feel that one ought to do one's best, and help to fulfill some desire of the dust that slept there," not the desires of a paying audience.[85]

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[82]Carl S. Smith identifies the entrance to the metropolis by train and the tall building as central expressive forms in Chicago School literature in his seminal text, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 101-150.

[83] Cather, *TSOTL*, 189.

[84] *TSOTL*, 190.

[85] *TSOTL*, 183, 195, and 191.

By representing Panther Canyon as an alternative American metropolis – a kind of anti-Chicago – in this way, Cather's realism not only subverts the commercial ends of its Chicago School forbears. It also reimagines the provincial hinterland as a vital site for the production of modernist art and artists that critique the modern nation's commercial cultural imperialism. In "The Ancient People," Cather lodges this critique primarily through the realist exposition of Thea's body during her "ceremonial" bath in Panther Canyon, and in the consummation of her relationship with Fred Ottenburg.[86] While scholars have traditionally read Thea's bathing scenes as a symbol of her imperial licentiousness, Thea's autoerotic interest in her own body during her bath on the canyon floor defies the heterosexual logic of Chicago School realism and generic Westerns in two key ways.[87] First, it underscores Thea's independence and fulfillment apart from her romantic relationship with Fred. Second, it facilitates Thea's articulation of and commitment to cosmopolitan artistic paradigm that enables her to identify with artists and artisans who occupy vastly different historical moments and landscapes: "what was any art but a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself."[88] As she realizes that "[i]n singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals," Thea's masturbatory bath becomes a symbol of her emergence as a self-reliant artist caring for her instrument rather than a deviant self-indulgence.[89]

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[86] *TSOTL*, 194.
[87] Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America*, 55.
[88] *TSOTL*, 195.
[89] Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America*, 55-6.

In this way, Thea's bath in Panther Canyon identifies her as a trans-national artist whose body and art work to transgress the political, cultural, and conceptual boundaries of the nation-state. Insofar as this trans-national identity enables Thea to forge human connections across space and time, the realist representation of her sexual experiences in Panther Canyon lays the foundation for her construction of a cosmopolitan artistic community organized around affective aesthetics, regardless of their national origin or commercial value. For instance, in addition to being able to "feel the weight of an Indian baby hanging to her back" when she hikes through the canyon, Thea's bath links herself, the potsherds she finds in the cliff dwellings, and "the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute" in a transnational art history that celebrates the anticommercial aesthetics of a lark's song at sunrise and vessels "that could not hold food or water any better for the effort put upon them."[90] Upon the consummation of her relationship with Fred, Cather further asserts the cosmopolitanism of the anticommercial ethic that undergirds Thea's artistic ambition. As she cannot marry Fred because he is already married to Edith Beers, Thea's decision to accompany him to Mexico locates her pursuit of authentic love and artistic success beyond the United States' jurisdiction. Thus loosed from the nation's political boundaries, Thea's unsanctioned romantic and professional relationship with Fred is not a metaphor for the expansion of U.S. empire. It is the prime symbol of Cather's critical cosmopolitanism, and the text's call for creative communities and cultural forms that transcend the imperial United States' commercial interests.

[90] *TSOTL*, 195.

Queer Freakonomics: The Critical Cosmopolitanism of "Dr. Archie's Venture" and Thea "Kronborg"'s Success

She was born a cosmopolitan, and I expect she learned a good deal from Johnny when she used to run away and go to Mexican Town. We thought it a queer freak then.[91]

More than Thea's detachment from the nation-state, the critical cosmopolitanism symbolized by her literal border-crossing from the United States to Mexico with Fred illuminates the deepening attachments to other cultures and people that inform Thea's trans-national identity. The metaphorical border-crossing implied by both her ethnic identity and the transgressive gender performance carried out in her illicit romance makes it clear to Dr. Archie that she was "born a cosmopolitan," whose difference from mainstream U.S. society was evident even in her childhood through her attraction to Spanish Johnny. According to Archie, what made this cosmopolitanism a "queer freak" in her childhood was its contradiction of Moonstone's social and cultural hierarchy which, as the town map asserts, is organized according to its inhabitants' class, ethnic, and gender identity. To this extent, Thea's cosmopolitanism can be read as an example of what Joseph Dimuro has called Cather's "queer economics." As Dimuro explains, "Cather's work discloses reserves of productive energy that inhere in queer bodies, queer labor, and queer relationships" by representing "forms of production, expenditures of resources, and accumulations of energy that go into the making of art" in order to "resist the dominant economic system upon which [artistic creation] depends" and, in this way, critique the commercial values of modern consumer capitalism.[92] Throughout the text,

[91] *TSOTL*, 237.

[92] Joseph Dimuro, "Willa Cather's Queer Economy" in *Modernism/modernity*, 28.3 (September 2021) pp. 425-446, 431.

Cather's emphasis on Thea's body describes the trans-national, cosmopolitan identity that informs her artistic talent and her deviation from normative models of U.S. feminine domesticity. In "Dr. Archie's Venture" and "Kronborg," Thea's explicit refusal to participate in the commercial capitalist economy that could have launched her career articulates the queer freakonomics that undergird Cather's cosmopolitan critique of the modern United States' expanding cultural empire.

The text registers this critique of the modern commercial culture industry by explicating the alternative ethics that inform Thea's decision to ask Dr. Archie, who puts up his shares in the San Felipe silver mine, to loan her the money to finish her musical education in Germany in "Dr. Archie's Venture." In response to Fred's dejection over her determination to go to Germany without him, for instance, Thea explains,

> I'd have liked your helping me eight months ago. But now, you'd simply be keeping me. […] If I borrow from [Dr. Archie], it's to study. Anything I took from you would be different. As I said before, you'd be keeping me. […] Being married is one thing and not being married is the other thing, and that's all there is too it. […] You say I was too much alone, and yet what you did was to cut me off more than I ever had been. Now I'm going to try to make good to my friends out there. That's all there is left for me.[93]

In Thea's resistance to the idea of Fred's "keeping" her, Cather nullifies the dehumanizing effects of the commercial cultural economy that are the major anxiety of Chicago School narratives like Thea's, even as she spotlights the link between capital wealth and artistic production in her career. Moreover, in as much as Thea's desire to "make good" on Dr. Archie and Ray Kennedy's emotional and financial investment in

[93] *TSOTL*, 230.

her future is the source of her artistic success, *The Song of the Lark* explicates the ethics of independence and friendship that shape her artistic persona. Given that this ethical decision leads to her success, embodied in a climactic final scene in which all of Thea's sponsors watch her perform, the novel dramatizes the unifying power of an anticommercial cultural economy that values affective connection and interpersonal relationships above capital gains. In doing so, Cather locates Thea at the center of a cosmopolitan artistic community and transnational economy that critiques the homogenizing impulses of the expansion of U.S. commercial culture.

This critical cosmopolitanism is literally embodied the in the moment of Thea's rise to stardom in the novel's penultimate "Kronborg" section, in which the representation of Thea's and other bodies emphasize the anticommercial, affective value of the art she creates. For instance, when Thea explains how she draws on her mother's memory in her role in *Die Walkürie*, Cather underscores how the artist uses her body to maintain a connection with her even after death: "Wait til you hear my *Fricka*," Thea explains, "You remember, Dr. Archie, how my mother always wore her hair parted in the middle and done low on her neck behind, so you got the shape of her head and such a calm, white forehead? I wear mine like that for *Fricka.*"[94] As the reportorial narrator's review of her *Fricka* describes how "her shining presence was a visible complement to the discussion of the orchestra," Thea's "shining body" connects herself, her mother,

[94] *TSOTL*, 283.

Fricka, the music in the orchestra pit and the action on stage, and the audience's "ears" in the opera's alternative world as "the themes which were to help in weaving the drama."[95]

In addition to dramatizing how her body joins together multiple communities in the space of a single performance, the realist narrative also demonstrates how this artistic community transcends the national commercial cultural marketplace that brings its members into contact. As the narrative gaze pans over the full house at the Metropolitan Opera to describe her "friends, old and new, seated about the house on different floors and levels," including Fred, Dr. Archie, and Andor Harsanyi seated together in a box, and "a gray-haired little Mexican" sitting in the balcony who is an aged Spanish Johnny, come to New York City as a performer with a Barnum and Bailey circus troupe.[96] With the inclusion of the working-class immigrants Spanish Johnny and the Hungarian music teacher Andor Harsanyi alongside industrial magnates like Fred and Dr. Archie, Thea's audience emerges as a cosmopolitan artistic community whose class and ethnic differences are superseded by their shared awe at her performance. They also represent the full scope of the transnational cultural economy in which Thea Kronborg the opera diva was produced, with Archie and Fred serving as capital investors and managers, Harsanyi as a foreign teacher and producer, and Thea and Spanish Johnny representing the extreme examples of contemporary artistic commodities in the global cultural marketplace.

[95] *TSOTL*, 286.
[96] *TSOTL*, 306.

Although the consumer capitalist associations of this artistic community are undeniable, the narrative attention to Spanish Johnny's bodily response to seeing Thea perform attests to the anticommercial value of the work of art she creates:

> Then he walked down Broadway with his hands in his overcoat pockets, wearing a smile which embraced all the stream of life that passed him and the lighted towers that rose into the limpid blue of the evening sky. If the singer, going home exhausted in her cab was wondering what was the good of it all, that smile […] would have answered her. It is the only commensurate answer.[97]

As Spanish Johnny's blissful smile is "the only commensurate answer" to understanding the value of Thea's stardom, the narrative articulates "queer freak" economics that underpin Cather's cosmopolitan critique of modern American commercial culture in *The Song of the Lark.*[98] During her childhood in Moonstone, Thea's queer affinity for the sense of freedom created by cultural forms like the Kohlers' garden and Ray Kennedy's travel narratives inspire her to travel across the ravine to play music with and befriend immigrants like Wunsch and Spanish Johnny, despite the freakishness and debauchery associated with their ethnic identities. Similarly, as she officially begins her career as a world-class artist as *Sieglinde* at the Met, the narrator explains that the purpose of telling Thea's story is only "to give some account of how a Moonstone girl found her way out of a vague, easy-going world" to become a famous artist, and reminds the reader that "[a]ny account of the loyalty to young hearts to [this] exalted ideal […] will always, in some of us, rekindle generous emotions," regardless of economic status or national origin.[99] While

[97] *TSOTL*, 306.
[98] *TSOTL*, 307.
[99] *TSOTL*, 307.

this moralistic conclusion to Thea's coming-of-age narrative resonates with that of so many Chicago School narratives of provincial migrants' journeys to the city, its embodiment in the incalculable value of Spanish Johnny's smile transcends the capitalist and national values associated with that genre's promotion of the modern myth of the American Dream.

By expanding the economic and political premises of Chicago School realism in this way, Cather puts the genre's reportorial narrative voice to new purpose in describing the purely emotional significance of Thea's story for her Aunt Tillie in the "Epilogue." Where many of Moonstone's inhabitants "think Thea ought to take Tillie to New York and keep her as a companion," and "feel sorry for Tillie because she does not live at the Plaza" with her now world-famous niece who earns $1,000 a performance, the narrator explains that they "would miss Tillie" if she were to leave because her stories about Thea bring "tidings of what their boys and girls are doing in the world [;] bring to the old, memories, and to the young, dreams."[100] As these dreams and memories give people "something to talk about and to conjecture about, cut of as they are from the restless currents of the world," Thea's narrative becomes significant not for the truths it reveals about the relationship between art and capital in the modern world, but rather for the story's power to inspire human connection.[101] By making the story valuable for its own sake, Cather subverts the dehumanizing effects capital success to emphasize humanist

[100] *TSOTL*, 310.
[101] *TSOTL*, 310.

potential of Chicago School realism, wresting the literary form from its association with the expansion of U.S. nationalism and commercial capitalism.

Chapter 2

"The Material Out of Which Countries are Made:" Pastoralism and Trans-National Community in My Ántonia

Although Jim Burden and I both live in New York, and are old friends, I do not see much of him there. He is legal counsel for one of the great Western railways, and is sometimes away from his New York office for weeks together. That is one reason why we do not often meet. Another is that I do not like his wife.[102]

Among the reasons she lists for not liking Jim's wife in the editorial introduction to his memoir, Cather explains that "she seems unimpressionable and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm […] and she finds it worth while [*sic*] to play patroness to a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability."[103] With this double-edged critique, Cather frames the subsequent narrative's pastoralism as an aesthetic opposition to the commercial culture of progressivism perpetuated in the early twentieth-century United States by New Women like Jim's wife and the bohemian artists she patronizes. As Christine Stansell has explained, "[i]n writing about and dramatizing the lives of workers, the immigrant poor, and plebian radicals," early twentieth century bohemians "believed they were building a bridge between the classes, stirring potent democratic sympathies in a middle-class audience made newly aware" and recasting the European writer-as-revolutionary on the American scene.[104] To this end, writers from New York to San Francisco like Floyd Dell, Hamlin Garland, Jack London, and Upton Sinclair published popular novels, memoirs, and short stories that made urban environments and social realism central to U.S. notions of progress by highlighting the

[102] Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, 1918 (Vintage Books: New York, 2018), 4.
[103] Cather, *My Ántonia*, 4.
[104] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns*, 2010 (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 2000), xiii.

opportunities for and barriers to social mobility that attended the protagonist's migration to the city. Having made his way from a rural homestead in Nebraska to pursue a Harvard education and legal career in New York where he makes a "brilliant marriage" to the "only daughter of a distinguished man," Jim's biography is easily read as one of these bohemians' progressive plots.[105] However, the pastoral lyricism and nostalgia inspired by his Bohemian muse, Ántonia Shimerda, signals his affective resistance to urban migration, settlement, and industrial capitalist success as symbols of American progress.

Speaking at the World's Fair in 1893 on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the historian Frederick Jackson Turner asserted that the experience of westward migration, agricultural settlement, and progressive industrialization made the American national identity unique in modern history. Building on this idea, in 1894 Hamlin Garland's *Crumbling Idols* expressed his view of the Midwest's status as the nation's new cultural capital given the influence of immigration and urban-industrialization on the region's social character:

> Commercially, the West rushes toward the future. Cities rise with velocity hitherto inconceivable. True, they are mushrooms to some extent […] but the people are coming on after all […] who will make these mushroom cities temples to art and song. This great basin, like Egypt, like Germany, is to be a 'well of nations.' […] It will be the base of food supply; the heart of the nation; the place of interchange. […]
>
> In the West there is coming into expression and literary influence the great Scandinavian and Germanic element to which the traditions of English literature are very weak and unimportant, and to whom Boston and New York are of small account.[106]

[105] Cather, *My Ántonia*, 4.

[106] Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting, and the Drama* (New York: Stone and Kimball, 1894), 146-7. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books?id=51EhAAAAMAAJ

Two decades later, Garland substantiated his notion of the Midwest as the crucible of the modern American self in the publication of his autobiography *Son of the Middle Border* (1917), which provides a realist account of his childhood in rural Wisconsin and its influence on his identity as an American author and literary critic. In *My Ánotnia*, Cather proffers a modernist alternative to this narrative in Jim's pastoral reflection on his childhood in rural Nebraska after moving to New York City. In the nostalgia that marks its pastoral form and its emphasis on the arduous process of adapting to U.S. culture and society for a Bohemian immigrant, the novel emerges as a formal and political critique of the aspirational bohemianism that undergirds Garland's portrayal of the American experience. In doing so, Cather not only exposes Garland and his realist compatriots as ironically out of touch with the social and cultural experience of Americanization for foreign-born citizens. She also interrogates the nativism that informed even progressive conceptions of American identity in the early twentieth century. As Jim recounts the series of events the precipitate Ántonia's transformation from an exuberant young immigrant girl to a workworn Nebraska farmer, Ántonia's Bohemian-style garden, orchard, and -speaking children defy her story's easy classification as a typical Americanization narrative.

Because of its representation of the exploitation and erasure of Native American and immigrant communities, *My Ántonia*'s pastoralism has long been read as an example of Cather's participation in the oppressive culture of U.S. imperialism. But this interpretation has failed to account for how the novel's pastoral imagery and lyrical prose describe a trans-national prairie landscape that facilitates Jim's resistance to the nativist,

heteronormative construction of U.S. national identity in the early twentieth century's domestic culture of empire. Similar to how *The Song of the Lark*'s realist form illuminates the transnational cultural economy that gave rise to both the United States' commercial cultural empire and Thea Kronborg's transgressive performance of domestic femininity, *My Ántonia*'s pastoralism foregrounds the transnational history of migration and settlement that structures Jim's queer embodiment of modern American masculinity. Where the virile speaker in Carl Sandburg's "Chicago" (1916) reveled in the establishment of the imperial nation's law and industrial order, in *My Ántonia* Jim's "naturally romantic and ardent disposition" informs his desire to leave New York City to for the western prairie of his youth.[107] Where the gritty realism of popular westerns from Frank Triplett's *Jesse James* (1883) and Zane Grey's *The Lone Star Ranger* (1914) added to the romantic power of their imperial visions, *My Ántonia*'s pastoral nostalgia expresses Jim's desire to commune with, rather than conquer, the prairie landscape and the ethnic migrants who live there. To this end, if Thea Kronborg's deviant femininity is expressed through the realist attention to her body in *The Song of the Lark*, in *My Ántonia* Jim's queer masculinity is communicated through his distinct desire to be rid of his body, and his nostalgic sense of being "dissolved into" or "erased, blotted out" by the Nebraska landscape as a child.[108]

By marshalling the nostalgia associated with literary pastoralism to emphasize his queer performance of modern American masculinity, Cather opens space for the

[107] Cather, *My Ántonia*, 4-5.
[108] *MA*, 15.

expression of Jim's trans-national, cosmopolitan identity and sense of community, which takes its final form in his literal and figurative reunion with Ántonia in the text. In thi, *My Ántonia* subverts the nativist and imperialist logic of Progressive-era U.S. migration narratives, be they migrations to the great West or the modern metropolis. To this end, in *My Ántonia* Cather draws on the pastoral tradition in Midwestern literature not, as William Barillas has argued, "to discern cosmopolitan regionalism from the unimaginative, crass provincialism she believed hampered cultural development in the U.S." and the region.[109] Rather, she mobilizes Midwestern pastoralism to describe a trans-national landscape and protagonist that resists the region's growing reputation as the center of the imperial United States' nationalist commercial culture. Cather scholars have characterized *My Ántonia*'s transnationalism as a weaving together of the American-born narrator Jim Burden's prairie experience with the revered Bohemian immigrant Ántonia Shimerda's, or Cather's combination of the distinct national narrative forms associated with the novel's allusions to a U.S. oral tradition, Russian folk-stories, and the Virgilian epic.[110] This weaving together of narrative forms and migration experiences results in the construction of a trans-national identity that, like Thea Kronborg's, resists interpretations of Jim's Americanness as a simple matter of his birth-

[109] William David Barillas, *The Midwestern Pastoral: Place and Landscape in Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 57.

[110] The combination of narrative forms and ethnic identities as a metaphor for Cather's interest in transatlantic exchange is common theme in scholarly considerations of what has been called her "old world" influences. For a specific interest in these themes as a means of political and social critique, see: Catherine Morely, "Willa Cather and the Transatlantic Imaginary" in *European Journal of American Culture*, V. 28.2 (July 2009) pp. 125-140; Guy Reynolds, "*My Ántonia* and the Americanisation Debate" in *Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, and Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 73-98; Carol Steinhagen, "Dangerous Crossings: Historical Dimensions of Landscape in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, *The Professor's House*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*" in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, V. 6.2 (July 1997), pp. 63-82.

right U.S. citizenship, and conceptions of the Nebraska prairie as an inherently American landscape. Just as Jim's pastoral nostalgia elucidates a queer, cosmopolitan identity that transcends the foreign-/native-born binary construction of national identity, Cather's pastoral descriptions of the landscape reveal a cosmopolitan environment that defies the historical and political boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. In doing so, *My Ántonia* makes the Midwest the subject of an anticommercial modern literature and culture that Cather worked hard to protect.[111]

Queering the Prairie: Pastoralism and the Production of a Trans-National Landscape in "The Shimerdas"

In a new country a body always feels friendly to the animals.[112]

By calling attention to the adult Jim's quirkiness in her introduction, Cather identifies him as a queer figure whose marital and legal ties to the United Sates' industrial economy belie his resistance to its imperial commercial culture and economy in the pastoral memoir that follows. As in *The Song of the Lark*, Jim's queer national identity is also communicated through the attention to his embodied experience and the friendships he pursues with non-native figures. However, where Thea's gender and national queerness is manifest in the realist fixation on her body, Jim's queer national and gender identity emerges through his desire to be rid of his body through a romantic communion with the landscape. Jim's repeated sense of being "dissolved" into,

[111] Sharon O'Brien discusses Cather's concerted effort to prevent *My Ántonia* from losing its formal and cultural prestige through commercial reprinting or serialization in the essay "Possession and Publication: Willa Cather's Struggle to Save *My Ántonia*" in *Studies of the Novel*, 45.3 (Fall 2013), 460-475.

[112] Cather, *My Ántonia*, 23.

"obliterat[ed]" by, or otherwise incorporated into the prairie environment suggests his desire to be removed from the progressive logic that undergirds his narrative of westward migration, homesteading, and urban education.[113] As this desire is associated with the Bohemian Ántonia and her family's experience of the Nebraska prairie throughout the narrative, the adult Jim Burden does not emerge, as Marilee Lindeman has argued, as "a policeman and gatekeeper of transgressions related to gender, sexuality, and ethnicity."[114] Rather, the text communicates his transgressive yearning to transcend these cultural and political boundaries in the process of constructing a cosmopolitan self-concept that is inseparable from his relationship with Ántonia.

Insofar as Jim's formulation of this cosmopolitan sense of self is blind to the expansionist policies that structure his and Ántonia's presence in Nebraska in the first place, it is undeniable that *My Ántonia* participates in the oppressive cultures of U.S. nationalism and imperialism. However, it is important to note that Jim's political and historical blindness is mutually constitutive with his memoir's larger project of resisting, rejecting, and redefining the binary construction of U.S. national identity that emerged in the Progressive era. In stark opposition to the nativist model of national identity that took hold in the Progressive-era United States, in which U.S. citizenship is an unquestionable matter of birth-right, Jim's memoir not only celebrates the ethnic diversity of his hometown. It depicts his active effort to incorporate an Other's perspective into his own. Similarly, compared to the emergent conception of the United States as a nation of

[113] *MÁ*, 24 and 325.

[114] Marilee Lindeman, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1999), 9.

consumers, Jim longs for vernacular cultural forms that reflect their makers' hybrid identities. In this regard, when Jim looks out over the landscape and sees "the material of which countries are made" rather than the United States, he articulates a queer model of the nation that resists the rising tides of nationalism and commercialism that attended the expansion of U.S. imperialism in the Progressive era. In doing so, the text's critical cosmopolitanism not only shows how cosmopolitanism can be coopted to support imperialism, as Rebecca Walkowitz has suggested.[115] It also suggests the ways in which even imperialist cosmopolitanism also troubles the nativist and binary conceptions of national identity and communities that emerged in the Progressive era.

Cather begins the construction of Jim's queer, cosmopolitan identity early in the text as he conflates his childhood experiences with Ántonia's through their mutual experience of geographic migration and cultural dislocation. For example, when the passenger train conductor explains that "in the immigrant car ahead there was a family from 'across the water' whose destination was the same as ours," Jim explains that he does not "remember crossing the Missouri River," because "by that time I had crossed so many rivers that I was dull to them."[116] Further, similar to how the footnote that accompanies Ántonia's name underscores her foreignness on the American scene, Jim's autobiographical notes emphasize his unfamiliarity with the modern American cultural landscape when he recalls how "Jake bought everything the newsboys offered him: candy, oranges, brass collar buttons, a watch-charm, and for me a *Life of Jesse James*."[117]

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[115] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 17.
[116] Cather, *MÁ*, 12.
[117] *MÁ*, 11.

A farmhand and avid consumer heading west to work on the Burden family's Nebraska homestead, Jake is representative of the turn-of-the-century United States' commercial culture of production and consumption and imperial expansion. Conversely, as the child of Jake's employers, Jim is neither a producer himself nor a consumer. He is presented instead as a passive figure whose social and cultural naivety leads him to misidentify his grandfather's hired hand, the Austrian immigrant Otto Fuchs, as the American railroad bandit Jesse James when he gets to Black Hawk simply because "[h]e wore a sombrero hat, with a wide leather band and a bright buckle, and the ends of his moustache were twisted up stiffly, like little horns. […] Surely, this was the face of a desperado."[118]

Cather further challenges traditional conceptions of Jim's normative national identity by destabilizing the association between the novel's Nebraska setting and the U.S. nation-state by emphasizing the landscape's foreignness. For example, coupled with his inability to discern the features of the surrounding town in the darkness of the prairie night, Jim's captivation by the unfamiliar sound of the Shimerdas' conversation at the Black Hawk train station indicates the regional setting's disconnection from the U.S. national cultural and political landscape. In this respect, it is also significant that Jim and Jake follow the immigrant Shimerda family and Otto out of the depot on the last leg of their journey. As immigrants lead native-born Americans out to the farm, the prairie landscape appears to Jim not as the U.S. state of Nebraska but rather as "nothing but land; not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made."[119] While this description has been read as evidence of Jim's imperialism, as he goes on to explain his

[118] *MÁ*, 11 and 13.

> feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction. […] Between the earth and sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night: here, I felt, what would be would be,

the text does not overlook Native Americans' historical presence so much as it rejects the notion of any form of manmade political or social control over the environment Jim has come to inhabit.[120] By denaturalizing the association between the prairie and the United States' political and social order in this way, Cather identifies the novel's Nebraska setting as a queer, trans-national landscape that lays bare the North American continent's history of human migration and settlement.

This history is marked throughout Book I not only by Jim and the Shimerdas' simultaneous arrival in Black Hawk, but also in the earth itself. This is especially the case with "the sunflower-bordered roads" that line the prairie landscape, which Otto tells Jim "were introduced into that country by the Mormons," as well as being "faintly marked in the grass, [by] a great circle where the Indians used to ride" and unearthed by a farmer "breaking sod, [who] turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade."[121] As the pastoral imagery that describes the Nebraska environment is increasingly associated with the Shimerda family in Book I, the text reflects Jim's nostalgia for a midwestern landscape that troubles assumptions about the

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[120] *MÁ*, 14-15; on *My Ántonia*'s nationalism and imperialism: Mike Fischer, "Pastoralism and Its Discontents: Willa Cather and the Burden of Imperialism," in *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 23.1 (1990), pp. 33-44; John T. Matthews, "Willa Cather and the Burden of Southern History" in *Philological Quarterly* 90.2-3 (March 2011), pp. 137-165. Lisa Marie Lucenti, "Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*: Haunting Houses of Memory" in *Twentieth Century Literature* 46.2 (2000), pp. 193-213; Blythe Tellefsen, "Blood in the Wheat: Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*" in *Studies in American Fiction* 27.2 (Autumn 1999), pp. 229-44.

[121] *MÁ*, 33, 62, and 217.

prairie region's U.S. national identity by representing the transnational histories and communities that inhabit it.

Jim's narrative also characterizes the rural homesteading community outside of Black Hawk as queer, trans-national landscape through his characterization of its queer economy. That is, as Joseph Dimuro has explained, the anti-commercial capitalist, alternative forms of social and emotional currency and value that govern day-to-day life and community-formations beyond the metropolitan center.[122] When Jim first arrives to the farm, his grandmother describes the foundational tenants of the homestead's queer economy when she reflects that "[i]n a new country, a body feels friendly to the animals."[123] As she explains that she enjoys the having badger "come out and watch [her] when [she's] at work" in her garden even though "[h]e takes a chicken once in a while," Grandmother Burden articulates a notably anti-capitalist and, to that end, anti-commercial sense of coexistence with the local wildlife that is mirrored in the subsequent image of Jim lying in her pumpkin patch:

> I sat down in the middle of garden, where snakes could scarcely approach unseen, and leaned my back against a warm yellow pumpkin. […] The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. […] I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great.[124]

[122] Joseph Dimuro, "Willa Cather's Queer Economy," in *Modernism/modernity*, 28.3 (September 2021), pp. 425-446.
[123] Cather, *MÁ*, 23.
[124] *MÁ*, 25.

Following Jim's communion with the queer bugs and pumpkins in his grandmother's garden, the novel's queer economy is most manifest in the Shimerda family. Not only are the Shimerdas described like the animals to which Grandmother Burden says a body feels friendly, but they also lack the capital and linguistic resources to participate properly in the national economy the homesteading community represents. Having "bought the homestead of a fellow countryman, Peter Kraijek, and […] paid him more than it was worth," Grandmother Burden's narrative of how the Shimerda family came to live in Black Hawk identifies them as queer figures by virtue of both their immigrant status and their misunderstanding of the homesteading community's commercial capitalist economy.[125] For instance, as Grandmother Burden goes on to explain how Kraijek was able to take advantage of the Shimerdas because they "could not speak enough English to ask for advice," the text emphasizes the social and economic vulnerability of immigrants and non-white characters. While this treatment of immigrants is often associated with Cather's imperialism, the Burden family is implicated in the Shimerdas' queer economy when Ántonia tries to give Jim a silver ring in exchange for teaching her the words "blue," "eyes," and "sky."[126] Jim identifies with his grandmother's Protestant-American asceticism when he rejects her gift, but is nonetheless initiated into the Shimerdas queer social order when Mr. Shimerda gives him a Bohemian-English dictionary and entreats him to "[t]e-e-ach, te-e-ach my Ántonia."[127]

[125] *MÁ*, 26.
[126] *MÁ*, 29.
[127] *MÁ,* 31-2.

In light of this, when Jim agrees to teach Ántonia English, he begins a transnational friendship with her that initiates him into a queer economy which is reflected in his pastoral characterization of Ántonia. For instance, On his way to the Shimerdas' homestead, which is characterized as a "*wild* place where there was no garden or chicken coop, and very little broken land," Jim describes the road as "[running] about like a *wild* thing."[128] Similarly, when the Shimerdas emerge one-by-one from their earthen dugout home to greet Jim and his family, Ántonia is characterized as an equally bucolic vision: "I remembered what the conductor said about her eyes. They were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood. Her skin was brown, too, and in her cheeks she had a glow of rich, dark color. Her brown hair was curly and *wild* looking."[129] In the pastoral imagery associated with Ántonia and the landscape, and the repetition of the word "wild" to describe them both, Cather illuminates the trans-national contexts that shape Jim's nostalgic desire for a midwestern homestead governed by "impulsiveness" and "big […] dreams" rather than the rational rules of industry and commerce.[130]

Although Ántonia and her family's association with the untamed landscape has been interpreted as a symbol of their yet-to-be cultivated American identity, reading the Shimerdas as U.S. citizens *a priori* downplays their value in Cather's queer economy.[131]

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[128] *MÁ*, 25, *emphasis added*.
[129] *MÁ*, 28, *emphasis added*.
[130] *MÁ*, 5.
[131] On the Shimerdas' U.S. citizenship, see: Joseph W. Meeker, "Willa Cather: The Plow and the Pen" in ed. Susan J. Rosowki, *Cather Studies: Willa Cather's Ecological Imagination* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 77-88; Carol Steinhagen, "Dangerous Crossings: Historical Dimensions of Landscape in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, *The Professor's House*, and *Death*

To this end, it also ignores the family's centrality to the text's critique of the nationalization narratives popularized by the commercial promotion of the "free land" made available by the Homestead Act in the immigrant guidebooks distributed abroad by railroad and steamship agents, as well as state governments.[132] This is especially true for Ántonia's father Mr. Shimerda, who she explains to Jim did "not want to come, never!" to the United States but emigrated from Bohemia to satisfy his wife's conviction that "America big country; much money, much land for my boys, much husband for my girls."[133] A "weaver by trade," who had "brought his fiddle with him [which] he used to pick up money by" in Bohemia, though "it wouldn't be of much use" in Black Hawk, Mr. Shimerda's queerness most obvious in his lack of farming knowledge.[134] This queerness is further embodied in his "thin […] stooped" shoulders and "white and well-shaped hands," which underscore his ill-fitness for agricultural labor when he emerges from the dugout, as well as his melancholic facial expression, which Jim describes as "ruggedly formed, but it looked like ashes—like something from which all the warmth and light had died out."[135] When Ántonia later identifies this embodied queerness as a symptom of her father's "sad[ness] for the old country" and the fact that "[h]e don't like this kawntree" the text undermines popular narratives about the individual happiness, social security,

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Comes for the Archbishop" in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 6.2 (July 1999), pp. 63-82.

[132] For more on immigration pamphlets and advertisements, see: Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1982), pp. 8-41. In the Midwest specifically, see: Kassidy N. Whetstone, "The Recruitmant of Volga Germans to the American Midwest, 1870-1900," Unpublished dissertation, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. 2022.

[133] *MÁ*, 86.

[134] *MÁ*, 29.

[135] *MÁ*, 29.

and economic independence that enticed immigrants like the Shimerdas to relocate to the rural Midwest to capitalize on the Homestead Act's promise of "free land" and U.S. citizenship.[136]

Cather furthers this critique by foregrounding the "queer" circumstances surrounding Mr. Shimerda's suicide in Book I's climactic scene.[137] For instance, Ántonia reiterates her family's queer relationship to the local economy when she tells Jim "[y]our grandfather is rich […] Why he not help my papa? Ambrosch be rich, too, after while, and he pay back" in response to his criticism that "[p]eople who don't like this country ought to stay at home."[138] Despite the nativist implications of Jim's initial critique, when he names Mr. Shimerda's homesickness as the cause of his death in the subsequent episode Cather affirms Ántonia's understanding that attaining the hallmarks of U.S. citizenship in the homesteading environment is more contingent upon social support networks than either the individual's knowledge or desire for success. Underscoring Mr. Shimerda's social precarity in Black Hawk, Jake observes "[t]here's something mighty queer about" how Kraijek's axe fits the gash in Mr. Shimerda's face, even though Otto insists that "[t]he old man wouldn't have made all them preparations for Kraijek to murder him" and "[t]he gun was right beside him when Ambrosch found him."[139] Although Jake, Otto, and his grandparents decide to leave the question of murder or suicide up to the local coroner, Jim's reflection that he "knew it was homesickness that killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually

[136] *MÁ*, 86.
[137] *MÁ*, 86 and 92.
[138] *MÁ*, 86.
[139] *MÁ*, 92-3.

find its way back to his own country" resolves the argument by identifying the immigrant experience of yearning for community as his cause of death.[140]

Jim's account of Mr. Shimderda's death and burial furthers Cather's critique of the U.S. nationalism by affirming the Nebraska prairie's status as a trans-national landscape that troubles conceptions of national identity a simple matter of political jurisdiction. The homestead's immigrant community comes into full view when Russian Pavel and Peter, the Burdens, Ánton Jelink, and other neighbors attend Mr. Shimerda's funeral, which takes place at the far corner of their property at the site of a future crossroads. In light of Grandfather Burden's warning not to bury Mr. Shimerda there to spare the family the shame associated with burying the victims of suicides at crossroads, Mrs. Shimerda's insistence on the spot reflects both her family's persistent queerness and association with the land in the text. After all, Mrs. Shimerda guarantees that her homesick Bohemian husband's body will be incorporated into the local farming community and national economy upon his body's internment in the land. Underscoring Mr. Shimerda's status as a constitutive element of the local topography – like the sunflower-lined roads and the Indian circle – Jim's description of his gravesite recalls the degree to which the Nebraska prairie resists classification as a purely U.S. American environment due to the transnational histories buried within it:

> Years afterward, when the red grass had been ploughed under [and] the roads no longer ran about like wild things, but followed the surveyed section lines, Mr. Shimerda's grave was still there, with a sagging wire fence around it and an unpainted wooden cross. […] The road from the north curved a little to the east just there, and the road from the west

[140] *MÁ*, 95.

> swung out a little to the south; so that the grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island.[141]

In addition to literally reshaping the prairie landscape, Mr. Shimerda's death is also the catalyst for Jim's cultivation of a transnational identity of his own. Left by himself while his grandparents, Otto, and Jake leave the Burden farm to attend to the Shimerdas, Jim cultivates his transnationalism through by identifying with the affective immigrant experiences of dislocation and nostalgia. This process begins with Jim's realization that he has been left alone in his grandparents' house for the first time, which he compares with Robinson Crusoe's experience of being shipwrecked on a deserted island, underlining his location in a regional sphere beyond the jurisdiction of the nation-state.[142] Finding *Robinson Crusoe* a less compelling narrative than the one unfolding around him, Jim begins to imagine Mr. Shimerda's experience of migrating to Nebraska, conflating it with his own when he thinks about "how far it was to Chicago, and then to Virginia, to Baltimore—and then the great wintry ocean."[143] Bolstered by this assessment of their similarity, Jim reflects on "all that Ántonia ever told me about his life before he came to this country" until "[s]uch vivid pictures came to me they might have been Mr. Shimerda's memories, not yet faded out from the air in which they had haunted him."[144] By appropriating Mr. Shimerda's painful experience of nostalgia in this way, the childhood Jim begins to articulate the cosmopolitan identity drives his desire for the prairie as an adult.

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[141] *MÁ*, 14 and 110.
[142] *MÁ*, 95.
[143] *MÁ*, 95.
[144] *MÁ*, 96

Queering Jim Burden: Nostalgia and Gender Performance in "The Hired Girls" and "Lena Lingard"

People said there must be something queer about a boy who showed no interest in girls his own age, but who could be lively enough when he was with Tony and Lena or the three Marys.[145]

While different from her father's nostalgia, Ántonia's transnational experience is equally tethered to the landscape insofar as working the land queers Ántonia's body in the same way that being buried on the farm queers the landscape. In keeping with her family's queer relationship to the homesteading community outside Black Hawk, after her father's suicide in "The Shimerdas" Ántonia undertakes the physical labor of breaking sod with her brother Ambrosch, wearing "the boots her father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself," keeping her "sleeves rolled up all day, [so that] her arms and throat were burned as brown as a sailor's" and her "neck came up strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf."[146] In addition to donning men's clothing and taking up the agricultural labor that is traditionally men's work on her family's farm, when Jim asks if she might not consider attending school she proudly proclaims to Jim "I ain't got time to learn, I can work like mans now" and "better I like to work out-of-doors than in a house! […] I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man."[147] In this way, Ántonia comes to embody a queer gender identity that is constitutive of the queer, trans-national economy of feeling and emotion which drives the text's critique of the repressive function of the modern United States' commercial capitalist social order.

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[145] *MÁ*, 194-5.
[146] *MÁ*, 114.
[147] *MÁ*, 115 and 127.

Throughout the text, Jim's attraction to both the landscape and wild quality of Ántonia's transgressive gender performance is a sign of his participation queer, trans-national economy she and her family symbolize. It is also a sign of his own queer performance of modern American masculinity, as his nostalgic desire for Ántonia and his Nebraska farm runs counter to the progressive logic of his education and career as a Manhattan attorney. As an adult, Jim's queer identity and economy is manifest in his affinity for vernacular cosmopolitan cultural forms, such as Mr. Shimerda's gravesite, the pastoral tradition the novel embodies, and eventually Ántonia's farm. As the longevity of these trans-national, cosmopolitan cultural forms emphasizes the repressive power and fleeting nature of the commercial culture and society that marks town life throughout the text, *My Ántonia* undermines the concept of mass consumption as a marker of the United States' successful creation of a liberal democratic society.

While being "put down among boys of [his] own age" teaches Jim the basics of becoming a Black Hawk boy who can "fight, play 'keeps,' tease the little girls, and use forbidden words," his family's friendship with the Harlings explicates the relationship between commercial capitalist wealth and gender normativity in town.[148] The Harlings' position at the top of the town's commercial economy makes them a model of American middle-class respectability despite the family's trans-nationality, given Mrs. Harling's status as a Norwegian immigrant. For example, although Mrs. Harling possesses Ántonia's emotional wildness insofar as she "quick to anger, quick to laughter, and jolly from the depths of her soul," this ethnic queerness is nullified in the presence of her

[148] *MÁ*, 133.

Minnesota-born husband, whose "autocratic and imperial" way of controlling his family's day-to-day affairs is well-known in town.[149] In addition to taming Mrs. Harling's boisterous personality, Mr. Harling's status as both a native-born American and "the most enterprising business man in our county" also normalizes the gender queerness associated with his daughter Frances's job as her father's primary business manager.[150] While Ántonia's pride in her ability to "work like man's" after her father's death causes Grandmother Burden no small amount of distress, Frances's ability to talk with her father about grain and cattle prices "like two men" inspires Black Hawk locals' respect and admiration for her intellectual capacities.[151] Supported by Black Hawk's burgeoning commercial capitalist economy, the Harling household becomes an ideal place for Jim to spend his teenage years because it displays the possibilities for queer identity expression despite the repressive influence of the U.S. nation-state. This is especially true after Ántonia comes to work as their hired girl, giving Jim direct access to the trans-national community in which he felt so at home on his grandparents' farm.

Following Ántonia's employment with the Harlings, Jim affirms his ties to Black Hawk's immigrant community and deepens his understanding of its social hierarchy by befriending her circle of country girls, including Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball, who provide him a critical perspective on the town's commercial economy. For instance, through his friendships with Ántonia, Jim encounters opportunities for social mobility and self-making in the modern United States that also force him to reckon with the

[149] *MÁ*, 135 and 143.
[150] *MÁ*, 136.
[151] *MÁ*, 137.

nation's history of racialized labor exploitation as when he joins Ántonia to watch Blind d'Arnault perform.[152] Despite recalling the nation's plantation past, when d'Arnault arrives in Black Hawk while touring the country as a free black musician, he embodies the opportunities for social mobility in the modern United States.[153] Moreover, although d'Arnault's status as a racial Other is emphasized through his body's uncontrollable movements and his association with the landscape, Jim explains that these characteristics are also the source of his success as a popular musician: "when he was six years old he […] felt his way through the lilacs, along the boxwood hedge," where he stood "in the open space between the hollyhock rows, his body rocking automatically, his blind face lifted up toward the sun and wearing an expression of idiotic rapture," listening the plantation owner's daughter practice piano.[154] After sneaking into the house to try the instrument for himself, it is discovered that his blindness has contributed to his development of such perfect pitch that "he could repeat, after a fashion, any composition that was played for him," and as professional performer he was

> always a Negro prodigy who played barbarously and wonderfully. As piano playing, it was perhaps abominable, but as music it was something real, vitalized by a sense of rhythm that was stronger than his other physical senses—that not only filled his dark mind, but worried his body incessantly.[155]

Inspired by Blind d'Arnault's performance to start a rhythmic rocking of their own, the audience at the Black Hawk Boys' Home begins a dance that transgresses Black

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[152] *MÁ*, 141.

[153] Cather, *MÁ*, 166; John T. Matthews explains the relationship between Blind Tom and Blind d'Arnault, and the musicians' function as evidence of the repressed history of black slave labor in *My Ántonia* in his essay "Willa Cather and the Burden of Southern History," 145-152.

[154] *MÁ*, 168.

[155] *MÁ*, 171.

Hawk's unwritten social code of respectability even as it reinforces national ideas about racial, ethnic, and gender performance. Caught dancing to Blind d'Arnault's "crashing waltz" when they ought to have been working or not present at all, Ántonia, Lena, Tiny and a handful of other hired girls run toward the kitchen to escape before one of the hotel regulars asks "What's the matter with you girls? Dancing out here by yourselves, when there's a roomful of lonesome men on the other side of the partition!"[156] Despite her reluctance to break with the hotel proprietor's rules for decorum, when Tiny and the front desk manager Johnnie are reminded that Mrs. Gardener is too far away on a trip to Omaha to stop a dance in Black Hawk, "d'Arnault spread himself out over the piano, and began to draw the dance music out of it [.] Whenever the dancers paused to change partners or to catch breath, he would boom out softly, 'Who's that goin' back on me? One of these city gentlemen, I bet! Now you girls, you ain't goin' to let that floor get cold?'"[157] As he reflects on Ántonia, Lena, and Tiny's dances with the traveling salesmen staying at the hotel, Jim's narrative dramatizes how the town's commercial economy promotes the intermixing of American and a variety of Other characters, while also underscoring a national culture of heteronormativity and racialized consumption as white men dance with immigrant women to music produced by a blind black man.

In doing so, *My Ántonia* demonstrates how the United States' commercial economy exerts a normalizing pressure that represses queer identities and exploitative processes in the production of popular artistic expression and social performance. In this

[156] *MÁ*, 171.
[157] *MÁ*, 172.

way, Cather initiates a critique of modern American popular culture that exposes its inability to resist the oppressive influences of modern market capitalism. For example, Blind d'Arnault's performance introduces Jim to the revolutionary possibilities of a modern cultural scene that is enlarged when a troupe of itinerant Italians open a tent to teach lessons and host dances the following summer. Although "[t]he Vannis' tent brought the town boys and country girls together on neutral ground," Jim and Ántonia are punished for their attendance due to their wealthy relations' influential position in Black Hawk society.[158] When Mr. Harling discovers Ántonia slapping the town boy Harry Paine for kissing her after walking her home from a dance one night, he admonishes her: "This is what I've been expecting, Ántonia. […] I won't have that fellow tramping around my back yard all the time. This is the end of it, tonight. […] You can quit going to those dances, or you can hunt another place. Think it over."[159] Similarly, when Jim finds his grandmother crying one afternoon because "people say [he is] growing up to be a bad boy" because has been sneaking out to attend dances with Ántonia, Lena, and the Bohemian Marys, he stops his dancing and starts to spend his evenings "at home with the old people […] reading Latin that was not in our high-school course."[160]

As Jim represses his desire to attend dances by focusing on his school work, and Ántonia quits her job at the Harlings and takes up new employment with the town's nefarious money-lender Wick Cutter, Cather dramatizes their ultimate failure to subvert the market town's middle-class culture of respectability. Upon their submission to this

[158] *MÁ*, 182.
[159] *MÁ*, 185-6.
[160] *MÁ*, 204.

hegemonic pressure, however, Cather revives prairie pastoralism as a means to elude pressures of commercial capitalism in Black Hawk. Following Jim's graduation, Ántonia invites him to attend a midsummer picnic with her, Lena, and Tiny at the river bluffs he can see from his grandparents' window. By explaining that the party will be "[j]ust us; nobody else. […] It'll be like old times," Ántonia initiates a pastoral experience that enables Jim to indulge his transnational nostalgia for the landscape.[161] While walking to meet the girls, for instance, Jim explains how "it occurred to me that I should be homesick for that river after I left it," beginning a pastoral reflection that recalls the prairie's existence beyond traditional social and political boundaries: "The sandbars, with their clean white beaches and their little groves of willows and cottonwood seedlings, were a sort of No Man's Land."[162] When he later comes upon Ántonia weeping over the smell of the elder bushes lining the river bluff, she explains that "[i]t makes me homesick, Jimmy, this flower, this smell [.] We have this flower very much at home, in the old country. It always grew in our yard and my papa had a green bench and table under the bushes."[163] In calling attention to the elder bush's presence in Bohemia and Black Hawk, Ántonia underscores both Jim's sense of the environment's trans-nationality and his experience of homesickness as they bond over Mr. Shimerda's memory.

In addition to this, the trans-national landscape also sanctions the transgender performance that allows Jim and Ántonia to resist the oppressive culture of commercial capitalism in town. When Lena Lingard interrupts Ántonia and Jim's reminiscence on

[161] *MÁ*, 209.
[162] *MÁ*, 209.
[163] *MÁ*, 211.

Bohemia and Mr. Shimerda, his description of "the perspiration stood in drops on her short, yielding upper lip" mirrors the image of Ántonia "bent over the pea-vines, beads of perspiration […] gathered on her lip, like a little moustache" after her father's death.[164] Beyond identifying the hired girls' masculine features, as Jim goes on to describe the scene from the riverbank "[b]elow us" his use of inclusive pronouns attests to his trans-national and -gender identification as a hired girl when he explains that "[w]e could recognize familiar farmhouses and windmills" from their lives before relocating to town.[165] As they return from this pastoral reprieve, the text affirms his identity as a hired girl when Jim agrees to trade places with Ántonia to prevent Wick Cutter from raping her while he is supposed to be out of town. After telling her not to be away from her room at night to protect the silver he has stored in her room, Wick confuses Jim for Ántonia while he is asleep in her bed and attempts to kiss the face looking up from her pillow until Jim "caught a handful of whiskers and pulled, shouting something."[166] Although Wick punishes Jim's transgressive gender and national behavior with a severe beating, insofar as Ántonia is spared the local money-lender's physical abuse and exploitation, Cather establishes transgressive gender performance and trans-national identities as a meaningful corrective to the exploitative forces of commercial capitalism.

Following his queer performance at the Cutters' house, Jim represses the experience of physical and emotional violence once again by dedicating himself to his school work when he begins classes at the University of Nebraska. There, he is

[164] *MÁ*, 213 and 127.
[165] *MÁ*, 214.
[166] *MÁ*, 222.

introduced to a new "world of ideas" and aesthetic forms that enable him to imaginatively transcend the modern United States' political and economic boundaries and signal his engagement with Cather's queer economy.[167] Despite detaching himself from Black Hawk's hired girls, Jim's effort to make a community for himself among cosmopolitan intellectuals like his instructor Gaston Cleric underscores his self-concept as a migrant figure whose queer national identity is expressed in his affinity for immigrant women. Early in the narrative, Jim's queerness is signaled by the conflation of his and Ántonia's migration experiences in "The Shimerdas," and in cultural performances that expose Black Hawk's embeddedness in the nation's history of exploitative labor practices, as with the dances at Blind d'Arnault's concert and the events at Wick Cutter's house. When he moves to Lincoln in "Lena Lingard," Jim's queerness is manifest in his idealization of the pastoral literary tradition and his relationship with Lena Lingard, with whom he frequents the commercial city's theatrical performances.

Like many young men from the rural Midwest at the turn of the century, Jim leaves Black Hawk to attend university in the hopes of fulfilling his family's desire for the social capital associated with higher education. Despite the futurity of this ambition, Jim's university education only reignites his pastoral nostalgia for the trans-national prairie of his youth, which he finds reflected in Virgil's *Georgics*. Insofar as Jim identifies with the speaker's proclamation that he "shall be the first […] to bring the Muse into my country," his affinity for the *Georgics* is often interpreted as a key sign of

[167] *MÁ*, 229.

his and the novel's nationalism.[168] But, as Karen Simons notes, "the role of the *Georgics* in the novel can and should be read more positively" due to both how "Cather testifies [to the] healing power of the poem" to connect human beings to the natural world through historical time, and Jim's understanding of the Virgil's anti-nationalist use of the word "patria" in the poem.[169] Reflecting on Cleric's lecture on the poem, Jim explains that

> 'patria' here meant, not a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighbourhood on the Mincio where the poet was born. This was not a boast, but a hope, at once bold and devoutly humble, that he might bring the Muse […] not to the capital, the *palatia Romana*, but to his own little 'country'; to his father's fields 'sloping down to the river and to the old beech trees with the broken tops.[170]

As he finds himself "thinking of the places and people of [his] own infinitesimal past" and "begrudg[ing] the room that Jake and Otto and Russian Peter took up in [his] memory" after this lesson, the text recalls the trans-national community that defines Jim's homestead experience.[171] As it becomes clear that Jim's identification with Virgil is not about their common desire to write new national narratives so much as a shared appreciation for their respective "little 'countr[ies]' – that is, pastoral regions defined more by familial figures and natural landscapes than geo-politics.

By explaining how Virgil's pastoralism incorporates rural environments and everyday people in the grand cycle of human life, Cleric's lesson more than legitimizes

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[168] Cather, *MÁ*, 234-5; On Jim's classical interests and U.S. nationalism, see: Blanche H. Gelfant, "The Forgotten Reaping Hook: Sex in *My Ántonia*" in *American Literature* 43.1 (March 1971), pp. 60-82; James E. Miller Jr., "*My Ántonia* and the American Dream" in *Prairie Schooner* 48.2 (Summer 1974), pp. 112-123; John N. Swift, "*My Ántonia* and the Politics of Modernist Classicism" in Jean Pickering and Suzane Kehde eds., *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism* (New York City: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 107-119.

[169] Karen Simons, "Re-making the Georgic Connection: Virgil and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*" in *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 7.4 (Spring, 2001) pp. 523-540, 526.

[170] Cather, *MÁ*, 235.

[171] *MÁ*, 233.

Jim's nostalgia for his childhood homestead.[172] It also affirms the narrative's representation of countryside settings as spaces that foster meaningful human connection through space and time, especially in comparison to urban environments where interpersonal relationships are dictated by performative social conventions and economic transactions. Cather crystallizes the formal critique of the modern United States' commercial culture in Jim's renewed friendship with Lena Lingard. For instance, compared to how the images of Jake, Otto, and Russian Peter "stood out strengthened and simplified now" in his mind after Cleric's lecture, when Lena turns up at Jim's boarding house door in real flesh and blood he explains that "[s]he was so quietly conventionalized by city clothes that I might have passed her on the street without seeing her."[173] Unsurprised at Jim's inability to recognize her, she explains that she came by her new clothes because she is "in business for [her]self" and has "a dressmaking shop in the Raleigh Block, out on O Street."[174] As her new manner of dress both marks her financial success and renders her nearly unrecognizable to Jim, Lena's appearance in Lincoln problematizes the processes of identity- and community-formation in the nation's commercial culture and society. As their friendship blossoms against the backdrop of the city's theater scene, Cather underscores the double-edged nature of modern commercial cultural performances, which simultaneously facilitate the production of new social relationships but ultimately fail to initiate the lasting communal bonds associated with the Classical tradition.

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[172] Simons, "Re-making the Georgic Connection," 536
[173] Cather, *MÁ*, 236.
[174] *MÁ*, 237.

Underscoring the performative nature of their new relationship, Jim and Lena's favorite pastime in Lincoln is attending the theater performances that come to town for one-night runs after their New York and Chicago residencies. In his reflection on their experience of Alexandre Dumas *fils's Camille* one April evening, Jim's narrative reflects the liberating power of modern art and cultural performance against the rigidity of middle-class social mores. Not only does Lena pay for her own seat at the play, but the production of a play about a bourgeois gentleman who falls in hopelessly in love with a courtesan enables the Lincoln-audience members to experience "excess and satiety without the inconvenience of learning what to do with one's hands in the drawing room."[175] Moreover, insofar as it centers the transgressive class performances of a gentleman and his courtesan lover—played by an aging actress whose "ravaged countenance was curiously hard and stiff" as a result of "a malady of the spine"—the play also demonstrates how commercial artforms employ queer bodies and identities in the service of normative middle-class entertainment.[176] As they are both moved to tears while watching Camille and Armand's on-stage romance, Jim's narrative underscores the normalizing influence of commercial cultural performance when he considers that, under the glow of the theatre banner he "was a man, and Lena at least was a woman."[177]

Although the play normalizes their relationship in this way, when Jim and Lena return to life outside the theatre, the narrative undermines the romantic potential of their reunion. For example, during their regular Sunday breakfasts at Lena's apartment Jim

[175] *MÁ*, 243.
[176] *MÁ*, 243.
[177] *MÁ*, 246.

recreates their theatrical experience by "drawing the curtains that shut out the long room" of her work studio, creating a make-shift stage that further underscores their relationship as a modern social performance.[178] While Jim and Lena's neighbors are so convinced of the sexual implications of this weekly show that he argues with one of them about his righteous intentions, Jim is disabused of his marital hopes when Lena tells him that she intends never to marry anyone. In her explanation of why she wants to remain single, Lena reiterates the emancipatory power of her financial success as a dressmaker and independent business-woman:

> Men are all right for friends, but as soon as you marry them they turn into cranky old fathers, even the wild ones. They begin to tell you what's sensible and what's foolish, and want you to stick at home all the time. I prefer to be foolish when I feel like it, and be accountable to nobody.[179]

As Jim's hope of integrating his rural past with his urban present is dashed, the narrative not only reifies the illusory quality of the optimism that marks modern commercial culture, but also dramatizes how its attendant social performances fail to cultivate the meaningful interpersonal relationships. Confronted by this disappointing reality, Jim retreats to the safety of continuing his studies of Virgilian pastoralism at Harvard.

Cather's Critical Cosmopolitanism: Trans-National Community and Identity in "The Pioneer Woman's Story" and "Cuzak's Boys"

As Jim's experiences in Lincoln affirm the lessons of his adolescence in Black Hawk, the pastoral nostalgia that marks his return to the countryside in "The Pioneer

[178] *MÁ*, 248.
[179] *MÁ*, 257.

Woman's Story" and "Cuzak's Boy's" expresses a sense of critical cosmopolitanism in which queer models of trans-national community and identity resist the oppressive influences of commercial capitalism and U.S. nationalism. In addition to underscoring the value of aesthetic pastoralism to Jim's sense of self, Cather asserts the significance of the pastoral sphere as a safe space for the expression of his queer national and gender identity when he returns to Black Hawk before enrolling at Harvard. Beginning with a brief report about how Ántonia was left pregnant and unmarried by the nefarious train-conductor and symbol of modern capitalism Larry Donovan, the narrative of "The Pioneer Woman's Story" in Book IV emphasizes Jim and Ántonia's disparate experiences of the industrial nation's commercial economy. Initially, Jim's disappointment in Ántonia reflects his capitalist conditioning to respect those individuals like Lena Lingard who avoid this kind of exploitation by "[keeping] her head for business."[180] But, when he visits the family's old homestead, the Widow Steavens emerges as a paradigm of Cather's trans-national critical cosmopolitanism, "brown as an Indian woman" with a "head like a Roman senator" who models a sympathetic response to Ántonia's plight that lays bare the humanist ethics of the rural, trans-national community in which she lives.[181] Recalling the moment Ántonia confessed her desertion, for instance, Widow Steavens explains how she

> sat right down on that bank next to her and made lament. I cried like young thing. I couldn't help it. […] It was one of them lovely warm May days, and the wind was blowing and the colts was jumping around in the pastures; but I felt bowed with despair. My Ántonia, that had so much good in her, had come home disgraced. And that Lena Lingard that was

[180] *MÁ*, 264.
[181] *MÁ*, 271-2.

> always a bad one […] had turned out so well, and was coming home here ever summer in her silks and her satins [.][182]

In contrast to the theatrical backdrop that marks performative nature of Jim and Lena's tearful connection while watching *Camille*, Widow Steavens's description of the bucolic setting of Ántonia's confession emphasizes both the authenticity of the affective bond that undergirds her sympathetic response, and the anti-commercial capitalist ethics that inform her critique of Lena Lingard.

Significantly, as these humanist ethics are echoed in the broader response to Ántonia's plight, the narrative also emphasizes the rural community's tolerance for transgressive gender identities. Upon returning to her family's farm, for example, Widow Steavens emphasizes Ántonia's queer gender identity when she explains how she spent

> [a]ll that spring and summer [doing] the work of a man on the farm; it seemed to be an understood thing. […] She was quiet and steady. Folks admired her industry and tried to treat her as if nothing had happened. They talked, to be sure; but not like they would if she'd put on airs. She was so crushed and quiet that nobody seemed to want to humble her. […]
>
> After the winter begun she wore a man's long overcoat and boots, and man's felt hat with a wide brim.[183]

When her avaricious brother Ambrosch suggests that Ántonia's daughter would be better for the family system if she were drowned, the Widow Steavens interjects: "there's a law in this land, don't forget that. I stand here a witness that this baby has come into the world sound and strong and I intend to keep an eye on what befalls it."[184] In doing so, she models an empathetic stance that both legitimizes Ántonia and her newborn daughter's

[182] *MÁ*, 276-7.
[183] *MÁ*, 279.
[184] *MÁ*, 280.

existence by invoking the law of the land, and re-affirms the rural, transnational community as a queer space that opposes the exclusionary gender norms of modern commercial society. In this way, "The Pioneer Woman's Story" not only transforms Jim's disappointment into a sincere regard for Ántonia's heroic reaction to her desertion. It also opens space for him to articulate his own transgressive gender identity when he tells Ántonia how he "would have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man. The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it. You really are a part of me."[185]

While this assertion is often read as an example of Jim's desire to possess Ántonia literally and figuratively, thus robbing her of her agency in the text, this interpretation undervalues the trans-national ethical paradigm in which it takes place. As Jim tells Ántonia about the last four years of his life and his future hopes while nestled in the "unploughed patch at the crossing of the roads […] outside the sagging wire fence that shut Mr. Shimerda off from the rest of the world," the text insists on the individuation of his and Ántonia's narratives by folding them together on the plot of earth that marks the queer point of intersection and divergence of their life trajectories.[186] Similar to how Mr. Shimerda's grave makes him a constitutive element of the Nebraska landscape even as it marks his inability to conform to life in the United States, when Ántonia laments that Jim "will be going away from us for good [.] But that don't mean I'll lose you," and Jim

[185] *MÁ*, 283.
[186] *MÁ*, 282.

explains that Ántonia "really [is] a part of [him]" they articulate a cosmopolitan sense of identity-formation that relies on affective, interpersonal connections which are rooted in a shared, albeit different, experience of place.[187] Given the contiguity of their personal experiences and identities, this model of self- and community-making allows Jim and Ántonia to articulate queer trans-national, transgender identities that resist classification as wholly American or Bohemian, or masculine or feminine.

If Mr. Shimerda's gravesite symbolizes this model of identity-formation, the surreal image of the simultaneously setting sun and rising moon suggests its reparative function for Jim:

> the sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cart-wheel, pale silver and streaked with rose colour, thin as a bubble or a ghost moon. For five, perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world.
>
> In that singular light every little tree and shock of wheat, every sunflower stalk and clump of snow-on-the-mountain, drew itself up high and pointed; the very clods and furrows in the fields seemed to stand up sharply. I felt the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at nightfall.[188]

Like the discrete objects that make up the unified landscape, dusky light obscures the gap in their experience to illuminate the salient features of Jim's childhood with Ántonia, integrating these memories into his mental image of "a boy and girl [running] along beside [him], as our shadows used to do, laughing and whispering together in the grass" as he walks alone into his future.[189] As Jim imagines himself as a part of the queer prairie

[187] *MÁ*, 283.
[188] *MÁ*, 285.
[189] *MÁ*, 285.

landscape alongside Mr. Shimerda and Ántonia, the pastoral environment becomes more than a nostalgic site of escape from industrial society and commercial culture. It becomes a restorative homeland that gives meaning to his industrial and commercial pursuits as a railroad attorney and venture capitalist in New York City.

The restorative properties of Cather's modernist pastoralism are manifest in the novel's final section, "Cuzak's Boys," in which Jim gains a renewed sense of self when he comes to see himself as a member of Ántonia's family unit. Enfolded in the sun-drenched "triple enclosure" of "wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge" that surrounds her orchard, they exchange stories about Jim's travels and Ántonia's married life with Anton Cuzak and her eleven children that helps bridge the twenty-year gap between the present moment and the last time they saw each other.[190] After spending the day touring her farm and learning about her children, Jim agrees to spend the night in Ántonia's haymow and "beg[ins] to feel like a farm-boy at evening, when the chores are everlasting, and the world far away."[191] As Jim is reminded of a younger version of himself by Ántonia's hospitality and the pastoral environment, his nostalgia does not make him yearn for a childhood that is a world away from the life he is leading. Rather, it helps him to integrate himself with her children in the present day by emphasizing the physicality of the family's affective relations.

For instance, following a large supper in which he sees himself as a constitutive member of the "two long rows of restless heads, and so many eyes fastened upon

[190] *MÁ*, 300.
[191] *MÁ*, 303.

Ántonia," Jim notices "a kind of physical harmony" that unites the Cuzak family as they "leaned this way and that. They were not afraid to touch each other. They contemplated [old] photographs in pleased recognition."[192] After coming across a photo of himself, Jake, and Otto that prompts one of her sons to ask Ántonia "He made grandfather's coffin, didn't he," it becomes clear to Jim that he became a part of the Cuzak family long before meeting them earlier that day, through Ántonia's retelling of stories from her childhood throughout their lifetime.[193] Realizing this, Jim also comes to understand that although Ántonia is no longer a beautiful young girl, her unbridled affection for those around her "somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples to make you realize the goodness of planting and tending [.] All the strong things in heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions."[194]

As it explicates the affective and embodied connections that make him a member of Ántonia's family, Cather's modernist pastoralism in "Cuzak's Boys" presents a model of critical cosmopolitanism and trans-national community formation that opposes the transactional ethics and relationships that mark the commercial culture and society in market towns like Black Hawk and progressive cities like New York. In addition to relating the story of Wick Cutter's murder-suicide, in which Jim is disheartened to learn that Black Hawk's notorious money lender murdered his wife before killing himself simply to prevent her family from inheriting his life's fortune of one hundred thousand

[192] *MÁ*, 305.
[193] *MÁ*, 306.
[194] *MÁ*, 309.

dollars, the narrative of his last day at the Cuzak farm centers on Jim's conversation with Ántonia's husband, Anton Cuzak. Like Jim, Anton explains that he is a product of modern commercial society insofar as he has immigrated to the United States from Bohemia and moved across the country in search of personal advancement. However, where Jim's "brilliant marriage" in New York City advanced his career while leaving him emotionally unfulfilled, Anton's marriage to Ántonia left him an economically destitute subsistence farmer but also resulted in his absolute emotional satisfaction as a result of his wife's "warm heart."[195] In light of this, Jim resolves to participate in the creation of the family's memories by returning to the Cuzaks' farm in the future to create new experiences that will bridge the gaps between his visits so that, whatever he and Ántonia "had missed, [they] possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past." By thus locating Jim within this alternative, affective method of trans-national community formation, Cather's cosmopolitan pastoralism in *My Ántonia* both resists the market demand for Western dime-novels and critiques nationalist impulses that created it.

[195] *MÁ*, 4 and 321.

Part II

Disillusioning the Empire: Realism, Romance, and Social Mobility in the Work of Sinclair Lewis

Thanks to his satirical representations of the Midwestern-parochialism-as-American-provincialism in bestselling novels like *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922) and especially *Elmer Gantry* (1927), "[s]omething very like a groan went up" among the U.S. intelligentsia when Sinclair Lewis was awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1930.[196] Lewis Mumford adequately summarized the protests of a host of literati when he explained that "the Swedish Academy has, in the form of a compliment, conveyed a subtle disparagement of the country they honored" in naming Lewis the United States' first Nobel prizewinning author.[197] At the time, modern intellectuals were critical of both the overwhelming popular appeal of Lewis's accessible realism, and the strands of xenophobia, racism, and economic liberalism drawn together in his representation of middle-class Midwesterners in the early twentieth-century United States. For this reason, Lewis is often credited with inaugurating a new era of popular and scholarly conceptions of the Midwest's political and social conservatism, and cultural parochialism in U.S. history, which led to its reputation for being left behind by the forces of U.S. progressivism.[198] In Part II of my dissertation, however, I contend that Lewis's satirical representations of the aspirational culture of middle-class progressivism that emerged in

[196] Ludwig Lewisohn, qtd. in Mark Schorer, "Sinclair Lewis and the Nobel Prize" in *The Atlantic* (October 1961), pp. 83-88, 85.

[197] Lewis Mumford, "The America of Sinclair Lewis" in *Current History (1916-1940)* 33.4 (January 1931), pp. 529-533, 533.

[198] Jon Lauck, *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920-1965* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, Press, 2017), pp. 11-36.

the turn-of-the-century Midwest offer a serious reconsideration of the historical narrative regarding the region's peripheralization in the United States' cultural and political economy after 1920.

Specifically, I read *Main Street* (1920) and *Arrowsmith* (1925) to demonstrate how Lewis's portrayals of the professional and personal failures of middle-class Midwesterners' offer cosmopolitan critiques of the imperialist ideology that underpinned mainstream cultures of U.S. progressivism in the early twentieth century. For example, after submitting to the "village virus" of anti-intellectualism that famously afflicts protagonist Carol Kennicott's Gopher Prairie neighbors, *Main Street*'s closing scene suggests the text's underlying anxiety about the global triumph of the aspirational United States' middle-class she represents. Tucking her daughter into bed after arguing with her husband, Will, Carol looks out her bedroom window and imagines an "unbroken sweep of land to the Rockies, to Alaska, a dominion which will rise to unexampled greatness when other empires have grown senile."[199] While the image of the unbroken landscape portends the United States' imperial status, Carol's simultaneous awareness of the senility of other empires triggers a sense of anxiety about the quality of the U.S. empire predicted to emerge from the fictionalized efforts of everyday progressives like *Main Street*'s Vida Sherwin, and, by extension to those of factual figures like Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Jane Addams. As Carol turns back to Will only to realize that he has not been listening to her complaints all evening, it becomes clear that the modern American world-order the novel imagines emanating out from Gopher Prairie

[199] Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*, 1920 (New York: Signet Classics, 2008), 470.

will be no more liberating than the Anglo-European one its inhabitants are striving to replace: "Main Street is [not] as beautiful as it should be! I will not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous than Europe! I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women!"[200]

Main Street establishes the key tropes that illuminate the changing global systems which structured local politics and society in the Progressive-era Midwest: individual characters as an embodiment of national values; occupational pursuits as a register of political economy and social hierarchy; interpersonal relationships as an index of transnational/international relations. These tropes are elaborated on in subsequent 1920s bestsellers *Arrowsmith* and *Dodsworth*, which fill in the expansive worldview from Carol's bedroom window by representing well-meaning Midwesterners at work and play in the world well beyond the continental United States. When the titular Dr. Martin Arrowsmith retires from public life after distributing the vaccine that both saves the Caribbean island of St. Hubert from plague and establishes it as the United States' newest sovereign territory, *Arrowsmith* registers a deep suspicion of U.S. progressives' faith in the power of scientific rationalism to do anything other than reproduce the failures of European colonialism. Similarly, in the total collapse of Sam and Fran Dodsworth's marriage during an extended European holiday to celebrate Sam's retirement, *Dodsworth* identifies the pursuit of efficiency in American conceptions of progress and reform as the source of the U.S. empire's imminent demise. By attending to how Lewis mobilizes interpersonal relationships, geographic and professional mobility, and individual identity

[200] Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*, 471.

formation as a register of the United States' shifting position in the Progressive era's global hegemonic order, I locate Lewis's bestselling work in the canon of transnational modern American writers such as Henry James, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. Read alongside these peers, Lewis's cataloguing of the evolution of the United States' imperialism and international relations vis-à-vis the representation of U.S. citizens abroad is unique mostly for his emphasis on their origin stories in the rural Midwest, and on everyday Midwesterners' privileged access to a culture of Western imperialism through the interrelated processes of industrial-urbanization and globalization.

By foregrounding *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith*'s interests in the global systems that shaped the twentieth century Midwest's cultural and political landscape, I demonstrate how Lewis's satirical representation of American provincialism in these works is made possible only by his assertion of U.S. Midwesterners' cosmopolitan sense of themselves as social actors and political agents in a world that extended far beyond the limits of any particular town, city, or nation. Understanding cosmopolitanism as a social and cultural process of community- and identity-formation, *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith* are examples of what contemporary literary theorists Amanda Anderson, Jessica Berman, and Rebecca Walkowitz have called "critical cosmopolitanism" in twentieth-century literature.[201] That is, a narrative style of cosmopolitan world-making that demonstrates

[201] Amanda Anderson, *The Power of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

"an aversion to heroic tones of appropriation and progress, and a suspicion of epistemological privilege, views from above or from the center that assume a consistent distinction between who is seeing and what is being seen."[202] Sinclair Lewis's work mobilizes this cosmopolitan perspective by satirizing the transnational networks of urban-industrialization, commercial capitalism, and Western imperialism which converged to inform Progressive-era Midwesterners' modern worldview. In attending to the relationship between fact and fiction in Lewis's novels, I take seriously the ways in which Midwestern protagonists incorporate foreign peoples, goods, and ideas into their everyday lives. In doing so, I show how these novels represent in narrative form the competing emotional, cultural, and political systems that structured the exclusionary white, native-born, middle-class social hierarchy which attended the United States' geopolitical expansion in the early twentieth century. In this way, I argue that these narratives undermine conceptions of the modern U.S. nation-state as a legitimate model of a reformed, progressive society after a notoriously Gilded Age of corporate capitalist expansion, and contribute to the ongoing study of new modernisms in the twenty-first century.

[202] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 2.

Chapter 3

Seeing Like an Alien Cynic: Chicago School Realism and Critical Cosmopolitanism in *Main Street*

> *Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea … Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?*[203]

In the epigraph to Sinclair Lewis's 1920 bestselling *Main Street*, the narrator constructs a teleological historical narrative of Western civilization that accounts for the expansion of U.S. commercial imperialism as a result of World War I. Following an image of a nation full of "dairies and little groves," the narrator's terse explanation that "[t]he town in our tale is Gopher Prairie," and its "Main Street is the climax of civilization" undercuts the romance of the pastoral panorama that precedes it. Despite the resulting sarcastic tone, the narrator is quite serious in identifying Main Street's symbolic status as the pinnacle of a new world-order when he remarks, "[w]hatever Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider."[204] As well as accentuating the narrative irony, the juxtaposition of familiar names and foreign capitals is also a faithful representation of the United States' emergent professional-managerial class' essential position in the twentieth century's global market economy. As a banker and grocer in rural Minnesota, Ezra and Ole likely never travel much farther than the region's de facto

[203] Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*, 1920 (New York: Signet Classics, 2008), 16.
[204] Lewis, *Main Street,* 16.

capital city of Chicago, but they possess a legitimate knowledge of the world well beyond the U.S. Midwest due to their imbrication in the United States' emergent commercial economy.[205] After all, Ole and Ezra may not have rewritten any legislation in London and Prague but, as the first of many brokers in the vast agribusiness networks of lenders, farmers, storage facilities, processing centers, and distributors that made Chicago "Hog Butcher for the world" and provided food for the Allies in World War I, they were vital to the everyday lives of citizens in these international capital cities.[206]

Following this epigraph, narrative references to Prague, London, and other foreign places and ideas in *Main Street* function as more than descriptive flourishes meant to amplify the provincialism associated with the small-town Midwest. They are legitimate allusions to the novel's geopolitical and social contexts. As such, references to the text's foreign contexts also do more set the stage for the novel's rehearsal of a generic critique of the early twentieth-century United States' commercial culture and consumer society. They appropriate and put to a new purpose the heroic ambition and idealism associated with first-generation midwestern realists like Henry Blake Fuller, Theodore Dreiser, and Hamlin Garland who popularized the urban literature of the Chicago School. In particular, *Main Street* subverts the Chicago School's central narrative trope of the hinterland migrant's journey to the industrial city to make the provincial Midwest the preeminent lens to examine the imperialist ideology which undergirds the twentieth-

[205] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (London and New York: W.W. Nortan & Co., 1991); Kristin Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019).

[206] Carl Sandburg, "Chicago" in *Chicago Poems*, Line 1 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994).

century United States' middle-class culture of progressivism. In doing so, *Main Street* constructs a regionally specific, ambivalent vision of the domestic processes which contributed to the global expansion of the United States' commercial empire in the Progressive era. In the process, Lewis also expands the modernist repertoire for representing the U.S. Midwest in literary form.

Literary scholars have long seen narrative ambivalence in *Main Street* as the result of Lewis's satirical authorial style combined with his private faith the United States' professional-managerial class' ability to create a more equitable society.[207] For instance, the literary historian Ronald Weber attributes the ambivalent perspective of Lewis's sociological narrators to his alignment with the Chicago School of U.S. realism, which fell into disfavor among the national cultural elite in the wake of World War I and the rise of European modernism. Originally associated with the urban themes and socially conscious, journalistic style of writers like Garland, Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair at the turn of the century, in the 1910s a second wave of Chicago School writers like Edgar Lee Masters, Floyd Dell, and Sherwood Anderson were recognizable for their realist exposés of the spiritual corruption associated with the commercial development of the rural Midwest. In 1922, Carl Van Doren labeled this brand of realist critique "The Revolt from the Village," and identified *Main Street* as the paradigmatic example of the genre in his seminal *Contemporary American Novelists* due to its sociological rendering of Gopher

[207] See especially: Michael Augsburger, "Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth*," in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 34.2 (Spring, 2001), pp. 73-97. Ronald Weber, *The Midwestern Ascendency in American Writing* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 146-173; Chris Wilson, *White Collar Fictions: Class and Social Representation in American Literature, 1885-1925* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992) pp. 207-249.

Prairie's commercial culture and society. Drawing on this canonical reading, Lewis's most recent biographer Richard Lingeman contends that his ambivalent representation of middle-class Midwesterners in *Main Street* and other novels is the result of his identity as "a literary sociologist" who "knew his country better than most of his generation. His politics were a blend of old-fashioned populism and urban reformers' idealism [.] He measured American life by high standards and found *it was not good enough*."[208]

It is likely true that the notoriously disagreeable Lewis was drawn to the social critique associated with Chicago School realism. But reigning assessments of Lewis's misanthropy as the inspiration for his revolt from the village overlook how his adaptation of the Chicago School's sociological narrative form in *Main Street* revises historical conceptions of the Midwest as a region somehow forgotten by or particularly resistant to the forces of industrial-urbanization and globalization which transformed the United States into a polyglot nation of cities by 1920. By adopting the Chicago School's sociological realism to represent the experiences of the nation's emergent professional-managerial middle class, Lewis locates the small-town Midwest at center stage of the global drama that attended the rise of the United States' commercial and political empire in the twentieth century. In this way, the novel illuminates the domestic processes which structured the global imperial reach of U.S. power, and critiques the failures of progressive intellectuals like Carol Kennicott to humanize, reform, and otherwise constrain that reach. In doing so, Lewis foregrounds transformations in the Midwest's

[208] Richard Lingeman, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* (St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books, 2002), 553 (*emphasis original*).

domestic culture and political economy to critique the imperialist ideology which undergirds the middle-class discourse of progressivism in the modern United States. As well as lampooning a parochial strain of anti-modernism in the U.S. Midwest, then, *Main Street* also expresses the modernist ambivalence and anxiety which attended the United States' emergence as a global hegemon in the wake of World War I.

Chicago School Realism and Critical Cosmopolitanism in *Main Street*

In *Main Street*, Lewis's modernist ambivalence and anxiety comes to the fore in local scenes in which the narrative exposition emphasizes Gopher Prairie's international contexts through references to foreign cities, people, or artifacts. In doing so, the novel illuminates the global processes which contributed to the transformations in Gopher Prairie's local cultural and political economy, and structure protagonist Carol Kennicott's representative experience of everyday life as a woman in the modern United States. For example, in the opening image of Carol standing on a hill overlooking Blodgett College, "drinking the air as she longed to drink life," Lewis foregrounds the transitional nature of the midwestern cultural landscape in which she learns to navigate the Progressive-era United States' imperial society:

> It is a bulwark of sound religion. It is still combating the recent heresies of Voltaire, Darwin, and Robert Ingersoll. Pious families in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, the Dakotas send their children thither, and Blodgett protects them from the wickedness of the universities. But it secretes friendly girls, young men who sing, and one lady instructress who really likes Milton and Carlyle. So the four years which Carol spent at Blodgett were not altogether wasted. The smallness of the school, the fewness of the rivals,

permitted her to experiment with her perilous versatility.[209]

Following from the epigraph, the sociological narrator's thick description of Blodgett College as a modern ideological crucible constructs an historical narrative that illuminates the role of educational institutions and women in facilitating social change in the United States by assimilating especially European philosophies and cultural forms in the domestic sphere of the nation. But even as Carol emerges on the scene as an optimistic symbol of the progressive discourses of New Womanhood and the Social Gospel, the narrator's sarcasm betrays an underlying anxiety regarding the modern United States' inheritance of an Anglo-European imperial tradition: "The days of pioneering, of lassies and sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that *bewildered empire* called the American Middlewest."[210]

Scholars have traditionally interpreted the ambivalence and anxiety which undergird Carol's experiences in Gopher Prairie as symptomatic of her exposure to its native-born residents' "Village Virus" of middle-class consumerism. As such, *Main Street* is historically read as quintessential example of the Revolt from the Village critique of rural Midwesterners' provincialism and cultural conservatism the Progressive era. But, as the historian Kristin Hoganson has noted, insofar as Carol's arrival on the scene illuminates the ubiquity of foreign artifacts in the small-town Midwest, when read against the grain of Lewis's characteristic satire *Main Street* also dramatizes an emergent

[209] Lewis, *MS*, 17-18.
[210] *MS*, 17 (*emphasis added*).

middle-class of U.S. Midwesterners' unfettered embrace of the modern nation's imperial commercial culture and political economy.[211] Read in this way, representing the uneasy assimilation of foreign and domestic cultural forms in the Progressive-era United States through the urban-migrant Carol's uneasy assimilation to the small town of Gopher Prairie operates as a modernist innovation in narrative form through which Lewis "test[s] and redefin[es] what can count as international politics […] in order to expand what we know of global processes such as world war or immigration."[212] In particular, *Main Street* dramatizes how the global imperial expansion of the United States' political sovereignty and cultural influence was perpetrated through the domestic processes of commercial consumption and urban-industrialization in the Progressive era.

To this extent the novel can be read as an example of what the literary theorist Rebecca Walkowitz has called "critical cosmopolitanism" or "cosmopolitan modernism" in twentieth century literature.[213] As Walkowitz explains, in addition to indexing the diversity of the urban landscape, works of critical cosmopolitanism foreground the protagonist's experience of suspended agency in the industrial metropolis by emphasizing "communal aspirations, urban patterns of participant observation, and ethnographic self-consciousness" in order to interrogate the ideological and historical foundations of modern society.[214] Similarly, Timothy B. Spears has demonstrated how early Chicago School realists like Fuller, Garland, and Dreiser canonized the eponymous city as a

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[211] Kristin Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6.

[212] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 10.

[213] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 4 and 18.

[214] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 10.

transformative site in the social and economic process of self-making in the Progressive-era United States by emphasizing their hinterland protagonists' nostalgia for their hometown communities after relocating to the industrial metropolis. For example, reading against the grain of Dreiser's archetypal Chicago School novel *Sister Carrie*, Spears explores the domestic symbolism of Carrie's rocking chair. In doing so, he shows how each time Carrie returns to her rocking chair to consider her next occupational or romantic move, she is pulled toward the city by her modern desires for financial independence and social autonomy, and away from it by the nostalgic "home feeling" created by the networks of family and friends who both inspire and provide refuge from the transformative forces she encounters in the city.[215]

Published twenty years after *Sister Carrie*, *Main Street* reverses Carrie Meeber's Midwestern migration from the Wisconsin hinterland to Chicago by sending its own thoroughly modern protagonist Carol from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul to the rural town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota in 1912. By drawing on a series of Chicago School tropes early in the novel, Lewis underscores Carol's status as an ambivalent Midwestern migrant, and mobilizes the theme of urban idealism in the text. For instance, like Carrie, Carol arrives in her new hometown by train, drawn there by the opportunity for social mobility and occupation offered by her chief romantic interest in the novel. Also like Carrie, once Carol arrives in Gopher Prairie she frequently experiences the pull of her own "home feeling." But, as Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello has recently pointed out,

[215] Timothy B. Spears, *Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 115-16.

Carol's nostalgic yearning is for the "'generous indifference' that marks city life" in the turn-of-the-century industrial metropolises of her youth, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota and Chicago, Illinois, not an intimate, domestic life in Gopher Prairie.[216]

Read in this way, Lewis's modernist reversal of the archetypal Chicago School migration narrative in *Main Street* seems to validate the urban culture Carol represents as an aspirational model of self- and community-making in the text. However, through its representation of urban-born Carol's discomfort in Gopher Prairie, the novel's sociological narrative form undermines the symbolic value of the city in the discourse of U.S. progressivism by explicating the leveling effects of United States' expanding commercial economy on the relationship between urban- and rural-dwelling citizens in the nation's political economy. In this context, it becomes clear that Carol does not fail to transform Gopher Prairie into a model of modern society because its inhabitants misunderstand the value of her intellectual worldliness. Rather, Carol fails to modernize Gopher Prairie because she misunderstands the ways in which the town's entirely market-oriented economy brought its modern commercial society into being—with a full spectrum of managerial professionals, industrial producers, wage laborers, and contemporary consumers—well before she arrived on the scene.

In the words of Vida Sherwin, her closest friend in town, Carol is a failure in Gopher Prairie because she is "not a sound reformer at all. You're an impossiblist. And you give up to easily. You gave up on the new city hall, the anti-fly campaign, club

[216] Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, *Modern Bonds: Redefining Community in Early Twentieth-Century St. Paul* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 22.

papers, the library-board, and the dramatic association—just because we didn't graduate to Ibsen the very first thing."[217] As evidence of the civic groups that structure Gopher Prairie society come into view over the course of the text, it is important to note that *Main Street*'s implicit celebration of Carol's urbane sensibilities is regularly undermined by her neighbors' criticism of her urban-elitism. For instance, as Vida's reference to the Norwegian naturalist Henrik Ibsen signals her access to the same foreign artforms which signal Carol's associations with the modern city, *Main Street* represents the increasing political tensions between urban- and rural-dwelling citizens in the Progressive-era United States as, at bottom, a difference in taste that belies their parity in the nation's expanding commercial empire. By reversing Carol's modern migration narrative, then, Lewis sets in motion a familiar Chicago School plot about urbanization in the United States that makes the rural Midwest the central battleground in cultural and political debates over the meaning of "progress" in modern U.S. society. As the sociological narrator rehearses Carol's local debates over everything from the literary merit of Henrik Ibsen to the going rate for maids' wages, *Main Street* exposes the imperialist cultural and political economy which structures her everyday experience in Gopher Prairie. Understood in this way, Carol's effort reform Gopher Prairie society does not uphold the progressive urbanism she represents as an aspirational model of modern selfhood so much as it reveals its complicity in perpetuating the expansion of the United States' commercial and political empire in the Progressive era.

[217] Lewis, *Main Street*, 290.

Lewis establishes the global scope of *Main Street*'s small-town drama early in the novel through Carol's marriage to Gopher Prairie native and local doctor Will Kennicott, who shares her interest in modernizing the town's civic structures and recreational pursuits to reflect its progressive national identity. Both college-educated by the time of the novel's opening in 1911, Carol and Will emerge in the text as the evidence of the Midwest's transformation from a primarily agricultural society to the nation's urban-industrial center after the Civil War. After hiking through an abandoned Civil War fort, Will proposes to Carol by pleading with her to "[c]ome to Gopher Prairie. Show us. Make the town—well—make it artistic. It's mighty pretty, but I'll admit we aren't any too darn artistic. Probably the lumberyard isn't as scrumptious as all these Greek temples. But go to it! Make us change!"[218] Reflecting progressive intellectuals' optimistic belief in the Social Gospel, which touted the power of elite cultural forms and institutions to generate social and political equality, Will's proposal also betrays his awareness of the social difference between Gopher Prairie's rustic farmhouses and the Neoclassical buildings in Carol's native St. Paul. However, the romantic value of their marriage hinges on its potential to collapse any distinction between them in the "common American past" that is suggested in the linear historical narrative of U.S. empire which sets the stage for their relationship.[219]

Like the epigraph that frames the novel, the narrative of Will and Carol's engagement is set against the backdrop of "the imperial sweep from the dome of the

[218] *MS*, 32.
[219] *MS*, 32.

cathedral to the dome of the [Minnesota] state capitol" in the St. Paul skyline.[220] In this way, Lewis foregrounds the political value of aesthetic conventions as a means of community- and identity-formation in the text. As Will continues his proposal while Carol looks out over St. Paul, he explains:

> I bet Luke Dawson has got more money than most of the swells on Summit Avenue; and Miss Sherwin in the high school is a regular wonder—reads Latin like I do English […] and if you want culture, besides Vida Sherwin there's Reverend Warren, the Congregational preacher, and Professor Mott, the superintendent of schools, and Guy Pollock, the lawyer—they say he writes regular poetry.[221]

As he attributes the cultural parity of Gopher Prairie locals to Luke Dawson's income, Will emerges as a contemporary U.S. realist, acutely aware of the relationship between capital and cultural form. Alternatively, Carol is a modern middle-class consumer, enamored of the international diversity of the Progressive-era United States' consumers' imperium but with little understanding of how it came to be:

> She almost gave up library work to become one of the young women who dance in cheese-cloth in the moonlight. She was taken to a certified Studio Party, with beer, cigarettes, bobbed hair, and a Russian Jewess who sang the Internationale. It cannot be reported that Carol had anything significant to say to the Bohemians. She was awkward with them, and felt ignorant [.] But she heard and remembered discussions of Freud, Romain Rolland, syndicalism, the Confederation Generale du Travail, feminism vs. haremism, Chinese lyrics, nationalization of mines, Christian Science, and fishing in Ontario.[222]

In the contrast between Will's realism and Carol's romanticism in this scene, the narrative form and content work together to signal the geopolitical contexts of the

[220] *MS*, 32.
[221] *MS*, 33.
[222] *MS*, 25-26.

couple's private exchange and emphasizes their status as the rightful U.S. inheritors of the Western imperial tradition.

Throughout the novel, Will and Carol's oppositional aesthetics are a key sign of the marital unhappiness that secured *Main Street* its Revolt from the Village status. But in the moment of their engagement, the narrative dramatizes the power of the progressive logic of the Social Gospel to collapse these distinctions in the construction of a scene that reads more like an imperial romance novel than a critique of Midwestern provincialism. In the background of Will's realist description of Gopher Prairie, the narrator describes the romantic image of the couple sitting "on the bank below the parapet of the old fort, hidden from observation."[223] As the distanced narrative perspective recalls the "imperial sweep" of the St. Paul skyline, the sentimental scene comes to a climax when Carol is "shocked, thrilled" and generally swept away by Will's supplication, "You say I'm so darn materialistic. How can I help it, unless I have you to stir me up? […] You say a doctor could cure a town the way he does a person. Well, you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does, and I'll be your surgical kit."[224] When he shows her a picture of Gopher Prairie to entice her, the geopolitical implications of the couple's engagement become clear. Carol looks at the image of a bleak forest clearing, bare except for "a clumsy log cabin chinked with mud and roofed with hay," as Will explains,

> 'Those are the kinds of folks I practice among, good share of the time. Nels Erdstrom, fine clean young Svenka. […] I operated on his wife on a kitchen table, with my driver giving me the anesthetic. Look at that scared baby! Needs some

[223] *MS*, 33.
[224] *MS*, 33.

woman with hands like yours. Waiting for you![225]

The photographic and literary realism with which Will describes his life as a doctor in Gopher Prairie emphasize Carol's awareness of the social and cultural differences between the rural town and St. Paul's skyline, but this tension is quickly resolved in her sentimental acceptance of his proposal: "'Oh it would be so sweet to help him—so sweet.' As [Will's] arms moved toward her she answered all her doubts with 'Sweet, so sweet.'"[226] As the photograph of the Swedish immigrant Nels Erdstrom's scared baby is transformed into an image of a modern, transnational family, featuring Minnesota natives Carol and Will as the anointed mother and father engaged in a passionate embrace, the scene of Will's proposal imagines the productive potential of their union in the modern United States. Moreover, set against the "imperial sweep" of the Minnesota state capitol building, the image presents an ethnically diverse community sanctioned by the sovereign authority of the expanding U.S. nation-state.

In the urban spaces that mark the beginning of Carol and Will's relationship, *Main Street*'s ambivalent narrative form mobilizes the romantic idealism associated with migration narratives of the Chicago School to accentuate the urban-industrial United States' imperial ambitions in the early twentieth century. In this way, the text emphasizes the power of middle-class ideologies such as the gospel of wealth and commercial capitalism to close the gap between a politics of democratic equality and an aesthetics of cultural elitism in progressive conceptions of the increasingly urban landscape of the

[225] *MS*, 34.
[226] *MS*, 34.

modern United States. As Carol relocates to Gopher Prairie, however, the narrative's critical cosmopolitanism undermines the unrivaled hegemony of the industrial metropolis in the politics of U.S. progressivism by restaging the conflict between cultural elitism and commercial culture in the provincial sphere of the market-town. In doing so, the text emphasizes the competition between political ideologies and cultural forms in the Progressive-era United States, prompting a reevaluation of the modern metropolis as a liberating model of national community- and identity-formation.

For instance, while on the train to Gopher Prairie after their honeymoon, the narrator explains that

> The hordes of the way-train were not altogether new to Carol. She had seen them on trips from St. Paul to Chicago. But now they had become her own people, to bathe and encourage and adorn, she had an acute and uncomfortable interest in them. They distressed her. They were so stolid. She had always maintained there is no American peasantry, and she sought now to defend her faith by seeing imagination and enterprise in the young Swedish farmers, and in a traveling [*sic*] man working over his order blanks. But the older people, Yankees as well as Norwegians, Germans, Finns, Canucks, had settled into submission to poverty. They were peasants, she groaned.[227]

As Carol reflects on the difference between seeing working-class immigrants returning home to farms in the midwestern hinterland rather than on passenger trolleys in the region's urban-industrial centers, the narrative underscores her belief in the modern metropolis as the means of economic and social progress in the United States. As she is disabused of the notion that "there is no American peasantry" by the presence of ethnic farmers in the rural Midwest, the narrative betrays the sophisticated Carol's naivety

[227] *MS*, 37.

regarding the Progressive-era United States' stratified socio-economic hierarchy. Moreover, Carol's desperate inquiry "What would happen if they understood scientific agriculture" echoes contemporary associations of the city with industrial and commercial models of economic self-determination that assume the intellectual inferiority agricultural communities. On the train to Gopher Prairie, however, *Main Street* critiques this ideology by recording Will's radical opposition to it:

> Look here, Carrie. You want to get over your city idea that because a man's pants aren't pressed, he's a fool. These farmers are mighty keen and up-and-coming. […] Besides, things are changing. The auto, the telephone, rural free delivery; they're bringing the farmers in closer touch with the town. Takes time, you know, to change a wilderness like this was fifty years ago. But already, why, they can hop into the Ford or the Overland and get into the movies on Saturday evening quicker than you could get down to 'em by trolley in St. Paul.[228]

As Will's critique of Carol's "city ideas" signals the illegitimacy of her urban-intellectual brand of cultural currency in Gopher Prairie, *Main Street* also dramatizes how the modern city gave new meaning to popular conceptions of what might be considered "foreign" ideas, practices, and identities in the Progressive era. At the same time, Will's realist catalogue of the ways in which rural communities like Gopher Prairie are "bringing the farmers in closer touch with the town" blurs the distinctions between urban and rural spheres in the modern United States. In doing so, Will's admonishment celebrates the homogenizing socio-economic influence of the imperial nation's privileged access to an ever-expanding commercial marketplace.

[228] *MS*, 37.

The Village Virus: The U.S. Consumers' Imperium and Critical Cosmopolitanism in *Main Street*

Since the transnational turn in American studies many historians have demonstrated how the U.S. middle class demonstrated their newfound economic and social mobility in the Progressive era by importing food, fashion, and ideas for social and political reform.[229] But not all members of the middle class participated in these consumptive practices equally or in the same ways. As the history of U.S. nativism in the Progressive era has proved, many representatives of the U.S. middle class actively resisted the integration of foreign goods, ideas, and especially people into their conception of the U.S. nation-state, even as they espoused progressive models of cultural pluralism and ideological citizenship as the national ideal.[230] In early twentieth-century politics, this tension was embodied in national figures like Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. In the cultural sphere, intellectual and political disagreements within the middle class were manifested in a proliferation of new aesthetic forms and modes of consumption, especially in the rising circulation of monthly magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Nation*.[231] By animating the

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[229] In addition to Kristin Hoganson's work in *Consumers' Imperium*, previously cited in this chapter, see: Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[230] John Hingham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1865-1920* (New York: Atheneum, 1963); Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign People at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); *Michael* McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

[231] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nathaniel Cadle, *The Mediating Nation:*

competing worldviews of a variety of middle-class consumers in *Main Street*, Lewis imagines why middle-class desires for foreign consumption did not translate into an equally inclusive middle-class political and cultural economy within the nation.

Through the figure of Guy Pollock, a local lawyer and transplant from Ohio, *Main Street* famously diagnoses Gopher Prairie with a textbook case of the "Village Virus," which Guy explains "infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces. You'll find it epidemic among lawyers and doctors and ministers and college-bred merchants—all these people who have had a glimpse of the world that thinks and laughs, but have returned to their swamp."[232] Although the Village Virus is traditionally read as shorthand for the anti-intellectual materialism of Gopher Prairie's middle-class professionals, Guy's pathology of the disease demonstrates the villagers' embeddedness in the modern socio-economic structures of industrial-urbanization and commercial capitalism. Speaking to Carol as a fellow "confirmed doubter" as to the merits of the Jolly Seventeen, Guy embodies the text's ambivalent, Revolt-from-the-Village-Chicago-School sociological narrator as he explains that the Village Virus in "Gopher Prairie isn't particularly bad. It's like all villages in all countries. […] The worst is the commercial hatred—the grocer feeling that any man who doesn't deal with him is robbing him."[233] As Guy makes it clear here that the Village Virus' symptomatic commercialism is the result of individual

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Late American Realism, Globalization, and the Progressive State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Susan Mizruchi, *The Rise of Multicultural America: Economy and Print Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Matthew Schneirov, *Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, 2000 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[232] Lewis, *Main Street*, 173.

[233] *M*S, 172.

community members' efforts to preserve their economic livelihood in an increasingly competitive market, *Main Street* undermines the liberating logic of Chicago School, progressive urbanism to reveal the social and economic precarity of middle-class life in the modern United States' commercial society.

Through its emphasis on social contingency, Guy's characterization of the Village Virus underscores the relationship between foreign cultural forms, U.S. urban space, and socio-economic mobility in the novel. For example, offering himself as a "perfect example" of the disease, Guy describes his childhood in rural Ohio, followed by four years of law school:

> 'I went to New York, to the Columbia Law School. And for four years I lived. Oh, I won't rhapsodize about New York. It was dirty and noisy and breathless and ghastly expensive. But, compared with the moldy academy in [Ohio, in] which I had been smothered – –! I went to symphonies twice a week. I saw Irving and Terry and Duse and Bernhardt, from the top gallery. I walked in Gramercy Park. And I read, oh, everything. […]
>
> 'When I first came here, I swore I'd 'keep up my interests.' Very lofty! I read Browning, and went to Minneapolis for the theaters. But I guess the Village Virus had me already. I was reading four copies of cheap-fiction magazines to one poem. I'd put off the Minneapolis trips till I simply had to go there on a lot of legal matters.'[234]

Insofar as it sets the conditions which prepare him to accept an economic opportunity afforded by his social connections, New York City catalyzes Guy's socio-economic and geographic mobility to new frontiers in the text. However, despite the ways in which volumes of "German novels, [and] a Charles Lamb in crushed levant" in Guy's Gopher Prairie office reflect his youthful appreciation for European thespians like Sir Henry Irving, Eleonora Duse, and Sarah Bernhardt, the town's material comfort is not reflected

[234] *MS*, 173-4.

in its social networks.[235] As the economic elite in a rural market-town, Guy explains how Gopher Prairie's small community of college-educated professionals "make themselves unhappy artificially" by competing against each other to ensure their economic security even as they rely on one another for companionship.[236] Coupled with its physical distance from urban-industrial centers of production, keeping up with this economic competition while maintaining meaningful social connections is a challenge that is mitigated for Guy and many others by reading mass-produced dime novels.

While the self-deprecating tone with which Guy confesses his commercial fiction consumption in Gopher Prairie underscores both the popular genres' and the town's inferior currency in the modern United States' global cultural economy, access to these domestically mass-produced texts does satisfy Guy's desire for intellectual diversion and social connection in town. To this extent, Guy's characterization of the Village Virus does not critique the texts and the town so much as it identifies the transnational cultural economic systems by which middle-class U.S. citizens "make themselves artificially unhappy" in light of their domestic achievements. Beyond their nostalgic function, then, the material evidence of Guy's coming of age in New York City symbolize the suspended agency that marks his experience as a middle-class consumer living in the rural provinces of the United States' commercial empire.

In this way, Guy's ambivalent narrative of his experience with the Village Virus demystifies the geopolitics of cultural consumption in the Progressive era United States.

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[235] *MS*, 171.
[236] *MS*, 175.

Likewise, the narrative of Carol's slow surrender to the Village Virus dramatizes the critical cosmopolitan process of becoming an imperial agent in the rural Midwest. By spotlighting the tension between characters like Guy and Carol's proclivity for foreign imports and their Gopher Prairie neighbors' more commercial domesticity, the narrative signals the local and global processes which contributed to the transformation of the imperial United States' domestic political economy in the Progressive era. In *Main Street* the liberating urban themes of commercialism, international cultural exchange, and social reform which inspire Carol's relocation to Gopher Prairie are routinely frustrated by her close contact with the local disease of the Village Virus. However, as it is her affinity for bric-á-brac like the Chinese lanterns, German novels, and English poetry that appear throughout the novel which makes Carol an outcast among the Jolly Seventeen, *Main Street* foregrounds the role of global market capitalism in shaping her domestic experience of the U.S. Midwest. As Carol's interpersonal relationships deteriorate despite her increasingly influential socio-economic status over the course of the narrative, *Main Street*'s cosmopolitan critique of U.S. progressivism does not reveal Carol's lack of agency in Gopher Prairie. Rather, it dramatizes Carol and the middle-class U.S. progressives she represents strategic efforts to preserve their newfound social and economic privilege in the twentieth-century's emergent U.S.-dominated world order.

Domestic Diplomacy: The Geopolitics of Friends and Family on *Main Street*

By dramatizing how the Progressive-era United States' middle-class hegemony was simultaneously challenged and reinforced by the intersection of domestic pocketbook

politics and foreign immigration, *Main Street* establishes Gopher Prairie as a barometer of progressive national values. True to its Revolt from the Village inspiration, *Main Street*'s narrative form accentuates the angst and ennui associated with its setting in the small-town Midwest. While scholars have traditionally and rightly interpreted this narrative tone as the result of Carol's suspended agency as a woman living in the United States' patriarchal society, critical interest in the novel's satire of midwestern provincialism has overshadowed Lewis's critique of U.S. imperialism for too long. After all, the comfortably middle-class progressive Carol's executive authority in the market-town of Gopher Prairie is checked less by her lived experience as a woman than by it is by an inarguably democratic process of dialogue and debate. As it becomes clear over the course of the novel that believes herself a failure in Gopher Prairie because she is not the chief executive of its civil society, it also becomes clear that *Main Street* is dramatizing how the expansion of bureaucratic state which attended the emergence of the professional-managerial class in the turn-of-the-century United States bolstered the political power of an elite class of urban-industrial magnates.

For example, while attending a bridge party with the Jolly Seventeen, the town's local "country club, the diplomatic set, the St. Cecilia, the Ritz oval room, the Club de Vingt" Carol becomes embroiled in a vehement argument that dramatizes her capitulation to Gopher Prairie's "lowbrow" commercial cultural zeitgeist because of her awareness of their social and political influence in town.[237] After rejecting Carol's invitation to attend a bobsledding party on the outskirts of town, the other housewives come to loggerheads

[237] *MS*, 103.

with her over the appropriate compensation for a maid. When it is revealed that Carol pays her Swedish "hired girl," Bea, six dollars a week when the going rate is "three-fifty to five-fifty a week" at best, the other housewives "gasped. Juanita protested, 'Don't you think it's hard on the rest of us when you pay so much,'" thus raising the stakes of Carol's personal pay-scale to the level of class treason.[238] In its record of how Vida Sherwin's "dictatorial voice" halts and "takes control of the revolution" the narrative amplifies the geopolitical scale of the domestic dispute in the description of the scene unfolding in

> [a] small-town bungalow, the wives of a village doctor and a village dry-goods merchant, a provincial teacher, a colloquial brawl over paying a servant a dollar more a week. Yet this insignificance echoed cellar-plots and cabinet meetings and labor conferences in Persia and Prussia, Rome and Boston, and the orators who deemed themselves international leaders were but the raised voices of a billion Juanitas denouncing a million Carols, with a hundred thousand Vida Sherwins trying to shoo away the storm.[239]

As allusions to Persia, Prussia, Rome, and Boston transform the "insignificance" of an argument between housewives into an international policy debate, the narrative's critical cosmopolitanism dramatizes how even the most domestic spaces participated in the social upheavals wrought by the United States' imperial expansion in the early twentieth century.

In the description of Carol's reaction to the Jolly Seventeen's rebukes, the narrator articulates her profound sense of isolation as she "crept back to her chair. In the fervor of discussing the game they ignored her. She was not used to being a wallflower.

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[238] *MS*, 107.
[239] *MS*, 108.

She struggled to keep from oversensitiveness [and] from becoming unpopular."[240] After Vida's rebuff, when the local librarian Miss Villets engages her in conversation again, this time on the subject of the gatekeeping function of public librarians,

> Carol saw that the others were listening, waiting for her to be objectionable. She flinched before their dislike. She hastened to smile in agreement with Miss Villets, to glance publicly at her wrist-watch, to warble that it was 'so late—have to hurry home—husband—such nice party—maybe you were right about maids, prejudiced because Bea so nice—such perfectly divine angel's-food, Mrs. Haydock must give me the recipe—good-by, such happy party—'[241]

Similar to the moment of Carol's arrival to the hinterland, in the moment of her social debut the narrative records her acquiescence to the Jolly Seventeen's hegemonic influence and undermines the cultural and political currency traditionally ascribed to her urban origins. Insofar as these origins are signaled by her trans-national friendship with Bea and other foreign interests in the text, the novel's critical cosmopolitanism in this scene also anticipates the failure of the modern metropolis represented by Carol to fulfill its promise of creating a unified national society.

By foregrounding the aesthetic and political differences between urban-intellectual elites like Carol and professional provincials like Vida and Will as the narrative progresses, Lewis transforms domestic debates about matters of taste and recreational pursuits into metaphors for contemporary political ideologies. As such, in moments like the bridge party, primary characters' seemingly trivial disputes about local issues dramatize how cultural and political ideologies compete for meaning and

[240] *MS*, 141 and 104.
[241] *MS*, 109.

relevancy in the United States' liberal democratic society. In this sense, in the same way that Carol's marriage functions as a metaphor for progressive U.S. imperial romance, her friendships in Gopher Prairie become a representation of the transformation of the domestic United States' middle-class cultural and political hegemony in the Progressive era. This is especially true for Carol's antagonistic friendship with Vida Sherwin—a Dickensian pun on the Latin for "life" and the homonym "sure win"—which dramatizes the competition between the gospel of wealth's urban-intellectual brand of social reform and the grassroots, local activism associated with the nineteenth-century Midwest's Granger and prohibition movements.

A native of the hinterland Midwest like Will, Vida emerges in the narrative as an industrious foil to Carol's romantic approach to social reform. Compared to Carol's aesthetic flamboyance, a character trait reflected in the musical quality of her name, the narrator describes Vida as "[g]ray steel that seems unmoving because it spins so fast in the balanced fly-wheel, gray snow in an avenue of elms, gray dawn with the sun behind it."[242] While this characterization downplays both her sexual and romantic appeal in the text, the brief narrative of Vida's life in Gopher Prairie before Carol's arrival describes her capability and desire to recreate U.S. society after her own design. "In the autumn of 1911," the narrator explains, "a year before Dr. Kennicott was married, Vida was his partner at a five-hundred tournament" and, after a chaste flirtation with him, "[s]he waited for him; she reveled in longing, and in a sense of guilt because she longed."[243]

[242] *MS*, 269.
[243] *MS*, 271.

Having established Will as a masculine model of the United States' progressivism, by introducing Vida as his previous love interest the narrator sketches the social and emotional framework for her competition with Carol to spearhead social change in Gopher Prairie.

As a fellow progressive reformer in Gopher Prairie, Vida is initially drawn to Carol's love of literature and, for the first year of their marriage, she imagines that Carol "was the child born of herself and Kennicott," but eventually becomes "healthily vexed by Carol's assumption that she was a sociological messiah come to save Gopher Prairie."[244] As it goes on to describe the source of Vida's irritation with Carol, the narrator adopts the sociological tone in question and amplifies the text's symbolic opposition between the provincial hinterland and the industrial city by cataloging the women's diametric interests in social reform:

> Vida was, and always would be, a reformer, a liberal. She believed that details could excitingly be altered, but that things-in-general were comely and kind and immutable. Carol was without understanding or accepting it, a revolutionist, a radical, and therefore possessed of 'constructive' ideas,' which only the destroyer can have [.][245]

As the narrator explains that the fundamental difference between Vida, the small-town "reformer," and Carol, the revolutionary "destroyer," Lewis subverts the expectations of the realist form by critiquing the motivations of "radical[s]" like Carol. To this extent, in the narrative of Vida's biography Lewis also undermines the central assumption of the Revolt from the Village style of modern midwestern literature; that is, the celebration of

[244] *MS*, 273.
[245] *MS*, 274.

the city as the aspirational center of progressive culture vis-à-vis the denigration of the small-town. In contrast to village revolutionaries like Masters and Anderson, who deployed the radically modern perspective of the urban sociologist to caricature the hinterland's social and cultural bankruptcy, Lewis's narrator adopts Vida's provincial standpoint to lampoon the social and political oblivion of the urban-intellectuals Carol represents:

> She recalled certain other women who had come from the Outside and had not appreciated Gopher Prairie. She remembered the rector's wife who had been chilly to callers and who was rumored throughout the town to have said, 'Re-ah-ly I cawn't endure this bucolic heartiness in the responses.' […] oh, the town had simply roared at her. Of course the rector and she were got rid of in a few months.
>
> Then there was the mysterious woman with dyed hair […] who wore tight English dresses, like basques [.]
>
> Vida insisted that she loved Carol, but with some satisfaction she compared her to these traducers of the town.[246]

Throughout the text, as Carol's antagonistic relationships chart the end of the modern metropolis's unrivaled primacy in mainstream political and cultural discourse, they also illuminate the intersection of urban and rural conceptions of the United States as a progressive society of middle-class consumers. Early in the novel, Will's proposal, Carol and Vida's friendship, and even her debate about maids' wages with the Jolly Seventeen signal these characters' collective agreement about the standards of comfortability, functionality, and affordability of modern life in Gopher Prairie, even if they disagree about the ways and means of realizing these ends. Having established the common socio-economic sensibilities of these otherwise oppositional groups early in the

[246] *MS*, 274-5.

narrative, *Main Street* collapses the social and political distinctions between them in the family portraits that mark the novel's falling action.

For instance, further underscoring Vida's function as a foil for Carol, soon after the beginning of "the Great War smote Europe" in 1914, Carol learns that she is pregnant with her first child, a son to be named Hugh, prompting Vida's acceptance of her lost love interest in Will. After a brief courtship in 1915, she marries Ray Wutherspoon who volunteers as a soldier in the U.S. campaign almost as soon as it is announced in 1917, as Vida busies herself with the wartime patriotic business of home economics. Although the couple never have children, Vida and Ray's marriage is characterized by "glowing, abstracted [,] tempestuous surprises of love" while the emotional distance between Carol and Will steadily increases at the same rate as both the Wutherspoons and the imperial United States' geopolitical influence expands, suggesting the spiritual emptiness associated with the progressive urbanism the couple represents.[247] Additionally, as it is Vida to whom Carol ultimately admits defeat in her battle to reform Gopher Prairie at the end of the novel, *Main Street* registers the text's wholesale critique of the urbanizing nation's consumer culture of social reform by dramatizing its role in perpetuating the oppressive structures of U.S. commercial imperialism in the local sphere of Gopher Prairie.

For example, after only a year of marriage to Miles "The Red Swede" Bjornstam, Carol's friend and former housekeeper Bea and her son Olaf die of typhoid fever after drinking contaminated water in the Swede Hollow neighborhood. In the scene leading up

[247] *MS*, 280-1.

to their death, the narrative emphasizes how Miles' ascent to middle-class status is insufficient inoculation against the environmental dangers of life in a provincial village: "Miles […] admitted now that so long as he stayed in Gopher Prairie, he would remain a pariah. Bea's Lutheran friends were as much offended by his agnostic gibes as the merchants by his radicalism."[248] As Miles continues to articulate the circumstances of their daily life, he explains:

> I've worked hard and built up this dairy business, and I hate to start all over again, and move Bea and the kid into another one-room shack! That's how they get us! Encourage us to be thrifty and own our own houses, and then, by golly, they've got us; they know we won't dare risk everything by committing lez—what is it? lez majesty?—I mean they know we won't be hinting around that if we had a co-operative bank, we could get along without [Ezra] Stowbody. Well—as long as I can sit and play pinochle with Bea, and tell whoppers to Olaf about his daddy's adventures in the woods […] I don't mind being a bum. It's just for them that I mind. Say! Say! Don't whisper a word to Bea, but when I get this addition done, I'm going to buy her a new phonograph![249]

While it reflects his characteristic joie de vivre, the image of Miles's domestic bliss is undercut by his awareness of his socio-economic precarity and his sense of familial responsibility, his explanation "that's how they get us" referring to the exploitative practices of property ownership and management that forced immigrant communities, rural and urban alike, into debt to stake their claim on U.S. citizenship the early twentieth century.[250] Moreover, insofar as Miles's declaration that playing pinochle and phonograph records is enough to satisfy his need for diversion echoes Guy Pollock's

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[248] *MS*, 337.
[249] *MS*, 338.
[250] Elaine Lewinnek, *The Working Man's Reward: Chicago's Early Suburbs and the Roots of American Sprawl* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

proclivity for dime novels, it becomes clear that even the local socialist's house is afflicted by the Village Virus as much as it is typhoid fever.

As the scene of Bea and Olaf's death unfolds, the narrative's realist form exposes additional malignancies associated with economic development and social mobility in Gopher Prairie: namely, class consciousness and its attendant cultural conflicts. Early in the chapter, the narrator describes how Carol's "liveliest interest" was in taking walks with her son, Hugh, to visit with Bea and Olaf, despite her husband's disdain for Miles' "crank" political ideas and his opinion "that a former 'Swede hired girl' was low company for the son of Dr. Will Kennicott."[251] When the wives of the Jolly Seventeen eventually arrive to assist in Carol's efforts to nurse Bea and Olaf back to health, a dejected Miles turns them away, articulating the novel's sharpest critique of its aspirational middle-class characters' ineffectual brand of social solidarity:

> You're too late. You can't do nothing now. Bea's always kind of hoped that you folks would come see her. She wanted to have a chance and be friends. She used to sit here waiting for somebody to knock. I've seen her sitting here, waiting. Now – Oh, you ain't worth God-damning.' He shut the door."[252]

Because "word of Miles rebuff … had spread through the town [like] a cyclonic fury" no one in town attends Bea and Olaf's funeral three days later; "[i]t was only by chance" that Carol, exhausted from her belated nursing efforts, sees him "walking quite alone, head down, behind the shabby hearse that bore the bodies of his wife and baby" in the procession afterward.[253]

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[251] *MS*, 335.
[252] *MS*, 340.
[253] *MS*, 340.

In contrast to the romantic scene of her engagement, in which Carol and Will embrace over a picture of the Swedish immigrant Nels Erdstrom's "scared baby," the realism in the scene of Bea and Olaf's death forecloses the possibility of creating the transnational family of Carol's daydreams in the modern United States. Not only are Carol's valiant nursing efforts too little, too late, but the Jolly Seventeen's response to Miles's despair reflects the commercial nativism that binds Gopher Prairie's progressive middle class together. In doing so, the episode also registers their social and political parity in the imperial nation's expanding middle-class cultural economy. After the funeral, "Juanita Haydock dropped in to brighten Carol. She said, too bad about that Bea that was your hired girl. But I don't waste any sympathy on that man of hers. Everybody says he drank too much, and treated his family awful, and that's how they got sick."[254] Similarly, after Miles declares that he will be leaving Gopher Prairie and, in fact, the United States "to buy a farm in northern Alberta—far off from folks as I can get," the ever-nonplussed Will responds,

> From what Champ says, I guess Bjornstam was a bad egg, after all. In spite of Bea. I can't see what but the citizens' committee ought to have forced him to be patriotic—let on like they could send him to jail if he didn't volunteer and come through for bonds with the Y.M.C.A. They've worked that stunt fine with all these German farmers.[255]

Between Bea and Olaf's death, Miles's expatriation, and her husband and the Jolly Seventeen's distaste for her cosmopolitan interests, Carol finds "no inspiration" in Gopher Prairie, and her marriage begins its inevitable decline. Vaguely suspicious of an

[254] *MS*, 340.
[255] *MS*, 343.

affair between Will and fellow Jolly Seventeen housewife Mrs. Maud Dyer, Carol briefly entertains the notion of an affair with both Guy Pollock and Gopher Prairie's most recent bachelor transplant, Erik Valborg. As in the novel's opening scenes, the emotional status of Carol's marital relationship in the climax is associated with the imperial status of the couple's geographic and social setting. In classic Chicago School form, Carol and Will first attempt to repair their marriage by returning to scene of their first meeting, in the industrial city of Minneapolis where

> They dined extravagantly at their hotel at night, and next morning sneaked round the corner to economize at a Childs' Restaurant […] and by eleven they were again so lively that they went to a Chinese restaurant that was frequented by clerks and their sweethearts on pay-days. They sat a teak and marble table eating Eggs Fooyung, and listened to a brassy automatic piano and were altogether cosmopolitan.[256]

Unlike the scene of their engagement, however, the city's international flavor fails to rekindle the romance associated with the couple's position in a small-scale imperial metropolis, and instead precipitates Carol's exasperation with the commercial cultural economy in which they are enmeshed. When Will later agrees to take her to the original coastal boundary of the U.S. empire in California, Carol is disappointed to find that "[i]n winter, California is full of people from Iowa and Nebraska, Ohio and Oklahoma, who, having traveled thousands of miles from their familiar villages hasten to secure an illusion of not having left them."[257] Upon their return, the narrator explains that Carol "tried to be content, which is a contradiction in terms [,]" to find that Gopher Prairie "was booming, as a result of the war price of wheat," but is instead unimpressed with the local

[256] *MS*, 231.
[257] *MS*, 424.

Commercial Club's further plans to boost the town's population—and thus its members' consumer base—by promoting it not only as "a wheat-center, but also the perfect site for factories, summer cottages, and state institutions."[258]

By affirming the relationship between Gopher Prairie's expanding commercial economy and the United States' entrance to World War I in this way, *Main Street* imagines Progressive-era urbanization in the Midwest as a domestic iteration of the United States' tradition of commercial and political imperial expansion in the twentieth century. Because Carol's emotional status continues to decline in the face of Gopher Prairie and the United States' economic and political expansion, Carol's marital demise is often read as the paradigmatic symbol of *Main Street*'s critique of small-town idealism and U.S. commercial culture. But this interpretation overlooks the important fact that embracing her status as a middle-class wife and mother is what enables Carol to remain married to Will and return to Gopher Prairie after a brief spiritual sojourn. Alternatively, Carol's emotional wellbeing deteriorates because she comes to realize how little political influence her privileged socio-economic status as a middle-class housewife afford her, even in the expanding bureaucratic state that attended the emergence of an expert class of managers in the Progressive-era United States.

After leaving Gopher Prairie to support the U.S. effort in World War I by working as a secretary in the Bureau of War Risk Insurance in Washington D.C. in 1917, Carol internalizes marriage and motherhood as the best means to exercise her social and political agency. It is significant that it is during Will's trip to visit her in Washington

[258] *MS*, 433.

D.C. in early 1919 that Carol decides to return to life as a housewife in Gopher Prairie. As the capital city of the nation whose economic power and political influence expanded the most as a result of the First World War, the setting emphasizes the modern United States' imperial status and recalls the romance of Carol and Will's earlier excursions in Minneapolis and St. Paul. While taking Will sight-seeing, the city's Baroque plan inspires a sentimental moment that underscores the couple's reconciliation as a symbol of national unity:

> As they walked through Lafayette Square, looking past the Jackson statue at the lovely, tranquil façade of the White House, [Will] sighed, 'I wish I'd had a shot at places like this. When I was at the U., I had to earn part of my way, and when I wasn't doing that or studying, I guess I was roughhousing. My gang were a great bunch for bumming around and raising Cain. Maybe if I'd been caught early and sent to concerts and all that – Would I have been intelligent?'
>
> 'Oh, my dear! Don't be humble! You are intelligent! For instance, you're the most thorough doctor--' […]
>
> He grinned. She liked his grin.[259]

Where Minneapolis's commercial cosmopolitanism failed to reignite Carol's affection for Will in the couple's first attempt to restart their marriage, in Washington D.C. a progression of neoclassical national monuments—from Lafayette Square itself, named for the French aristocrat and Revolutionary War general who famously assisted the Continental Army, to Andrew Jackson, ardent defender of the common man in United States' politics and society, and the White House itself—suggests an inspiring tradition of democratic liberalism in the United States that approaches its final form in the image of Will's attractive grin, successful career, and sophisticated wife.

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[259] *MS*, 57.

The narrative quickly affirms the power of this model of modern marital bliss when an unnamed "generalissima of suffrage," whose self-professed only interest in other women is "whether they're likely to prove useful in building up real political power for women," encourages Carol to return to Gopher Prairie with Will.[260] According to the generalissima, motherhood is a path to social reform because it is a "[m]atter of endurance," in which Carol can "keep on looking at one thing after another in your home and church and bank, and ask why it is, and who first laid down the law that it had to be that way. […] Easy, pleasant, lucrative home-work for wives [.] That's the most dangerous doctrine I know!"[261] When she resolves to return to Gopher Prairie and "go on asking questions," Carol's attempt at this brand of social reform represents modern motherhood as a strategic practice of psychological disassociation and emotional affiliation.[262] For example, once back in town Carol is "unable to rhapsodize" when Will excitedly shows her the "seven new bungalows and two garages" which are evidence of Gopher Prairie's continued expansion during her absence, but she is inspired by the construction of a new public rest-room and school building in town which, the narrator explains:

> indicated Vida's triumph, and it stirred [Carol] to activity [.] She relieved the attendant at the rest-room for an hour a day. […] She talked to the farmwives and soothed their babies and was happy. Thinking of them she did not think of the ugliness of Main Street as she hurried along it to the chatter of the Jolly Seventeen.[263]

[260] *MS*, 460.
[261] *MS*, 462.
[262] *MS*, 462.
[263] *MS*, 465.

Although this kind of volunteer social work allows Carol to transcend the boundaries of her local environment, as the narrative continues it becomes clear that it also renders her complicit with the commercial cultural and political hegemony that she once vehemently opposed. For example, in the record of the local businessmen's discussion of Carol's efforts in the next episode, the narrative affirms the innocuous quality of this form of social work in town:

> 'Well, I see Kennicott's wife is taking a whirl at the rest-room, now,' said Dr. Westlake [.] Of course, she's like all the rest of these women […] doesn't know anything about political economy [.] But she's a nice woman. She'll probably fix up the rest-room, and the rest-room is a fine thing, brings a lot of business to town.'[264]

When Sam Clark agrees that "smart educated women all get funny ideas, but they get over 'em after they've had three or four kids. You'll see her settled down one of these days, and teaching Sunday School and helping at sociables and behaving herself," the narrative reifies the cultural and social processes through which Carol emerges as both a model housewife and political gadfly in Gopher Prairie.[265] Contrary to Dr. Westlake's assertion, then, as the narrator explains that "the supreme council decided that they would permit Carol Kennicott to live," Carol's acute understanding of Gopher Prairie's political economy and her position within it becomes clear.[266] Similar to the childless generalissima and Vida Sherwin, leaning into the gendered expectations of her domestic role as a wife and mother in Gopher Prairie's public sphere is an expression of the sense of social and political agency Carol acquires in the imperial United States' capital city.

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[264] *MS*, 466-67.
[265] *MS*, 467.
[266] *MS*, 467.

To this extent, the final installment of Carol's urban education in *Main Street* is a liberating experience for her and the middle-class women she represents:

> 'Now that I've made a precedent, joined the union and gone out on strike and learned personal solidarity, I won't be so afraid. […] I've lived with people who are not afraid to go to jail. I could invite a Miles Bjornstam to dinner without being afraid of the Haydocks … I think I could. I'll take back the sound of Yvette Guilbert's songs and Elman's violin. They'll be only the lovelier against the thrumming of the crickets in the stubble on an autumn day. I can laugh now and be serene … I think I can.' Though she should return, she said, she would not be utterly defeated.[267]

That Carol is further empowered to return Gopher Prairie because she can mitigate her discomfort there by listening to the French cabaret performer Yvette Guilbert and the Russian-born violinist Mischa Elman on contemporary phonograph records underscores her privileged status in the United States' consumers' imperium. However, just as Miles's and Guy's habits of commercial cultural consumption take the edge off their youthful radicalism, insofar as Carol's consumer practices conform to local conceptions of middle-class women's "funny ideas," the narrative forecloses her ability to upset the town's entrenched social and political hierarchy. Even as she vows never to stop rebelling against the Jolly Seventeen, the novel's final chapter suggests the anticlimactic effects of Carol's personal liberation in Gopher Prairie. After Dr. Westlake and the other husbands "permit [her] to live," Will and Carol join Sam Clark and his wife hunting and, as in the opening scene, the narrative imagines the imperial scene that emerges from Carol's selective participation in Gopher Prairie's commercial leisure activities:

[267] *MS*, 362-3.

> She looked across the silent fields to the west. She was conscious of an unbroken sweep of land to the Rockies, to Alaska, a dominion which will rise to unexampled greatness when other empires have grown senile. […]
>
> 'Let's go to the movies tomorrow night. Awfully exciting film,' said Ethel Clark.
>
> 'Well, I was going to read a new book but—All right, let's go,' said Carol.[268]

Cementing the relationship between cultural products and identity formation in *Main Street*, by accepting the Clarks' invitation to the movies Carol defies the conventions of her outsider status, underscoring her newfound sense of agency and belonging in Gopher Prairie. Further, mirroring the moment of Carol's initial ostracization from the Jolly Seventeen, in this final acquiescence to the Gopher Prairie establishment, the narrative neutralizes Carol's threat to the town's commercial cultural and political economy as she imagines "the unbroken sweep of land" connecting herself to the United States' last North American frontier of Alaska.

In the imperial vision emanating out from Carol's headquarters in Gopher Prairie, *Main Street* registers Lewis's critique of the urban-elite cultural forms she represents in the text as impotent symbols of the United States' ideological progressivism. Coupled with its distanced perspective, the narrator's comparison between the United States' new "dominion" and "other empires [which] have grown senile" expresses anxiety regarding the nation's participation in an historical cycle of Western imperialism that reiterates Carol's impotence in U.S. society: "Before that time, she knew, a hundred generations of Carols will aspire and go down in tragedy devoid of palls and solemn chanting, the

[268] *MS*, 470.

humdrum inevitable tragedy of struggle against inertia."[269] Similarly, in its final episode the narrative confirms Carol's inability to reform the imperial future she imagines by dramatizing her failure to transform systems that structure her domestic life in Gopher Prairie. While preparing for bed one night, Carol complains to Will, "this Community Day [Vida planned] makes me see how thoroughly I am beaten. […] But, I have won this! I have never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to go beyond them."[270] Echoing Sam Clark and Dr. Westlake's acceptance of Carol's most recent funny idea, Will replies, "Sure, you bet you have. Well, good night. Sort of looks like it might snow tomorrow. […] Say, did you notice whether the girl put the screwdriver back?"[271]

In stark contrast to the romantic image of her that opens the novel, in which the narrator characterizes Carol as "a rebellious girl [and] the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest," the closing scene's realism emphasizes the regimentation of domestic life in the modern U.S. empire. Even though Carol declares, "I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous than Europe! […] I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith," as Will wonders if "the girl put the screwdriver back" while she "pat[s] his pillows, turn[s] down his sheets," the narrative dramatizes the once rebellious girl literally preparing a bed for the modern model of middle-class progressivism: an upwardly mobile local businessman from the United States whose

[269] *MS*, 17.
[270] *MS*, 471.
[271] *MS*, 471.

small-town concerns bely his influence in world affairs.[272] As well as critiquing Carol's brand of progressive urbanism as a means of fomenting social reform, then, *Main Street*'s final scene also suggests how the progressive social and political forces driving the process of urbanization within the United States were complicit in the expansion of commercial capitalism and Western imperialism in the world beyond it. Like Guy and Miles before her, "keeping the faith" with her cosmopolitan tastes after returning to Gopher Prairie inures Carol to its aesthetic shortcomings, allowing her to find meaning through selective participation in community life. But, as this faith enables her to disassociate from her own subjugation in town, it also suppresses her will to "fight the good fight" against the progressive expansion of United States' commercial culture and political economy in the world beyond the nation's continental borders.

If, as most critics agree, *Main Street*'s great tragedy is that the worldly Carol Kennicott succumbs to the Village Virus as a result of her decision to return to Gopher Prairie, it is worth noting that the disease is pathologized by an impulse to strategic self-preservation rather than cultural parochialism or political provincialism. Understood in this way, Carol's case of the Village Virus does not lampoon Midwestern parochialism so much as it reveals the inextricability of early twentieth-century U.S. conceptions of progressivism and the exploitative processes of global commercial capitalism. By emphasizing the function of commercial cultural consumption and global market capitalism in Gopher Prairie, the narrative focalizes the intersection of the local politics

[272] *MS*, 471.

of progressive urbanization and the United States' expansionist foreign policy in the Progressive era.

As Carol's narrative trajectory demonstrates, embodying the modern discourse of middle-class progressivism required individuals' collective complicity with the exploitative structures of Western empire and U.S. commercial capitalism, even as they espoused the democratic values of radical individualism and the right to self-determination. Additionally, in its representation of the paradoxical alignment of such contrasting social and economic programs in early twentieth-century progressives' efforts to modernize the rural Midwest in the Progressive era, *Main Street* emerges a distinctively Midwestern, modernist, and cosmopolitan critique of the nation-state's imperialist expansion. By foregrounding the imperial-romanticism of the Chicago School in its rehearsal of the story of Progressive-era urbanization in Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, the narrative undermines the modern metropolis as an implicit symbol of U.S. progressivism. In this way, the pre-eminent Revolt from the Village novel also subverts the genre's conventional celebration of cosmopolitan cultural forms in its critique of rural parochialism. In doing so, *Main Street* asserts the critical value of the hinterland Midwest in Sinclair Lewis's mainstream literary modernism of the 1920s.

Chapter 4

Diagnosis Empire: Medical Education, Professional Patriotism, and Critical Cosmopolitanism in *Arrowsmith*

In *Arrowsmith* (1925), Lewis extends Carol Kennicott's imperialist vision to its logical conclusions in the young doctor Martin Arrowsmith's bildungsroman. *Arrowsmith*'s titular protagonist is a second-generation son of the middle border, born and raised in the rural town of Elk Mills which connected hinterland farmers to national markets in the late nineteenth century. Like *Main Street*'s Gopher Prairie, Elk Mills' built environment reflects its status as a node in the United States' rapidly expanding industrial and commercial networks. As the narrative's panoramic gaze zooms out from the image of a young, cross-legged Martin reading *Gray's Anatomy* in the office of the town doctor, the narrator explains:

> It was the central room of the three occupied by Doc Vickerson, facing on Main Street above the New York Clothing Bazaar. […] This central room was at once business office, consultation-room, operating-theater, living-room, poker den, and warehouse for guns and fishing tackle. […] On the wall was a home-stuffed pickerel on a home-varnished board. […] The most unsanitary corner was devoted to the cast-iron sink which was oftener used for washing eggy breakfast plates than for sterilizing instruments.[273]

Like *Main Street*, in *Arrowsmith* the narrator's attention to the minutia of Doc Vickerson's office signals the economic and cultural hierarchy that governs Elk Mills, and suggests the ways in which that social order is in transition. In particular, the image of the doctor's office located in the "central room … above the New York Clothing

[273] Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith*, 1924. (New York: Signet Classics, 2008). 4.

Bazaar," positions the provincial scene at center stage of the global drama that attended the commercialization and industrialization of professional medicine in the Progressive-era United States.

At the turn of the twentieth century, medical education in the United States transformed from an ad-hoc regional system of proprietary schools, owned and operated by local physicians with little academic training, to a standard model of university instruction that imitated models of scientific training at elite European academies. Thanks to the influence of Minnesota's Secretary of Public Health, Charles N. Hewitt, the University of Minnesota Medical School was a leader in this reform. As Minnesota's first Secretary of Public Health, Hewitt oversaw the consolidation of more than twenty proprietary schools into a single medical school at the University of Minnesota that was supported by a combination of philanthropic and state funds by 1888. As a result of these changes, by 1910 the American Medical Association and the Carnegie Foundation co-sponsored a survey of *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*, authored by Abraham Flexner, heralded the University of Minnesota Medical School as "the first […] in the Union that may fairly be said to have solved the perplexing problems connected with medical education and practice."[274]

Following the so-called *Flexner Report*'s publication in 1910, medical reformers across the United States implemented educational changes like those in Minnesota such as common entrance and graduation exams, and legislative reforms like requiring state-

[274] Abraham Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1910), 248.

sanctioned examining boards and licenses to practice. Under Flexner's influence, U.S. medical schools also adopted European models for funding scientific research by accepting new investments of from the General Education Board, the nongovernment organization staffed and funded by John D. Rockefeller beginning in 1902. Two years after publishing his seminal report on *Medical Education*, Abraham Flexner brought to fruition its recommendation for "[a]bundant benefaction" in the form of private philanthropic and state money for medical research when he became Secretary of the GEB in 1912.[275] Throughout his twenty-eight year tenure, the GEB channeled millions of federal and philanthropic dollars into public and private universities within the United States, but its influence extended well beyond the domestic sphere. The GEB also allocated the research staff and capital for global public health campaigns such as the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's campaign for the Eradication of Hookworm in the U.S. South and Caribbean, as well as the International Health Division's campaigns for the study of yellow fever and malaria in South America and Europe.[276]

In the same way that *Main Street* dramatizes how middle-class Midwesterners contributed to the expansion of U.S. commercial imperialism, in *Arrowsmith* Lewis imagines how the revolution that began in Midwestern medical education had ramifications far beyond the United States by dramatizing its role in constructing the notion of "public health" in the Progressive era. However, where *Main Street*'s critique of U.S. empire operates through its critique of the progressive urbanism represented by

[275] Flexner, *Medical Education*, 142.

[276] Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board, A Foundation Established by John. D. Rockefeller* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

Carol Kennicott's journey from the imperial metropolis to the provincial town, in *Arrowsmith* Lewis's critique of U.S. empire takes shape over the course of Martin Arrowsmith's professional development, which documents his transformation from a naïve medical student in the rural Midwest to a world-weary researcher in the imperial sphere of the fictional Caribbean island of St. Hubert. Because Martin's medical education enables his privileged participation in the political bureaucracy which marks the modern United States' medical industrial complex, recent critics have interpreted the novel's ending as an endorsement of U.S. medical imperialism.[277] But these readings undervalue Martin's disillusionment at the novel's end. Disgusted by his wife's suggestion to take a new research job due to its high salary, Martin divorces her and retires to a cabin in rural Vermont to "plug along on [experiments and] maybe we'll get something permanent—and probably we'll fail."[278] In doing so, he articulates a cynicism about scientific research that is inextricable from his limited agency in the modern United States' medical industrial complex and Lewis's larger critique of U.S. imperialism.

Midwestern Modernism: Exposing the Imperial Ambitions of Martin's Medical Education

As a doctor novel, *Arrowsmith* has an acute awareness of the potential social benefits of rational science, but, thanks to Lewis's ambivalent narrative form it has

[277] Yeonsik Jung, "The Immunity of Empire: Tropical Medicine, Medical Nativism, and Biopolitics in Lewis's *Arrowsmith*," in *Literature and Medicine*, V. 34.1 (Spring 2016), pp. 185-206, and "The Rockefeller Institute and American Imperialism in Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*," in *The Explicator* V. 74.2 (2016), 83-87; Lisa L. Lynch, "*Arrowsmith* Goes Native: Medicine and Empire in Fiction and Film," *Mosaic* V. 33.4 (December 2000), pp. 193-208.

[278] Lewis, *AS*, 450.

decidedly little corresponding sense that society will improve as a result of advanced technical and scientific knowledge. As in *Main Street*, the oscillation between sociological realism and romantic idealism in *Arrowsmith* illuminates the imperialist ideologies which informed everyday citizens' efforts to reform U.S. society in the Progressive era. Where *Main Street* attends to the domestic institutions of kith and kin to expose consumers' role in the expansion of U.S. empire, *Arrowsmith* focuses on civilian institutions such as the public university, local government offices, and the private research firm to critique the bureaucracy which undergirded the simultaneous expansion of the United States' domestic public health infrastructure and its imperial sovereignty abroad. As Martin graduates from Elk Mills to a variety of professional environments that boost his social influence, *Arrowsmith* relies on the Chicago School narrative trope of the rural Midwestern migrant's personal and professional development to critique the imperialist ideologies which undergirded the pursuit of public health in the twentieth century.

For instance, when Martin leaves Doc Vickerson's office to attend medical school, the institutional backdrop of Winnemac State University in the novel's opening chapters mobilizes the theme of social and cultural transformation as a result of scientific progressivism. Located in the fictional midwestern town of Mohalis, "fifteen miles from Zenith," Winnemac State University spotlights the ostensibly provincial region's status as a central proving ground for modern conceptions of national citizenship and education in the early twentieth century. Speaking from the present moment novel's publication in

1925, *Arrowsmith*'s sardonic narrator underscores the commercial orientation of these progressive ambitions when he explains,

> There are twelve thousand students; beside this prodigy Oxford is a tiny theological school and Harvard a select college for young gentlemen. The University […] hires hundreds of young Doctors of Philosophy to give rapid instruction in Sanskrit, navigation, accountancy, spectacle-fitting, sanitary engineering, Provençal poetry, tariff schedules, rutabaga growing, motor-car designing, the history of Voronezh, the style of Matthew Arnold, the diagnosis of *myohypertrophia kymoparalytica*, and department-store advertising.[279]

As in *Main Street*, the juxtaposition of foreign cultural institutions and aesthetic forms with the intellectual products of the United States' consumer culture here does more than satirize the capitalist corruption and social elitism associated with modern higher education. It reflects the romantic idealism associated with a modern scientific education compared to a classical liberal arts education in the Progressive era.[280]

Lewis draws on this context in the representative episodes of Martin's experiences as pre-medical student at Winnemac State in 1904. One evening while Martin is attending a party, the narrator records a cozy scene of university professors debating ideals and faculty gossip that illuminates the university's imbrication in an increasingly scientific global knowledge economy. Declaring his disdain for the new bacteriologist on campus—Dr. Max Gottlieb who, the narrator explains, was "a Jew, born and educated in Germany"—the literature professor Dr. Norman Brumfit laments, "when one of you scientific sharks can take the genius of Ben Jonson and measure it with a

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[279] *AS*, 6.

[280] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1993).

yardstick, then I'll admit that we literary chaps […] are on the wrong track!"[281] When the host and popular chemistry professor Edward "Encore" Edwards retorts with his respect for Gottlieb's "effort to synthesize antitoxin, and his diabolic pleasure in disproving his own contentions as he would those of Ehrlich or Sir Almroth Wright," Lewis articulates U.S. scientific progressives' reverence for European advances in science and technology, which undergirded their "detestation of such literary playboys such as Brumfit."[282]

As the narrator reveals that Edwards is a traditional homeopathic medical practitioner who would "[o]rdinarily […] have suggested […] that Gottlieb was a 'crapehanger' who wasted time destroying the theories of other men instead of making new ones of his own," but defends his research only to undercut the "literary playboy" Professor Brumfit Lewis highlights the role of intellectual affinities in the process of identity- and community- formation in the Progressive era United States. In addition to illuminating the university's geopolitical contexts, then, this scene also anticipates the scientific professional's emergence as the preeminent model of U.S. masculinity. For instance, as the narrator goes on to describe Max Gottlieb, the oscillation between realism and romance makes it clear that his foreignness on campus is as much the result of his research interests as it is his national and ethnic identity. Compared to the description of Professor Edwards as a popular professorial type, "[sitting] before fires and strok[ing] his collie and chuckl[ing] in his beard," the narrator explains that

> Professor Gottlieb was the mystery of the University. It was known that he was a Jew, born and educated in Germany, and that his work on immunology had given him fame in the East and in Europe. […] A

[281] Lewis, *AS*, 9.
[282] *AS*, 9.

> thousand fables fluttered about him. It was believed that he was the son of a German prince, that he had immense wealth, that he lived as sparsely as other professors only because he was doing terrifying and costly experiments which probably had something to do with human sacrifice. It was said he could create life in the laboratory, that he could talk to the monkeys which he inoculated, that he had been driven out of Germany as a devil-worshiper or an anarchist, and that he secretly drank real champagne at dinner.[283]

In doing so, Lewis dramatizes the power of modern scientific progressivism to bridge the gap between Gottlieb's ethnic, national, and intellectual exoticism, and Edwards's familiar materialism.

If Edwards's interest in defending Gottlieb's integrity signals his intellectual solidarity with Winnemac State's lone foreign faculty member, the romantic tropes which articulate Martin's attraction to his field of study – bacteriology – dramatize Gottlieb's inevitable assimilation to the modern United States' intellectual community. For example, while the description of Gottlieb's reputation foregrounds his foreignness, the narrative of Martin's reaction to the conversation explains that "the discussion of Gottlieb had roused him to a reasonless excitement," and records the gothic scene of his first encounter with Gottlieb:

> Himself, [Martin] had never seen the man, but he knew that Gottlieb's laboratory was in the Main Medical Building. He drifted toward the distant medical campus. The few people whom he met were hurrying with midnight timidity. […] Beyond him was the turreted bulk of the Main Medical Building, a harsh and blurry mass, high up in its dark wall a single light. He started. The light had gone out abruptly, as though an agitated watcher were trying to hide from him.
>
> On the stone steps of the Main Medical, two minutes after, appeared beneath the arc-light a tall figure, ascetic, self-contained, apart. His swart cheeks were gaunt, his nose high-bridged and thin. He did not hurry, like the belated homebodies. […]

[283] *AS*, 8.

> He had worn the threadbare top-coat of a poor professor, yet Martin remembered him as wrapped in a black velvet cape with a silver star arrogant on his breast.[284]

As Gottlieb materializes out of the "turreted bulk" of the main building on the "distant medical campus" the narrative accounts for his mysterious reputation as the result of his romanticized cultural status as a scientific pioneer. Moreover, as Martin's vision of the German Gottlieb "wrapped in [the] black velvet cape" of British novelist Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll is incomplete without the "silver star" of a U.S. dime-novel deputy sheriff, this scene constructs an image of a decidedly modern, completely generic Western hero that embodies the transnational imaginary in which it was produced. In this way, the romance of Martin's formative medical school experiences emphasizes the popular belief in U.S. scientific progressives' ability to resolve the geopolitical tensions which came to a head by the outbreak of World War I.

In the subsequent narrative of Martin's relationship with Madeline Fox, his first love-interest, Lewis expands on this idea by assimilating the themes of literary realism and romance in the text. A graduate student in English literature, Madeline emerges as the Carol Kennicott to Martin's handsome-young-doctor Will when she exclaims, "[t]hink how much more money—no, I mean how much more social position and power for doing good a successful doctor has than one of these scientists that just putter," emphasizing her realist understanding of the relationship between social reform and financial capital in the twentieth-century United States.[285] In the description of Martin's

[284] *AS*, 9-10.
[285] *AS*, 25.

reaction to Madeline's belief that "[he's] going to have a wonderful future," Lewis emphasizes the romantic appeal of his professional ambition:

> He noted that Madeline was not only a rare and understanding spirit but also an extraordinarily desirable woman—fresh color, tender eyes, adorable slope from shoulder to side. […] [H]e perceived that she was incredibly the right mate for him. Under his training she would learn he distinction between vague 'ideals' and the hard sureness of science. […] He yearned for her; he regretted the casual affairs of a student and determined to be a pure and extremely industrious young man, to be, in fact, "worthy of her."[286]

As Martin sets about becoming worthy of Madeline by studying for his final exams back on campus, his commitment to a career in an emergent field of bacteriology under Dr. Max Gottlieb's tutelage affirms his status as a midwestern pioneer for the modern age.[287] As the narrator describes how "Martin was alienated from the civilized, industrious, nice young men of [his fraternity] Digamma Pi" and explains that he "preferred [the] barbarian loneliness, for next year he would be working alone with Max Gottlieb," the narrative echoes the heroic triumphalism of his great-grandmother's declaration that "Nobody ain't goin to take [her] in" on her journey "Goin' West!" toward Elk Mills in the 1830s.[288] By foregrounding the theme of national progress through the romantic combination of a rational, scientific education and rugged individualism in this way, Lewis exposes the imperialist ideologies and practices which structure Martin's career trajectory in the text.

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[286] *AS*, 26.

[287] For a definitive study on the emergence of laboratory science as a professional medical field in the United States, see Kenneth Ludlermer *Learning to Heal: The Evolution of American Medical Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), and Richard E. Brown's *Rockefeller Medicine Men: Medicine and Capitalism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[288] Lewis*, AS*, 31.

For example, subverting the intellectual arrogance associated with his professional goals of becoming a research scientist, Martin spends the summer after meeting Madeline and passing his exams installing telephone lines in Montana to earn the money which supports his education at Winnemac State. Similar to the image of the juvenile Martin reading a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* in Doc Vickerson's "wild" rooms that begins the narrative, the image of a twenty-one-year-old Martin as medical student in Montana "looking like a farm-hand. Climbing all day long" up and down trees by "digging the spurs of his leg-irons into the soft and silvery pine, to carry up the wire, lash it to the glass insulators" symbolizes the maturation of the industrial United States' economy and culture in the Progressive era.[289] Insofar as the description of Martin stringing the telephone wires that will civilize wild western state of Montana recalls John Gast's image of Columbia in his famous 1872 painting *Progress*, the romantic narrative form here affirms Martin's status as the hero of the modern United States' pursuit of Manifest Destiny in the Progressive era. Moreover, the narrator's romantic description of Martin's sudden clarity of vision from "atop a pole" presents a pastoral image that assimilates the rugged individualism attributed to industrial laborers and the pioneering scientific methods in the project of empire building in the twentieth-century United States:

> [H]e saw that the prairie was vast, that the sun was kindly on rough pasture and ripening wheat [;] he saw that the meadow larks were jubilant, and blackbirds shining by little pools, and with the living sun all life was living. Suppose [his medical schoolmates] were tights tradesmen? What of it? 'I'm *here*!' he gloated.

[289] *AS*, 3 and 31.

> The wire-gang were as healthy and as simple as the west wind; they had no pretentiousness [.] They laughed easily had were content to be themselves, and with them Martin was content to forget how noble he was. He had for them an affection such as he had for no one at the University save Max Gottlieb.[290]

Read in this way, Martin's enrollment as a medical student at Winnemac State University takes on special significance because of the public institution's symbolic status as both a center of knowledge production and state power in the twentieth-century United States. This was especially true in the Midwest where the Land-Grant College Act, or Morrill Act, of 1862 allocated parcels of land to states for the purposes of supporting academic institutions for the study of agriculture and related sciences. In the Progressive-era Upper Midwest where Winnemac is located, land-grant colleges like the University of Wisconsin and the University of Minnesota were vital knowledge centers where advances in agricultural and medical science directly contributed to the region's growth. Specifically, at the University of Minnesota – for which Winnemac State may be considered a stand-in – political leaders from governor Lucious Hubbard to Knute Nelson collaborated with local physicians and scientific researchers throughout the Progressive era to make the state the gold-standard for public health in the United States. In fact, when the *Flexner Report* was published in 1910 The University of Minnesota was celebrated for leading the nation its public health-oriented approach to the reform of medical education:

> The state universities of the west will doubtless lead this movement […] to protect their own sons and the public health against the lower-grade doctors made elsewhere. The University of Minnesota having by statesmanlike action got rid of all other medical schools in the state, is thus

[290] *AS*, 31 (*emphasis original*).

backed up by the legislature and the state board.[291]

As the *Flexner Report* notes, the University of Minnesota was instrumental to the legislative policies that shaped the state's progressive approach to public health in the late nineteenth century. Due to the university's charter as a public entity under the Land-Grant College Act, in 1872 the Minnesota State Medical Society submitted a bill to the Minnesota legislature to create a state-funded board of health and vital statistics that would be operated by the University of Minnesota and staffed by local medical scientists and practitioners. When the bill passed, the resulting State Board of Health established a committee of seven physicians from across Minnesota to oversee healthcare practices in the state with Charles N. Hewitt appointed as secretary and chief executive officer. As secretary, Hewitt also became the first faculty member of the newly created University of Minnesota Medical School, and used part of his $250 salary to build a laboratory at his home-office in Red Wing that became the first state-supported public health research facility in the United States.[292]

More than any one piece of legislation or scientific breakthrough, the most important precedent Hewitt's appointment at the University of Minnesota Medical School established was the state's role in overseeing the health and hygiene practices of its citizens. In 1873, Hewitt eagerly accepted the faculty appointment as a prime pulpit from which to spread the new scientific gospel of germ theory, and to normalize the role of

[291] Flexner, *Medical Education*, 51.

[292] Ben Freedman, "The First State Board of Health Laboratories in the United States" in *Public Health Reports*, 69.9 (September 1954) pp. 867-875.

government in the promotion of good public health.[293] Throughout his career, Hewitt touted the role of government in enforcing the higher standard of community living he endorsed. Not only was he a chief sponsor of the bill that created the State Board of Health, after building the laboratory in Red Wing, Hewitt immediately set about collecting vital statistics about towns and cities across Minnesota. Due to the high prevalence of typhoid, diphtheria, and Scarlet fever, Hewitt began to survey local water supplies in 1873 and established an intra-state epidemic response network which effectively wiped out the mortal threat of these illnesses in the state by the 1890s. As such, Hewitt's laboratories were integral to the Board of Health's efforts to promote public health policies and to demonstrate the board's legitimacy to the public interest. By 1883, lab testing of public water and food stores was grounds for the legislation of a "Health Code" in the state of Minnesota, which gave the advisory board punitive powers over local governments that failed to report vital statistics or rates of illness to the state, and empowered immigration officials in Canada and the U.S. Marine Hospital Service at Ellis Island to implement quarantine and vaccine regulations for foreign migrants bound for Minnesota.[294] In thus leveraging the University of Minnesota charter to exercise his influence on the Minnesota legislature, Hewitt established the institutional foundation for the expansion of state sovereignty to include matters of hygiene, sanitation, and education

[293] William Watts Folwell, "Biographic Memorial of Dr. Charles N. Hewitt, Address to the Minnesota Medical Society Executive Council," 9 November 1914. From the Library of Congress, *Pioneering the Upper Midwest: Books from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin*, https://www.loc.gov/item/18022777/ (Accessed 20 January 2021); Leonard G. Wilson, *Medical Revolution in Minnesota: A History of the University of Minnesota Medical School* (St. Paul: Midewiwin Press, 1989). pp. 23-31.

[294] Freedman, "The First State Board," 871-2.

in the United States by the time of his retirement from public life in 1897, paving the way for the state's pioneering reputation in matters of medical education and public health in the Progressive era.[295]

Critical Cosmopolitanism: The Geopolitics of Medicine and Marriage in *Arrowsmith*

As a midwestern medical student, Martin occupies a unique position in the modern United States' expanding medical industrial complex of physicians, hospitals, universities, and state agents. As a medical student of marrying age, Martin's narrative emphasizes the tension between his ambition to become a renowned research scientist and his personal desire for a traditional domestic life to critique the ideological and institutional structures which informed the expansion U.S. medical imperialism in the twentieth century. The oscillation of literary romance and realism which marks Lewis's midwestern modernism thus points to the region's history as a center of state knowledge and power production. By presenting Martin's interpersonal relationships as repeatedly impeding the fulfillment of his life goals, Lewis's bestselling doctor novel registers the disillusionment and cynicism typically associated with the Lost Generation's critiques of turn of the century U.S. literary realism and romantic idealism. As this cynicism emerges as a result of the Midwestern Martin's international encounters, *Arrowsmith* advances a

[295] Under Dr. Wesbrook, the state board of health promoted the adoption of legislation for public health policies, including sanitariums and treatment for tuberculosis patients, indigent children, and mental illness (Wilson, 124-140), setting the precedents for the Minnesota legislature's reliance on the university's laboratories in policy-making throughout the Progressive era. For more information see: Molly Ladd-Taylor, "'Ravished by Some Moron:' The Eugenic Origins of the Minnesota Psychopathic Personality Act of 1939," in *Journal of Policy History*, 31.2 (April, 2019), pp. 192-216; Mark Soderstram, "Family Trees and Timber Rights: Albert E. Jenks, Americanization, and the Rise of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota," in *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 3.2 (April, 2004), pp. 176-204.

cosmopolitan critique of the nation-state's imperial expansion by detailing the extents and limitations of his suspended agency as a medical scientist in the United States' bureaucratic pursuit of global public health in the Progressive era.

Lewis affirms the modern culture of scientific professionalism as the key to U.S. strategies for social reform when Martin returns to Winnemac State from Montana to take a class with Dr. Max Gottlieb that precipitates the demise of his relationship with Madeline Fox. Following to the gothic scene that establishes Gottlieb's status as a romantic hero, the narrative assimilation of realism and romance underscores the global impact of modern bacteriology when the narrator describes how Martin

> had begun, perhaps in youthful imitation of Gottlieb, to work by himself in the laboratory at night. … The long room was dark, thick dark, but for the gas-mantle behind his microscope. The cone of light cast a gloss on the bright brass tube a sheen on his black hair, as he bent over the eyepiece.[296]

Similar to his first encounter with Gottlieb, following the ellipses which mark the narrator's slippage from realist characterization to romantic description, Martin's reverence for Gottlieb's gospel of scientific technique is palpable, despite its unpopularity among the Winnemac medical community. Moreover, in the description of the "eight-branched rosette stained with a polychrome methylene blue; a cluster of organisms delicate as a narcissus, with their purple nuclei, their light blue cells, and the thin lines of the flagella" Martin is studying under the microscope, Lewis transforms the stained glass germ plate into a handheld version of the stained glass rose window at the Notre-Dame in Paris.[297] In doing so, the assimilation of realism and romance here asserts the

[296] *AS*, 36.
[297] *AS*, 37.

epistemological and formal parity of the modern research scientist and artistic aesthetics. Noticing Martin's beautifully stained germ plate, for example, Gottlieb exclaims "Splendid! You have craftsmanship. Oh, there is an art in science—for a few," and suggests the lifesaving potential of such a practiced technique: "[P]erhaps you may try the trypanosomes of sleeping sickness. They are very, very interesting and very, very ticklish to handle. […] In some villages in Africa, fifty percent of the people have it, and it is invariably fatal. Yes. I think you might work on the bugs."[298]

Insofar as Martin's return to campus elevates Gottlieb's status in the text from romantic hero to a globetrotting scientific demigod, *Arrowsmith* goes beyond demonstrating the potential power of laboratory science in the domestic United States to illuminate the geopolitical significance of Gottlieb's scientific skillset. For instance, impressed by the rosette on his germ plate Gottlieb invites him back to his office for a midnight sandwich and opens a rose window to the world for Martin: "He summoned forth London laboratories, dinners on frost evenings, in Stockholm, walks on the Pincio with sunset behind the dome of San Pietro, extreme danger and overpowering disgust from excreta-smeared garments in an epidemic in Marseilles."[299] With the international scope of Gottlieb's work coming into focus, Lewis emphasizes the cynical worldview that attends his cosmopolitan pursuit of scientific knowledge when Gottlieb explains that

> [t]here is but one trouble of a philosophical bacteriologist. Why should we destroy these amiable pathogenic germs? Are we too sure, when we regard these oh, most unbeautiful young students attending Y.M.C.A.'s […]—iss it worth while [*sic*] to protect them from the so elegantly functioning *Bacillus typhosus*, with its lovely flagella? You know, I once asked Dean

[298] *AS*, 37.
[299] *AS*, 37.

> Silva would it not be better to let loose the pathogenic germs on the world, and so solve all economic questions? But he did not care for my met'od.[300]

In this way, similar to the romantic Montana vista that drives Martin's return to medical school, this scene underscores the political power of his field of study. Unlike the previous scene, however, Gottlieb's cynical suggestion undermines the romance associated with both his character and the pursuit of U.S. empire by articulating the text's central dilemma. That is, the question of the medical scientist's greater obligation to his craft or to his fellow human beings.

Critics typically read the novel's domestic scenes as critiques of the capitalist corruption of Gottlieb's brand of rational medical science in the Progressive-era United States.[301] But as this scene foregrounds the question of the medical research scientist's greater obligations to science or society, it is scientific rationalism itself that emerges as the object of critique in *Arrowsmith*. To this end, when Martin makes "bacteriology all of his life," the realist narrative form reveals how his commitment to scientific technique damages his interpersonal relationships. For example, as the narrator explains that Martin "had learned from Gottlieb the trick of using the word 'control' […] as a standard for comparison; and there is no trick more infuriating," Lewis animates the competition between rational science and homeopathic approaches to modern medical education, and

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[300] *AS*, 38.

[301] In particular, see: Michael Augsburger, "Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth*," in *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 34.2 (Spring, 2001), pp. 73-97; Everett Hamner, "Damning Fundamentalism: Sinclair Lewis and the Trials of Fiction," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 55.2 (Summer, 2009), pp. 265-292; Ilana Löwy, "Immunology and Literature in the Early Twentieth Century: *Arrowsmith* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*," in *Medical History*, 32.3 (July, 1988), pp. 314-332. Charles E. Rosenburg makes this argument in his essay "Martin Arrowsmith: The Scientist as Hero," in *American Quarterly* 15.3 (Autumn, 1963), pp. 447-458.

articulates its negative influence on his reputation: "When a physician boasted of his success with this drug or that electric cabinet, Gottlieb always snorted, 'Where was your control?' […] Now Martin began to mouth it—control, control, control, where's your control?—till most of his fellows and a few of his instructors desired to lynch him."[302]

When Martin's professional ambitions result in his isolation from his colleagues at Winnemac, he turns to Madeline Fox for sympathy and companionship. In an anticlimactic albeit romantic scene staged in the rooftop garden of Madeline's apartment overlooking Mohalis, Martin proposes to her: "I almost feel as if I dared to love you. You're going to marry me [.] By thunder, with you helping me, I'm going to climb to the top!"[303] However, when the narrator explains that "[i]t cannot be said, in this biography of a young man who was in no degree a hero, who regarded himself as a seeker of truth yet […] bogged himself down in every obvious morass, that Martin's intentions toward Madeline Fox were what is called 'honorable,'" Lewis both explicates the formal conceit of his Martin's modernist bildungsroman, and sets bout imagining how the medical researcher's commitment to rational science, ironically, results in the irrational and even inhumane treatment of the human beings whose interests he is supposed to have at heart.[304]

For instance, despite the eagerness with which Martin initially pursues Madeline, he loses his romantic interest in her when he is appointed as Gottlieb's undergraduate research assistant in his junior year and meets Leora Tozer. A nursing student from the

[302] *AS*, 40.
[303] *AS*, 47.
[304] *AS*, 43.

small town of Wheatsylvania, North Dakota in residence at the Zenith General Hospital, Leora emerges as an immediate foil to Madeline thanks to her "vulgar, jocular, unreticent" personality compared to Madeline's urban-educated literary pretentions.[305] When he takes her to an out of the way Zenith restaurant later that evening, it also becomes clear that Martin is attracted to Leora because of her appreciation for his work with Max Gottlieb. Where for "Madeline, Gottlieb was a wicked old man who made fun of the sanctities of Marriage and Easter lilies" by keeping Martin busy for long hours in the lab, Leora "glowed as Martin banged the table and quoted his idol."[306] After dining together only twice more in as many weeks, Martin proposes to Leora, and the narrator explains that "[b]y any canon of respectable behavior Martin should have felt like a low dog," but instead devises an experiment in which he invites the women "to lunch together, tell them the truth, and see which of them loved him" more.[307]

Emphasizing the global implications of his personal and professional ambitions, Martin's experiment is set in Zenith's Grand Hotel, "an oriental palace [with] a score of brick Moorish arches" and "select views of Pompeii, Venice, Lake Como, and Versailles" on the walls.[308] When Martin introduces the women, Lewis's realist narrative form recapitulates the East-West geographical and social hierarchy in the twentieth-century United States as Madeline impresses her superiority upon Leora by inquiring:

> 'Do you come from Zenith, Miss—Tozer?'
> 'No, I come from—Just a little town. Well, hardly a town… North Dakota.'
> 'Oh! North Dakota!'

[305] *AS*, 54.
[306] *AS*, 57.
[307] *AS*, 62.
[308] *AS*, 67.

> ‘Yes… Way West.’
> ‘Oh yes… Are you staying East from some time?’ […]
> ‘Oh, yes, it’s pretty nice. These big cities—So much to see.’
> ‘“Big”? Well, I suppose it all depends on the point of view, *doesn’t* it? I always think of New York as big but—Of course—Do you find the contrast to North Dakota interesting?’ […]
> ‘Well, it’s got lots of wheat and lots of Swedes.[309]

Convinced of North Dakota’s immigrant farmers’ inferiority to the “Eastern” city of Zenith, Madeline turns “patronizingly” to Martin to ask, “Are you planning some more work on the what-is-it with rabbits?”[310] As this line of questioning underscores Madeline’s ultimate disregard for his laboratory work, Martin grows exasperated and confesses to his ongoing experiment with the women at the Grand: “Madeline! Brought you two together […] because I’ve—I’m not making any excuses for myself. I couldn’t help it. I’m engaged to both of you, and I want to know—"[311] Without allowing Martin to finish his statement, Madeline answers his research question as she “spr[ings] up […] stared at them, and walked away wordless” before coming back to the table to express her sympathy for Leora’s future as Martin’s wife.[312]

As Madeline affirms both her sense of self-worth and her identification with the United States’ elite eastern establishment, she leaves Leora and Martin free to forge ahead from the Grand Hotel to the new scientific and geographic frontiers associated with Western states in the text. Despite Leora’s support of his scientific work, however, their relationship challenges Martin’s professional development. When Leora is called back to North Dakota to care for her sick mother, for instance, a distracted and lonely Martin is

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[309] *AS*, 68, *emphasis original*.
[310] *AS*, 69.
[311] *AS*, 69.
[312] *AS,* 69.

fired from his laboratory job for mistakenly bringing Gottlieb six female instead of the requested six male rabbits to run an experiment. Falling victim to the same kind of disregard for human emotion which inspired his own experiment with being engaged to two women at once, Martin decides to quit medical school altogether. However, after a few months of "crazy drifiting," the narrator characterizes the romantic impulse which brings him "westward, and to the west," where "in the long prairie dusk, Leora was waiting" and, almost as suddenly as he left Winnemac University, Martin "woke up […] with his mind running clear, 'Why shouldn't I go back? Maybe [medical school] hasn't been so bad for me. […] Will they ever let me do research again?"[313]

As he returns to medical school and elopes with Leora after graduation, Lewis sets about exposing the mutually constitutive expansion of the United States' medical and political sovereignty visavis the pursuit of public health in the industrializing Midwest through Martin's career trajectory. Initially bored by his first job as a country physician in Leora's North Dakota hometown, Martin's role in curing outbreak of blackleg disease among the local cattle reignites his passion for bacteriological research and inspires him to take volunteer for a new position as the Superintendent of Health for Crynssen County, and solidifies his status as a combined medical-state authority. Despite never being officially appointed, in keeping with the ad-hoc nature of rural development "the Board of County Commissioners recognized Martin's limited power" when he begins setting new standards of public health by "pok[ing] into yards, denounc[ing] Mrs. Beeson for her reeking ash barrels, Mr. Norblom for piling manure in the street, and the school-board for

[313] *AS*, 96.

the school ventilation and lack of instruction in tooth-brushing."[314] Alongside these sanitation efforts, as Superintendent of Health Martin is also tasked with eradicating an outbreak of typhoid that illuminates the expanding bureaucratic network that undergirds his medical sovereignty. As his research reveals that most of the typhoid cases "appeared after the visits of an itinerant seamstress" who is well-loved by the community, Martin calls in "the township police officer and had the seamstress arrested and confined in the segregation ward of the county poor-farm."[315] When Martin's reputation starts to suffer as a result of this decision, the narrator explains that

> Leora saved him and the seamstress. 'Why not take up a collection to send her off to some big hospital where she can be treated, or where they can keep her if she can't be cured?' said she.
>
> The seamstress entered a sanitarium – and was amiably forgotten by everyone for the rest of her life—and his recent enemies said of Martin, 'He's mighty smart, and right on the job.'[316]

As this episode call attention to the combined professional, state, and private resources that both to eliminate threats to public health and increase Martin's influence in local life, Lewis dramatizes how modern medicine came to be understood as means for improving public welfare in the early twentieth-century United States. However, despite the ways in which Martin's ascendance to a state authority is facilitated by his romance with Leora, as Martin advances through the Midwest's expanding medical infrastructure it becomes clear that his professional success will not be replicated in his personal life when Leora nearly dies after miscarrying the couple's first and only child. Afraid of life

[314] *AS*, 184.
[315] *AS*, 185.
[316] *AS*, 187.

without Leora, after her miscarriage Martin explains, "We'll just have to make up our minds that we never can have a baby now, and so I want—Oh […] to you, I want to be everything."[317] When Leora agrees that "if [she] can't have a real baby, I'll have to bring you up. Make you a great man that everybody will wonder at," Lewis underscores the romantic foundation for Martin's professional success even as the realist episode forecloses the possibility that he will ever become both a renowned researcher and domestic patriarch.[318] In this way, *Arrowsmith* not only reifies the tensions between professional and personal ambitions for the modern medical professional, but also opens critical space to examine how Martin and Leora's romantic dedication to his career is implicated in the global expansion of U.S. sovereignty in the Progressive era.

If Leora's miscarriage functions as Martin's personal inspiration to pursue his dream of becoming a great man of science, his ambition is also guided by professional role models, including his fallen idol Dr. Max Gottlieb, and the Swedish bacteriologist Dr. Gustaf Sondelius. Martin discovers that the world-famous Sondelius is on an American lecture tour "shout[ing] in high places and low, that most diseases could be and must be wiped out; that tuberculosis, cancer, typhoid, the plague, influenza, were an invading army against which the world must mobilize" while reading a Wheatsylvania newspaper and decides to attend one of the lectures at the University of Minnesota.[319] Considering his experience with Dr. Gottlieb, when he arrives in Minneapolis the realist

[317] *AS*, 172.
[318] *AS*, 172-3.
[319] *AS*, 169-70.

narrator records Martin's anxiety that "the Sondelius lecture will be rotten," but when he enters the theater the narrator adopts a romantic register to describe how

> [T]he room was charged with vitality. Down the central aisle, ineffectively attended by a small fussy person, thundered a man with a smile [.] Martin sat straight […] as Sondelius launched out […] with Swedish pronunciation and Swedish singsong:
>
> 'The medical profession can have but one desire: to destroy the medical profession. As for the laymen, they can be sure of but one thing: nine-tenths of what they know about health is not so, and with the other tenth, they do nothing. As Butler shows in 'Erewhom' […] the only crime for w'ich we should hang people is having toobercoolosis'[320]

Where this scene's realism emphasizes the Sondelius's foreignness on the Midwestern scene, as the narrator describes how Sondelius's lecture transports Martin to "a Mexican port stilled with the plague and famished beneath the virulent sun; with him he rode up the mountain trails to a hill town rotted with typhus" to help heal the village, the romantic narrative form reiterates the global contexts that inspired Martin's pursuit of bacteriology at Winnemac State.[321] Moreover, when the narrator records Martin's enthusiastic response to Sondelius's lecture, "That's what I want to do! Not just tinker at a lot of worn-out bodies but make a new world" through the pursuit of rational science, the narrative emphasizes the political influence which attends his renewed ambition to become a bacteriologist. In doing so, like the scene in Gottlieb's lab which awakens Martin to the power of the medical scientist, Sondelius's lecture imagines the global influence of which modern U.S. medical professionals.

[320] *AS*, 180.
[321] *AS*, 181.

The Ideological Foundations of Martin Arrowsmith's Professional Patriotism: World-Salvation and the Roots of U.S. Medical Imperialism in the Flexner Report

As various medical and scientific historians have demonstrated, the intellectual shifts that precipitated the public health interests that drive Sondelius, Gottlieb, and Martin's laboratory research careers emerged in the United States in the 1880s and 1890s, and contributed to the overall climate of reform in modern medical education.[322] In 1910, the publication of Abraham Flexner's seminal *Report on Medical Education and Canada* normalized the role of laboratory and clinical research in U.S medical schools through its ideological emphasis on the medical profession as a primarily "social organ" that is actively engaged in "promoting health, physical vigor, and happiness—and the economic independence and efficiency immediately connected with these factors" for the general public.[323] Given its emphasis on the contemporary medical professional's function in the service of the public good, the *Report* stresses the joint responsibility of educational institutions, doctors, and state legislatures to enact its suggestions for reform. In in this way, the *Flexner Report* naturalized both the bureaucratic relationship between universities, physicians, and government which shaped the state of Minnesota's progressive approach to public health at the turn-of-the-century, and the conception of

[322] E. Richard Brown, *Rockefeller Medicine Men: Medicine and Capitalism in America* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 60-134; Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Fourth Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 52-91 and 111-134; Kenneth M. Ludlermer, *Learning to Heal: The Development of American Medical Education* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 29-138; William G. Rothstein; *American Medical Schools and the Practice of Medicine: A History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 65-116.

[323] Flexner, *Medical Education*, 42.

public health-oriented medical professionalism which structured that bureaucracy in the Progressive era.

To support the bureaucratic model of public health for which it advocated, the *Flexner Report* called for a new attitude of "educational patriotism on the part of the institutions of learning" and a "medical" or "professional patriotism amongst medical men" that empowered non-government organizations and individuals to understand themselves as moral and political agents capable of using their scientific to the benefit of the twentieth-century world.[324] Defined in the *Report* as the "duty of loyalty to the standards of common honesty, of intellectual sincerity, of scientific accuracy," and "the sort of regard for the honor of the profession and that sense of responsibility for its efficiency which will enable a member of that profession to rise above the consideration of personal or professional gain," *Arrowsmith* articulates this model of professional patriotism when Martin and Sondelius discuss the state of their profession.[325] While talking with Martin after his lecture at the University of Minnesota, Sondelius expresses his admiration for Dr. Gottlieb as "[t]he greatest! The spirit of science! I had the pleasure to talk with him at McGurk. He would not sit here bawling like me! He makes me a circus clown! He takes all my statements about epidemiology and shows me I am a fool!"[326] As Sondelius's respect for Gottlieb demonstrates his personal humility in the

[324] For definitive studies on the role of medical science and expertise in the expansion of U.S. imperialism, see: Rosemary A. Stevens, *History and Health Policy in the United States: Putting the Past Back In* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2006) pp. 49-79; Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010) pp. 11-119, as well as Richard Brown's *Rockefeller Medicine Men*, previously cited in this chapter.

[325] Pritchett, "Introduction" to *Medical Education*, xiii.

[326] Lewis, *AS*, 182.

face of scientific rationalism, Martin's admiration for Sondelius grows when he declares that "he did not care whether he worked under socialism or an emperor so long as he could bully people into being well."[327] As he is inspired to undertake the job of Superintendent of Health for Crynssen County after "tearfully swearing to meet [Sondelius] again, in Minnesota or in Stockholm, or in Rio or on the southern seas," Lewis dramatizes Martin's renewed sense of medical professional patriotism and foreshadows the global trajectory of his career. [328]

To the extent that Sondelius, Martin, and the *Flexner Report*'s conceptions of medical professionalism reflect their dedication to the value of scientific rationalism over their own self-interests or a particular nation-state for the sake of improving social welfare, it becomes clear that the term "professional patriotism" draws on the internationalist discourse of Progressive-era "world-salvation." That is, as the historian Nathan Cadle has explained, an impulse among American progressives to extend the Christian universalism of the Social Gospel "to its logical conclusion and designate the United States […] as a site of hope for the whole world's future."[329] However, as the *Flexner Report* leverages the power of the state to support and oversee the education of medical professionals in the interest of public health, the "patriotism" of educational and professional patriotism more than a euphemism for "ardent dedication." It is also an explicit acknowledgement of the nation-state's central role in determining the kinds of expert knowledge that might be pursued, what classes of people might pursue it, and to

[327] *AS*, 184.
[328] *AS*, 184.
[329] Nathan Cadle, *The Mediating Nation: Late American Realism, Globalization, and the Progressive State.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 49.

what ends it might be used. In this way, the *Flexner Report*'s deployment of "educational" and "professional patriotism" did more than establish the power of domestic legislatures to create a new standard of public health in the United States. It anticipated the sovereign potential of the U.S. nation-state to universalize its standards of public health at a much broader scale:

> The right of the state to deal with the entire subject in its own interest can assuredly not be gainsaid. The physician is a social instrument. […] It matters not that the making of doctors has been to some extent left to private institutions. The state already makes certain regulations; it can by the same right make others.[330]

While medical historians have debated the exact extent of *The Flexner Report*'s impact on medical education in the modern United States, there is little doubt regarding the *Report* and its lead author Abraham Flexner's significant ideological influence on the United States' reputation as a global leader medical science and technology. After the *Report*'s publication in 1910 and the release of a sequel study of European medical education two years later, in 1913 Flexner was appointed Secretary of the General Education Board, the non-government organization that John D. Rockefeller funded and staffed beginning in 1902. Until Flexner's retirement in 1926 the GEB channeled millions of federal and philanthropic dollars into universities within the United States, but its influence extended beyond the domestic sphere as the GEB allocated the capital for global public health campaigns as the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's campaign for the Eradication of Hookworm in the U.S. South and Caribbean, as well as the Rockefeller Foundation's International Health Division's campaigns for the study of yellow fever and

[330] Flexner, *Report on Medical Education*, 154.

malaria in South America and Europe.[331] As a result, by the time the International Health Division began its public health research in the Caribbean in 1914, the presence of U.S. doctors, nurses, and medical researchers abroad was nothing especially new. What was new, however, was the implicit support of the federal government via the GEB, which presented the pursuit of global public health as the primary cause, concern, and responsibility of U.S. scientists in the nation's effort to eradicate of imperial despotism in the twentieth century.[332]

Lewis's interest in critiquing the influence of private capital and government corruption on research science is palpable throughout *Arrowsmith*, especially following Martin's appointment to Superintendent of Health for Crynssen County when his sense of professional patriotism is met with the disdain of area locals who argue, "Who does he think he is? We call him for doctoring, not for bossing! Why, the damn fool said we ought to burn down our houses—said we were committing a crime if we had

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[331] Martin Bulmer and Joan Bulmer, "Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefller memorial, 1922-29" in *Minerva*, 19.3 (September, 1981), pp. 347-407; Ilana Löwy, "Epidemiology, Immunology, and Yellow Fever: The Rockefeller Foundation in Brazil, 1923-1939" in *Journal of the History of Biology*, 30.3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 349-417; Steven Palmer, "Toward Responsibility in International Health: Death Following Treatment in Rockefeller Hookworm Campaigns, 1914-1934" in *Medical History*, 54.2 (April, 2010), pp. 149-170.

[332] The microbiologist Paul De Kruif provided much of Lewis's inspiration for the character of Martin Arrowsmith. A Michigan native who earned his PhD in bacteriology at the University of Michigan, De Kruif began his own writing career after being fired from the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in New York City when it was discovered that he was the author of an article that critiqued the institution for its capitalist corruption of scientific research. After befriending De Kruif shortly after his firing from the Rockefeller Institute, Lewis invited him to retrace his previous research expeditions in the Caribbean in the spring of 1922 as research for the novel that would become *Arrowsmith*. For more on Lewis's relationship with De Kruif, see: James M. Hutchisson, *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920-1930* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 91-124; Robert Lingeman, *Sinclair Lewis: A Rebel from Main Street* (New York City: Random House, 2002), 218-27; for more on De Kruif's scientific career, see: Robin Marantz Henig, "The Life and Legacy of Paul de Kruif." *Bringing Science to the People*, The Alicia Patterson Foundation, 2001. https://aliciapatterson.org/stories/life-and-legacy-paul-de-kruif (Accessed 11 January 2021); Jan Peter Verhave, "Paul de Kruif: A Michigan Leader in Public Health," in *Michigan Historical Review*, 39.1 (Spring, 2013), pp. 41-69.

[tuberculosis] here! Won't stand for nobody talking to me like that!"[333] Attributing his North Dakota constituents' disregard for his scientific expertise to their provincial lifestyles and lack of education, Martin writes to Sondelius, who informs him of an opening for an Assistant Director of Public Health in the much larger city of Nautilus, Iowa. Although he eagerly applies for and accepts the position, after only a year of working under the doctor *cum* politician Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, whose interest in orchestrating choral concerts to promote toothbrushing campaigns and boost his popularity takes precedent to his role as a protector of the public against illness, Martin becomes disillusioned by working in the public sphere and returns to the private sector first as a bacteriologist at the Rouncefield Clinic in Chicago, and then, finally, as a microbiologist at the McGurk Institute for Biology in New York City. Modeled on the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, becoming a researcher at McGurk exposes the bureaucratic relationship between private capital, national governments, and medical science which structured the United States' expanding sphere of political influence in the Progressive era.

"And Probably We'll Fail:" Arrowsmith's Imperial Romance as Cosmopolitan Critique

When he invites him to work as a researcher at McGurk, Martin forgives Gottlieb for firing him as a medical student and their working relationship is immediately rekindled by their shared belief in the McGurk Institute's mission to use rational science

[333] Lewis, *AS*, 170.

to expand human knowledge and control over the natural world. With Martin and Gottlieb reunited by their sense of scientific professional patriotism, the narrative shifts from a realist exposé of the commercial corruption of laboratory science within the domestic United States to an imperial romance that exposes what Amy Kaplan has called the anarchy of empire to critique the bureaucratic expansion of U.S. imperialism. Soon after Martin begins research on a bacteriophage to cure bubonic plague, the Institute receives a letter from an American missionary doctor named Stokes based on the Caribbean island of St. Hubert explaining that a "plague was ready to flare up and consume all the West Indies, and would Dr. Gottlieb do something about it."[334] In the account of how the disease traveled from "Yunnan in China, from the clattering bright bazaars […] creeping across the Himalayas, down through walled market-places, across a desert, along hot yellow rivers, into an American missionary compound" before arriving in St. Hubert by way of rats onboard a cargo ship from Bombay that landed in Marseilles and Montevideo, the romantic narrative form identifies the structures of global market capitalism as the source of the island's contagion while the realism of Dr. Stokes's missive identifies the U.S.-based research scientists as the island's only hope for salvation.[335] In this assimilation of literary romance and realism, the narrative of Martin's subsequent journey to the Caribbean exposes the failure of U.S. scientific progressivism to make lasting improvements to the human condition in the world at large.

[334] *AS*, 347.
[335] *AS*, 339.

In her monograph *The Anarchy of Empire* Kaplan analyzes how representations of the failures of Anglo-European empire in American literature, journalism, and film – especially the spectacle violence of starving, enslaved, or rebellious native populations – reflected the anarchy which the institution of U.S. economic and political influence was meant to resolve.[336] In doing so, she shows how the assimilation of realism and romance in turn-of-the-century cultural texts promoted the contradictory values of national expansionism and anti-imperialism in the United States' pursuit of empire. In *Arrowsmith*, Lewis represents the transitional anarchy and romance of U.S. empire in the historical narrative of St. Hubert,

> a little isle of the southern West Indies [which] supports a hundred thousand people […] Here the buccaneers careened their ships [.]
>
> Hither that peasant beau, Gaston Lopo, brought Madame de Merlemont, and dwelt in fashionableness till the slaves whom he had relished to lash came on him shaving and straightway the lather was fantastically smeared with blood.
>
> Today, St. Hubert is all sugar-cane and Ford cars, oranges and plantains and the red and yellow pods of cocoa, bananas and rubber trees and jungles of bamboo, […] and the immortelle that fills the valleys with crimson; today it is all splendor and tourist dullness and cabled cane-quotations, against the unsparing sun.[337]

Coupled with the Dr. Stokes's realist call for help with the current plague, the narrative of island's transformation from a European colony into a romantic postcard image defined by American commercial and philanthropic agents dramatizes how U.S. commercialism merely supplants one imperial hegemon for another. As the narrative of Martin's journey expands on this theme by emphasizing the personal and political interests which motivate

[336]Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002 (92-170).

[337] Lewis, *AS*, 340-41.

the McGurk Institute's desire to help the islanders in the first place, Lewis undermines the ideology of U.S. professional patriotism as a means to political reform and social uplift.

For example, after receiving Dr. Stokes' call for help, Gottlieb explains that "[i]f I could trust you, Martin, to use the phage with only half your patients and keep the others as controls, […], then you could make an absolute determination of its value […] and then I would send you down to St. Hubert."[338] Ever the scientific professional patriot, Martin "[swears] by Jacques Loeb that he would observe test conditions" and vows to "determine the value of the phage," committing himself to the professional pursuit of scientific accuracy.[339] Although St. Hubert emerges as a strictly experimental field in the researchers' scientific worldview, the narrative precludes any presumption of scientific disinterestedness on the part of Max Gottlieb in light of the commercial and political interests of his employer, Ross McGurk, the owner and founder of the McGurk Institute. Before Martin answers Gottlieb's call to work, for example, the narrator explains that

> [t]he letter from Dr. Stokes was not the only intimation that plague was striding through St. Hubert … Ross McGurk was an emperor of the new era, better served than any cloistered satrap of old. His skippers looked in at a hundred ports, his railroads penetrated jungles; his correspondents whispered to him of the next election in Colombia, of the Cuban cane-crop [.] Ross McGurk, and after him Max Gottlieb, knew better than did the [the locals] how much plague there was in St. Hubert.[340]

Given his privileged position in the global hierarchy of modern medical science, the narrative underscores the popular belief in Gottlieb's acute moral responsibility to

[338] *AS*, 348.
[339] *AS*, 397.
[340] *AS*, 347.

intervene in the island's public health crisis**:** "Letter's demanded of Gottlieb: 'Can you stand by, with the stuff of salvation in your hands, and watch thousands of these unfortunate people dying in St. Hubert [?] My dear man this is the time to come out of your scientific reverie and act!'"[341] However, it is not until Ross McGurk himself steps in and explains to Gottlieb, the narrator describes, "over a comfortable steak … not too diffidently, that this was the opportunity for the Institute to acquire world fame" that he is prompted to call on Martin to test his vaccine.[342]

Having undercut the moral and scientific virtues of his mission, when Martin arrives in St. Hubert accompanied by Leora and Gustaf Sondelius to "determine the value of his phage," the narrative forecloses the possibility of achieving his larger goal of "perhaps end[ing] all plague forever" through the processes of rational science.[343] For instance, drawing on one of the central tropes of popular U.S. imperial romance novels in which the national hero falls in love in the colonial periphery to symbolize the success of the imperial project, Martin and Leora rediscover the passion their early relationship on board a McGurk steamer bound for the Caribbean. However, when Leora dies soon after their arrival in St. Hubert after contracting the plague from a cigarette left near an experimental vile in Martin's lab, Lewis subverts the imperial romance trope when the narrator explains: "Then he went to pieces [….] Because death had for the first time been brought to him, he raged […] 'What do I care for your science?' […] Martin had a bitter satisfaction in throwing away all his significance, in helping to wreck his own

[341] *AS*, 348.
[342] *AS*, 348.
[343] *AS*, 397 and 348.

purposes."[344] As he sets about "wreck[ing] his own purposes" by abandoning his commitment to the scientific accuracy of his experiment, the narrator explains that Martin gives his vaccine to everyone on the island who wants it. Although the islanders are more grateful to receive his vaccine than they are invested in the accuracy of his test, as the narrator describes Martin sitting alone at night, "drinking steadily, living on whisky and hate," the Lewis articulates the newfound cynicism of his privileged position in the United States' nascent medical empire: "He had an advantage over normal cautious humanity in not caring whether he lived or died."[345]

By exposing the emotional shortcomings of the United States' modern imperial hero, Martin's professional unraveling also advances a critique of rational science as a means to creating meaningful social change that takes its final form in Martin's second failed imperial romance with the wealthy American widow, Joyce Lanyon. As the narrator explains that Joyce had gone to St. Hubert "to see [the] plantations" she inherited from her first husband, the imperial implications of her presence and flirtations with Martin are clear from the outset.[346] After a brief courtship in New York City upon their return to the United States, Martin marries Joyce and enables him to realize the dream of becoming as a world-traveling scientist as the couple travels Europe together until he resumes work at McGurk. When he is offered the position of Director following Gottlieb's sudden death, Joyce builds him a state-of-the-art laboratory at their glamorous New York apartment. But, rather than sharing in Joyce's excitement, Martin "saw that

[344] *AS*, 393.
[345] *AS*, 393.
[346] *AS*, 384.

with all her eager complaisances she never understood what he was up to, had not comprehended the murderous effect of the directorship on Gottlieb," nor his resistance to the idea of becoming "a stuffed shirt" whose job is to fund and approve new experiments to raise the McGurk Institute's international esteem, and decides to end his marriage and retire from public life altogether.[347]

The decision to divorce Joyce and retire from professional research underscores the narrative's affective transformation from a celebration of scientific rationalism to a cynical critique of scientific progressivism. This critique is the ultimate product of Martin's evolution from a naïve medical student at Winnemac State to a world-worn agent of empire upon his return from St. Hubert. Unlike Gottlieb, Martin's acute awareness of the human cost of his commitment to scientific rationalism does not activate any meaningful sense of hope or renewal for the future in the novel's falling action. Rather, as he rejects the directorship and his new marriage in favor of joining an old college friend at a remote cabin in rural Vermont, where he intends to divide his time between fishing and puttering about in a private laboratory researching purely personal curiosities, Martin embodies the novel's critique of modern scientific rationalism as a means to effect any material social change in a world organized according to the principles of commercial capitalism and imperial expansion. In the novel's final scene, for example, as he "[lolls] about in a clumsy boat, an extraordinarily uncomfortable boat, far out on the water," rather than signaling his status as an imperial provocateur, Martin's rejoice in the idea that "probably we'll fail!" to make any more scientific discoveries

[347] *AS*, 443.

underscores his and the novel's cosmopolitan cynicism regarding the progressive ideals associated with scientific rationalism.[348]

In this context, similar to how Carol's selective participation in Gopher Prairie's commercial cultural economy signals her suspended agency in the United States' consumers' imperium in *Main Street*, Martin's decision to extricate himself from public life at the novel's end embodies *Arrowsmith*'s cosmopolitan critique by exposing the scientific professional's suspended agency in the nation's expanding medical empire. By foregrounding the romantic aspirations associated with modern medicine's potential to safeguard humanity against environmental disease in its realist exposition of the scientific researcher's imbrication in the institutional structures of empire throughout the text, the narrative undermines the modern scientist as a symbol of U.S. progressivism. In doing so, the novel does not celebrate Martin's cynical withdrawal to simpler life so much as it presents the decision as the only viable means of reconcile his belief in the value of scientific experimentation with his world-worn understanding of rational science's inability to protect modern society from a world structured by imperialist design.

[348] *AS*, 450.

Part III

Midwesterners Abroad: Heartland Cosmopolitanism in *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth*

Where the city of Chicago's unprecedented growth inspired an earlier generation of midwestern writers to craft celebratory narratives about the new opportunities the industrial nation offered to countless numbers of urban migrants, Cather and Lewis reject the Chicago School's assumption that rural Midwest's hinterland status made it a less powerful site of self- and community-making. Certainly, Lewis's domestic disillusionment with the promises of U.S. progressivism is different from Cather's commitment to the recuperative power of art to imagine humane alternatives to the expansion of the United States' commercial cultural empire. But their shared interest in representing the transnational communities and economies that structured the Midwest's growth in the Progressive era produced the cosmopolitan style of midwestern modernism that uses the hinterland region as a meaningful site of critique and resistance to the oppressive cultures of U.S. commercial capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism. By revising the region's symbolic form and function in this way, Cather and Lewis's critical cosmopolitanism not only revolutionized the representation of midwestern characters and landscapes, it also located native-born Midwesterners and their ostensibly provincial region within the global flows that shaped the development in U.S. literary modernism. In doing so, they contributed to the development of a regional style of modernist cosmopolitanism that I call heartland cosmopolitanism, in which the presence of people, goods, and ideas from around the world in the small-town Midwest initiates a literary critique of the modern United States' imperial nation-state.

In their representations of the domestic United States, this heartland cosmopolitanism results in the representation of Midwesterners whose sense of self is contingent upon their relationship to a variety of social and cultural forms which reveal the inadequacies of the modern United States as an example of a progressive liberal democracy. As they expanded their repertoires to represent international spaces in later texts like *One of Ours* (1922) and *Dodsworth* (1929), Cather and Lewis's heartland cosmopolitanism sends native-born Midwesterners abroad to expose the failure of the United States' progressive political and economic expansion to impart the power of individual sovereignty, and to curtail the violence of class conflict on a global scale. In *One of Ours*, for instance, Cather exposes the domestic costs of the United States' effort to keep the world safe for democracy in World War I through the representation of Nebraskan Claude Wheeler's search for purpose and direction by marrying the Christian missionary Enid Royce and then joining the U.S. army in 1917. Similarly, in *Dodsworth* Lewis dramatizes the United States' failure to reinvent the imperialist world-order to which its progressive expansion was ostensibly opposed through the representation of Zenith's leading industrial magnate Sam Dodsworth's effort to reinvent himself following his divorce from his wife Fran during an extended European tour to celebrate his retirement in the late 1920s. Like their earlier works, in *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth* Cather and Lewis's heartland cosmopolitanism illuminates the Midwest's relationship to the global community to critique the free market economics that the Wilson administration claimed would keep the world safe for democracy long before officially declaring war with Germany on April 6, 1917. But where *The Song of the Lark*, *My*

Ántonia, *Main Street*, and *Arrowsmith* emphasize the disorienting effects of immigration, industrialization, and the rise of global market capitalism on the experience of everyday life in the Midwest, *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth* dramatize the disillusionment of the everyday Midwesterners who benefitted from these phenomena and set out to see the world.

As in *The Song of the Lark* and *My Ántonia*, in *One of Ours* (1922) Cather lodges her cosmopolitan critique of the United States' imperial expansion through protagonist Claude Wheeler's queer performance of his national and gender identity. Beyond the oft-commented on queerness that is manifest in his chaste, seemingly loveless marriage to Enid Royce and the homosocial relationships he enjoys as a soldier in France, Claude's trans-national identity is represented early in the text in the contrast between himself and other male members of his family. For example, while his father Nat is an archetypal pioneer and Midwestern booster, with a "State-of-Maine drawl" and personal and financial investment in building up the Lovely Creek farming community, and his brothers embody more modern forms of U.S. masculinity in their business acumen and interest in new technologies, Claude is a sensitive intellectual and romantic idealist with a deep appreciation for the natural environment and immigrant friendships.[349] Like Jim Burden and Thea Kronborg, early in the text Claude seeks refuge from the commercial capitalist ethics that govern his father and brothers' lives by retreating to the uncultivated environment on the banks of Lovely Creek to drink beer and smoke cigars with his Bohemian immigrant friend Ernest Havel. While he is away at school, he idealizes the

[349] Willa Cather, *One of Ours*. 1922 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13.

laid-back, freethinking lifestyle his friend Julius Erlich leads with his family outside Lincoln. They offer paradigmatic examples of Cather's queer economy as people Claude "supposed to be rich, but he found out afterwards that they were poor. […] They merely knew how to live […] and spent their money on themselves, instead of on machines to do the work and machines to entertain people."[350]

In light of how Claude's humanist ideals make him a symbol of the United States' ostensibly inclusive, liberal democratic social values upon entering World War I, *One of Ours* earned Cather a Pulitzer Prize and the disdain of contemporary modernist icons Ernest Hemingway. While Hemingway lamented Cather's simplistic celebration of U.S. patriotism, since the 1990s queer approaches to the text have interpreted it as a work of subversive modernism invested in the incorporation of queer bodies and relationships into the U.S. national community, and conceiving of women authors as war writers.[351] Like earlier modernist critics, however, even recent accounts of Claude's asexuality take for granted the idealistic patriotism his decision to join the war effort implies, emphasizing Cather's interest in crafting a narrative that illuminates the expansiveness and potential of the modern United States' national community.[352] By attending to Claude's queerness as a symbol of his trans-nationalism, however, it becomes clear that Cather's war novel is an example of her heartland cosmopolitanism, in which

[350] Cather, *One of Ours*, 66.

[351] Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 69-76.

[352] Susan Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 95-113; Iqra Shagufta Cheema, "Asexualizing Cather's *One of Ours*" in *Arizona Quarterly* 77.3 (Fall 2021), pp. 81-100.

Midwestern characters and locations elucidate the novel's critique of the United States' foreign policy in the years surrounding World War I.

As in *My Ántonia*, Cather's heartland cosmopolitanism emerges in the representation of Claude's queer relationship with Enid Royce in the rural Midwest, which acts as a metaphor for the United States' political and economic expansion in two primary ways. First, through the emphasis on Claude and Enid's ambitions to leave the small town of Lovely Creek and see the world, and second through the emphasis on their Nebraska hometown's proximity to the war as a result of the nation's agricultural economy. However, unlike *My Ántonia*, rather than imagining the positive potential of couple's union, the juxtaposition between the region's fertility and Claude and Enid's unconsummated marriage symbolizes the impotence of the United States' emergence as a world-power in light of the First World War.

Underscoring its status as a symbol of the modern United States' imperial expansion, the geopolitical contexts of Claude and Enid's relationship are always in view in the text. In addition to Enid's desire to join her sister as a Christian missionary in China, when Claude proposes to her he jokes that "[i]f you won't have me, I'll try South America,—and I won't come back until I am old man and you are an old woman."[353] Just as Claude proposes to Enid to combat the aimlessness that marks his existence, Enid accepts his proposal because she believes that, outside of traveling to China, "the most important service devout girls could perform for the church was to bring promising

[353] Cather, *One of Ours*, 210.

young men to its support."[354] While their engagement gives the couple a sense of purpose in the domestic sphere, the text underscores the significance of their union as a symbol of the United States' expanding political and economic influence through its coincidence with the outbreak of World War I in Europe. However, even against the backdrop of "one of those 'good years' which farmers tell about, when everything goes well" with the harvest and the skyrocketing price of Nat Wheeler's wartime wheat, Claude and Enid's purposeful courtship does not inspire any sense of romance or optimism.[355] Not only does Claude experience a "terrible melancholy" when he kisses Enid in the moments after his proposal, but she also "said frankly that she didn't like men who had just come out of the harvest field," regardless of the benefits she might receive from the labor.[356]

In this way, Cather's heartland cosmopolitanism emphasizes the couple's trans-nationalism – that is, their queer, asexual embodiment of national community – and symbolizes the impotence of the United States' political and economic expansion in the Progressive era. Early in the text, this critique is most manifest when Claude begins building the house they will live in after the marriage. For instance, having "heard that the deeper the cellar was, the better it was; and he meant that this one should be deep enough" Claude throws himself into the project of digging a cellar so deep that it becomes a key sign of their marriage's inevitable demise when his friend Leonard Dawson's jokes,"[w]hen your wife takes a notion to go to China, you can open a trap-door and drop her through."[357] Moreover, in the same way that Enid's cold distaste for

[354] *OOO*, 242.
[355] *OOO*, 213.
[356] *OOO*, 215.
[357] *OOO*, 236.

men fresh from the field takes the romance out of Claude's efforts to court her during the heavy threshing season, the narrator explains that "disappointing thing was that she seemed more interested in the house than in him. These months when they could be together as much as they want, she treated merely as a period of time in which they were building a house."[358] The sterility that marks Enid's response to building the house is maintained even after their marriage, which goes unconsummated, as the narrator describes her "kitchen, full of afternoon sun, glitter[ing] with new paint, spotless linoleum, blue-and-white cooking vessels" and the dining room table "neatly set for one," while she is away at a meeting of the Anti-Saloon league.[359]

It has been argued that Claude's decision to enlist in the army is an effort to recover the normative masculinity of which Enid's political activism, ideological convictions, and lack of sexual interest deprives him of.[360] But these readings overvalue the recuperative function of the homosocial spaces Claude inhabits as a member of the U.S. military and, in doing so, overlook the critical ends of his journey overseas. After all, while Claude's search for personal meaning is fulfilled by his work as a medical assistant on board the *U.S.S. Anchises*, this fulfillment only reveals the naivete, political corruption, and ideological disillusionment that follows from the United States' entrance to the war. For instance, in addition to the *Anchises*'s advanced age, the departure from the New York City harbor emphasizes the young soldiers' lack of preparedness for war as the narrator describes their "howling swarm of brown arms and hats and faces [that]

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[358] *OOO*, 237.
[359] *OOO*, 269.
[360] Pearl James, "The Enid Problem," in *Cather Studies* Vol. 6, Steven Trout ed. (2006), pp.92-128.

looked like nothing, but a crowd of American boys going to a football game. But the scene was ageless; youths sailing away to die for an idea […] and on their departure they were making vows to a bronze image in the sea."[361] While the idea of fighting to keep the world safe for democracy makes the soldiers lively upon their initial departure, when the ship is overtaken by a flu epidemic the idea that they will die in the war without ever seeing combat provides little comfort to men like Fritz Tannhauser, who laments "[m]ein arme Mutter" in his dying breath.[362] Further, Claude almost loses Tod Fanning, his closest friend onboard, because by the corrupt shipmaster hoards the eggs and orange juice that have been helping him fight his illness to sell them for a profit when they reach port.

While participating in both the medical care and blackmail that secures Tod a stockpile of eggs and juice gives Claude an honorable sense of duty that was not available in the domestic sphere with Enid, the narrative undermines the feeling of purpose the war effort provides in his relationship with David Gerhardt. Claude and Gerhardt's relationship is often read as the novel's pinnacle example of the queer love Cather aims to incorporate within the United States' national community, but the cynicism that marks Gerhardt's response to his wartime experiences echoes the aimlessness and impotence that defined Claude's experience with Enid in Lovely Creek.[363] Claude admires Gerhardt's prewar career as a concert violinist for the way in

[361] *OOO*, 364.
[362] *OOO*, 398.
[363] Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America*, 69-78. and K. Allison Hammer, "Epic Stone Butch: Transmasculinity in the Work of Willa Cather," in *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7.1 (February 2020), pp. 77-98.

which, like Thea Kronborg, his musical talent operates in a queer economy of art and feeling that enables him to travel the world and play music that creates human connections. But when he explains that he will never return to his career, even after the war is over, it becomes clear that Gerhardt has lost his faith in the value of his music:

> 'While I was at Camp Dix, I had to play one of the entertainments. My violin, a Stradivarius, was in a vault in New York. I didn't need it for that concert any more than I need it at this minute; yet I went to town and brought it out. I was taking it up from the station in a military car, and a drunken taxi driver ran into us. I wasn't hurt, but the violin, laying across my knees, was smashed into a thousand pieces. I didn't know what it meant then; but since, I've seen so many beautiful things smashed … I've become a fatalist.'
>
> Claude watched his brooding head against the grey flint rock.
>
> 'You ought to have kept out of the whole thing. Any army man would say so.'
>
> David's head went back against the boulder [.] 'Oh, one violinist more or less doesn't matter! But who's ever going back to anything? That's what I want to know.'[364]

As the violin becomes an early casualty of the war, foreshadowing the destruction innumerable other beautiful artifacts, Claude's chastisement that Gerhardt "ought to have kept out of the whole thing" does more than lament the loss of the instrument and the beauty it creates.[365] It places the blame for these losses on the United States' entrance to the war in the first place. Further emphasizing joining the army as an ultimately impotent and shortsighted attempt at meaning making in his life, as Claude listens to David play briefly while on leave in France, he realizes that "[i]f he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here tonight a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt

[364] *OOO*. 538.
[365] *OOO*, 538.

that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it."[366] As it becomes clear that his army enlistment has given him a sense of purpose but not, ultimately, helped him to create anything so beautiful as Gerhardt's song, the narrative signals Claude's disillusionment with the war effort. Moreover, even as Claude finds solace in the war mission in the moment of his death, the facts surrounding his battlefield death underscore the war's significance of as a sign of innocence lost. Not only does Claude die happily during a surprise German raid because he mistakenly believes that Gerhardt will survive the battle – in fact, Gerhardt dies moments before him – but his mother's reflection in the closing scene expresses an ironic gratitude for the fact that her son will never return home because she cannot bear the thought of witnessing his disillusionment:

> [Claude] died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more. [Mrs. Wheeler] would have dreaded the awakening,— she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment. One by one the heroes of that war, the men of dazzling soldiership, leave prematurely the world they have come back to. Airmen whose deeds were tales of wonder, officers whose names made the blood of youth beat faster, survivors of incredible dangers,— one by one they quietly die by their own hand.[367]

While Mrs. Wheeler's gratitude that Claude before he could be disappointed by the war's end can be read as a celebration of his wartime idealism, the narrative explication of his mother's disillusionment undermines such a positive interpretation of the novel's closing scene. Moreover, as Cather's heartland cosmopolitanism emphasizes

[366] *OOO*, 551.
[367] *OOO*, 604-605.

the global forces that have shaped Mrs. Wheeler's postwar disillusionment, the narrative does not articulate a sudden loss of innocence that is symbolized in Claude's death. Alternatively, as Mrs. Wheeler sits alone in her house thinking of Claude and looking at the map of Europe "which was the end of his road" the narrative suggests that the premodern, domestic innocence so often associated with Cather's images of the Nebraska prairie cannot be recuperated because it never existed in the first place.[368] After all, not only does Claude only find his place in the world "somewhere among those perplexing names" on the map of Europe in the moment of his death, but the uninhabited house he built for Enid in Nebraska stands as a symbol of the empty promise of a happy future for the United States' expanding cultural and political empire.[369]

In the same way that Cather's heartland cosmopolitanism explodes the notion of the rural Midwest as a model of prelapsarian innocence by illuminating its imbrication in the economic and cultural forces that structured the United States' imperial expansion, Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* leverages its protagonists' Midwestern origins to lament the impossibility of constructing a meaningful self and community in the wake of the nation's rise as a world power. As in Lewis's earlier works, the theme of marriage mobilizes *Dodsworth*'s critique of U.S. middle-class progressivism by establishing Sam and his wife Fran's relationship as a model of modern marital bliss early in the novel. However, while traveling abroad to celebrate Sam's retirement, Fran's extramarital affairs with a variety of European aristocrats destroy the marriage and push Sam to try to

[368] *OOO*, 603.
[369] *OOO*, 603.

understand himself as an individual detached from the social institutions of work and family. This opens the way for Lewis's cosmopolitan critique of U.S. progressives' failure to reform the global reach of Western imperialism. While his retirement triggers this period of soul-searching, Sam's international introspection emerges from the tension between his desire to eventually return to the United States and embrace his identity as a modern American urban-industrialist, and Fran's desire to live abroad forever, embracing her identity a modern-day aesthete and member of the global aristocracy. Throughout the text, Sam's struggle to articulate his identity is dramatized in the couple's declining marital happiness, and finally resolved in his decision to divorce Fran in the novel's conclusion.

Emphasizing Sam's decision to leave Fran in New York and return to Paris to be with Edith Cortwright, who supports his dream of returning the to the United States to build a modern American suburb, the scholarship on *Dodsworth* focuses on its protagonist's moralistic desire to build a beautiful suburb as the source of the novel's critique of the modern United States' commercial culture. For example, Michael Augsburger argues that *Dodsworth*'s celebration of the industrial engineer as artist demonstrates the author's promotion of "adversary professional" values which "actively resisted the increasingly dominant culture of corporate capitalism."[370] Because characters like Martin Arrowsmith and Sam Dodsworth recuse themselves from their participation in the United States' commercial capitalist society, Augsburger reads Lewis's major

[370] Michael Augsburger, "Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth*," in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 34.2 (Spring, 2001) pp. 73-97, 77 and 78.

novels as "primers for the professional managerial class" on how to maintain an individual identity or "'true' self" in the twentieth century.[371] However, as novels from *Main Street* to *Arrowsmith* to *Dodsworth* dramatize how the production of a successful U.S. middle class identity is contingent on the nation's global market economy, it is more accurate to say that Lewis mobilizes the romantic trope of the individual's search for a true self only to undermine the possibility of creating something like a liberal identity in the modern era.

If *Main Street*'s and *Arrowsmith*'s critical cosmopolitanism exposes the failures of the progressive state by subverting the salient features Chicago School realism, *Dodsworth* emerges as a pinnacle example of the author's heartland cosmopolitanism by sending middle-class Midwesterners off to Europe. As Sam and Fran's marital demise dramatizes the impossibility of forging a coherent identity outside the modern social institutions of family, work, and the nation-state, Lewis recycles key elements of Henry James's *The American* (1877) and Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913) to subvert the representations of U.S. progressive individualism and economic liberalism in popular realist narratives such as Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) and biographies of U.S. industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, J.D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford. Specifically, Lewis adapts the characteristics of the archetypal U.S. industrialist Christopher Newman in *The American* to Sam Dodsworth, and gives Fran Dodsworth the social-climbing personality of protagonist Undine Spragg from *The Custom of the Country*. By combining these character traits and appropriating Wharton's divorce-plot-

[371] Augsberger, "Primers for the Professional Managerial Class," 73 and 75.

as-critique of the modern United States' commercial economy, *Dodsworth* sets a pair of thoroughly modern Midwesterners abroad to enjoy a life of leisure only to expose the limitations imposed on individual liberty and identity by the expansion of U.S. imperialism in the Progressive era.

In keeping with Lewis's brand of heartland cosmopolitanism, *Dodsworth*'s global theme is announced in the novel's opening episode, in which the narrative exposition emphasizes the geopolitical contexts of Zenith's local society. When a young Sam arrives at a dance at the Kennepoose Canoe Club in 1903, he is struck by the figure of a "slim; shining; ash-blonde […] crystal candle-stick of a girl among black-and-white lumps of males."[372] This is Frances Voelker, daughter of Herman Voelker, a Zenith brew master who "had brewed his way into millions and respectability" to become

> a leader among the German-Americans who were supplanting the New Englanders throughout the state as controllers of finance and merchandising. He entertained German professors when they came lecturing and looking, and it was asserted that one of the genuine hand-painted pictures which he had recently brought back from Nuremberg was worth nearly ten thousand dollars.[373]

In addition to illuminating Zenith's international community, the narrator also foregrounds the United States' Progressive-era transformation from an industrial to a commercial economy in both the objectified description of Fran and the record of the immigrant Voelker family's rags-to-riches history. In doing so, Lewis both establishes the foundation for Sam's attraction to her and explicates the global reach of U.S.

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[372] Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth*, 1929. *Sinclair Lewis: Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry,* Dodsworth, Richard Lingeman, ed. (New York: Harcourt, 2002), 918.

[373] *Dodsworth*, 918.

commercial capitalism. Although the narrator explains that both Sam and "Zenith [were] still in the halcyon William Dean Howells days" the narrative underscores his imbrication in the United States' expanding commercial economy when he explains to Fran that he would

> 'Certainly like to see Europe some day. When I graduated, I thought I'd be a civil engineer and see the Brazil jungle and China and all over. Reg'lar Richard Harding Davis stuff! But—certainly going to see Europe anyway['…]
>
> Ah, if she desired Europe, he would master it, and give it to her on a platter of polished gold![374]

While the narrator explains that Sam never got away from work long enough to realize his dream of taking Fran to Europe during their twenty-two years of marriage, when the couple discusses their feelings about selling Sam's business Lewis characterizes the modern national identities they have come to embody by 1925. For example, as Sam prepares for his last day of work he emerges as a modern-day version of Christopher Newman, the protagonist of James' *The American* who is also a newly retired industrialist headed abroad on a grand tour of Europe in 1867. Similar to how Newman's face displays "that blankness which is not simplicity, that look of […] an attitude of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal, so characteristic of many American faces" and reflective of the industrializing nation's culture of temperance, hard-work, and self-reliance, in *Dodsworth* the narrator explains that Sam Dodsworth

> was common sense apotheosized, he had the energy and reliability of a dynamo, while he liked whisky and poker and paté de fois gras, and all the

[374] *Dodsworth*, 921.

> while he dreamed of motors like thunderbolts, as poets less modern than himself might dream of stars and roses and nymphs by a pool.[375]

Alternatively, when Sam expresses his disappointment about retiring to Fran, she expresses her excitement at the newfound economic and personal liberty his hard work and temperance has afforded them: "I'm not a bit sorry! I'm delighted. You'll be free for the first time in all these years. Let's run off some place. […] We have enough money, and you go on stewing—'must change the design of the carburetor float [' …] So silly!"[376]

In her articulation of the speculative mindset of the twentieth century's new market capitalists in this way, Lewis establishes Fran as an older but no less ambitious version of Undine Spragg, the social climbing, midwestern protagonist of Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1915). In *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton presents divorce as the ultimate modern solvent that burns through custom, tradition, and even history itself as it leaves Undine and all four of her husbands marooned in a consumer-capitalist present. Wharton accentuates the cultural anxiety that attended the rise of modern divorce laws by foregrounding Undine and her first-*cum*-fourth husband Elmer Moffat's origins in the up-and-coming midwestern city of Apex. To the extent that Apex, like Lewis's Zenith, should be read as a stand-in for the midwestern market town of Chicago, in *The Custom of the Country* Wharton leverages the anxiety associated with the modern Midwest's newly monied industrial landscape to construct a divorce-happy

[375] Henry James, *The American* 1877. *Henry James: Novels, 1871-1880*, William T. Stafford ed. (New York: Literary Classics of America, 1983), 517; *Dodsworth*, 927.

[376] *Dodsworth*, 925.

antiheroine who stands as a "monstrously perfect result" of the modern United States' commercial capitalist economy and consumer culture.[377] Alternatively, in *Dodsworth*, Lewis's emphasis on the Dodsworths' midwestern origins establishes the novel's central tension between Sam's nostalgic desire for a pre-modern national ideal and Fran's embodiment of an archetypal middle-class American consumer. In the contrast between these ideals, Lewis cultivates the sense of disappointment and betrayal that attends Fran's decision to divorce Sam for the German Kurt Von Obersdorf, thus dissolving the only remaining institution of meaning in Sam's life after his retirement, and leaving him to wander aimlessly, not unlike Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours*, for a sense of purpose and meaning in Europe that, it becomes clear, he will never recover.

As the trip becomes an attempt for Sam and Fran to reinvent and liberate themselves from the Midwestern United States, their conflicting values mobilize *Dodsworth*'s cosmopolitan critique of the United States' pursuit of global market capitalism and industrial urbanization as symbols of national progress. For example, while traveling in Berlin the Dodsworths befriend Count Kurt Von Obersdorf, with whom Fran falls in love while he acts as their benevolent tour guide. Throughout their stay, Kurt's job as a travel agent and aristocratic connections enable Fran to reinvent herself by attending lavish dinners, dances, and plays where she learns to imitate European table manners and turns of phrase while Sam struggles to enjoy a leisurely lifestyle, having "learned that Life is real and Life is earnest and the presidency of a

[377] Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 1913 (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2001), 129.

corporation is its goal."[378] As Sam becomes increasingly jealous of Fran's infatuation with the Count, and Fran flirts her way across Europe, Lewis reiterates Wharton's critique of the modern United States' global commercial economy's damaging effects on marriage in *The Custom of the Country.* Like Undine, Fran's commercial savvy allows her to appropriate European mannerisms and perform properly in whatever aristocratic company she finds herself and revealing her lack of core sense of self or identity to which these habits are attached. To this extent, as Sam tries and fails to convince her of the sanctity of their marital bond, Sam takes on the role of Undine's first husband Ralph Marvell, the old-money New Yorker forced to become a working businessman to support his wife's luxurious tastes, only to commit suicide when she divorces him for a French nobleman.

After Fran confesses her desire to divorce him to marry Kurt, Sam travels to Venice where he introduces himself to Edith Cortright, the expatriate American widow of a British ambassador, and begins a relationship that ultimately reveals the impossibility of cultivating either a meaningful sense of self or interpersonal relationships in a world organized by the United States' global commercial cultural economy. In keeping with Lewis's style of heartland cosmopolitanism, this critique emerges through the Sam and Edith's shared disregard for social graces and nostalgia for the experience of growing up in the small-town Midwest. For instance, compared to Fran's desire to trade in her domestic identity by becoming an expatriate socialite in Europe, Edith immediately "showed herself so superior to Expatriate Americanisms that she dared to be American

[378] *Dodsworth*, 1148.

and to offer iced tea," and Sam takes such comfort in her presence that he confesses to Edith that he is in Venice due to his desire to be alone after Fran's request for a divorce.[379] Although Sam is embarrassed at airing his marital troubles to a relative stranger, Edith explains that her husband "was a dreadful liar [,] a secret drunkard [who] humiliated me all the time as a backwoods American" from Michigan who managed to marry an English aristocrat only because of her father's job as Secretary of the U.S. Treasury.[380] As Sam and Edith bond over their poor treatment by their spouses and a mutual desire to live without the imperative to be either a productive member or ostentatious product of industrial society, their relationship emerges as a recuperative love affair that presents the pre-modern Midwest as meaningful alternative to the couple's consumer cultural present.

Inspired by Edith's authenticity, Sam shares with her his desire to return to the United States and begin work on the design for his new Sans Souci Gardens suburb and is so impressed by her affinity for such provincial domesticity that he develops a keen appreciation for the pre-industrial United States' history of agricultural husbandry and frontier settlement. When, for example, Sam receives a letter from Fran that criticizes life in the United States for being "so thin, so without tradition," his only response is to think of "the tradition of pioneers pushing to the westward, across the Alleghenies, through the forests of Kentucky and Tennessee, on to the bleeding plains of Kansas, on to Oregon and California […] opening a new home for a hundred million people," making it clear

[379] *Dodsworth*, 1256.
[380] *Dodsworth*, 1267-8.

that his relationship with Edith reinvigorates both his appreciation for his Midwestern homeland and his awareness of a much longer history of American pioneering.[381] Further, when the couple travels together to Naples following the receipt of Fran's letter, the narrative emphasizes Sam's renewed perspective on the United States' tradition of rugged individualism is inextricable from Edith's presence:

> [H]e began to desire to have—with Edith—a farm at home, and not a gentleman's show-place, to increase social credit, but an authentic farm, smelling of horses and cattle and chickens, with cornfields baking and noon, mysterious in their junglelike alleys. […] He smiled to think of himself, this bucolic lump, drawn back to earth by her thin unearthen hands.[382]

Awakening to the idea "[i]n this most Italian Italy he might without apology still be a most American American" while sitting in the garden with Edith, Sam exclaims "I *am* real!"[383] By calling attention to the global contexts which precipitate this embrace of a pre-modern American national identity symbolized by the bucolic vision of a midwestern farmhouse, Sam's heartland cosmopolitanism enables him to liberate himself from the oppressive influences of U.S. industrialization and commercial capitalism. Unable to realize his true identity in the United States' because of his occupational status, Sam's full-throated embrace of his identity as a rustic American abroad symbolizes his liberation from the ties of work, family, and the modern U.S. nation-state's imperative to be wedded to the demands and expectations of industrial production and commercial appeal embodied in the figure of Fran. In the course of the novel's falling action, this

[381] *Dodsworth*, 1273.
[382] *Dodsworth*, 1282-3.
[383] *Dodsworth*, 1283 (*emphasis original*).

critique takes final form in Sam's decision to divorce Fran even though her plan to leave him for Kurt is foiled. As Fran stands on the docks of the New York harbor while he heads back to be with Edith in Europe, Sam is free to dream about the garden suburb he might build outside Zenith while Fran is left to contend Zenith society's criticism of her failure to live up to the expectations associated with her status as a middle-class housewife.

However, despite Sam's ability to free himself from the cycle of Fran's unending quest for social relevancy by leaving her in the United States, the narrative fails to resolve the question of whether he is truly free to live the post-industrial, premodern life he craves with Edith. For example, the novel's final scene depicts Edith and Sam

> dining and the Ritz in Paris […] feeling superior to its pretentiousness, because that evening they had determined to return to America, when his divorce should be complete, and to experiment [.]
>
> But after his second cognac the orchestra played selections from Viennese operettas, and he remembered how happy Fran and he had been in Berlin. He remembered the wretchedness of the letter he had received from her that day.[384]

Noticing his melancholy behavior, Edith chastises him, "You enjoy being sad about her. But hereafter, every time there is a music, I shall also think of Cecil Cortwright! How handsome he was! How he spoke five languages!" calling attention to both the global exchanges which brought the new couple together and their former partners' commercial appeal in the process.[385] As Sam laughs at her remark and becomes "so confidently happy that he completely forgot Fran and he did not again yearn over her, for almost two days"

[384] *Dodsworth*, 1298.
[385] *Dodsworth*, 1299.

the narrative articulates the purgatorial ends of Sam's retirement from both his industrial career and his first wife.[386] Now that Sam is free to embrace his passion for pioneering design and empowered to return to the United States to live a life of provincial domesticity in the Midwest with Edith, the narrative's closing line suggests that he is nonetheless unable to resist the commercial appeal and imperial influence embodied in the figure of Fran Dodsworth. In doing so, the final image of two Midwesterners abroad does not symbolize Sam's heroic maintenance of the adversary values of the modern American artist raging against the commercial machine, as previous critics have argued. More accurately, it underscores the novel's modernist critique of the global reach of the United States' oppressive social and political influence, and suggests the failure of even the most well-meaning U.S. progressives to constrain or resist that power in the twentieth-century world.

As *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth*'s ambivalent conclusions expose the misalignment of such cultural values as individual agency and free market economics in the U.S. middle class' pursuit of progressive liberalism, Cather and Lewis's world-worn Midwesterners expose the United States' failure to live up to its ideological aspirations. In this way, they not only revised contemporary assessments of the Midwest's primary literary function as a synecdoche of political parochialism and cultural provincialism in the early twentieth century United States. They made the Midwest a vital site for the production and representation of modernist literary critiques of U.S. culture and society. Along with *One of Ours* and *Dodsworth,* understanding the imperialist critiques of novels

[386] *Dodsworth*, 1299.

like *The Song of the Lark*, *My Ántonia*, *Main Street*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth* better situates Cather and Lewis's work in terms of the anxiety and ennui associated with more appreciated Midwestern modernists like Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T.S. Eliot, Floyd Dell, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg. Even more poignantly, though, understanding how Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis mobilized the Midwest's literary forms and symbolic content to expose the failures of U.S. progressivism also illuminates the pathways taken by later novelists like Jack Conroy, Meridel Le Sueur, Richard Wright, and William Attaway to make midwestern landscapes integral to their criticism of classism, sexism, and racism in U.S. society. While novels like *The Disinhereted* (1933), *The Girl* (1939), *Native Son* (1940), and *Blood on the Forge* (1941) represent stylistic innovations in midwestern literature in their own rights for their representation of working class, non-white characters, Cather and Lewis's critical cosmopolitan representation the region's landscape helped make these critiques possible.

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