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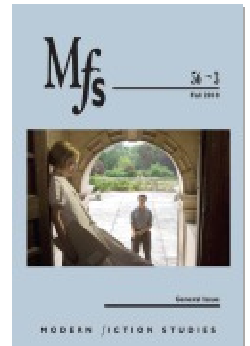

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PIONEERS OF *MAIN STREET*

James Marshall

"THE DAYS OF PIONEERING, OF LASSIES IN SUNBONNETS, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot," Sinclair Lewis writes on the beginning page of his classic Revolt-from-the-Village. The sentence that follows suggests his intent to transform the cultural symbol of the pioneer into a satirist's political allegory of the frontier cultural promise, one that nevertheless remains a legacy of individual and communal independence. He visualizes the rebellious twentieth-century woman as a type whose revolt against the ugliness of village life will transvalue the pioneer symbol into her protest as the new "spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest" (1). At first Carol Kennicott, his heroine, is helplessly naive, but with the maturity of increasing restraint her articulate outcry against land speculation, one of the Populist Party's anathemas in the 1883 election to which the mortgaged frontier farm had contributed, invokes a

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cultural promise that the homestead West once represented—an opportunity for economic independence and resultant freedom on the land.[1] Carol's rebellion—a concealed allegorical shadow play of twentieth-century pioneering, so to speak—occurs within Lewis' unrecognized political context that enables his brilliantly executed satirical vision of cultural sterility. Critics have neglected this rewarding aspect of *Main Street.*

Lewis' political vision originates in Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads.* As Mark Schorer suggests, Garland's bleak lives with their anguished pioneer hope echo loudly against the rubble hills of failed cultural promise on his desolate farms and in his cruel villages. The mortgage-ridden farmers, the Haskins family in "Under the Lion's Paw" and the destitute Smiths of "The Return of a Private," for instance, suggest Garland's (and the Populist's) frontier heritage (287-288).[2] In addition, David D. Anderson has suggested that Lewis' major characters are driven by psychic wolves of fear, namely, fear of failure inherited from the terror and collapsing idealism of the prairie frontier; they dream big dreams, as Carol does in her town planning, but suffer the cost of their idealism, voicing needless self-justification. Even Babbitt finds the Maine woods to be merely his own fantasy of frontier (manly) life, free and independent, which seems the genesis and enabling metaphor of his abortive rebellion as a liberal and hip-flask bohemian and which troubles his surrender and return to the conventions of Floral Heights, to family, and to friends. Lewis read Garland during the summer of 1905 when home from Yale in Sauk Centre. Young Hal's listless days of trivial conversation and mindless commercialism must have crystalized in his reading of Garland's book (Schorer 286). Like Garland, although for different reasons, Carol is preoccupied with mortgage-owning land speculators: Rauskukle, Luke Dawson, "Honest Jim" Blausser, and Dr. Will Kennicott, her husband

[1]Henry Nash Smith definitively analyzes the garden of the West myth and its significance to Thomas Jefferson, noting its erosion after the 1850s when land speculators seemed the most noxious weed. He writes: "The agrarian utopia of the garden of the world [or the West] was destroyed by the land speculator" (141). Lewis was likely an heir to this prairie heritage before his reading of Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads.*

[2]Schorer believes Lewis' literary heritage was the unfriendly Midwestern village common to prairie novelists such as Edward Eggleston, Joseph Kirkland, Harold Frederic, and Willa Cather with some assistance from Twain, Howells, and Glasgow. He overlooks the prairie garden and its plague of land speculators.

for whom land speculation is at first merely a hobby, an activity like hunting, golf, and, for the practical Will, his marriage as well. Appropriately, she becomes a friend of Miles Bjornstam, the "half-Yankee, half Swede," as he describes himself, Lewis' free spirit and sociologically fated pioneer redivivus. Carol's rebellion is intended to suggest Lewis' transformation of the mythic pioneer into his allegory of twentieth-century political and personal freedom from the tyranny of Main Street, a thematic transvaluation that Garland's stories suggested to him. If Carol generates no reform, she finds a renewal that implies Lewis' allegory of the modern independent spirit, or pioneer. In sum, this article will suggest that Carol's rebellion, which reaches fruition in Washington, D.C., during her separation from Will, activates Lewis' framework of political allegory, Jeffersonian in nature.

In addition, Lewis' framework of idealism was influenced by the aspirations of a rising new literary generation. Like his friends, Lewis explored the socialist ideologies of his generation as a source of political allegory. Its promise of intellectual renewal and equalitarian government obviously interested the satirist of *Main Street.* Lewis' letter in November, 1920, to Floyd Dell, author of *Moon-Calf*, another novel of revolt from the village published just months previous to *Main Street*, suggests his stance toward these significant issues. Bantering and fraternal yet withal serious, he admires with fond irony Dell and other broadly socialistic American writers. Two brief quotations illustrate his attitude. He first confides to Dell that ". . . we've done, I think, good books. I pray (to the spirit of Lenin perhaps) we may do *great* ones. There's some good writers in these Soviet States now . . ." and includes an eclectic list, ". . . you and I, perhaps, Hergesheimer, Gale, Anderson, Dreiser, Cather, Charley Norris, Wharton," in his surprising pantheon.[3] He concludes with hope that "Perhaps we may yet be worthy of the International." Yet his usual self-mockery and distrust of all dogma are also unmistakable here. Although a romantic impulse in his nature frequently sought the ideal, political and cultural, he was a satirist and a writer. Not until *Ann Vickers* (1933) does he commit a protagonist to socialism, and then with an artist's objectivity. A neglected achievement in *Main Street* is,

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[3]I thank the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, for permission to quote from Lewis' letter to Floyd Dell.

I think, Lewis' synthesis of Garland's Populist democracy and a theoretic socialism in his political satire of small town economics and culture.

Lewis' letter to Dell also suggests a little-known intention in his characterization of Carol and her role in his allegory. A brief explanation, however, is necessary to clarify his full intention. Dell's criticism in his review of *Main Street* underlies Lewis' comparison of his heroine with Dell's Felix Fay. Carol's final acceptance of the commercialism and conventions of a stale culture, Dell's review had stated, undermines the implied lyric idealism of her rebellion. Without acknowledging Dell's criticism, Lewis diplomatically comments:

> Don't you think that the difs [*sic*] between M = C [*Moon-Calf*] and M St [*Main Street*] are 2, both important. One, Felix is young, unbound, a male—*free to go*; while Carol is (since she thinks she is) not free [italics Lewis']. Second, your Davenport [Iowa; called Port Royal by Dell in *Moon-Calf*] is just enough bigger than G.P. [Gopher Prairie]—to be worlds bigger! Give Carol just one Felix Fay (who isn't silly and you know it) & she would be contented enough to begin to create life about her. Aren't those rather than our personal opinions of the midwest the differences in the two?

Lewis hints that Carol must exist without the stimulus of a cultured (and politically astute) city ("your Davenport") or an intellectual (and socialist) husband to "create life," that is, to be the free spirit she could be. Lewis curiously omits reference to Carol's unfolding progress toward inner freedom and its expression under the benign influence of his cosmopolitan Washington, the place of a "sensuous education" (Henry James's term) in society and culture. Her renewal takes an explicitly political form before she returns to Gopher Prairie, although she does not again disturb the sleep of the village.

Lewis' focus on Carol's inward growth never relaxes scrutiny of her democratic (and articulate) "commonplaceness." In the concluding chapter of the novel, he writes, "She had fancied that her life might make a story. She knew there was nothing heroic or obviously dramatic in it, no magic of rare hours, nor valiant challenge, but it seemed to her that she was of some significance because she was commonplaceness, the ordinary life of the age made articulate and protesting" (439). For Lewis, she thus represents the ordinary person of the time, like Whitman's "divine

average'' of ''Song of Myself,'' involved in Howellsian social and commonplace life; her character, her naive struggle against Gopher Prairie and eventually against Will himself are defined by these limits. (If Lewis disliked Howells, his gift for the middle-class detail furnishes this novel with its brilliant settings.) For this reason, Lewis holds the characterization of his protagonist to a secure level of plausibility, or realism; Dell and most critics have held another viewpoint.[4] Yet framed by Lewis' pioneer allegory of the democratic average, Carol's limitations—that is, the political fact of her womanhood, her victory-in-defeat by the unformed culture of Gopher Prairie as well as her democratic protests—imply a Jeffersonian ideal: in a Main Street context, she thus offers a measure of the cultural myopia. Though trapped by the pioneer freedom she dreams but can never realize, she is enabled nevertheless to dissent from cruel village norms and oppose Will's blind practicality. Carol cannot change either; she can express her difference, however. Walking, usually alone, is a source of refreshment in the countryside beyond Main Street and thus seems an element of Lewis' allegory of recovering the pioneer spirit of freedom even though troubled by the echoing howls of Garland's frontier wolves, the land speculators. Appropriately, Carol meets Lewis' pioneer and immigrant Miles Bjornstam while walking the open land beyond Main Street. Both seek independence.

Yet, perversely it seems, Lewis undermines his conscious intent. Two later articles refute her significance; one, ''Introduction to *Main Street*,'' explicitly assures a growing popular readership ''that Carol was not as good stuff as her husband. As I most painstakingly planned that she shouldn't be—that she be just bright enough to sniff a little [independence] but not bright enough to do anything about it'' (*Man* 217); and a second, ''Main Street's Been Paved!,'' attempts lugubrious humor at the Kennicotts' pretensions to culture with the influx of wealth into Gopher Prairie after the war (*Man* 310-327). As a result, whatever Lewis' original intention, his novel has been consistently misread. So fine a mind as Mark Schorer believes that Carol's circumstances reveal the

[4]Schorer's collection of essays reveals a history of Lewis criticism from T. K. Whipple and H. L. Mencken through Malcolm Cowley's essay (1951); critics seem inclined to view Carol Kennicott as Lewis' aesthetic failure without recognizing his concern with her freedom and her search for inward fulfillment. This aspect of the novel is the romance or allegory of an average person's quest, as I have suggested here.

author's inadequacies rather than intended satire. In *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* Schorer writes: "Her dreams, like his, lack a plausible reference [that is, Lewis hasn't a historical sense of civilization]; her 'culture' is necessarily 'bogus' " (292). More insightful is Glen Love's criticism in which he finds a surface of authentic detail to be the formal expression of a bitter, fugitive romance, an allegory of the engulfed democratic self. But for Love, as for the other critics, Carol's failure to effect social change in Gopher Prairie implies failure as an individual who promises leadership but affords none. For Love, Carl Ericson in *The Trail of the Hawk* (1915) and Cass Timberlane in the novel that bears his name (1945) are quasi-mythical heroes, industrialists, thus pioneers of modern technological progress and resultant beneficial social change. Their "pioneer" lives reveal "patterns of affirmation," he thinks, that may foreshadow a future "sublime architect" (perhaps a Frank Lloyd Wright cum Henry Thoreau).[5] For most critics, Carol seems to have become reduced to a simplistic point of view, thus a mere foil to the writer's performing wit.

Let us then clarify Lewis' development of a protagonist whose image is the pioneer idealist, that is, the democratic voice of "commonplaceness," rising to become "articulate and protesting." Her rebellion (as pioneer "spirit of the bewildered empire," the Midwest) against Main Street begins with a reflection on Mr. Rauskukle, a land speculator whose wealth lofts him to the eminence of leading citizen of Schonstrom village. It occurs during her bridal journey to Gopher Prairie, her new home, while the train waits endlessly in the apparently deserted station. Rauskukle crosses the street. He seems to emerge from the tedious barren of stale myth, an existential desert, into an empty and equally desolate Main Street. With naive pride, Will Kennicott identifies Rauskukle as a person "worth three-hundred thousand" who "owns lots of mortgages" (25). For her husband, the true measure of human worth is money. The couple's first marital argument ensues. Carol asks with scarcely veiled irony why villagers and nearby farmers don't rise in anger to demand reparation for Rauskukle's usurious suppression of independent people who, as

[5]Glen Love's neglected article is unquestionably definitive in his perception of Lewis' concealed cultural idealism that I here view as a synthesis of prairie aspiration and an early twentieth-century socialism.

Garland and Lewis knew, had been the mythic promise of the homestead. Unsatisfied with Will's response, she suggests that the land speculator in his glorious person must be a wholly fulfilling source and "symbol of beauty." (Shekinah, thus encountered, is ostensibly all necessary enlightenment, present and future.) There seems little need for his contribution to the cultural relief of bitter village monotony, that is, for improved schools, libraries, theaters, social centers, government, and commerce. Lewis' acerbic satire of communal impotence is implied by his democratic and broadly socialistic idealism. Shocked by the incident into a bride's painful awareness of her new husband's limits, Carol eases herself over the submerged rock of reality with an optimistic meditation on the prairie landscape.

She begins to consider the Northwest affluent if gauche in its new wealth, therefore rich with potential for the success of democracy. She observes that its people are "pioneers, these sweaty wayfarers, for all their telephones and bank-accounts and automatic pianos and co-operative leagues. And for all its fat richness, theirs is a pioneer land" (24-25). She reflects that like herself, perhaps, the region may mature into a self-conscious culture, ordering its mean business practices and enlivening its flat, sometimes puritanical conventions. She continues her brooding on the passing fields, wondering with democratic passion and an eruptive idealism if this "pioneer land" could "achieve something different in history" and thus avoid "ancient stale inequalities" that mark "the tedious maturity of other empires" (25). The satirist's context of a domestic tiff and Carol's ensuing escape into an idealist's romance of the pioneer juxtaposes the cultural promise of the myth with the reality of the land speculator. Her awakening has thus begun. The method of a satirist's allegory seems obvious.

A second encounter with a land speculator occurs during her bridal year as Dr. Kennicott's still insecure wife. Luke Dawson, a wealthy land speculator, is Gopher Prairie's Rauskukle, a member of its ruling class. Dawson admits to Carol that he has assets worth more than three million dollars. (His holdings in farm land, timber land, and land potentially rich in minerals suggest that Lewis has borrowed from the land speculating folk villain of the Populist Party of the 1880s when Garland was a member.) But when she proposes that he build a new community social center, he simply laughs, unable to recognize obligation. In constant use,

largely by the Scandinavian farmers' wives, the present center is small, colorless, and poorly maintained. Although Lewis suggests that Carol is naive in her request, Dawson is shortsighted in his refusal to understand that democracy can be "good business," as it were. For Lewis, impoverished, culturally and politically denied citizens (usually immigrant farmers) undermine the economic vitality of Main Street and erode the Western ideal of independence.

Carol's maturation and renewal originate in such disillusioning incidents. She finds that Dawson, among others, is but a Main Street "parasite," destroying its potential with his usury and noxious moral inertia.

> Carol saw the fact that the prairie towns no more exist to serve the farmers who are their reason of existence than do the great capitals; they exist to fatten on the farmers, to provide for the townsmen large motors and social preferment; and, unlike the capitals, they do not give in return for usury a stately and permanent center, but only this ragged camp. It is a "parasitic Greek civilization"—minus the civilization. (269)

Lewis' allegory of pioneers and land speculators is demonstrated further by Carol's relationship with Miles Bjornstam, the natural freemason of the earth. Miles embodies the traditional ideal of the independent person, the Westerner. He characterizes himself, for example, as a democrat: "I am about the only man in Johnson County that remembers the joker in the Declaration of Independence about Americans being supposed to have the right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' " (117). He finds these values in the bachelor independence of a clean one-room shack in "Swede Hollow." Byron, Tennyson, Stevenson, and Thorstein Veblen on his bookshelf suggest his rebellious and active freedom of mind; his decision to work as the village handyman for whom and when he chooses illustrates his freedom of action. Miles's distance as "the Red Swede," as the town names him for his moustache and socialist politics, from a conservative Anglo-American Main Street liberates him from the middle-class anxieties that initially destroy Carol's freedom. But it is the freedom of an underclass, politically ineffectual if socially aware. Nevertheless, Miles's ability to command his own destiny until this reversal characterizes him as the true pioneer, the ideal West reborn. In the summer, as he tells Carol, he travels to the Far West to trade horses and enjoy the aesthetic beauty of an open

country. Whitman's self-reliant pioneer has a literary mirror in this passage.

> Pete and me will be rambling across Dakota, through the Bad Lands, into the butte country, and when fall comes we'll cross over a pass of the Big Horn Mountains, maybe, and camp in a snow-storm, quarter of a mile right straight up above a lake. Then in the morning we'll lie snug in our blankets and look up through the pines at an eagle. How'd it strike you? Heh? Eagle soaring and soaring all day—big wide sky—. (147)

The romance of Miles's direct association with the open landscape of the West, derived from stock fiction though it is, further suggests his democratic freedom. Like Daniel Boone, an archetype of the frontiersman, Miles becomes a guide to fulfilling beauty and freedom by remaining the village model of independence. He represents the ideal of personal and social "pursuit of happiness," which Carol seeks and which the land speculators of the village are destroying in their dealings with farmers—and with each other.

Miles, as we see, reflects an earlier time, an agrarian past with its democratic ideals. Thus he survives in Gopher Prairie only through persistent resistance to its twentieth-century Babbittry. Although he has neither the education nor temperament to be the cultural architect whom the unfriendly village requires if it would change, his limits further define Lewis' political allegory of pioneer and land speculator. Miles meets and falls in love with Bea Swanson, a Swedish immigrant who is Carol's maid-of-all-work. In the tradition of the Jeffersonian homestead model, the couple marries and prospers as farmers; they are self-reliant, independent, and joyous in the promise of their beautiful child, Olaf. An active principle of "liberty and the pursuit of happiness" enables their contentment and encourages resistance to the tawdry in American society. Carol observes:

> Scandinavian women zealously exchanging their spiced puddings and red jackets for fried pork chops and congealed white blouses, trading the ancient Christmas hymns of the fjords for "She's My Jazzland Cutie," being Americanized into uniformity, and in less than a generation losing in the greyness whatever pleasant new customs they might have added to the life of the town. . . . And along with these foreigners, she felt herself being ironed into glossy mediocrity, and she rebelled, in fear. (265-266)

However, Miles's outspoken agnosticism and seemingly alien socialism offend both Swedish-American and Anglo-American sides

of Main Street. Lewis implies the loss of pioneer ideals of religious and political tolerance and the isolation of a village intellectual. The cost of the Bjornstam family's obviously allegorical independence is isolation, a kind of exile, within the community.

A catastrophic reversal then isolates Miles in one of Lewis' several circles of hell, a uniquely American hell where the individual destroys all he has gained, built, or created in the confidence of a cultural promise that he seemed destined to fulfill. Feisty and antagonistic, a closet socialist among conservative neighbors, Miles takes issue with Oskar Eklund, a kind neighbor who has allowed him to use his well because Miles has not taken the time to dig his own. Baiting him, Oskar asks Miles if he believes all wells, like wealth, should be shared. Afraid he will strike his neighbor, Miles leaves and subsequently draws water from an unused well fouled with typhoid. Neither Will Kennicott's skill, which he gives freely, nor Carol and Miles's nursing save Bea and little Olaf; within two weeks they are dead. Miles follows the hearse to the cemetery alone. "There was no music, no carriages. There was only Miles Bjornstam, in his black wedding suit, walking quite alone, head down, behind the shabby hearse that bore the bodies of his wife and child" (322). Miles sells his dairy farm, comparable to a Garland homestead and its thematic loss of individual and political freedom, and leaves for Alberta "far off from folks as I can get" (323). As Miles boards the train, Chad Perry tells him that leaving on his own volition is preferable to an uncomfortable exit on a rail for being a socialist. Among the pioneers who settled the village, the aging, now self-righteous and intolerant Perry further illustrates the fading social vision that sends Bjornstam farther West. He never returns. For Lewis, Miles and Carol, both seeking freedom as individuals, are eloquent allegories of the pioneer in continued agonic struggle against cultural erosion. Significantly, the underclass Bjornstam is silenced; only Carol remains to voice protest against cultural erosion.

Will Kennicott, Carol's husband and the village's most respected doctor, is by nature a follower. Like his Main Street friends, he has an uncritical mind; his horizons, like theirs (and the prairie setting), seem unlimited but linear. Will's world is composed equally of "medicine, land investment, Carol, motoring, and hunting" (195). For him, life holds neither uncertainty nor discriminating choices. He thus lives with awesome compla-

cency in the harsh, acquisitive culture of an early twentieth-century small town, assuming the unconscious and at times tyrannical ignorance of his peers as his reality. Will is naturally delighted with a return from land speculation during World War One that is twice that of his medical practice. Although heroic as a country doctor who braves prairie winters in a horse-drawn sleigh at all hours to care for the immigrant farm families, he is essentially an obtuse individual, practical but inarticulate. When a land boom occurs, his uncritical mind accepts blind fortune as personal destiny, unable in this respect to perceive a communal (or cultural) failure in his financial success. Lewis is explicit:

> The wheat money did not remain in the pockets of the farmers; the town existed to take care of all that. Iowa farmers were selling their land at four hundred dollars an acre and coming into Minnesota. But whoever bought or sold or mortgaged, the townsmen invited themselves to the feast—millers, real-estate men, lawyers, merchants, and Dr. Will Kennicott. They bought land at a hundred and fifty, sold it next day at a hundred and seventy, and bought again. (413)

Will's euphoria (like that of his friends on Main Street) suggests the absurd boom-and-bust psychology of the actual nineteenth-century frontier with its ''speculation fever'' that Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner create in its resplendent folly in *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today.* The quotation also suggests Garland's influence on Lewis' political allegory of independent pioneer/victim and established speculator.

Land speculators in Gopher Prairie are individually weak, yet collectively they represent a force that contributes profoundly to the communal apathy Lewis calls ''village virus.'' Individually they are not clever, merely shrewd, practical minds (the influential man of wealth; Luke Dawson, for example), or hollow like James Blausser. They undermine the democratic society of Gopher Prairie by usurping the authority of leadership. Thus, Blausser, ''Honest Jim'' as he likes to be called, arrives in Gopher Prairie with the wartime land boom in farms; he soon becomes promoter, public relations man, speculator, and a recognized leader in the community. His allegorical roots are suggested by his appearance; he reflects the gaudy world of Twain's speculator/confidence man. ''He was a bulky, gauche, noisy, humorous man, with narrow eyes, a rustic complexion, large red hands'' (413). However,

Twain's frontier Satan wore the conventional business suit of the land speculator; Lewis' invention is a flabby devil, concealed by loud clothes and voice. Blausser is a crowd pleaser, a successful Colonel Sellars, nothing more. Like Babbitt, whom he anticipates, he wears a transparent coat of the land speculator's familiar rhetorical colors; an inverted Joseph, his ironic lack of prophecy is among the finer achievements of the book. When in the speaker's rostrum at a business luncheon, for example, he utters the dull cliches of all such meetings, urging "Pep, Punch, Go, Vigor, Enterprise, Red Blood, He-men, Fair Women, God's Country . . . Fair Return on Investments . . . One Hundred Percent Americanism, and Pointing With Pride" (414). Like *The Great Gatsby, Main Street* follows the tawdry glitter of the corrupted American dream. Lewis' vitriol eats away such metallic surfaces, revealing village emptiness. Another speculator is Ezra Stowbody, a type of Yankee peddler, who is Gopher Prairie's respected banker. He, of course, owns numerous farm mortgages. Like Blausser, his concern is money, although concealed by a defensive posture of false respectability. Ella, Ezra's spinster daughter, asserts that her father hated to foreclose on farm mortgages and did so only to make certain that the Scandinavian immigrant farmers of the area learned to respect the laws of their new country (142). Stowbody's flaccid disguise is patriotic bunk: he conceals moral cowardice; he is an enemy of the people, as it were, posing as benefactor. Such land speculators reveal the political evils of sham and greed that undermine the independence of the people by creating a destructive illusion of economic freedom.

In his Preface to *Jason Edwards,* Hamlin Garland invokes the Western myth of opportunity that, as Henry Nash Smith amply demonstrates, evolves from Jefferson's agrarian plan of free Western land. When economic conditions were hopeless, Garland recalls, "The artisan or farmer once turned his face toward the prairie and forests of the West. . . . All the associations called up by the spoken work, the West, were fabulous, mythic, hopeful." Miles Bjornstam's travels reflect Garland's influence of mythic independence and its corollary values of democratic freedom and happiness in the West. But for Garland the hopeful West disappeared in mortgages; it revived for him in the Farmers' Alliance and the Populists, only to fade with his later political and social disillusion. (A Populist song of the Eighties suggests the ethos of

prairie politics in which Garland had participated. "We do not live—we only stay. / And are too poor to get away," a line from the parodic "Nebraska Land," sung to the tune of "Beulah Land" in the *Alliance and Labor Songster* (1891), illustrates the spirit of prairie resistance [qtd. in Watson 41][6]). Lewis' heritage of political discontent has obviously entered into the context of Carol's opposition to a series of land speculators, historically the Populist farmer's demon of tyrannous economic power. The Midwestern novelists, Edward Eggleston, Joseph Kirkland, and Ed Howe, like Garland and Twain, reflect this folk Satan of the prairie in their awareness of deception commonly practiced by land speculators such as the railroads, larger banks, and Eastern mortgage houses (Marshall, "Unheard Voice"). But Lewis' political evil is the collective force of "eminently safe" men who, like the narrator of "Bartleby," see all human values from the inhuman perspective of cold profit. Theirs is the allegory that represents the motive underlying Lewis' insidious cultural erosion.

Carol's temporary separation from her husband (as the rebel/pioneer) begins with domestic conflict that originates in her dislike of Will's land speculation. Will's reply, reflecting Lewis' small-town ruling class, is to label his wife and other critics of business as political subversives, thus suggesting the politically intolerant who dominate Gopher Prairie's communal perspective. Will cites vigilante justice in nearby Waukamin to illustrate how best to deal with such people, in this instance the Scandinavian immigrant farmers who were neutral toward American involvement in World War One. They had asked speakers from the Nonpartisan League to address their group, but, without knowledge of the content of the speeches, the sheriff and Waukamin businessmen rode the Nonpartisans out of town, Twain-style, on a rail. In rebellious anger, Carol asks, "Precisely how do you expect these aliens to obey your law if the officer of the law teaches them to break it?" (419). Will's reply thrusts marital conflict into the stark Twainian chiaroscuro of Lewis' political allegory. "I suppose you'll be yap-

[6]Many songs illustrate the ethos of the poverty-ridden frontier farmers who later joined the Populists. A few lines of their satiric "Starving to Death on a Government Claim" suggest the plight of the homesteader. "Hurrah for Lane County, the land of the free, the home of the grasshopper, bedbug and flea. / I'll sing loud its praises and tell of its fame / While starving to death on a government claim." Lewis' rasp and sandpaper satire, cold, abrasive, and effective, is evident in the harsh judgment from experience reflected in this traditional song.

ping about free speech next. Free speech! There's too much free speech and free gas and free love and all the rest of your damn mouthy freedom!" (420). One thinks of Daumier's satires of the mercantile middle class and Twain's attacks on racial intolerance and cultural failure. Lewis' invective exposes unlawful and undemocratic suppression of free speech and the right to assembly during a war fought to uphold such democratic principles. Garland's evasive Judge Balser, the land speculator in *Jason Edwards,* has the silent guile of the wealthy smiling villain. Like his *Main Street* friends, Will is tyrannical, dull, and—terrifyingly—in the inarticulate, comfortable majority. His allegory is that of middle-class political indifference and its fear of human differences. Lewis' socialism and democratic passion fuse in his political attack on the land speculator, representative of a Main Street oligarchy.

At this point in the argument Carol begins to gain the strength to oppose Will's domineering attitudes. The pioneer moves westward, so to speak, though she returns as liberated woman conscious of a political and cultural mission she can only symbolically fulfill. She gains courage and eventually the inward freedom needed to complete her education and enjoy a renewal of confident endeavor.

After two months of painful discussion, the Kennicotts agree to a temporary separation that will free Carol to work in Washington. She shares remembered isolation with other small-town emigres; friendships with men and women ripen in a healthy cultural climate. Although she discovers she has not wholly escaped Main Street—it remains in the fusty boarding houses and churches, in periodic visits from Will—she finds enlivening people: ". . . chiefly Washington was associated with people, scores of them, sitting about the flat, talking, talking, talking not always wisely but always excitedly" (421). Lewis captures the noisy bohemianism, sometimes idealistic socialism, of wartime cosmopolitan Washington. In this atmosphere she finds a woman whom she believes has the key to survival in Gopher Prairie. A leader of the suffragette movement, this person advises persistent democratic challenge to its stale usages and unchecked power.

Your Middlewest is double-Puritan—prairie Puritan on top of New England Puritan; bluff frontiersman on the surface, but in its heart it still has the ideal of Plymouth Rock in a sleet storm. There's one attack . . . perhaps the only

kind . . . : you can keep on looking at 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. (441)

The suffragette adds that Gopher Prairie might be civilized in twenty-thousand years instead of two hundred thousand if an "articulate and protesting" minority challenge authoritarian and mindless custom. She enables Carol to accept her entrapment in history as a woman and civilizer and to believe that—with this strategy—she may effectively return to Will and Main Street. As this essay indicates, her achievement is to become an average person in revolt, that is, an allegorical pioneer whose protesting voice of "commonplaceness" articulates strong resistance to the encroachments of dishonest authority. Lewis' "apathy-osis," as it were, of village inanition invites Carol's necessary political challenge of custom and her enlivening courage. The theoretic socialism of Lewis and a rising generation of writers as well as Garland's weary farmers underlie Carol's strategic withdrawal into the pioneer stance of the lonely idealist of Gopher Prairie, voicing grievances against a soulless culture.

Carol's two-year separation in Washington becomes an allegory of liberating education. If she effects no social reforms in Gopher Prairie, she undergoes change into an individual confident of her ability to challenge the shibboleths of village conformity. Lewis suggests that she finds an equanimity that was "not information about office systems and labor unions but renewed courage, that amiable contempt called poise" (430). Her actual change, however, is modest but allegorically significant. She feels confident in facing Ezra Stowbody and others who rule Main Street with their collective myopia; she feels she might invite Miles Bjornstam to dinner without fear of the Haydocks' intolerant opinion. Thus, although she does not threaten the security of Main Street land speculators, she learns the principle of questioning shameless materialism. In this way, Lewis extends the immediate narrative into the allegory (or shadow play) of a twentieth-century dispossessed pioneer whose lonely outcry against greed evokes the American myth of the land and its nineteenth-century promise. Her change in Washington seems comparable to the change that Dell's Felix Fay undergoes through exposure to a lively diversity of urban types and ideas. As a rabbi who befriends Felix suggests, Port Royal (in *Moon-Calf*) is a culturally stimulating city due to the

Flemish-German immigrants who encouraged the love of liberty and "brought with them a taste for music, discussion and good beer"; and in addition who contributed "magnificent parks" and the library, which is "well-stocked with free-thought literature," that is, literature containing socialist theories (218).

In sum, Carol in Washington finds sources of education that free her as an individual to oppose and mitigate if not change Will Kennicott's village ways and to challenge the politics of daily life on Main Street. Here as elsewhere in the narrative she is Lewis' instrument of transvaluation. First, Carol's pathos awakens literary echoes of Garland's weary folk in their austere economies of helpless virtue, but she must be understood from the prospect of Lewis' design for an equable cultural life. Moreover, his apprenticeship with Upton Sinclair and his bohemian days among the socialists at Carmel, California, figure strongly in her dream of sufficient bread and intellectual roses for all in a reformed Gopher Prairie. But this dream, flawed by its essential innocence and simplicity, requires adjustment to the stubborn fact of village life. The adjustment asks Carol's self-knowledge, for Lewis a growth of consciousness. On the concluding page, for example, she renews her decision to view Gopher Prairie as less beautiful and generous than a European town and to accept "dish washing" as a career no longer untenable. If she senses her failure to alter the unalterable stream of mindless respectability that floods Lewis' village, she assures herself that although she has "not . . . fought the good fight," she has "kept the faith" of the idealist, who, like Lewis himself, saw the frontier wolves of economic and cultural failure howling on the threshold of a new age (451). They seem not to threaten her determined intent to challenge "your home and church and bank" with questions that will probe the sanction of a village "double Puritanism." Lewis renews a pioneer myth through a rebellious woman whose passion for nature allegorically links her to the agricultural roots of democratic promise and whose struggle for inward freedom and external beauty relate pioneer and socialist aspirations to a bewildered century.

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