

ABSTRACT

Fitzgerald, Lewis, Wharton, Anderson, and Individual-Community Conflict in the 1920 American Novel

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1920 saw an eruption of significant American novels portraying conflicts between individuals and community norms. These tensions between individuals and their families, churches, social classes, and towns, for example, conveyed the Progressive-era antagonisms toward civil society. In their constructivist approach to society, Progressives believed that “they could reshape character by reshaping the environment,” writes historian Michael McGerr (81). They favored national, disinterested, and enlightened solutions to the economic and social problems associated with Gilded Age industrialism, and criticized local and traditional authority structures for being provincial, pecuniary, and conformist.

Contemporary critic Carl Van Doren referred to the outburst of literature on this theme as “The Revolt from the Village,” for its criticism of “[t]he traditions which once might have governed” and “no longer hold” (412). Among these works were F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*, Edith Wharton’s *The*

Age of Innocence, Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*, and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. Characters in these novels are alienated from groups like family, church, guild, class, and village.

Such communities are considered intermediate associations because they intervene between individuals and government power. Sociologist Robert Nisbet highlighted their importance for the well being of individuals and society in his book *The Quest for Community* (1953). He stated, "The modern release of the individual from traditional ties of class, religion, and kinship has made him free; but on the testimony of innumerable works in our age, this freedom is accompanied not by the sense of creative release but by the sense of disenchantment and alienation" (7).

Indeed, to the degree the characters in these works disengage from the moral influence of social bonds, their senses of belonging and purpose are diminished. In contrast, the characters that become more interdependent in their traditional communities are consistently well adjusted with regard to their individuality and objectives. This dissertation examines the Progressive-era milieu of these works that engendered opposition toward civil society. It then traces the correspondence between the communal interdependency and moral development of characters in these novels to demonstrate the importance of intermediate associations for a free and good society.

Fitzgerald, Wharton, Anderson, Lewis and
Individual-Community Conflict in the 1920 American Novel

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PREFACE

Sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another.

I have shown that this action is almost nonexistent in a democratic country. It is therefore necessary to create it artificially there. And this is what associations alone can do.

Tocqueville 491

[C]reative historical accounting is troubling not only because it has falsely reified individualism into America's chosen political ideology, but because, as a consequence, a long and rich tradition of American political thought has been ignored. What has been largely overlooked is a normative theory of the good political life that is enduring, democratic, and communal.

Shain xviii

This dissertation attempts to demonstrate that the 1920 publication of four significant novels about the alienation between individuals and their groups illuminates the Progressive-era transition from an American society of local communities to that of a national community. Close readings are presented of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*. The order in which these works are addressed reflects the increasing degree to which their characters are engaged in the social bonds of their groups. The alienation of the major characters is indirectly related to their assimilation within their intermediate associations. In their historical context, these novels show that,

rather than encumber individuals, intermediate structures such as the family, church, and civic groups enable persons to flourish, particularly through moral nurture.

The reform period loosely stretched from the first “muckrake” article, Henry Demarest Lloyd’s 1881 *Atlantic Monthly* piece, “The Story of a Great Monopoly,” through its culmination in the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921). Spurred by the technological advances of industrialization, reformers sought to re-shape American political, economic, and social life through efficient government regulation. A primary theme of Progressivism was its attack on the economic and social freedoms associated with capitalism and local institutions like the family, the church, and the township.

Factors such as the Civil War-era shift of the balance of political power from the states to the federal government, the influences of the German rationalism and British efficiency movements, and Darwinism’s liberalizing effects on Christianity influenced the Gilded Age view of the perfectibility of human nature. These conditions gave rise to the demand for State-sponsored solutions to social issues. Reformers at the turn of the twentieth century argued that since humans are inherently good, the government should empower and coordinate the best scientific and administrative minds to mend society. The traditional spheres of civil authority such as kinship, religion, and private organizations were deemed to be too local in scope and too self-interested by nature to serve adequately the needs of Americans in the industrial era.

Antagonism toward the authority of traditional groups increased in the late nineteenth century and climaxed during the Progressive years of the Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations. The historical connotations of certain political and economic philosophies such as “individualism” can be perplexing and, perhaps, counter-intuitive to twenty-first century readers who assume that liberalism always has been synonymous with collectivism and that conservatism always has been synonymous with individualism. In fact, nineteenth-century classical liberals (modern-day libertarians) believed individual freedom resulted when the State and intermediate society exerted minimal power and influence. Progressives (collectivists), on the other hand, emphasized the need for the political power of the State to secure individual freedom. And conservatives (traditionalists) stressed the need for the moral influence of a robust civil society to promote individual freedom.

These competing political visions affect how individuals assimilate into society. As social beings, humans naturally desire to be in community with others. That is why sociologist Robert Nisbet suggested, in his book *The Quest for Community* (1953), that an unrestrained State and atomized individuals reinforce each other. He wrote, “The real conflict in modern political history has not been, as is so often stated, between State and individual, but between State and social group” (*Quest* 100). Both civil society and government are necessary for the common good, yet they can be complementary or antagonistic. When civil

society is weakened by social or political conditions, de-socialized individuals seek meaning and status in the context of the State apparatus.

Individuals thrive, however, when they identify with groups and acquire purposes larger than themselves. Such communal allegiances encourage moral guidance because they are based upon authority and assent. Families, churches, and other voluntary associations sustain themselves through the subordination of individual members to the objectives of the group. Ultimately, individuals accommodate their own desires to the purposes and standards of the community for the sake of the benefits that accompany their participation. The moral agency of the individual is essential to this process, for private societies succeed through persuasion. In this way, group doctrines, morals and ethics naturally proceed to the members unless they rebel and withdraw or are excluded. In contrast, the State's relationship to its citizens is political in nature. The coercive power of laws, regulations, and the police are antithetical to moral freedom. Unlike social groups, the main point for the national political community is obedience under threat of fines, punishment, or incarceration. That is why moral formation occurs naturally within the voluntary nature of intermediate associations, but does not occur through the compulsory nature of government direction.

The theme of this project is that an eruption in 1920 of noteworthy novels addressed the unprecedented tension between individuals and their families, traditions, and purlieus. The specific argument of this study is that these novels, through the correlation of the communal ties and moral developments of their

characters, affirm that intermediate associations are vital for the well being of individuals and their communities. To prove causation between historical events and fiction is not the present intent. Nevertheless, reasonable inferences are useful and necessary for the interpretation of literary texts in light of their historical settings. These works did appear together at a defining moment in the American experience. Perhaps only the 1770s and 1860s have been more influential periods on contemporary America. The World War I era inaugurated the modern age and shaped the next century including our present geopolitics.

In his 2010 introduction to a critical edition of *The Quest for Community*, *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat contends that both the contemporary right and left will contribute little to a conversation about “the cultivation of our common life” (xvi) as long as they perceive themselves as “the party of the individual” and “the party of the state” (xv). Douthat notes how “[t]he post-9/11 period showcased modern conservatism’s statist side – its willingness to out-liberal liberalism when it comes to building new bureaucracies, empowering central authorities, and invoking the mystical bonds of the national community, so long as national security is deemed to be at stake” (xv). Current liberal state supporters, according to Douthat, also are ill suited for the improvement of intermediate associations. He writes, “the cultish enthusiasm associated with the rise of Barack Obama revealed that Americans remain immensely vulnerable to a Rousseauian romance of centralized authority, in which national politics is the highest form of community, and perhaps the only kind of community worth

pursuing" (xv). Douhat observes that a century after the World War I era, in which the United States government assumed powers not known before for the sake of freedom, both major political parties are proponents of progressivism once again. Thus the similarities of today's social, political, and economic circumstances to those of the Progressive era make these novels as relevant as when they were published nearly one hundred years ago.

The insights of Fitzgerald, Wharton, Anderson, and Lewis are vital to understanding America's World War I-era transition from a country of local communities to one of a national community. Their moving treatments of both the individualist and communal perspectives contribute to the abiding value of these narratives. In our democratic, individual rights-based culture, the priority of the individual in these works is often emphasized. However, these novels should be rediscovered for their representations of how intermediate associations provide the moral context in which individuals and their communities flourish.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Individual-Community Conflict and the 1920 American Novel

We are upon the eve of a great reconstruction. It calls for a creative statesmanship as no age has done since that great age in which we set up the government under which we live, that government which was the admiration of the world until it suffered wrongs to grow up under it which have made many of our own compatriots question the freedom of our institutions and preach revolution against them.

Wilson 30-31

I believe it is no exaggeration to say that the West's first real experience with totalitarianism – political absolutism extended into every possible area of culture and society, education, religion, industry, the arts, local community and family included, with a kind of terror always waiting in the wings – came with the American war state under Woodrow Wilson.

Nisbet, *Twilight* 183

The year is 1920. Princeton graduate, war veteran, and hitchhiker Amory Blaine professes vehement dissatisfaction with American society to Mr. Ferrenby, a wealthy, cigar-chomping businessman who has offered the young man a ride in his chauffeured sedan. Rather than exude the youthful optimism of someone with an Ivy League education in a country newly victorious in war, Amory expresses complete frustration. He tells the older man and representative of the established social order, "I'm restless. My whole generation is restless. I'm sick of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her, where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button

manufacturer" (Fitzgerald 280). Amory is the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920), and his alienation from American life represents the mood of many in the immediate post-War era.

Amory's disapproval of American society parallels the general social criticism in the Progressive period,¹ which loosely covers the years 1900-1920. According to "The Progressive Intellectual Tradition in America," a paper from the Center for American Progress, Progressivism sought political and economic reforms, because "stronger government action was necessary to advance the common good, regulate business interests, promote national economic growth, protect workers and families displaced by modern capitalism, and promote true economic and social opportunity for all people" (Halpin and Williams). This summary manifests the Progressive agenda's emphasis on economic, political, and social concerns for the commonweal. Specifically, the deleterious effects of industrialism inspired the Progressive claim that government must collectively intervene into civil society for the welfare of individuals. Theodore Roosevelt's historic 1910 "New Nationalism" address illustrates this perspective. In that speech, he said, "The national government belongs to the whole American people, and where the whole American people are interested, that interest can be guarded effectively only by the national government" (New 27).

The individual-community tension portrayed in *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis, *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton, and *Poor White* by Sherwood Anderson was the existential crisis of the

Progressive era. These four novels directly comment upon the collectivistic politics and economics of the Progressive period. Such references establish the 1920 milieu of the works as well as their individual-community conflict themes that reflect the concerns of the day.

The Progressive outlook touched upon fundamental beliefs about society that are summarized by historian Michael McGerr in his book *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (2003) in the following questions: "What is the nature of the individual? What is the relationship between the individual and society? What are the proper roles of men, women, and the family? What is the place of work and pleasure in human life?" (xiv). These themes of social order were addressed in a flurry of significant American novels published in 1920. In particular, their presentations of individuals alienated from society parallel the concerns of the Progressive era.

The Progressive utopian ideal is evident in each work. *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* have contemporary settings in the World War I-era, which was the height of Progressivism. The 1870s setting of *The Age of Innocence* and the 1890s setting of *Poor White* anticipate the Progressive era and conclude in the early 1900s. In fact, Wharton's Archer is a friend of Roosevelt (207). The promise of collectivism was timely in 1920 with the 1917 Bolshevik takeover in Russia and the 1919 Red Scare in the United States. The potential for socialism to salvage the ruinous effects of industrialism is a theme of *This Side of Paradise*, *Main Street*, and *Poor White*. In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory is sympathetic to Wilson's Progressive

agenda (216) and to socialism (272). In *Main Street*, Carol favors the socialist labor agenda (53) and goes to Washington, D. C., to work in the Wilson Administration's war effort (431). And in *Poor White*, Clara's friend Kate is an avowed socialist (105) and socialist proselytizers stump nightly in the streets of Bidwell (217). The politically realistic backdrops in these novels affirm their post-War immediacy, yet their emphases on the struggle between individual and group norms make their messages timeless.

These four novels portray alienation toward traditional intermediary associations. Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* is the privileged Ivy Leaguer who comes of age during the Great War. He rejects capitalism, family, and the Catholic Church for pragmatic radicalism. New Woman Carol Kennicott in *Main Street* rebels against her conservative husband and town for career ambition. Patrician Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence* battles the restraints of the Old New York social class so that he can leave his conventional wife, May, for her bohemian cousin, Ellen Olenska. And in *Poor White*, Hugh McVey's assimilation into community life mitigates promotes his business ethics. In contrast to Hugh, the diminished social bonds of his business partners Steve Hunter and Tom Butterworth encourages their unprincipled ethics. Additionally, the isolation of successful artisan Joe Wainsworth contributes to his alienation against industrialism that that ends in tragedy.

These characters are at variance with their groups over issues that gained popularity in the Progressive years. In his alienation toward capitalism, the

family, and the Church, Amory Blaine breaks away from traditional middle class perspectives and adopts a collectivist, democratic egalitarian, and individualist outlook. In her alienation toward the family and the town, Carol Kennicott objects to her husband's nationalism and nativism and to her town's provincialism. Instead, she embraces the perspectives of sex equality and feminism. Newland Archer fashions himself an individualist in his revolt against his own upper class. Also, as a champion of Ellen Olenska's divorce rights, he is a kind of feminist. And in his reaction to the industrialism that Hugh represents, Joe Wainsworth is emblematic of the collectivists who resist capitalism. The enduring quality of these works suggests that they transcend mere commentary on the political activism of the day. Instead, this study calls attention to their classic themes of individual-community conflict that reflect the social change of the Progressive milieu.

The order in which these works are addressed reflects the increasing degree to which their characters are engaged in the social bonds of their groups. Although the conclusions of the novels are ambivalent, the protagonists are in various stages of commitments to their intermediate structures. *This Side of Paradise* is considered first because Amory Blaine is the character who concludes with the most antagonism toward civil society and, conversely, who is the most alienated. *Main Street* is evaluated next because Carol Kennicott returns to her husband and town after living in Washington, D. C. as a career woman for two years. The third novel to be assessed is *The Age of Innocence* because Archer

Newland reluctantly remains in his marriage to May. Moreover, at the conclusion, he has a change of heart and affirms the social class system that May represented and to which he had remained embittered for many years. And *Poor White* is the final work to be addressed. This is because, of the protagonists under consideration, Hugh McVey concludes as the one most engaged in his intermediary associations and, conversely, as the one who is the least alienated. Hugh's difficult but happy marriage to Clara Butterworth influences him to be an ethical businessman. He is determined, against the desires of his less principled partners, to forsake financial profits and forego the infringement of another inventor's patent. Consideration of the accounts of Amory, Carol, Archer, and Hugh demonstrate the importance of civil society for the moral formation and welfare of individuals.

Interpretations of these works typically acknowledge broad historical connections to the War-era but do not emphasize the Progressive agenda's hostility toward intermediate associations. Moreover, the individual norms presented in the novels tend to be perceived more sympathetically than group norms. The thrust of *This Side of Paradise*, according to Nancy P. Van Arsdale, is that "individuals should change the places and institutions of society" (44). For Stephen S. Conroy, *Main Street* offers "a brave young bride who struggles pridefully against the spiteful parochialism of a prairie village" (350). And Lydia Blanchard observes that a "career" for Carol is "[t]he possibility that most critics of *Main Street* see as Lewis's alternative for empowerment" (131). For Helen

Killoran, the theme of *The Age of Innocence* is “the frustration and futility of Archer Newland’s empty life caused by the weight of social inhibitions” (94). Marilyn Jones Lyde identifies the “persistent undercurrent of revolt throughout the novel,” and judges that “if Archer gives up happiness for the duty dictated by his social class, he never submits mentally to the dullness of this group” (5). Regarding *Poor White*, Blanche Housman Gelfant estimates that this transformation affects the people of Bidwell so that “they become avid for money and indifferent to human values, and as they grow apart from family and community, they incorporate the attitudes and relationships of urbanism as a way of life” (61). These representative comments suggest how personal defiance of or reluctant submission to traditional standards is typically considered normative with regard to interpretations of individual-community conflict.

The resistance to community norms in these novels reflected the writing of the day. Contemporary literary historian Vernon L. Parrington noted a turn from “the movement of social criticism which dominated fiction between 1903 and 1917” (373). He counted 1918 to be “sterile,” but claimed, “[T]he year 1919 began a new literary period” that included psychological naturalism, ironic romanticism, and a revolt against tradition (373). During the “social idealism” of the 1903-1917 period, which solidly falls within the Progressive period, Parrington saw “the glorification of propaganda” in the economic and political problem novels (347). He also noted that the post-War novels acknowledged, “psychology as well as economics has its word to say on politics” (412). This

might explain the enduring acclaim of the novels under present consideration against many of those published within the height of the Progressive era that focused on “social justice” (Parrington 412). Contemporary critic Carl Van Doren, who considered the novels a part of a “Revolt from the Village,” verged upon that idea when he wrote, “When its elders have let the world fall into chaos, why, youth questions, should it trust their counsels any longer?” (412). The enthusiasm for political liberalism, Parrington noted, had subsided by 1920. This allowed for more nuanced psychological and sociological analyses of the younger generation’s break from Victorian traditions.

This study will examine the historical importance of intermediate associations such as family, church, class, and town to American social life. The role these associations play in the moral development of individuals is then explored. Next, the rise of Progressivism as a solution to the problems of capitalism is explained. This is followed by a consideration of the idea of the national community, which was the Progressive goal to replace the traditional local communities of civil society. Then the novels will be analyzed in light of their depiction of antagonism toward intermediate associations. This analysis shows that the characters in these works flourish, with regard to their senses of belonging and purpose, to the degree they are engaged in the morally influential social bonds of local communities. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities.

Intermediate Associations Are Traditional to American Society

Authority in the social order of a democratic republic like the United States is found within three spheres: the individual, government, and the intermediate voluntary institutions between them such as families, religious groups, townships, professional guilds, and private associations. The political philosophies that emphasize the relative importance of the individual, the state, and civil society are individualism (classical liberalism), collectivism (socialism), and communalism (conservatism), respectively. Before the turn of the century, the moral development of the individual was considered to be the purview of the family and other private associations. In his book *The Myth of American Individualism* (1994), historian Barry Alan Shain argues that the American “vision of the good” historically “was reformed Protestant and communal, rather than secular and individualistic” (4). However, the Civil War-era rise of a redemptive federal government and the acceptance of Darwinian natural selection contributed to a shift from a culture dominated by Christian and communal influences to one of social progress through “political and social planning, enlightened controls, and a conception of government as both liberating and protecting in its relation to citizens” (Nisbet *History* 302). This skepticism toward civil society for its perceived subjugation and menace to individuals is portrayed in these novels.

According to Shain, the communal social model was the pattern for American culture until the late nineteenth century. In contrast to the

“republicanism and individualism” that are “the dominant explanatory models of late 18th-century American political thought,” Shain argues,

The vast majority of Americans lived voluntarily in morally demanding agricultural communities shaped by reformed-Protestant social and moral norms. These communities were defined by overlapping circles of family- and community-assisted self-regulation and even self-denial, rather than by individual autonomy or self-defining political activity. (xvi)

He calls this system “communalism” and defines it, “as opposed to both collectivism and individualism,” as the “sanctioned formation of the individual by intermediate social institutions” such as “the family, the neighborhood, a religious congregation, fraternal organizations, and locally controlled schools and governments” (23). These novels address the Progressive-era resistance to the communal philosophy that governed American culture to the end of the nineteenth century.

Progressive philosophy opposed the two defining features of traditional American communalism. The first is an emphasis on “local rather than central and national political, religious, and economic organization” (Shain 49). The second is that “an individual’s ethical existence be corporately envisioned, defined, and enforced” (Shain 50). Progressive focus on federal-level solutions and national service undercut localism and the communal bonds necessary for moral formation. The disillusionments of Amory, Carol, Archer, and Joe toward family, church, town, class, and guild reflect the Progressive idea that the common good is found in the release of individuals from the local and moral

allegiances that interfere with personal independence and with citizenship duties.

The underlying constructivist philosophy of the Progressive disregard for civil society was the sentiment that inspired the French Revolution to uproot traditional institutions in the name of liberalism, egalitarianism, and democracy. Here Progressive leader Herbert Croly, in his book *The Promise of American Life* (1909), acknowledges the destruction to France's civil society: "All traditional authority fell under suspicion. Frenchmen, in their devotion to their ideas and in their distrust of every institution, idea, or person associated with the Old Regime, hacked at the roots of their national cohesion and undermined the foundations of social order" (223). Yet he affirms these events anyway. He writes, "[T]he revolutionary democracy succeeded, nevertheless, in releasing sources of national energy, whose existence had never before been suspected, and in uniting the great body of the French people for the performance of a great task" (223). To Croly, the benefits of increased nationalism justified the ruination of that country's time-tested cultural associations. Amory in *This Side of Paradise*, Archer in *The Age of Innocence*, Clara's friend Kate Chantecleer in *Poor White*, and Carol in *Main Street* all long for radically different societies. However, this constructivist sentiment is foreign to the traditional American experience.

Conservative defenders of the American Revolution assert its fundamental difference from its counterpart in France. Irish political philosopher Edmund Burke saw it as the "historical tradition of a people under assault by an

alien power" (Nisbet, *Conservatism* 22). In 1798, Connecticut minister Israel Wolcott observed the different views of human nature expressed in the two revolutions. He writes,

The *liberties* of the American and French nations, are grounded upon totally different and opposite principles. In their matters of civil government, they adopt this general maxim, that mankind are virtuous enough to need no restraint; which idea is most justly reprobated by the more enlightened inhabitants of the United States, who denominate such liberty, licentiousness; the fruit of it, Corruption. (Shain 227)

In this way, Croly's support of the French Revolution is consistent with his belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature. And Shain notes the Colonists would not have rebelled against England for the sake of individualism. He writes, "To make sense of the American Revolution, fought against the greatest 18th-century defender of individual rights, their most valued secular understanding of liberty would have had to have been corporate and political, not individual and private" (268).

The individual-community conflict in these novels reflects the timeless philosophical difficulty of the One and the Many. Until the modern era, corporate entities had social and political priority before individuals. Literary historian Ian Watt offers this explanation for the transition: "[A]s a result of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the primacy of the individual over the collective became the defining characteristic of modern Western society" (237). The traditional Christian or communal approach, however, views neither the individual nor the collective as primary. Communalism avoids the anarchy of

unchecked individualism as well as the tyranny of unchallenged collectivism. Communalism, like the Christian theological concept of the Trinity, obviates the ontological subordination of either the individual or the group to the other. For this reason, historian Gary North states, “The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of social theory” (*Inheritance* 965). In these works, the traditional authority of intergmediate groups is opposed by individualists such as Amory in *This Side of Paradise*, Carol in *Main Street*, Archer in *The Age of Innocence*, and Joe in *Poor White*. This resistance in the novels to groups like the family, the church, the guild, the social class, and the town is representative of the Progressive attitude at the turn of the century that favored economic collectivism and political individualism.

Intermediate Associations Foster Moral Development

A key distinction between the local communities that comprise communalism and the national community of collectivism is their approaches to individual moral agency. The State operates through laws that demand obedience under threat of punishment like fines and incarceration. In contrast, civil society functions through voluntary association. In his book *The Trouble with Democracy* (2001), English professor William D. Gairdner explains the connection between volition and moral formation. He writes, “By definition, community can arise spontaneously only between those who choose to bind and subordinate themselves to common ideals and standards of behavior – that is, those who

choose a higher collective civil freedom over their lower individual freedom” (173). Private groups can only induce their members, because they do not have the governmental power of compulsion. People are free to leave organizations, churches, neighborhoods, and even families. Of course, proscribed behavior and separation from affiliations bring negative consequences including loss of tangible and intangible advantages, excommunication, or disownment. In *This Side of Paradise* Amory loses his opportunity to be the newspaper editor at Princeton. Carol forfeits the benefits of fellowship in Gopher Prairie in *Main Street*. In *The Age of Innocence* Archer is excluded from family councils, and Ellen is exiled from New York. And in *Poor White* Joe forfeits the economic benefits of fellowship in Bidwell. These characters lose certain material and emotional benefits, as they become outsiders to allegiances they formerly enjoyed.

Intermediate associations provide the structure that encourages interdependence among people and moral development in individuals. Estrangement occurs when persons lack purpose and identity. However, in community, humans connect through common goals and a sense of belonging. Nisbet explains, “Community is the product of people working together on problems, of autonomous and collective fulfillment of internal objectives, and of the experience of living under codes of authority which have been set in large degree by the persons involved” (*Quest* xxix). Members bond as they collaborate on their group objectives. Also, because members assent to organizational discipline, familial, religious, and organizational interests ultimately shape their

behavior. This idea counters Enlightenment and liberal thought, which sees individuals prosper in proportion to their extrication from the restrictions of social bonds. To the contrary, Nisbet writes, "The modern release of the individual from traditional ties of class, religion, and kinship has made him free; but, on the testimony of innumerable works in our age, this freedom is accompanied not by the sense of creative release but by the sense of disenchantment and alienation" (*Quest* 7). Common goals, shared identity, and collective reinforcement promote interdependence and alleviate estrangement.

The Progressive-era tension between individual autonomy and group authority was rooted in contrasting visions of human nature. Communalism presumed inherent human fallibility, but Progressivism supposed that humans are innately unaffected and perfectible. Croly writes, "Democracy must stand or fall on a platform of possible human perfectibility" (*Promise* 400). This view saw voluntary organizations as superfluous if not harmful. If humans are *tabulae rasae* then social maladies originate in intermediate institutions. The resistance to traditional civic authorities such as family, church, guild, class, and township portrayed in these novels connotes this perspective. In their desires for individual autonomy, Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, Lewis's Carol Kennicott, Wharton's Newland Archer, and Anderson's Joe Wainworth presume that these groups have failed as centers of authority. These characters believe their personal fulfillment lies more in their achievement of abstract rights and freedoms than in their group allegiances.

Intermediate associations played a significant role in American history because they are vital to the moral formation in individuals. In his article “Tocqueville’s ‘Administrative Decentralization’ and the Catholic Principle of Subsidiarity” (2011), law professor L. Joseph Hebert connects Tocqueville’s praise of nineteenth-century American associational life to the moral teaching of the Catholic Church. He writes,

[T]he recent Catholic Magisterium, like Tocqueville before it, insists that a political liberty worthy of the name be characterized not only by limits to the functions of central government – state as well as federal – but also by the fostering of the virtues manifested and developed in the free and responsible actions of individuals, families, and local political and civil associations. (“Tocqueville’s”)

Thus decentralization and personal goodness are necessary for a free society. The plurality of government authorities among townships, cities, and states provides individuals and families a defense against the potential tyranny of the State. If community leaders are corrupt, however, this benefit of local rule is of little value.

The Church historically has connected moral growth with individual freedom that is ordered at local and intermediate levels. In his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1892), Pope Leo XIII cautioned against the intrusion of government into the family sphere. The idea that “the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household” he called “a great and pernicious error” (par. 14). Later, Pope Pius XI similarly emphasized this point when he clarified the principle of subsidiarity. In his

encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), he wrote, “[I]t is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do” (par. 79). These popes affirmed the concept of distributed authority and administrative decentralization for the sake of greater moral responsibility at every level of society.

Moreover, communities also have a positive aspect in addition to their protection of individuals against the tyrannical power of the State. Nisbet comments, “The conservative position, set forth most eloquently by Tocqueville, is that intermediate associations are valuable as mediating and nurturing contexts for individuals and equally valuable as buffers against the power of the state” (*Conservatism* 62). The relationships of Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise*, Carol Kennicott in *Main Street*, Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*, and Hugh McVey in *Poor White* to their groups affect their moral developments. Amory embraces the amorality of pragmatism following his repudiation of the Church; Carol’s desire for the fellowship of her family and town initiate her renewed sense of calling and consequent return to Gopher Prairie; Archer’s submission to the Old New York code preserves his marriage, family, and standing; and Hugh’s marriage to Clara Butterworth emboldens his moral imagination. Relationships rooted in family, faith, place, and interests have the potential to produce moral formation.

Progressivism Opposed Economic Individualism

The overriding concern of the Progressive era was economic individualism or capitalism. Parrington describes it as a time “when America was seeking to readjust her ideals and institutions to a revolutionary economic order that had come upon her” (346). He notes the consensus to be that “capitalism is no longer competitive but monopolistic” and that “*laissez-faireism*² no longer suffices” (347). Parrington explains that Progressives believed that through “the doctrine of the expert and the rule of efficiency,” the remedy of “collectivism” in which “the state must absorb the trust” would be found (347). Thus the zeitgeist was an outcry against private enterprise and other traditional institutions that were considered inhibitive or futile toward the individual.

Amory’s diatribe against capitalism in Ferrenby’s car illustrates the Progressive critique of the free market that is also portrayed in *Main Street* and *Poor White*. He complains to Ferrenby that the capitalist system limits the potential social influence of artists and intellectuals because the bourgeois are naturally conservative and control mass communications through their wealth. Amory explains, “[A] man who has money under one set of social institutions quite naturally can’t risk his family’s happiness by letting the clamor for another appear in his newspaper” (275). Progressives faulted capitalism for its unequal distribution of riches and associative power. However, communalism-minded conservatives also challenged capitalism, but they did so for its damage to social bonds. This is why in *The Age of Innocence* the law “was accounted a more

gentlemanly pursuit than business” (80). Family and social order were the presumed priorities of cultured lawyer in contrast to those of businessmen and politicians.

Progressivism attempted to mitigate the dangers of economic individualism with a collectivist agenda. This approach, however, disregarded the historic American tradition of communalism. Both perspectives, therefore, believed community was the remedy for the social dislocation caused by industrialism. However, Progressives wanted national allegiances at the expense of local ones. Shain argues that America’s “most enduring political tradition” is its “Protestant, democratic, and communal localism” (xviii). Similarly, Tocqueville observed, “Americans so completely confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of the one without the other” (280-81). Commitments to Christianity, shared power, and intermediate groups had historically shaped American social life. Shain suggests that this practice remained until the Gilded Age. He writes, “It was not until well after the Civil War, however, that the balance of power between these hostile postrevolutionary American traditions of political liberty shifted decisively and permanently away from local communalism and toward nationalism and individualism” (243). The unmistakable transition from communalism to individualism occurred with the advent of industrial capitalism, which encouraged economic individualism. The conclusive transition

to political nationalism occurred with the emergence of Progressivism, which was a reaction to capitalism.

In his book *The Quest for Community* (1953), sociologist Robert Nisbet suggests that capitalism's potential for social disruption depends on context. He notes "the pursuit of gain" is "a timeless pursuit" (87). Thus the market's potential for greed is assumed but not required. According to Nisbet, capitalism's novelty is "the supposition that society's well-being is best served by allowing the individual the largest possible area of moral and social autonomy" (87). The real concern, then, is "the structure or context of these incentives" (89). When persons understand themselves primarily to be economic beings rather than social beings they act on individual interests instead of group ones. Therefore, the Progressive aim of national community at the expense of local community discourages the social bonds that mitigate the dislocating effects of capitalism.

The national political reaction against capitalism is evident in the fierce public criticism of individualism that culminated during the Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations. This resistance came from various professions and disciplines. Scientist and first president of the American Sociological Association Lester Ward notes, "The individual has reigned long enough." Pastor and Social Gospel leader Washington Gladden asserts, "I do not believe that political society or industrial society or any other society will endure on a purely individualistic basis" (McGerr 59). Settlement house pioneer and first American

female Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jane Addams writes, “[W]e are passing from an age of individualism to one of association . . . [W]e must demand that the individual shall be willing to lose the sense of personal achievement, and shall be content to realize his activity only in connection with the activity of the many” (McGerr 66). Muckraker journalist Henry Demarest Lloyd gloomily refers to individualism as “one of the historic mistakes of humanity.” Sociologist E. A. Ross charges, “The community has become too often the prey of individuals” (McGerr 59). Lyman Abbott, theologian and editor of *The Outlook*, grimly observes, “[I]ndividualism is the characteristic of simple barbarism, not of republican civilization” (McGerr 59). And Baptist theologian and Social Gospel leader Walter Rauschenbusch bluntly insists, “individualism means tyranny.” These comments from eminent figures in social science, education, religion, and journalism represent the broad antipathy in the Progressive years toward economic individualism and unregulated society.

The move toward a nationally regulated society increased when Gilded Age industrialism created conditions that made workers physically and economically vulnerable in unprecedented ways. Between 1870 and 1900 labor employment surpassed that of agriculture. Key union formations included the National Grange (1867), the Knights of Labor (1869), and the American Federation of Labor (1886). They pressed work issues such as hiring, bargaining, wages, workdays, overtime, unemployment, and insurance. However, some in the private sector considered trade associations to be insufficient and began to

encourage State intervention. This statement from the first platform of the American Economic Association (1885), for example, supported redemptive government:

We regard the state as an educational and ethical agency whose positive aid is an indispensable condition of human progress. While we recognize the necessity of individual initiative in industrial life, we hold that the doctrine of laissez faire is unsafe in politics and unsound in morals; and it suggests an inadequate explanation of the relations between the state and the citizens. (Eisenach 42)

Such a resolution fundamentally redefined the spheres of authority among the State and civil society. The protection of workers would come from government coercion rather than from private association. The Interstate Commerce Act (1887) soon followed and denied states the power to regulate intrastate commerce including the railroads. The decades following the Civil War saw a marked rise in labor issues, which are explicitly referenced in *This Side of Paradise*, *Main Street*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *Poor White*.

The late nineteenth-century turn to government to solve social issues such as labor relations, insurance, and poverty raised questions about both the role of government and the effectiveness of its solutions. While allowing that government assistance can “supplement” private efforts, Yale professor of political economics Henry W. Farnam feared the consequences of State aid as a replacement for charity (307). In his article “The State and the Poor” (1888), he asks, “[D]oes [the fortuitousness of life] supply a sufficient reason for governmental action?” (284). This question illustrates the challenge to the

American tradition of communalism in the industrial age. He cautioned that public assistance might work against a strong work ethic, and that government might not perform like private charity. Personal reform, Farnam writes, requires “sympathetic but intelligent interest” (284) on behalf of the destitute that public aid cannot offer. Indeed, the private charity Hugh receives in *Poor White* from the Shepards does not stifle his work ethic. In fact, through their relationship with the indigent and directionless young man, the Shepards spur him to achievement and personal responsibility. In contrast, Amory in *This Side of Paradise* spurns opportunities to benefit from teachers and employers and winds up rudderless and professionally frustrated.

Progressivism Opposed Intermediate Associations

The Progressive vision encompassed national-level solutions to political, economic, and social matters. For this reason, Progressive hostility toward intermediate institutions occurred because such organizations buffer individuals against unrestrained political power. Heritage Foundation researcher Brian Brown, in his article “Extended Republic or Centralized Nation-State? Herbert Croly, Progressivism, and the Decline of Civic Engagement,” explains how the Progressive desire for political intervention led to this antagonism:

By transforming domestic policy into a climactic struggle between the national government and every conceivable social ill, the early Progressives raised the scale of the solution along with that of the problem. This eliminated civil society from the picture, made social problems too big for little people, and thus guaranteed that the war would be impossible to win. (1)

Progressive leaders like Roosevelt and Wilson envisioned the federal government as the solution to the economic, political, and social ills they believed industrialism spawned. For the government to fulfill this mission required nationwide unity. Thus Progressives sought a transition toward a national community of civic-minded citizens and away from families, churches, and organizations that are focused on local and private interests.

The transfer of power to the federal government during and after the Civil War made the Progressive program possible. Progressive leader Herbert Croly acknowledged the importance of the War to the Progressive vision of a national community when he wrote, "Thanks to the theory of implied powers, to the liberal construction of the Supreme Court during the first forty years of its existence, and to the results of the Civil War the Federal government has, on the whole, become more rather than less efficient as the national political organ of the American people" (*Promise* 35). The political consequences of the War and the economic results of post-bellum industrialism modified the American tradition of communalism. The individual-community conflict depicted in these novels, from 1870s New York City to 1890s Ohio to World War I-era Princeton and Minnesota, expresses the Progressive-era struggle between the competing Progressive and communal ideals of American life.

These opposing prospects for the American social order, bottom-up traditional local communalism and top-down Progressive centralization, are

antagonistic. Nisbet argued that intermediate associations provide the meaning and authority by which individuals assimilate into society for the common good. Moreover, he emphasized that a centralized State and civil society are adversaries. He wrote, "The real significance of the modern State is inseparable from its successive penetrations of man's economic, religious, kinship, and local allegiances, and in its revolutionary dislocations of established centers of function and authority" (xviii). For Nisbet, consolidated authority and bureaucracy undermine the kinship, religious, and community ties in which individuals flourish. He believed that the United States entered such a crisis during the Wilson administration, the very milieu of these novels, which are concerned about individuals alienated from their social groups.

The Progressive alternative to a robust civil society capable of promoting individual moral growth through communal relationships is the centralized State, which seeks reform at the societal level through national community. Those who do not willingly align with an absolute political system either surrender or receive punishment, neither of which contributes to personal moral growth. The communal vision desires a free civil society whose decentralized authorities counteract the State's potential for tyranny. On the other hand, the unitary State resists free markets and other sources of competing authority. This demotion of intermediate associations atomizes individuals so that a totalitarian order naturally emerges. Nisbet explains, "What gives historical identity to the totalitarian State is not the absolutism of one man or a clique or a class; rather, it

is the absolute extension of the structure of the administrative State into the social and psychological realm previously occupied by a plurality of associations" (*Quest* 187). The alienation from traditional communities in these novels parallels the decline of intermediate associations in the Progressive period, in which centralized government sought to replace civil society as the source of commonweal.

The collectivist solution to the perceived oppression of the masses by an industrial capitalist system is national community, in which individuals rather than families and voluntary associations are the primary social units. In his defining "New Nationalism" speech in 1910, Theodore Roosevelt averred, "where the whole American people are interested, that interest can be guarded effectively only by the National Government" (*New* 27). In TR's argument that only the State can protect the masses from corporate greed, he omits any role for civil society. Similarly, Herbert Croly, whose book *The Promise of American Life* (1909) influenced Roosevelt and the whole Progressive movement, writes, "No voluntary association of individuals, resourceful and disinterested though they be, is competent to assume the responsibility. The problem belongs to the American national democracy, and its solution must be attempted chiefly by means of official national action" (24). These Progressive leaders emphasized the need for a public-spirited technocracy to solve domestic problems.

For Progressivism, the national community of the State is society, which makes traditional civil society extraneous and oppositional. Brown calls attention to this:

What was new about Croly was that not only was the atomistic individual to be abhorred, but so also were the intermediate institutions of civil society and local government that prompted him to veer away from acting in the higher collective good. Instead of classing those institutions with society as other thinkers had done, Croly classed them with the individual and condemned them together for their resistance to nationalism. (11)

Progressives wished to release individuals from their traditional bonds so that they might be incorporated into the national community. Individualists like Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, Lewis's Carol Kennicott, Wharton's Newland Archer, and Anderson's Joe Wainsworth want deliverance from the perceived oppressive authority of the family, the church, the corporation, the social class, and the town.

Nisbet argued, however, that civil society is the individual's protection against arbitrary power. He wrote,

The claims of intermediate groups do not add up to tyranny but to the reinforcements necessary to the liberty of individuals. If the rights of such groups as family, community and province are invaded by the central state – and almost predictably in the name of individuals assertedly robbed of their natural rights – the true walls of individual freedom will in time crumble. (*Conservatism* 62)

Thus the collectivist vision of Progressivism and the individualist vision of liberalism unite in opposition to the authority of voluntary associations.

However, defenders of traditional society, like Father Darcy in *This Side of*

Paradise, May in *The Age of Innocence*, Clara in *Poor White*, and Kennicott in *Main Street*, recognize that their institutions protect individual freedoms.

The rise of the social sciences in the Gilded Age gave prominence to leaders like Lester T. Ward, Thorstein Veblen, and John Dewey who believed “political intervention the very core of economic and social progress” (Nisbet, *History* 300). This perspective contrasted with the classical liberalism of the nineteenth-century, represented by figures such as Mill and Spencer, who argued for “individual freedom in all spheres” (Nisbet, *History* 299). This late nineteenth-century confidence in the power and expertise of the State encouraged utopian solutions to social problems. Consequently, the 1890s saw a wave of utopian writing that was succeeded by muckraking³ literature, which raised public awareness about unpleasant urban conditions and unsavory business and political practices. For remedy, these works urged public policy intervention rather than a vigorous civil society. In addressing the fundamental question of whether poverty is solvable, Farnam denoted impoverishment as more than the lack of money. He suggested it includes “the mental and moral habit which occasions this lack of funds” (309). He believed the “social disease of pauperism” could be cured (309-10). This illustrates how belief about human nature affects public policy. Farnam did not contradict his earlier statement that poverty is related to “mental and moral habit,” because he accepted the plasticity of humanity. If the habits that lead to poverty are innate, as the Christianity that fostered communalism held, then the problem endures. But if mankind is

inherently uncompromised, as Farnam and other Progressives believed, then poor behaviors can be eliminated through external pressures in the environment.

Although Christianity had historically advocated communalism, the Social Gospel Movement saw many clergy support the Progressive vision of national community over local community. Catholic leader John A. Ryan believed the remedy for American social ills was the intersection of religious philanthropy and civic-mindedness. He writes, "The State, and only the State, can prevent a large part, probably the larger part, of the social distress which is due primarily to the environment" (Resek 125-132). However, some Christian ministers intuited that unqualified attacks on society might deter personal responsibility. Congregational pastor Gladden noted how reformers were intent upon "changing the environment" and not "strengthening character" (Milkis 115). For Gladden, efforts toward "getting temptation out of the way of men" instead of "equipping men to resist temptation" led the moral weakling to think that "the community or the public officials or the purveyors of vice are to blame for his degradation; that he is a victim, more than a sinner" (Milkis 115). Gladden's concern about Progressivism's disregard for personal moral responsibility calls attention to the need for a strong civil society.

The Progressive desire for social control was, therefore, based in the perfectibility of human nature. Yale University economist Irving Fisher illustrated this in his article "Why Has the Doctrine of Laissez Faire Been Abandoned?" (1907). He wrote, "[I]t is not true that each man can be trusted to

pursue his own best interests” because of “ignorance” and “lack of self-control” (19). This view attributed human weakness to the lack of education and to the lack of social constraints. Fisher could therefore rationale coercion in this way: “The world consists of two classes – the educated and the ignorant – and it is essential for progress that the former should be allowed to dominate the latter” (20). Consequently, once the basis for control was established, age distinctions became arbitrary. Ross, therefore, suggested that control begin at an early age. He wrote, “[T]he role of the schoolmaster” is “[t]o collect little plastic lumps of human dough from private households and shape them on the social kneading-board” (*Social Control* 168).

Theodore Roosevelt elevated the late-Gilded Age concern for the moral transformation of society. His defeat of conservative Democratic presidential candidate Alton B. Parker in 1904 gave TR public sanction to pursue his avowed Progressive ideology. Roosevelt said, “I have always believed that it would also be necessary to give the National Government complete power over the organization and capitalization of all business concerns engaged in inter-State commerce” (Chapman 14). Sensitive to public concerns fueled by muckraking journalists⁷ and business reformers, he expressed this ethical vision in a 1906 speech: “So far as this movement of agitation throughout the country takes the form of a fierce discontent with evil, of a firm determination to punish the authors of evil, whether in industry or politics, the feeling is to be heartily welcomed as a sign of healthy life” (McGerr frontispiece). In his praise of Ross’s

Social Control (1901), TR writes, “[I]f a ring is to be put in the snout of the greedy strong, only organized society can do it. You war against the vast iniquities in modern business, finance, politics, journalism, due to the ineffectiveness of public opinion in coping with the dominant types of wrong-doing, in a huge, rich, highly complex industrial civilization like ours” (Ross, *Sin ix-x*). Roosevelt’s early reforms included the Meat Inspection Act (1906), the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906), and the Hepburn Act (1906), which gave the ICC power to set maximum railroad rates.

The Progressive agenda succeeded at the national level, in part, because it used the principle of “Police Power” to “enact laws that override constitutional rights to liberty and property, in the name of a compelling public interest in health, welfare, or morals” (Leonard “American Economic Reform” 118). In the ascendancy of Progressivism, legal historian Charles Warren, in his *Columbia Law Review* article, “The Progressiveness of the United States Supreme Court” (1913), wrote, “The years 1887 to 1911 inclusive have constituted the period most productive of progressive and liberal – even – radical – social and economic legislation in the United States” (294).⁴

Roosevelt’s August 1910 “New Nationalism” speech and return to political life in Osawatimie, Kansas, broadened the appeal of Progressivism. The slogan came from Croly’s book (O’Toole 106), which TR had read earlier in the year on his return from African safari. He called it “the most profound and illuminating study of our national conditions which has appeared in many

years” (Ekirch 190). Both men believed that “human nature can be raised to a higher level by an improvement in institutions and laws” (Croly 399). TR argues in his speech that individual economic success is suspect and cause for government control.

It is not even enough that [a fortune] should have been gained without doing damage to the community. We should permit it to be gained only so long as the gaining represents benefit to the community. This, I know, implies a policy of a far more active governmental interference with social and economic conditions in this country than we have yet had, but I think we have got to face the fact that such an increase in governmental control is now necessary.

Croly and Roosevelt maintained that the Jeffersonian ends of an industrious and civic-minded citizenry required the Hamiltonian means of a centralized and interventionist government.

Although Roosevelt lost the 1912 presidential election, his historic third-party candidacy pushed the political mainstream even further toward collectivism. Wilson wanted to defeat monopolies through competition; Roosevelt wanted to do so through regulation. Both attacked the other for being too capitalist. Roosevelt claimed that Wilson’s New Freedom agenda was *laissez faire* and “can mean only freedom for the big man to prey unchecked on the little man” (“Progressive Party” 831). TR continues:

We propose to use the government as the most efficient instrument for the uplift of our people as a whole; we propose to give a fair chance to the workers and strengthen their rights. We propose to use the whole power of the government to protect all those who, under Mr. Wilson’s *laissez faire* system, are trodden down in the

ferocious, scrambling rush of an unregulated and purely individualistic industrialism. (Milkis 216)

On the other hand, Wilson charged that Roosevelt would be indebted to business. Both affirmed that individuals are helped most through State intervention rather than through intermediate groups. The proximity of the positions of these two leading vote getters is significant. Historian Lewis L. Gould explains, "The argument between these two candidates showed how far the nation had moved in the direction of progressive ideas by 1912. Programs for social justice that would have been deemed impossibly intrusive into private affairs in 1890 were now on the national agenda" (66).

Roosevelt claimed to defend individuals, in his article "The Progressive Party" (1913), in which he explained his rationale for a third party. He argued that modern complexities require "the partial substitution of collectivism for individualism, not to destroy, but to save individualism" (828). He resumes:

[T]he goal is not socialism, but so much of socialism as will best permit the building thereon of a sanely altruistic individualism, an individualism where self-respect is combined with a lively sense of consideration for and duty toward others, and where full recognition of the increased need of collective action goes hand in hand with a developed instead of an atrophied power of individual action. (829)

Roosevelt offered a defense for Progressive policy that echoed Croly. They asserted that individuals need the help of government, not voluntary associations. Roosevelt's call for "duty toward others" superficially seems communal in its approach. However, duty within civil society involves assent to

authority instead of surrender to power. Amory's military service and Carol's work in a Washington, D. C. war bureaucracy gives them experiences with the efficiencies of centralized power during wartime. These stints last less than two years after which both enthusiastically resume their civilian lives. However, neither gains a deeper sense of individual action or a greater sense of duty. Rather, as Nisbet suggested, collectivism reinforces the disenchantment of individuals.

The extraordinary success of the Progressive national vision is evident in the 1912 election.⁵ All of the four major candidates – Wilson, Taft, Roosevelt, and Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs – favored Progressivism. Frank Tariello, Jr., in his book *The Reconstruction of American Political Ideology: 1865-1917* (1982), notes how in the Progressive era, “liberalism as an effective force had perished” because of an “intellectual trend” that was “manifestly against limited government” (48). Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, Lewis's Carol Kennicott, Wharton's Newland Archer, affirm this direction in their pursuit of individualist agendas at the expense of their familial, religious, and community ties. By the end of *This Side of Paradise*, Amory endorses totalitarianism. In their show of support for the State, Carol and Archer cheerfully work for their Progressive governments

The American preparation for World War I shifted the focus of many Progressives from domestic issues to foreign policy. This transition in emphasis merely reinforced the Progressive commitment to a national community. Croly

famously connected the value of war to the existence of national community when he wrote, "The American nation needs the tonic of a serious moral adventure. It has been too safe, too comfortable, too complacent and too relaxed" ("Effect" 162). A January 1916 editorial, "The Newer Nationalism," signaled the break of Croly's *The New Republic* magazine from Roosevelt and its alliance with Wilson. Although Wilson had won re-election with the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War," the Progressive magazine would influence him to lead the United States into the European War. The article thought Roosevelt's preparedness plan was not comprehensive enough.

A democracy which adopts the principle of universal and compulsory public service and which proposes for stern reasons of national discipline to conscript the energy of its citizens, must insist upon applying equally stern and exacting standards to all phases of the national endeavor. A system of enforced collectivistic morals must be balanced and expressed by a larger measure of collectivism in the business of organization. (320)

The stark language of compulsion, conscription, stern discipline, enforcement, and increased collectivism demonstrated the Progressive desire for social control. Leonard notes that the reformers recognized the bureaucratic potential of the military. He explains that "war mobilization" offered the Progressives "a golden opportunity to promote nationalist feeling, and then to enlist it in the reform cause, against individualism and decentralization, and for technocracy and economic planning" ("American Economic Reform" 133).

When Congress declared war in April 1917, the *New Republic* editorial "Who Willed American Participation" credited Progressive intellectuals for the

national resolve to enter the War. The column expressed excitement about its historic meaning: "It is an illustration and a prophecy of the part which intelligence and in general the "intellectual" class have an opportunity of playing in shaping American policy and in moulding American life" (309). And they rejoiced that "[f]or the first time in history a wholly independent nation has entered a great and costly war under the influence of ideas rather than immediate interests" (309).

Nisbet believed the commitment to war was detrimental to intermediate society in America. Differently. He considered World War I "the most important war in U. S. history" because it brought about "the greatest number and diversity of changes in American life" (*Present* 5). Nisbet thought these changes were negative, because "[w]ar tends to break up the cake of custom, the net of tradition" (6). Specifically, wars bring "a secularizing effect," that includes "a diminution of the authority of old religious and moral values and a parallel elevation of new utilitarian, hedonistic, or pragmatic values" (10).

Examples of the Progressive War State's new power were the War Industries Board, which oversaw the country's first military draft since the Civil War, and the Committee on Public Information, which oversaw the shaping of public opinion. Nisbet called the CPI, "the most complete thought control ever exercised on Americans" (*Present Age* 7). In 1917-18, volunteer "Minutemen" gave an estimated 7.5 million speeches in over 5200 communities. These four-minute speeches, purposed to encourage patriotism and raise war funds, were

delivered in public settings such as restaurants, parks, and movie theaters (Goldberg 81). Perhaps 175,000 Americans were arrested for failure to demonstrate patriotism (Goldberg 117). *Main Street* acknowledges how the War divided Progressives. In the spirit of anti-War Progressives like Robert LaFollette and Jane Addams, Carol supports the free speech of the “National Nonpartisan League” (425).

The drastically curtailed freedoms including speech and association during the War demonstrated the Progressive agenda’s totalitarian impulse. Ann Hagedorn, in her book *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America, 1919* (2007), adds, “What began as a wartime measure to protect Americans on their own soil and to outmaneuver German spies evolved into a homeland war waged against anyone who did not agree with what the government was doing, especially with regard to the war” (30). Similarly, in their book *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917-1918*, Meirion and Susie Harries identify how the centralization of government power affected life during World War I:

Where once power had been widely dispersed and shared, during the war the nation was organized and directed from the center down to the details of its dress, its food, and its conversation. The nation surrendered itself to the draft, to censorship, to repression. Dissent was forbidden, and even honest criticism was outlawed. Worse, ordinary Americans volunteered to police the system, to spy on their neighbors, to condone violence and the abuse of civil rights, to participate in a shameful travesty of their former lives. (8)

Such accounts of the pervasive control of private life convey the manner and effectiveness of norms imposed upon the national community. Because the

wartime mandates were impersonal, one-sized, and severe, they encouraged fear and distrust of one's government and neighbors.

The generation of reform and social control culminated with the oppressive Espionage (1917) and Sedition (1918) Acts and the post-War race riots, labor strikes, and anxieties about Communism. A week after the armistice, the *New Republic* catalogued the wartime rollbacks to America civil freedom:

We conscripted lives, property and services; we took over railroads, telegraphs and other economic instruments. We fixed wages, prices, the quantity of coal, power, labor or transportation a man might command and the quantity of food he might consume. We stopped motoring on Sunday. All this we did on the narrowest of legal bases, for no one dared question our power. We did many arbitrary things, most of them wise and necessary, some of them unfortunately foolish and vicious, because it was war and the emergency was severe. The Executive took astonishing short cuts while the inhibitory courts, like palsied old men, lagged trembling behind. Social control was a necessity of war and unrestrained private initiative was contraband. ("Uses" 60)

Beyond the significance of the tally of actions is the sobering acknowledgement of the caprice and questionable legalities involved. Also noteworthy is the impersonal tone with regard to the many affected by such policies. One reason these actions could go unchallenged is the diminished civil society that is the only viable check on government power.

"Call it what you like," comments Goldberg, "progressivism, fascism, communism, or totalitarianism – the first true enterprise of this kind was established not in Russia or Italy or Germany but in the United States, and

Woodrow Wilson was the twentieth century's first fascist dictator" (80).

Goldberg expands on his charge against Wilson:

This claim may sound outrageous on its face, but consider the evidence. More dissidents were arrested or jailed in a few years under Wilson than under Mussolini during the entire 1920s. Wilson arguably did as much if not more violence to civil liberties in his last three years in office than Mussolini did in his first twelve. Wilson created a better and more effective propaganda ministry than Mussolini ever had. [...] Wilson had unleashed literally hundreds of thousands of badge-carrying goons on the American people and prosecuted a vicious campaign against the press that would have made Mussolini envious. (80-81)

The Progressive era, capped by Wilson's domestic and international record dramatically increased the size and role of the State. Because the public sector and the private sector are inversely related, the growth of the national community led to the diminution of the local communities found in intermediate associations.

The War era concluded a generation of more rights for people but fewer freedoms. The nationalization of social problems and solutions weakened the need for local communities and private institutions to function naturally. The tension between individuals and their groups in these 1920 novels is a challenge to the importance of intermediate associations for the good of society. If people are better off as atomized individuals who only need the authoritative structure of the State for their common good, then they are better off as collectivists and civil society is obsolete. However, these works demonstrate that it is the

communal bonds that best provide the purpose and belonging in which humans flourish.

The 1920 American Novel Depicts Opposition to Intermediate Associations

In contrast to the harsh Wartime national control measures, characters in these novels undergo moral development with the help of the disciplinary authority of their intermediate associations. In Fitzgerald's novel, Amory Blaine's university colleagues chastise him when they select another student for the coveted editorship of the student newspaper. In Lewis's novel, Will Kennicott tenderly scolds his wife, Carol, to avoid a potentially adulterous relationship. In Wharton's novel, Newland Archer is shut out of family councils for his extramarital interests in Ellen Olenska. And in Anderson's novel, Clara McVey rises against deranged artisan Joe Wainsworth when he physically attacks her husband, Hugh. These disciplinary actions appear in the context of group social bonds and provide the characters with opportunities to develop their moral perspectives. In his individualism, Amory spurns the potential learning opportunity of his rebuke and becomes more alienated toward civil society. Carol heeds Will's advice and avoids a potentially scandalous affair. Archer reluctantly remains faithful to his wife through the pressures of his social code. And Hugh is inspired by Clara to forego the infringement of another man's invention. The examples of these characters demonstrate the potential for them to be morally nurtured by their intermediate groups.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blaine represents the Lost Generation that came of age in the World War I era and lost faith in civil society. He goes from being a pampered only child of wealthy parents to being a disenchanted young man who loses his job, apartment, girlfriend, and inheritance. The harsh realities of life cause Amory to lose confidence in the traditions of the middle class such as free enterprise, family, and faith. In the climax of the novel, he rejects bourgeois society in his extended conversation with Mr. Ferrenby.

Amory's cynicism derives from his disappointed idealism with regard to the American Dream of romantic love and a rewarding and lucrative career. For Amory, these expectations are a part of his birthright. When these desires are frustrated, Amory's egotism leads him to find fault with the American system and not with himself. As a boy, Amory experienced an idyllic life with his idiosyncratic mother as they traveled "searching for sunshine" (13). However, at Princeton, Amory's lack of discipline and distaste for method lead to a failure in math class that costs him his dream of being editor of the student newspaper (102). Later, following his unremarkable stint in World War I, Amory quits his entry-level advertising job. He is quickly frustrated with the low pay and mundane work, and believes that the capitalist system is unfair to artistic types like him.

In addition to his vocational frustrations, Amory is romantically disillusioned. After the War, his future appears bright as he rooms with his college buddy in New York City, where he falls in love with Rosalind Connage,

the woman of his dreams. She recognizes Amory's uncertain career path and opts for a wealthy suitor. As Amory's prospects dim for future happiness in work and love, his ties to the past fade. His aloof father and hypochondriac mother pass away, leaving Amory an inheritance reduced by failed investments and taxes.

In addition to his vocational and romantic troubles, Amory is spiritually frustrated. The death of Amory's priest and mentor, Father Darcy, further isolates him. Darcy is the alter ego of his young protégé. Darcy is from an elite background, has artistic interests, and also wrestled with philosophical and religious skepticism. In contrast to Amory's vocational difficulties, however, Darcy overcame his religious doubts to become an esteemed priest and politically connected statesman. Yet despite Darcy's wisdom and charm, Amory is unable to embrace the Church and its authority. Amory is without meaningful social, religious, or economic connections either to the past or present.

The lack of traditional allegiances in Amory's life provides him with little support in his disappointments. Isolated from the authority of intermediate structures, Amory's frustrations lead him to embrace radicalism. A philosophical turning point for Amory happens one night in Atlantic City when he atypically puts himself at risk to save a former schoolmate and his girlfriend from indecency charges under the Mann Act (251). This moment of pragmatic action emboldens "the Machiavelli latent in him" (51). The former idealist is emboldened by the newfound power he perceives in his pragmatic approach to

life. At Darcy's funeral, Amory tells Mrs. Lawrence, a close friend of the priest, that he considers himself "rather pagan at present" because "religion doesn't seem to have the slightest bearing on life at my age" (214). Amory is convinced of the irrelevance of the Church. His new humanistic ambition is "to give people a sense of security" (269).

Amory's discussion with Ferrenby is his coming out as a Progressive-minded pragmatist. He argues the need to experiment with socialism because "[a] social revolution might land me on top" (280). In frustration, he confesses, "I'm in love with change and I've killed my conscience" (280). Amory is personified will without morality. In his pragmatism, Amory finds truth in action and not in the Church. In his radicalism, he finds collectivism superior to capitalism. Convinced that traditional institutions have failed, he is zealous for the Progressive vision of security through the social reform made possible by a national community.

Like *This Side of Paradise*, *Main Street* has a contemporary 1910s setting. It follows the marital and vocational struggles of reform-minded Carol Kennicott and her conservative husband Will after they wed in 1912 and settle in his hometown, Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Their contrasting perspectives parallel the differing attitudes in American society toward the social changes that occurred during the Progressive era.

Kennicott, an established general practitioner, is able to woo the idealistic university-educated young woman to marry him and move to Gopher Prairie

with suggestions that she will be able to improve the town. Carol becomes frustrated, however, by the lack of emotional support and funds from the community. She is especially discouraged by the lack of encouragement from her husband toward her reform ideas and toward her interest in a cultured life.

Kennicott is a hardworking physician who has nonintellectual tastes and enjoys common-man recreations like hunting and poker. Because of her New Woman ideals, Carol must cope with being an outsider to her conservative new husband and town.

Carol's undeveloped sense of vocation leaves her restless at home and desperate for a creative outlet. She finds mixed success with house parties, women's clubs, and town projects. Kennicott contributes to Carol's predicament because he is not ready to have children. Also, he does not provide her a regular allowance with which to budget household needs. Carol finds some comfort in friendships with her Swedish maid Bea Sorenson, old maid schoolteacher Vida Sherwin, bachelor lawyer Guy Pollock, anarchist handyman Miles Bjornstam, and young tailor Erik Valborg. Erik is an aspiring artist and reciprocates Carol's enthusiasm for beauty and culture. Kennicott's aloofness encourages Carol to pursue a clandestine friendship with Erik that nearly becomes scandalous before Kennicott gently terminates it. Eventually, Carol's inability to find kindred spirits with regard to her desire for town reform leads to her further disengagement from her family and local community.

In October 1918, Carol decides she must discover her calling, and moves to Washington, D. C., with their three-year-old son. She finds work life and city life to have benefits and drawbacks just like homemaking and small towns do. Kennicott's letters and his visit after they have been separated a year keep Carol open to returning to Gopher Prairie. Frank counsel from a suffrage leader she admires encourages Carol to see that a home life does not necessitate giving up her Progressive ideals. Carol returns to Kennicott and Gopher Prairie in June 1920 with a renewed perspective on her husband and her town. She will make the home her first priority and reform Gopher Prairie as opportunities allow. Moreover, she seeks to engage her community neighbors and appreciate them as they are. Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* becomes increasingly alienated as he withdraws from his traditional intermediate associations. Carol, however, is less disillusioned when she returns to her intermediate groups after her separation from her home and town. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer, like Carol, considers leaving his marriage to be with the woman he loves.

Archer is a stalwart younger member of 1870s Old New York society until he romantically desires Ellen Olenska, the exotic cousin of his conventional fiancée, May Welland. Archer comes to resent the community restraints of his social class that prohibit Ellen from a divorce from her Polish husband.

Archer's devotion to May corresponds his affirmation of the social code. Therefore, his interest in Ellen is not immediate. At first, he resents the clumsiness of her foreign manners and the embarrassment her past has brought

to his intended's family. Archer comes to be Ellen's defender, however, as he questions his society for their acceptance of wealthy rogue Julius Beaufort while they disapprove of Ellen for her troubled marriage to a womanizer.

As Ellen's legal counsel, Archer must help her understand that New York's communal culture protects marriage and family interests before individual ones. Ellen accepts this reality and forsakes her pursuit of divorce in absentia. Archer becomes increasingly enchanted with Ellen as the representative of his ideal of individualism. However, convinced that Ellen represents natural beauty that is unconditioned by human institutions, Archer wants to escape social codes for individual autonomy.

Archer expresses his understanding of freedom as autonomy when he tells New York society authority Sillerton Jackson, "Women ought to be free – as free as we are" (27). A "free man" to Archer is "accountable to no one for his actions" (183). However, as Archer's understanding of freedom becomes more individualistic, Ellen's idea of freedom becomes more communal. He expresses his desire to go with her "into a world" where they can be "the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter" (174). But she authoritatively replies that such journeys end only in places "smaller and dingier and more promiscuous" (175). Ellen accepts that for communal reasons she cannot have a divorce, and for similar reasons she entreats her grandmother, Catherine Mingott, to influence the Wellands to honor Archer's request to advance his wedding date with May.

May's conventionality and consistent adherence to the code is the reason for Archer's waning interest in her as a spouse. He finds her to be oblivious to her oppression by their conservative society. Aware of Archer's uncertainty towards her during their engagement, she offers him the opportunity to withdraw. In contrast to Archer, May finds liberation in her allegiances to her family and social tribe. Ultimately, she must employ the code to protect the interests of her family and class. With the help of her extended family, she influences Ellen to depart from New York.

Although Archer straddles the boundaries of the social code, he ultimately remains obedient. Thirty years later, while visiting Paris, Archer looks back on his exemplary family and career and feels that he missed out on the fullness of life. Upon learning that May knew of his desire for Ellen, Archer's admiration for his wife and the class mores she represented grows. He demonstrates his affirmation of the old social code and of the life he chose with his subsequent decision to forego a visit to Ellen.

Archer's individualism and resistance to the intermediary structure of social class in the 1870s anticipates the Progressive era movement toward national community. As a New York civic leader, he eventually promotes Progressive agendas. The discipline and constraint of the old New York code keeps Archer from abandoning May or damaging their reputations with an extramarital affair with Ellen. His persuasion of Ellen to forego a divorce, his marriage to May, and his decision to remain with her are inspired by the mores

of his elite class. Although Archer scoffs at the moral boundaries of his tribe, they benefit him, his family, and his community.

Eccentric inventor Hugh McVey, the protagonist of *Poor White*, hungers for the social community that Amory, Carol, and Archer seek to escape. As a representative of industrialism, Hugh is inadvertently in conflict with those like artisan Joe Wainsworth, who resent the economic displacement brought about by the new machines. Only at the end of the novel, with the help of his wife Clara, does Hugh realize his work has engendered conflict in his rural Ohio town of Bidwell. The novel's ambiguous presentation of capitalism portrays its potential both to harm and to benefit society. The determinant for whether capitalism positively or negatively influences a community is the condition of the social bonds. Communal allegiances protect against the atomizing effects of the marketplace.

The ability of social ties to promote the common good in market contexts is evident in the contrasting experiences of certain characters in the novel. The first contrast is between the positive family influence in Hugh's early life and the negative family influence in the early life of his unprincipled partner, Steve Hunter. A second contrast is between the ways wealthy farmer Tom Butterworth and his daughter Clara value possessions and people. A third significant contrast in experiences that reveals how intermediate associations mitigate the anti-social influences of capitalism is between Hugh's principled business ethics and the professional and personal deterioration of Joe Wainsworth.

The first contrast is between the disparate influences of Hugh and Steve's family situations. Despite his impoverished background, Hugh becomes an honest and principled inventor because of the influence of his foster parents, Henry and Sarah Shepards. Decent and hardworking Sarah Shepard saves fourteen-year-old Hugh from his wretched upbringing. She tutors the shy and unmannered boy, and her husband, Henry, employs Hugh at the rail station. The Shepards impart their strong work ethic to Hugh, whose influence on the Mississippi Riverbanks has been poor white idlers and drunkards. Hugh takes to the instruction and example of his foster parents and is inspired by Sarah's stories of beautiful eastern cities with good people and economic opportunities. Conscious of his loneliness, Hugh travels east in 1886 at age twenty-one and locates in Bidwell, Ohio. To relieve his isolation, Hugh applies his talent for physics and math to the design of agricultural machines.

In contrast to Hugh's positive experience with the Shepards, Steve's experience with his family and community is less uplifting. His mother died when Steve was little. Moreover, he has a poor relationship with his aloof father. Later, when his father dies, Steve becomes a degrading guardian of his crippled sister, Elsie. The lack of moral influence from any intermediate groups in Steve's early years leads to his selfish behavior in later years.

Steve is representative of the young men who "dream of suddenly acquired wealth" (44). His cynicism and opportunism come from his desire to prove himself great through the achievement of wealth. Steve lies to secure

investors for Hugh's machines. Then Steve persuades his board of directors to defraud their stockholders when one of Hugh's inventions fails. Later, Steve secretly colludes with Tom Butterworth against the interests of the other board members. Steve's unprincipled behavior as a business manager contrasts with Hugh's principled outlook.

The second contrast concerns the relationship between widower Tom Butterworth and Clara, his university-educated daughter. Tom is the richest man in Bidwell and a business partner with Steve Hunter. Clara resents her father, however, for his lack of affection, which she perceives is because of his love of possessions. Tom is obsessively suspicious about the sexuality of his wife and daughter. He misreading of certain innocent interactions Clara has with men leads to the distrust and poor communication between them.

Clara's communal perspective contrasts with her father's individualist outlook. A primary influence on her viewpoint that people are more important than possessions is Tom's veteran farmhand, Jim Priest. He gives Clara avuncular sympathy and advice that helps her navigate the difficulties she has with her father and other men. Jim takes Clara to the depot and encourages her when she departs for college because Tom is embittered toward her. Similarly, when Clara goes with Hugh to get married, Jim offers them salutations. He then tracks down Tom, who is with a prostitute, so that Clara and Hugh can return to a surprise party to celebrate their wedding. Despite growing up with her wealthy and materialistic father, Clara maintains a community-centered outlook that

prizes people over things. Jim's personal concern for Clara influences her toward this communal perspective.

The third contrast in *Poor White* that shows how intermediate groups avert the individualism that is associated with capitalism concerns the way Joe Wainsworth and Hugh McVey respond to professional crises. The social isolation of harness maker Joe Wainsworth contributes to his economic loss and mental breakdown. Joe is a lonely widower who withdraws from association with others. He reluctantly takes on an assistant, Jim Gibson, who turns out to be cruel and disloyal. Joe's unwillingness to accommodate modern machinery or to engage the counsel of others leads him to violently strike out at those he considers responsible for the loss of his livelihood. Joe's rampage includes the murder of Jim, the shooting of Steve, and the assault of Hugh.

In contrast to Joe, Hugh benefits from social bonds. The Shepards prevent Hugh from isolation when he is a young man. And his marriage to Clara helps Hugh to become more communal when he is a successful inventor. Both Hugh and Clara have communication difficulties, which makes their marriage shaky from its beginning. Joe's assault on Hugh occurs three years into their marriage, with Clara present. The attack improves Clara's sympathy towards Hugh, for she no longer sees him as a predatory businessman like she does her father. The attack also awakens Hugh to the socially disruptive aspects of capitalism that are manifest in Joe's situation. This social consciousness inspires Hugh to resist the influence of greedy Tom Butterworth. Tom wants Hugh to violate the patent of

an inventor in Iowa. However, with the moral clarity of a communal perspective that values persons over wealth, Hugh resists the temptation to undercut a stranger for the sake of profits.

Poor White depicts how free enterprise can negatively affect lives, families, and communities. Yet the novel also shows the potential for intermediate associations to mitigate the negative consequences of capitalism. In contrast to Hugh's assimilation into community life, Joe becomes further alienated with regard to the loss of his craft and without any fellowship to draw upon for support. Similarly, the selfishness and materialism of Steve and Tom are largely unchecked because of their individualistic attitudes. The communal influences of the Shepards and Jim Priest on Hugh and Clara help them to remain principled and community-centered despite the wealth Clara knows from childhood and Hugh comes to know as a successful inventor.

The experiences of these characters suggest that the good life is illusory apart from the moral vision that is made possible by the communal bonds found in intermediate associations. The alienations of Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, Lewis's Carol Kennicott, Wharton's Newland Archer, and Anderson's Joe Wainsworth reflect the Progressive-era disillusionment with intermediate groups. At the conclusion of these novels, Amory remains the most alienated, because he has extracted himself from traditional middle-class commitments to the market economy, the family, and the Church. Having accepted the priority of the home above her career, Carol is reconciled to her husband and town. Archer

remains in his marriage though the pressures of his social class code. And Hugh, the least alienated protagonist, is also the most desirous of social assimilation. To the degree these characters are extricated from the moral allegiances of their communities, their senses of identity and purpose are diminished. Yet, the more these characters commit to their intermediary groups the greater is the richness of their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

“I’m in love with change and I’ve killed my conscience”:
Traditional Authority and Authoritarian Power in *This Side of Paradise*

[T]he inefficient man, unable by his own hand and brain to cope with the conditions which beset and menace him, seeks refuge, soon or late, in the notion that the world is out of joint. Sometimes he concludes, finally, that the horrors of existence are irremediable, and then he is ripe for religion, with its promises of repayment in some gaseous paradise beyond the grave. At other times he arrives at the idea that all would be well if there were some abysmal reconstruction of the scheme of things – some new deal of the cards, with four aces pushed his way.

La Monte and Mencken 120

The transition from free capitalism to forced collectivism is easy and will hardly be noticed when a population has lost the sense of social and moral participation in the former.

Nisbet, *Quest* 222

Panicked pre-dawn whispers awaken recent Princeton graduate and war veteran Amory Blaine in an Atlantic City hotel. It is October 1919, when Alec and Jill, a former classmate and his girlfriend, come to Amory’s quarters, through a shared bathroom, because the authorities rapping on their door threaten to arrest them under the Mann Act (249). Normally irresolute, Amory firmly instructs Alec to get in Amory’s bed and appear drunk (251). He then takes Jill into the other room, pretends to be her companion, and convinces the detectives to let them off with a warning (253).

This rescue of Alec and Jill at the risk of his own arrest is a defining act for Amory because its boldness and sacrificial nature contrasts with Amory's normally self-serving and indecisive manner. In his vocational, romantic, and spiritual frustrations, Amory adopts a new pragmatic approach to life that is characterized by action and results. This attitude contrasts with his former idealism and tentativeness. As they leave the hotel, Jill asks Amory about Alec: "It was sorta crazy you takin' all that blame. Is he pretty important? Kinda more important than you are?" (255). He replies, "That remains to be seen" (255). For narcissistic Amory to consider his own inferiority is a new perspective for him. His fresh outlook is revealed in his decisive action and in his open-ended reply to Jill. Practical action and indeterminate truth are key themes of the American pragmatism that emerged in the early twentieth century. Why does this formerly speculative idealist become a cynical participant? As the protagonist of *This Side of Paradise*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920 *Bildungsroman*, Amory comes to reflect the contemporary Progressive-era outlook that favored social control and centralized government solutions to the turn-of-the-century anxieties about capitalism and a laissez faire society.

Like three other significant American novels from 1920, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*, *This Side of Paradise* addresses the transition of America from local communities to a national community during the Progressive years, loosely 1900-1920. *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* have contemporary settings in the

1910s. *The Age of Innocence* and *Poor White* have earlier settings but culminate in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. *Main Street* concerns New Woman Carol Kennicott's career ambition and consequent rebellion against her conservative husband and town. *The Age of Innocence*, set in 1870s New York, portrays patrician Newland Archer's battle against his social class, so he can leave his conventional wife for her bohemian cousin. And in *Poor White*, inventor Hugh McVey's assimilation into community life promotes his business ethics. These novels express reaction against the intermediate associations of traditional civil society that parallels the Progressive era transition from a society based upon local communities to one supported by a national political community.

Community structures such as family, church, class, guild, and town are considered intermediate associations because they intervene between individuals and government power. The deliberate and voluntary natures of these communities, along with their disciplinary capacities, provide the moral context in which individuals flourish.

Amory's gravitation to pragmatism is prompted by his frustration with the contemporary social order. This novel primarily covers Amory's maturation during his Princeton years, 1913–1917, and his post-War experience in 1919. In this study, Amory's vocational frustrations that inspire his disillusionment with capitalism are examined first. Next, his romantic frustrations that give rise to his disillusionment with the traditional family are considered. This is followed by a look at his spiritual frustrations, which foster his disillusionment with the

Catholic Church. Then comes an examination of how Amory's disillusionment with bourgeois society prompts his embrace of pragmatism. The final section analyzes how Amory's pragmatism inspires his enthusiasm for collectivism.

This close reading in the light of historical and sociological context shows that Amory's alienation increases to the degree he disengages from the morally influential social bonds of local communities. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities.

Amory's Vocational Frustrations Inspire His Disillusionment with Capitalism

Amory's disillusionment with traditional middle-class social allegiances such as the professional marketplace of capitalism comes from the idealistic expectations that are ingrained in him during his childhood. His love for aristocratic manners and refined culture is frustrated by a society that values efficiency and common tastes. The divide between Amory's longings and experiences exhibits a Victorian trait that Brown University English professor George P. Landow labels "the double awareness." He describes this as a desire to "balance the rival claims" between "private, aristocratic insights" and "tendencies existing in a society progressively vulgarized by the materialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Amory's elitist temperament, poetic sensibilities, and Enlightenment rationality are rooted in Gilded Age mores but

collide against the prevailing democratic currents in America during the Progressive era.

Amory's aristocratic manner derives from his privileged and eccentric background. His newly rich father, Stephen, was "an ineffectual, inarticulate man with a taste for Byron and a habit for drowsing over the *Encyclopedia Britannica*" (11). However, his debutante mother, Beatrice O'Hara, was educated in Europe and recognized there "as a fabulously wealthy American girl" (12). Amory gets from his mother "every trait, except the stray inexpressible few, that made him worthwhile" (11). She inordinately influences him, because he travels itinerantly with her between the ages four and ten. Beatrice told him, "My nerves are on edge – on edge. We must leave this terrifying place tomorrow and go searching for sunshine" (13). In her lassitude, Beatrice indulges her only child, saying, "Dear, don't *think* of getting out of bed yet. I've always suspected that early rising in early life makes one nervous" (13).¹ The extent to which she coddles her son with affluence is evident in his medical care. When he contracts scarlet fever, Amory has a retinue of health workers at his side, where "the number of attendants, including physicians and nurses, totalled fourteen" (14). Amory lives his early life on tour because his mother has the means to visit the new locales that soothe her.

Beatrice's wanderings are in response to her insecurities. New places and people allow her to retell "certain stories" that threaten to "sweep in and lay siege to her nerves" (14). These include "the history of her constitution and its

many amendments" and "memories of her years abroad" (14). Amory's eccentric mother is affected with hypochondria, and makes doctors and priests "her favorite sport" (15). Beatrice considers her stories to be "[l]ike Freudian dreams," and therefore "must be thrown off" (14). By the time he begins prep school, Amory considers the "ingredients" in his composition to be "Amory plus Beatrice plus two years in Minneapolis" (39). Therefore, in Amory's formative years, he is "attached to no city" (14), and his primary influence is his high-strung mother's impulsive and self-absorbed behavior.

Amory has high ideals for both society and himself. From a young age, Amory's egocentricity and pride are prominent. As a schoolboy, his "chief struggle" is "concealing "how particularly superior he felt himself to be" (16). He desires to reach "a vague top of the world" (27), and he marvels "how people could fail to notice that he was a boy marked for glory" (25). Amory considers his "first philosophy" and "code to live by" to be "a sort of aristocratic egotism" (26). At fifteen, Amory reunites with Beatrice after two years with relatives in Minneapolis. He complacently tells her that in order to survive he "became conventional" and "adapted [himself] to the bourgeoisie" (29). He considers himself a philosopher, and therefore "in a superior class" (41). At St. Regis prep school, others see Amory as "both conceited and arrogant" (35).

Amory's idealism and vanity are evident in his habitual pretension. He uses friends "as mirrors of himself, audiences before which he might do that posing absolutely essential to him" (35). His affectation is so fundamental that

family friend Monsignor Thayer Darcy says, “[F]or you not posing may be the biggest pose of all” (109). In college, a defensive Amory tells his housemate Alec Connage, “If I enjoy going around telling people guilelessly that I think I’m a genius, let me do it” (140). And his ideal sophisticate is classmate Dick Humbird, a “perfect type of aristocrat” (83), who possesses good looks, intelligence, and “a clear charm and *noblesse oblige*” (83). These reactions to Amory’s eccentricities and postures elicits from those around him suggest an incongruity between his idealistic expectations about life and the realistic expectations of the democratic society of the early twentieth-century,

An active mind contributes to Amory’s ideals and insecurities. His exposure to different places and cultures stimulates his abundant imagination. However, his unchecked creativity is a hindrance. Clara Page, with whom Amory has a brief romance, becomes exasperated by Amory’s affectations and narcissistic self-analysis. The clear-headed young widow and mother correctively tells him, “You’re a slave, a bound helpless slave to one thing in the world, your imagination” (146). One drawback to Amory’s cleverness is how it stimulates his fearfulness. In the spring of his senior year at Princeton, Amory, who “hate[s] the dark,” goes for a walk at night in the woods with his friend Burne Holiday, who used to fear the dark as well (133). Burne sympathetically acknowledges, “Any person with any imagination is bound to be afraid” (133). He then explains to Amory how to overcome the fear: “project yourself completely into another’s place” (134). Burne continues about the importance of empathy, saying, “I knew

that if I were the dog or the convict or the ghost I wouldn't be a menace to Burne Holiday any more than he was a menace to me" (134). The implication is that fear comes from unfounded expectations of danger. Amory's creativity often enervates him because it fuels his insecurities about what he cannot see or know.

Amory's characteristic hesitation factors in his eventual frustrations at Princeton and in the business world. His "tendency to waver at crucial moments," along with his height, are the "two abstractions" Amory inherits from his father (11). In his freshman year, Amory is "up in the air" because he "can't decide whether to be "a great dramatist" or "a Princetonian slicker" (54). For military service, Amory considers "[i]nfantry or aviation" and says, "I can't make up my mind" (153). And when his girlfriend Rosalind Connage asks about his career plans, he replies, "Can't say – run for President, write" (188). Uncertainty about a vocational path is not unusual for young adults. However, Amory's vacillation is problematic because his imagination constructs abstract false dilemmas that fail to move beyond broad and safe categories. The pursuit of drama and popularity are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, politics and writing are not necessarily contradictory interests. These aspirations have common ground, so that Amory could strive after more than one at a time, consider his successes and failures, and fine-tune his course. His dislike for confusion and nuance gives Amory an indecisiveness that hampers him personally and vocationally.

Amory's idealism leads to unrealistic goals that impair his ambitions and groom him for vocational frustration at school and in professional life. He neither accepts less than his ideal, nor works for incremental successes. Positions of service and responsibility at his school newspaper and club do not appeal to Amory. Instead, he wants to be "Princetonian chairman" and "Triangle president" (54). Similarly, he is not merely interested in government or law but in being "President" (188). Ambition typically fosters motivation. However, Amory's ambition conceals his fear and laziness that cause his immobilization. His friend Kerry Holiday, a Princeton classmate, notices that he is "just going round in a circle" (54). He suggests to Amory, "If you want to be prominent, get out and try for something" (54). Similarly, Beatrice, in a moment of clarity, suggests that Amory "must go into finance" (106). Here is her informed and practical advice: "I'm sure you would revel in it. You start as a messenger or a teller, I believe, and from that you go up—almost indefinitely" (106). Amory's failure to heed the advice of family and friends to take the risk of certain challenges contributes to his vocational frustration.

At Princeton, Amory's individualism clashes with the conformity that is expected of young students. In his desire for social success, Amory aims to become "one of the gods of the class" (50). His "system" (103), therefore, attempts to navigate "the intricacies of the social system" (51). These complexities include the informal code of the University's prestigious upper-class clubs. One such tenet is the disapproval of underclassmen "running it out,"

or bringing attention to themselves (51). The clubs assumed that “the influential man was the noncommittal man” (52). Amory knows that his “nearest approach to success” is through “conformity,” but he also realizes that “his imagination” is “nearly snowed under” (104). Yet, in his conceit and desire for independence, Amory increasingly marginalizes himself at college and later in his young career. His vanity and idealistic enthusiasm lead him to overplay or underplay his efforts. To gain recognition as an influential person, Amory exaggerates his noncommitment to the point that he loses his coveted newspaper position.

The laziness of Amory embodies his indecisiveness. His alert mind, athletic physique, and relish for fellowship all attest to his general spiritedness. However, he is frequently indolent with regard to the very enterprises that would promote his social and vocational ambitions. In fact, a “recumbent position” is the one “most natural” to Amory (215). At prep school he has “a lazy indifference toward his work” (35). He loves Princeton’s “lazy beauty” (50). And he tells Kerry, “I hate to get anywhere by working for it” (52). These examples communicate Amory’s fundamental reluctance to meaningful action. He prefers to remain in the abstract. Performance implies commitment, to which idealistic Amory is averse.

Amory’s inclination to avoid definiteness leads to his most crushing collegiate setback. His failing grade in math causes Amory to be passed over for the goal he eagerly desires. Instead, Jesse Ferrenby unexpectedly becomes chairman of the *Daily Princetonian* (54). Amory’s difficulty with conic sections

reveals his aversion to concreteness. He personifies them this way: “their calm and tantalizing respectability breathing defiantly through Mr. Rooney’s fetid parlors” (101). This striking image conveys how the purity of the abstract figures becomes contaminated for Amory when the teacher instantiates them. Amory has a similar experience with a psychology course “which he had eagerly awaited” (85). To his dismay, it becomes “a dull subject full of muscular reactions and biological phrases rather than the study of personality and influence” (85). Amory is disappointed that the content of the psychology course focuses on the specific and scientific rather than about the power of great personalities. And when he considers military service options, Amory favors the glory of aviation to infantry, because he “hates mechanics” and does not “know a horsepower from a piston-rod” (153). Amory delights in the perfections of theory, but he falters in the messiness of the practical. His preference for abstraction and ideals hinder his opportunity to gain valuable vocational experience as an editor.

The rationalization Amory offers for his failure to secure the leadership position at the newspaper reveals his unwillingness to be self-critical. Moreover, Amory’s consistent disregard for the insights of others who know him and care about him reveals his individualist outlook. Upon hearing the news, his friend Alec Connage discerningly expresses his disappointment in this way: “[W]hat makes me the angriest isn’t the fact that you won’t be chairman of the *Prince*,” he tells Amory, “but just that you didn’t get down and pass that exam” (103). Alec blames Amory’s “laziness,” and believes his friend simply failed to apply himself

(102). Amory, on the other hand, suggests that his behavior is more complicated. Rather than take personal responsibility, he becomes “mad at the concrete thing” (103). He assures Alec, “My own idleness was quite in accord with my system, but the luck broke” (103). Amory’s defense is a justification of his listlessness. Despite his egotism and dilatoriness, Amory’s ability to remain charming and likeable is illustrated by Clara’s observation. She judiciously tells him, “there’s so much lazy sweetness in your heart” (149).

His irresoluteness makes Amory an unacceptable marriage prospect to Rosalind Connage. She is his ideal woman that he meets after the war. Her mother warns her that Amory is “a theoretical genius who hasn’t a penny to his name” (194). Despite her affection for him, a realistic Rosalind then tells Amory, “The very qualities I love you for are the ones that will always make you a failure” (196). In his vocational disillusionment, Amory soon quits his advertising job, and tells his boss, “I just got tired of it” (209). He elaborates about his frustration saying, “It didn’t matter a damn to me whether Harebell’s flour was any better than any one else’s. In fact, I never ate any of it. So I got tired of telling people about it” (209). Amory is too idealistic to apply his skills in the commercial world. He later complains to businessman Mr. Ferrenby, “I’m sick of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her, where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button manufacturer” (280). Idealistic Amory is alienated by the capitalist system that financially rewards salesmen more than artists. Consequently, struggling artists,

like Amory, are then at a pecuniary disadvantage in the romance market.

Amory's vocational frustration increases his skepticism toward the marketplace, and it ultimately contributes toward his embrace of collectivism.

In his article "The Question of Vocation in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*," James L. W. West III suggests that "the American educational system bears much of the blame for the predicaments" of elite young Americans who "need some notion of how inherited wealth might be deployed to make society better, or at least to free the possessor to develop artistically or intellectually" (53). Perhaps some students might benefit from such training. However, Amory disregards the sound counsel he receives. His main barrier is his own lack of steadfastness. Amory's disregard for the sensible opinions of those who know him well demonstrates his inability to leave the theoretical for everyday matters. Father Darcy describes him as "living in an intellectual and emotional vacuum" (110). Amory's inclination toward abstract thought often brings him personal and vocational problems. His theoretical mind and penchant for ideals lead to characteristic wavering. His aversion to the mess and decay of life yields an indecisiveness that hinders Amory's educational and subsequent vocational success.

Amory's Romantic Frustrations Inspire His Disillusionment with Family

The idealistic expectations that Amory has about life are evident in his romance life as well as in his vocational life. These unfulfilled expectations

eventually lead to Amory's frustrations with traditional society and his acceptance of a pragmatic outlook. Young Amory's moralism toward women is an expression of his egocentrism. His first kiss, at age thirteen with Myra St. Clair, creates a miserable experience. When she playfully says, "We're awful," and responsively snuggles to him, Amory is overcome with "revulsion," "disgust," and "loathing for the whole incident" (22). His negative reaction begins when Myra jokingly refers to their moral characters. It then escalates when Amory becomes "conscious of his face and hers," and of "their clinging hands," so that he "want[s] to creep out of his body and hide somewhere safe out of sight, up in the corner of his mind" (22). At an early age, Amory desires the status appeal of a pretty girl and the ideal of romance. However, he is averse to the intimacy and the suggestion of impropriety, which undercuts his idealistic self-concept and might threaten his reputation.

On another occasion, as a college sophomore, Amory again annoys a female companion with his preference for the theoretical over affection. He sits in a limousine in a country club parking lot and begins a conversation with a girl who offers, "I'm just full of the devil" (66):

"Let's be frank — we'll never see each other again. I wanted to come out here with you because I thought you were the best-looking girl in sight. You really don't care whether you ever see me again, do you?"

"No — but is this your line for every girl? What have I done to deserve it?"

"And you didn't feel tired dancing or want a cigarette or any of the things you said? You just wanted to be —"

“Oh, let’s go in,” she interrupted, “if you want to *analyze*. Let’s not *talk* about it.” (66)

Amory’s vanity stimulates his imagination to the point that he is unsociable. Amory is less concerned for the Victorian mores of his day than for his own reputation and glory. Here Amory hassles the debutante because he resents that she is more interested in the moment than in him. And earlier he nervously objects to affection with Myra after she playfully alludes to virtue. The moral idealism that Amory shows in these awkward romantic encounters actually reveals his vanity. Amory’s egotism and idealism toward romance make relationships more difficult for him, which ultimately leads to his disillusionment with love and marriage.

In his idealism, no matter how good life is, Amory desires that it be better. Amory’s expectation of a favorable future originates in his idyllic and carefree early life. He considers the summer after his sophomore year at Princeton to be “life as he would probably never enjoy it again” (94). He is on vacation with his beautiful girlfriend, Isabelle Borge, at her family’s Long Island summer home. This is the description of his inner voice as he prepares for dinner: “There was little in his life now that he would have changed. . . . Oxford might have been a bigger field” (94). Amory’s acknowledgement that his collegiate experience and romantic life are nearly perfect is immediately followed by the thought of how everything might be even better if he had attended Oxford. This description of

Amory aptly captures his attitude of perfectibility: "It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being" (25).

Amory's sublimines include the beauty of women and nature. A self-identified "romantic" (181), Amory considers "only a few obvious things" such as "women, spring evenings, music at night" and "the sea" to be "primarily beautiful" (90). An example of Amory's glorification of the natural world is his reaction upon his arrival at the Jersey Shore in the spring of his sophomore year:

The car was obligingly drawn up at a curb, and Amory ran for the boardwalk. First, he realized that the sea was blue and that there was an enormous quantity of it, and that it roared and roared — really all the banalities about the ocean that one could realize, but if any one had told him then that these things were banalities, he would have gaped in wonder. (81)

Amory's sensibilities are stimulated by the abstractions of the sea such as color, size, and sound. Female beauty similarly offers him glimpses of perfection. Schoolboy Amory tells Myra St. Clair, "I don't like girls in the daytime" (22). The implication is that he likes girls at night, because the beauty of nighttime improves them. And in a poem from childhood about his first crushes, Amory reveals his idealization of females. He writes: "Marylyn and Sallee, / Those are the girls for me. / Marylyn stands above / Sallee in that sweet, deep love" (24). In later years Amory idealizes the abstract beauty and qualities of Isabelle Borge, Clara Page, Rosalind Connage, and Eleanor Savage. However, his preoccupation with the theoretical merits of these women ultimately affirms him in his

individualism, but it does not strengthen his relationships with them. The subsequent failures of these bonds deepen Amory's romantic frustrations.

Amory's consideration of Isabelle Borge to be "a dream" (87) suggests his unrealistic idealization of her. He keeps her picture "enshrined in an old watch" (87), and he writes "rapturous letters" to her "at eight almost every night" (87). These "thirty-page documents" (86) are written with Amory "sitting by the open windows" and "with the picture before him" (87). The open access allows him to hear music on campus, such as a mandolin playing "Love Moon," which "seems to bring [Isabelle] into the window" (88). Amory's extreme writing to Isabelle demonstrates his uncompromising nature. The combination of Isabelle with two of his other sublimines, nighttime and music, suggests his idealistic perspective toward her.

Clara's goodness appeals to Amory's idealism. He considers the "poverty-stricken" (142) beautiful young widow to be "St. Cecilia" (147) and "a daughter of light alone" (148). She tells Amory that she has "never been in love," which makes him ready to canonize her (148). He stammers, "I love you – or adore you – or worship you" and wants "only to touch her dress with almost the realization that Joseph must have had of Mary's eternal significance" (148). Although Clara is older with more life experience, her nobility appeals to Amory's idealism. However, his exalted representation of Clara misreads her authenticity and maturity for an unrealistic holiness. Amory's admiration for a Clara's high moral character is ego-based, because it makes him feel better about

himself as an individual. Moreover, his exaggeration of Clara negatively influences their relationship, because it creates distance between them.

Amory's failure with debutante Rosalind Connage hurts him the most, because she is his ideal as a woman. For this reason, the narrator states, "Amory had loved Rosalind as he would never love another living person" (212). She is the sister of Amory's Princeton classmate Alec Connage. Amory and Rosalind fall quickly and madly in love. They are "together constantly" and "always in a sort of breathless hush, as if they feared that any minute the spell would break" (189). In Amory's estimation, she is impeccable, for "all criticism of Rosalind ends in her beauty" (176). He considers her a "once-in-a-century blend" of "personality" and "personage" (176). Amory tells his roommate in New York City, Tom D'Invilliers, "She's life and hope and happiness, my whole world now" (191). Of Amory's girlfriends, Rosalind is the best match for him. They are alike in their overexcited personalities, aristocratic manners, and cultured interests. However, she decides to marry wealthy Dawson Ryder, who is "floating in money" (183), at the urgent request of her mother, who considers Amory a "dreamer" (194). Rosalind realistically tells Amory, "I can't marry you and ruin both our lives" (198). She understands that financial security is necessary to her happiness and, therefore, to Amory's. Despondent, he goes immediately to the Knickerbocker Bar when he gets back to New York. He carefully notes the time, because "[l]ater it would satisfy him in a vague way to be able to think 'that thing ended at exactly twenty minutes after eight on

Thursday, June 10, 1919" (201). Amory loses the chance for happiness with Rosalind because she desires the security of marriage to a man of means. Amory enjoys the privilege of family wealth during his younger years, and he has the advantage of an elite education. However, his idealistic tendencies and individualistic attitudes prevent him from finding his place in the market-oriented worlds of enterprise and romance.

Amory's romance with nihilist Eleanor Savage illustrates his turn to skepticism following his breakup with Rosalind. Amory finds Eleanor to be "magnificent" and "dreamy" (230). They meet in the fields of rural Maryland during a late summer storm. His references to her as Poe's "Madeline" (230) and Byron's "Manfred" (238) reveal their shared admiration for gothic sensibilities to the extent that he considers her to be "the mirror of himself" (225). Although Eleanor has skin "the color of marble in starlight" and "eyes that glittered green as emeralds" (230), Amory is most taken by "the gorgeous clarity of her mind" (225). As kindred spirits of romantic disposition, they finish each other's thoughts and "revelled in their imaginations" (234). They recite Poe, Byron, Verlaine, Brooke, Swinburne, and Shelly to one another as they swim and ride horses day and night. The time with Eleanor allows Amory to enjoy his perfections of feminine beauty, the evening firmament, and romantic melodies. He sees in Eleanor egotism similar to his own, at which time "Amory's love waned slowly with the moon" (242).

Amory realizes that he and Eleanor are too much alike in their individualism to have a lasting relationship. His romantic frustrations occur because of his idealistic expectations that set him up to be disappointed in his vocational life and in his romantic life. In his eventual embrace of radicalism, Amory rejects the value of traditional marriage. He tells Mr. Ferrenby that when a man marries,

his first job is to provide and to hold fast. His wife shoos him on, from ten thousand a year to twenty thousand a year, on and on, in an enclosed treadmill that hasn't any windows. He's done! Life's got him! He's no help! He's a spiritually married man. (274)

In his disillusionment with capitalism and romance, Amory rebels against the intermediate associations of family and corporation. His increasingly individualistic perspective heightens his alienation.

Amory's Spiritual Frustrations Inspire His Disillusionment with the Church

No one affirms and challenges Amory more in his ideals and theoretical disorientation than Father Darcy. His bond with Amory is affectionate and deep, but ultimately it does not influence the young philosopher toward the Christian faith. Their first visit is "a wonderful week" (34) at Darcy's home on the Hudson River the week before fifteen-year-old Amory starts at St. Regis prep school. The meeting is a complete success: They "took to each other at first sight" and "accepted in their own minds a relation of father and son" (32). They have a rapport that allows Darcy to "guess Amory's thoughts before they were clear in his own head" (109). This immediate rapport occurs because their backgrounds,

interests, and temperaments are so similar. Darcy considers Amory “his reincarnation” (214). Like Amory, Darcy is from a well-to-do family, attended elite schools, is a passionate and unsentimental artist, favored English and history over science and math, once embraced paganism, and had a romance end due to his own insufficient financial prospects. In Darcy’s case, the woman was Beatrice, Amory’s mother.

Darcy consistently counsels Amory towards faith and revealed truth to no avail. In a follow-up letter after their Christmas 1915 visit, Darcy writes, “Whatever your *métier* proves to be – religion, architecture, literature – I’m sure you would be much safer anchored to the Church” (110). When Amory is about to leave for war, Darcy reiterates his desire for Amory to trust in God. He writes in January 1918, “if you don’t use heaven as a continual referendum for your ideas you’ll find earth a continual recall to your ambitions” (161). Darcy suggests that surety belongs to God, that human thinking is contingent on divine standards, and that godly blessing accompanies obedient desires. He also declares that “an out-and-out materialistic world – and the Catholic Church” (161) are the only two options that people have. And in his final letter to Amory, in August 1919, Darcy challenges Amory’s fundamental perspective. He writes, “You make a great mistake if you think you can be romantic without religion” (223). He does not dispute Amory’s idealism, but suggests that the qualities that emerge from his imagination require the objective foundation of God’s perfections for their significance. Darcy’s warning to Amory, in essence, is that

creative thought based on autonomous authority is ultimately self-defeating and meaningless.

A defining experience occurs at the end of Amory's junior year at Princeton when he thinks he sees "the devil" (123). Out with friends at a New York City nightclub, Amory notices a strange man in a brown suit "watching their party intently" (115). Later, in the wee hours, at Phoebe Column's apartment, a "tiresomely sober" (115) Amory sits with the coquettish Axia Marlowe. While Phoebe and Fred Sloane pour drinks, Axia "laid her yellow head on his shoulder" (117). This upsets Amory, for "temptation crept over him like a warm wind" and "his imagination turned to fire" (117). He then sees the strange man sitting in the corner wearing "pointed" shoes with "the little ends curling up" like those "in the fourteenth century" (117). Terrified and paranoid, Amory flees into the street of white apartments and moonlight, where he has a vision that is "far beyond horror" (119).

Amory's dreamlike flight from the phantom symbolizes his epistemic and spiritual confusion, and "haunt[s] him for three years" (114). He hears "breathing," and "footsteps," and then enters an alley (119). When Amory rests by a fence, his "sense of reality" emerges "like a problem whose answer he knew on paper, yet whose solution he was unable to grasp" (119). He perceives that "something was pulling him down" and wanted him "inside a door" to "slam it behind him" (120). Through "instinct" and "not an act of will," Amory voices a request to the fence: "I want someone stupid" (120). It occurs to him that

“stupid” was “intermingled through previous association” with “good” (120). Then, after he hears something “like a low gong,” he sees the apparition’s visage (120). It appears “pale and distorted with a sort of infinite evil,” and has “the face of Dick Humbird” (120), who had died in an automobile crash the previous June (91). At that time, two cars of students were returning to Princeton from a night in New York City. Amory was in the second vehicle, which did not wreck.

The day after Amory sees the specter, he seeks relaxation at the barber, but “the smell of the powders and tonics” evoke “Axia’s sidelong, suggestive smile” (121-22). The connection between Axia’s sexuality and Humbird’s death in Amory’s imagination suggests that his instincts for survival and self-destruction are in conflict. His realization that the footsteps “were ahead” and “not behind” (119) implies that his current path is in view. The gong indicates a separation in time and thus a turning point for Amory. His interchange of the words “stupid” and “good” implies the path is an amoral one. The fence suggests his sense of psychological confinement, and the shutting door represents a temporary means of exit. The death of Humbird, Amory’s exemplar, causes him to reconsider his ambition for greatness apart from morality.

Amory’s angst concerns his fear of receiving inadequate acknowledgement for his greatness. The “American life” that he finds “so damned dumb and stupid and healthy” (165) is in conflict with his idealistic expectations in which life rewards him with recognition and benefits for being a superior person. Because of his privilege, handsomeness, and talent, Amory is

distressed that his greatness might not be realized or affirmed by others. He tells Kerry Burne, "I want to be admired" (54). Young Amory believes that he has an "infinite expansion for good or evil" (26). Growing up, his favorite quotation was: "If one can't be a great artist or a great soldier, the next best thing is to be a great criminal" (24). At fifteen, he wants "to influence people in almost every way, even for evil" (26). From an early age Amory's hunger for esteem is intense and potentially amoral. He desires greatness but not necessarily goodness.

His rejection of Father Darcy's counsel makes it possible for Amory embrace the skepticism that embodies pragmatism. Though he "had not been brought up a Catholic" (33), Amory seems inclined toward a nominal belief in transcendence. He tells Rosalind, "I'm religious" (179). He rejects Eleanor's materialism and exclaims to her, "I *have* to have a soul" (232). He affirms belief in an afterlife when he wonders, "did Beatrice go to heaven?" (262). He acknowledges the reality of Divine favor when he laments, "with all God's given you," to Burne on his departure from school to aid the pacifist cause. And he admits to the existence of providence when he tells the devout Clara, "what a devil you could have been if the Lord had just bent your soul a little the other way" (149). Furthermore, he proclaims to her, "[I]f I lost faith in you I'd lose faith in God" (148). Amory even defends the legitimacy of belief against the atheist Eleanor. She baits him by saying, "there *is* no God, not even a definite abstract goodness" (241). He retorts that "like most intellectuals who don't find faith convenient" she will "yell loudly for a priest on [her] death-bed" (241). Amory's

repeated assertions of belief or openness to belief in God illustrate why Darcy considers him to have a “half-realized fear of God” (110), considers his faith to be “uncrystallized” (162), and believes that it “will eventually clarify” (214).

However, despite the many overtures to the Christian God, Amory does not make a commitment of faith. In a letter to his future New York City roommate, Tom D’Invilliers, in the spring after the war, Amory writes that the conflict “*has made me a passionate agnostic*” (166).“ He considers “crisis-inspired religion” to be “rather valueless and fleeting at best” (167). Later that summer, Amory tells Darcy’s friend Mrs. Lawrence that he considers himself “rather pagan at present” because “religion doesn’t seem to have the slightest bearing on life at my age” (214). The Catholic tradition is “the only ghost of a code that he had” (128). He is tolerant toward the Church because it has the consummate standards that he admires. However, his cynicism toward the “gaudy, ritualistic, paradoxical” (128) Church increases along with his pessimism toward the social order. Amory’s conscious openness to Christian faith ceases at the time of his sacrifice for Alec and Jill in Atlantic City. Darcy’s character and humanitarian influence are important to Amory. However, Amory sees the priest’s “moments of strange and horrible insecurity” (267) not only as human weakness but also as reasons not to believe. Amory does not deny the existence of God but knows that “[t]here was no God in his heart” (285).

Amory's Disillusionments Inspire His Pragmatism

Throughout Amory's life his individualism and egotism have made him open to amorality. Though he has appreciated certain facets of the Church, he has never embraced religious faith. Over time, vocational and romantic frustrations lead Amory to reject certain intermediate structures. At the time he loses the newspaper opportunity, his first major vocational disappointment, Darcy differentiates practical living from unprincipled pragmatism for Amory. During their Christmas visit, after Amory's letdown, the priest empathetically urges his learner to be more task-oriented, and to "do the next thing" (108). Darcy humbly admits, "I have only just learned to do it myself. I can do the one hundred things beyond the next thing, but I stub my toe on that, just as you stubbed your toe on mathematics this fall" (108). Amory is perplexed by the idea, however, and says it "never seems the sort of thing I should do" (108).

Darcy then emphasizes to Amory the difference between "personalities" and "personages" (108). A personality, he says, "lowers the people it acts on" and "overrides 'the next thing,'" while a personage "gathers" and "is never thought of apart from what he's done" (108). Darcy's elliptical statements essentially try to encourage Amory toward responsibility and benevolence and away from idleness and opportunism. He wants Amory to meet his short-term goals in addition to having long-term dreams. Darcy's most important concern is that Amory's actions dignify others rather than exploit them. Both Darcy and Amory experience a youthful idealism that tempts them to withdraw into

abstraction and ideology. However, while the Father eventually channels his rationalism into practical ministry based in biblical truth, Amory's allegiance to reason becomes pragmatic.

The elemental Amory is a rationalistic thinker. He relies on reason more than sense, and he uses deduction more than induction. The abstract and ideal are his security. Coherence and certainty appeal to him. After his comeuppance at Princeton, Amory seeks self-improvement. When he asks, "Why do I make lists?" (109), Darcy explains that he is a "mediaevalist" and has "the passion for classifying and finding a type" (109). Amory indeed likes to categorize people in this manner: For example, to Amory, Slim Langueduc is "the rugged type" (53), Kerry is "the nice boy type" (55), Humbird is "the perfect type of aristocrat" (83), Tom is "a Princeton type" (89), Mrs. Lawrence is "a type of Rome-haunting American" (141), and Garvin, Mr. Ferrenby's assistant, is "that lower secretarial type" (271). Darcy cautions Amory, in a subsequent letter, about putting people into needless categories. He writes,

beware of trying to classify people too definitely into types; you will find that all through their youth they will persist annoyingly in jumping from class to class, and by pasting a supercilious label on every one you meet you are merely packing a Jack-in-the-box that will spring up and leer at you when you begin to come into really antagonistic contact with the world. (110)

According to the Monsignor, the oversimplification of people denies their complexity and their propensity to change. He deems this presumption and

arrogance. Amory later encounters Jack-in-the-box figures in the form of the supernatural figure at Phoebe's apartment, and in the form of Mr. Ferrenby.

Amory's growing interest in political and social ideology reveals his passage to pragmatism. Besides encouraging Amory to apply himself, Darcy also advocates that he avoid the unbridled embrace of social philosophy. He cautions his protégé that "[p]eople like us can't adopt whole theories" (108). He praises the young man for "casting off a lot of your old luggage about success and the superman and all" (108). The priest senses that Amory's desire for success and his budding acceptance of amorality fuel his fascination with Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch*. Indeed, Amory disagrees with Burne's contention that "[t]here is no such thing as a strong, sane criminal" (135). To give Burne evidence, he points out that "life and history were rife with the strong criminal," particularly "in politics and business" (135). However, by graduation, the idea of the superman no longer fascinates Amory. He tells Alec, "He's absolutely irreconcilable with any Utopia. As long as he occurs, there's trouble and all the latent evil that makes a crowd list and sway when he talks" (156). Amory's ideal for social change has shifted from the great individual leader to social reform.

Certain comments by Amory after the war suggest his incipient radical thought. Upon his military discharge in March 1919, Amory writes Tom a letter to say he looks forward to being apartment roommates. Amory wants him and Tom and Alec to "get a Jap butler and dress for dinner and have wine on the table and lead a contemplative, emotionless life until we decide to use machine-

guns with the property owners – or throw bombs with the Bolshevik” (167). Although intended as humor, Amory’s jolting comments hint that political activism is an option for him. His post-war mood is fairly upbeat except for his reference to violence with regard to social protest. That summer, with Tom in the apartment, Amory again jokes, “I might cause a poor, inoffensive capitalist to have a vulgar liaison with a bomb, or get some innocent little Bolshevik tangled up with a machine-gun bullet” (218). His consistent humor about militant action suggests that Amory considers extreme political means to be acceptable.

World War I for Amory, however, is less of a moral campaign than a distracting interval before returning to his pursuit of the good life. The war is an interruption to his vocational and romantic pursuits. His advertising job and relationship with Rosalind are soon to come. To Amory, Kerry Holiday’s death is “a blow” and Jesse Ferrenby’s is too “to a certain extent” (166). However, for Amory, the war is an inconvenience more than a cause. When the European fighting begins, between Amory’s freshman and sophomore years (62), it is a “tiresome” irritation that interferes with his desire to travel (107). He and his cohorts are apathetic about the possibility of an intervention by the United States, for “while Amory talked and dreamed, war rolled swiftly up the beach and washed the sands where Princeton played” (150). The spring of his graduation arrives, and even then “[t]he war seemed scarcely to touch them” (155). On a train to Washington, Amory catches “some of the spirit of crisis” (150). But on the ride home, it is “changed to repulsion” because of “stinking aliens” (150).

Amory's passion about the war is so tepid that a trip to the nation's capital arouses his emotion only briefly and mildly before it is reversed because some Greek and Russian passengers have body odor. In his anticipation of military service, Amory prefers aviation to infantry because, as Tom says, it "sounds like the romantic side of the war" (153). Moreover, Amory's motivation for service is less for love of country than a hate for Germany, because they "stood for everything repugnant to him" (153). Their offenses include "materialism" and "the direction of tremendous licentious force" (153). His grievances against Germany are abstract. And he is indignant not about force itself but only the "tremendous licentious" use of it (153).

Amory's primary disillusionment from the war is with the older American generation that he believes influenced the country toward conflict. He is mad at "the materialists" and "the idolizers of German science and efficiency" from the Gilded Age (153). At Princeton, he tells Tom, "We *want* to believe. Young students try to believe in older authors, constituents try to believe in their Congressmen, countries try to believe in their statesmen, but they *can't*. Too many voices, too much scattered, illogical, ill-considered criticism" (217-18). Amory assigned "blame for the whole war on the ancestors of his generation" (153). Hearing "Locksley Hall" in his literature class one day, Amory felt "contempt for Tennyson and all he stood for" (153). Idealistic Amory has lost faith in the preceding generation for its lack of leadership.

Amory's criticism of the older generation parallels that of John F. Carter, Jr., in his September 1920 *Atlantic Monthly* article, "These Wild Young People." Carter's piece is a defense of the younger generation from the criticism of their elders. To set his context, he wrote, "Hardly a week goes by that I do not read some indignant treatise depicting our extravagance, the corruption of our manners, the futility of our existence" (301). Then Carter returns the criticism: "[T]he older generation had certainly pretty well ruined this world before passing it on to us. They give us this Thing, knocked to pieces, leaky, red-hot, threatening to blow up; and then they are surprised that we don't accept it with the same attitude of pretty, decorous enthusiasm with which they received it" (302). Carter's sentiment echoes Amory's complaint against the elder generation. On the night before they leave for their training camps, Amory tells Tom, "We're just one generation – we're breaking all the links that seemed to bind us here to top-booted and high-stocked generations" (156). Amory's acknowledgement of the younger, Progressive generation's separation from the Gilded Age generation implies a break with the intermediary associations of traditional civil society.

Amory's chief complaint about the war is its elimination of individualism. He tells Tom, "I'm not sure that the war itself had any great effect on either you or me," but, he goes on to say that it "sort of killed individualism out of our generation" (216). When Tom challenges this statement, Amory vehemently refutes him and says, "War used to be the most individualistic pursuit of man, and yet the popular heroes of the war had neither authority nor responsibility"

(216-17). He rhetorically asks, "How could a schoolboy make a hero of Pershing?" Amory connects individualism with heroes such as Sergeant York (217), and its demise with bureaucratic prominence, in which "[a] big man has no time really to do anything but just sit and be big" (217). Amory's acceptance of the end of individualism is an implicit recognition of the collectivist and technocratic perspectives that came to prominence in the Progressive era.

Amory's drunken response to his breakup with Rosalind suggests his break with idealistic thought and his receptivity to pragmatism. A dejected Amory gets drunk at the Knickerbocker and voices his grievances from the past two years that include his war service. He explains, in a slurred manner, to his companion, "Two years of my life spent in alleshual vacuity. Los' idealism, got be physcal anmal" as "he shook his fist expressively at Old King Cole" (202). Although he resents being away for two years, when he could have pursued his writing, Amory's distress centers on his loss of Rosalind. When he angrily gestures at merry Old King Cole (202), who is in the painting behind the bar (201), Amory reveals his utter unhappiness.

Other events emphasize Amory's rejection of idealism. The night after the Knickerbocker, Amory's bender has him at the Cocoanut Grove, where he is humorously caught in the middle of a spat between a man and a woman. She grabs Amory and does not let go. A familiar waiter intervenes and unwittingly sums up more than he realizes when he jokes, "C'mon, Amory. Your romance is over" (208). Also, in his August letter to Amory two months later, Darcy

observes changes in him. He tells Amory that his previous letter “was not a bit like yourself” (223). He writes, “I see you have lost all the feeling of romance that you had before the war” (223).

Amory is not alone in his Progressive era-disillusionment. Before the Princeton students leave for war, Burne Holiday helps lead the Princeton campus in the “[s]pirit of reform” (125). These students motivate others to begin “questioning aloud the institutions that Amory and countless others before him had questioned so long in secret” (124). Darcy comments on the malaise of younger people. In his January 1918 letter to Amory, he writes, “your generation is growing hard, much harder than mine ever grew” (161).

Amory’s encounter with the law in Atlantic City, on behalf of Alec and Jill, is his initiation into pragmatism. Without Beatrice, a job, money, or an apartment, Amory is in a downturn, and “felt that life had rejected him” (248). He had gone on “an impulse” (224) to Maryland and spent September 1919 in a romance with Eleanor. Upon his return, he sees Alec at the Boardwalk on a dreary October day. Amory is meditating on Eleanor and how “he lost a further part of him that nothing could restore” (225). He does not believe his idealism will return. Nature on that day reflects Amory’s downcast mood. The sea breeze is “half-mournful,” and the land is “faithless” (246). He is described here at his lowest: “He was in an eddy again, a deep, lethargic gulf, without desire to work or write, love or dissipate. For the first time in his life he rather longed for death to roll over his generation, obliterating their petty fevers and struggles and

exultations" (248). Amory's characteristic motivations are absent, and his curse upon his contemporaries reveals his exasperation with modern life.

When Alec and Jill confront him with their situation that night in the hotel, Amory first thinks of "the great impersonality of sacrifice" (250). Amory recalls a story of a college student who, "in a gust of sentiment," took the blame for his roommate who cheated on an exam (250). The innocent man endured shame and committed suicide. Amory understood that "years afterward the facts had come out" (250). This account amazes Amory, for "[n]ow he realized the truth" about sacrifice (250). He sees that "what we call love and hate, reward and punishment, had no more to do with it than the date of the month" (250). Amory believes that sacrificial actions are devoid of emotion and morality. In his view, the act of sacrifice is "like a great elective office" and "an inheritance of power" (250). He understands that sacrifice brings "responsibility" and "risk" rather than "security" and "a purchase of freedom" (250).

John Dewey, the leading philosopher in twentieth-century pragmatism, writes, "In an experimental philosophy of life, the question of the past, of precedents, of origins, is quite subordinate to prevision, to guidance and control and future possibilities" (*German* 127). In this vein, it does not matter to Amory that the innocent student who took the blame acted out of emotion, nor does it matter that he killed himself before the facts were known. Thus Amory manipulates the story in order to achieve hypothetically favorable consequences in the future. In his replacement of rationalism with pragmatism, Amory

exchanges his ideals for action. In the hotel room, Amory does not waver, and formulates the plan in the tense moment that “occupied in actual time less than ten seconds,” (251). He tells Alec, “You have a family and it’s important that you should get out of this” (251). Amory acts unselfishly on behalf of Alec in light of his family, but does not explicitly mention or think of his sister Rosalind. This suggests that he does not help Alec for her sake.

The result of the sacrifice for Amory is pride. In the moment he formulates his plan, Amory recollects Luke 23:28. The verse reads, “Weep not for me but for thy children,” which he thinks is “somehow the way God would talk to me” (251). Amory identifies with the Daughters who are weeping for Jesus as he makes his way to the Cross. Jesus instructs the women to weep for their own offspring and futures, in light of the coming judgment. Jesus is on the way to die, but he tells the women their situation is actually worse than his. Therefore, Amory thinks that “[s]acrifice by its very nature was arrogant and impersonal; sacrifice should be eternally supercilious” (251). In this way, Amory considers his role in the hotel room to be similar to that of God, because he enters a chaotic situation, takes action, and sacrifices to achieve order on behalf of helpless others. Similarly, Amory imposes a new outcome or judgment that would not occur otherwise. In his book *Ashes to Ashes: Mourning and Social Difference in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Fiction* (2001), Jonathan Schiff suggests that, in light of the quotation by Jesus, by helping Alec, Amory “is accepting his lifelong calling as a caretaker to Beatrice, beginning to mend his sense of maternal loss” (74). This

does not seem likely, however. In Amory's March letter to Tom, he mentions Beatrice's death without any sense of emotional loss (165-66). Moreover, Amory is attuned to "the way" or the tone in which God would talk to him (251).

Amory's action parallels that of Jesus and not of the Daughters.

Amory's pragmatism means his relinquishment of Enlightenment truth. This is why he is aware of two "other things in the room besides people" (250). The appearance of these ghostly traces of his former conscience suggests the philosophical transition he is undertaking. The first is "an aura, gossamer as a moonbeam" (250), which is over the bed; and the second, located near the curtains and the window, is a "dynamic shadow" (251) that is "featureless and indistinguishable, yet strangely familiar" (250). The recognizable umbra is the experience-based wisdom of Darcy. This becomes apparent to Amory when, in the days after Atlantic City, he receives news of Darcy's death. This confirms for him "what it was that he had perceived among the curtains of the room in Atlantic City" (256).

The meaning of the aura is clarified soon after as well. Amory has a moment of recognition that is described this way: "Once he had been miraculously able to scent evil as a horse detects a broken bridge at night, but the man with the queer feet in Phoebe's room had diminished to the aura over Jill. His instinct perceived the fetidness of poverty, but no longer ferreted out the deeper evils in pride and sensuality" (265). The emanation that was symbolically over the bed with Jill on it represents Amory's receding moral sense. Amory's

commitments to ideal goodness and to empirical knowledge fade away in light of his newly accepted pragmatism.

Historian Carl J. Richard explains in *The Battle for the American Mind* (2004) that pragmatism is skepticism toward human knowledge. Enlightenment humanists believed in the possibility of objective truth. Richard explains why the pragmatists rejected this. He writes, "Concepts were, by their very nature, abstract and static. Therefore, they could never duplicate reality, which was the many-hued and ever-changing world of pure experience" (286). And H. S. Thayer, in his book *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* (1981), explains how this pragmatic understanding of knowledge affects planning. He writes, "Knowledge is an interpretation of given situations as means to deliberate future consequences under hypothetical or anticipated conditions" (453). Uncertainty is the only conclusion, the pragmatists affirm, because human sense perception and scientific understanding are limited and superficial. Pioneer of pragmatism William James acknowledges that ideas can be helpful, but they "become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with the other parts of our experience" (Richard 289). In other words, ideas must be tested for them to be true.

Philosopher James Campbell explains the future orientation of pragmatism. He writes, "[T]he natural world is a place of openness and possibility where we can use our tentative webs of knowledge, without foundation or finality, to help meliorate our existence" (5). Experimentation is

always necessary because the world is constantly changing. And literary and social critic Randolph Bourne summarized the pragmatic ethos in his 1915 *New Republic* article "John Dewey's Philosophy." He writes, "The mind is not a looking-glass, reflecting the world for its private contemplation, nor a logic-machine for building up truth, but a tool by which we adjust ourselves to the situations in which life puts us" (155). Therefore, Amory is not overwhelmed by or pessimistic about the scene that confronts him in the hotel room. Instead, he feels "a sudden surge of joy" as he creatively uses his ideas as tools to transform the chaotic situation before him (256).

The metaphor of the labyrinth incorporated into his self-reflection following his experience in Atlantic City suggests a rebirth for Amory with his new pragmatic approach to life. He wanders New York City in personal meditation after learning the news that Rosalind is married and Darcy died, and imagines that "he had escaped from a small enclosure into a great labyrinth" (267). This imagery of Amory's move from complete containment to convoluted passages suggests an increased freedom. A small enclosure restricts movement and limits view; however, a labyrinth allows movement along a network of paths.

English professor Penelope Reed Doob in *The Idea of the Labyrinth* (1990) explains the two general types of labyrinths are *in bono* and *in malo*. Benevolent mazes allow the walkers to transcend confusion; on the other hand, malevolent ones yield perpetual frustration and imprisonment. Pragmatism, however, is

concerned with the experience of navigation rather than the ultimate destination. Therefore, the type of labyrinth Amory envisions is irrelevant. Doob also notes, “a labyrinth asserts the presence of order in apparent chaos” (54). The accomplishment of function and harmony from earlier discord is precisely what Amory achieved for Alec and Jill. In the labyrinth, Amory senses that he is “alone,” and is “where Goethe was when he began “Faust,”” and “where Conrad was when he wrote *Almayer’s Folly*”” (267). Amory’s optimism returns for he feels ready to initiate a great artistic achievement.

Amory is empowered in his sense of autonomy and in the knowledge of his creative potential. He is to be accompanied in his quest by a part of the old, idealistic Amory, “the romantic elf who was to enter the labyrinth with him” (269). This elf is the remnant of his former idealistic self, and represents Amory’s purpose. He realizes at Darcy’s funeral that there was “something that he wanted, had always wanted and always would want” (269). Amory wants what he found so meaningful in Darcy and Princeton student reform leader Burne Holiday: “to be necessary to people, to be indispensable” (269). These men were vital to others because of their steadfast commitments to religion and radicalism, respectively. Amory desires to emulate them in their significance to others.

Amory’s Pragmatism Inspires His Collectivism

Amory’s dialogue with Mr. Ferrenby is a philosophical standoff between the established and traditional ideas of a capitalist and the radical and pragmatic

ideas of a collectivist. Amory is walking from Manhattan to Princeton when he accepts a ride from the “large and begoggled and imposing” Ferrenby (270). Ferrenby, in his car with his goggles, is a type of Jack-in-the-box figure that Darcy warned Amory would confront him with reality (110). The day is optimistically described as one “of dreams and far hopes and clear visions” (270). It is even described in philosophical terms as “a day easily associated with those abstract truths and purities that dissolve in the sunshine or fade out in the mocking laughter by the light of the moon” (270). These references suggest that Amory’s pragmatism and Ferrenby’s empiricism will clash. Amory rides in the backseat of the chauffeured sedan across from Ferrenby and Garvin, his small, nervous assistant (270).

Their extended climactic exchange centers on the strengths and weaknesses of the present capitalist social order. Amory’s primary concern is that this system encourages good men with education to become “spiritually married” to the status quo, which makes them “a conservative as far as existing social conditions are concerned” (274). Even more disillusioning to Amory is that the “spiritually unmarried man hasn’t direct power,” because he has avoided the “money chase” (274). Amory explains that the drawback is it “makes wealthy men the keepers of the world’s intellectual conscience” (274-75). The philosophy of the spiritually married man “takes human nature as it finds it, uses its timidity, its weakness, and its strength for its own ends” (275). On the other hand, the philosophy of the spiritually unmarried man “continually seeks for

new systems that will control or counteract human nature” (275). The spiritually unmarried philosophy is “a part of progress” and pursues “the struggle to guide and control life” (275). Because of his vocational, romantic and spiritual frustrations, Amory radically seeks to be spiritually unmarried to the contemporary capitalist, middle-class social order.

Amory’s ideas for a better society are experimental and harmonize with pragmatism. His suggestions emphasize education and economics. With regard to schooling, he believes that “[e]very child should have an equal start” (275). The implication is that public education would overcome the unfair advantage of undeserving pupils being aided by private education. And with regard to commerce, Amory desires “a fair trial of government ownership of all industries” (276). Amory’s plea for a “fair trial” is an admission that such a plan would not be guaranteed to succeed. In fact, Ferrenby objects to the idea, saying, “That’s been a proven failure” (276). But Amory rebuts and says, “No – it merely failed” (276). He suggests that a brain trust of “the best analytical minds” would work (276). This interchange highlights a difference between empiricism and pragmatism. Both champion experimentation, but pragmatism alone asserts the importance of active adaptation to new environments. Therefore, Ferrenby’s empirical understanding thinks the matter is settled if the government ownership of industries has been tried once and failed. Amory, however, affirms the pragmatist conclusion that experiments can never be settled, because different circumstances and variables might work where others did not.

Amory and Ferrenby express views that call attention to the different understandings of freedom that became prominent during the Progressive era. Ferrenby espouses the traditional view that believes freedom is the absence of compulsion. Amory, on the other hand, holds the Progressive and pragmatist view that freedom means opportunity. Amory's concerns are those of John Dewey, who wrote, "We have said long enough that America means opportunity; we must now begin to ask: Opportunity for what, and how shall the opportunity be achieved?" (*German* 129). Amory's suggestions for government-operated education and government-controlled industry seek a more egalitarian and less materialistic society.

Amory's declaration of interest in socialism demonstrates his passion for collectivist change. He brings the subject up when he announces, "I am contemplating socialism as possibly my forte" (272). Ferrenby suspects that Amory is not an experienced dissident and asks him if he is "one of these parlor Bolsheviks, one of these idealists?" (272). Amory responds, "[I]f being an idealist is both safe and lucrative, I might try it" (272). This reply suggests that Amory's fundamental desire for the good life has not changed even though he now seeks it through radical means. Like other people, Amory desires comfort and security. This is in accord with what he explains to Ferrenby about human nature. He says, "however the brains and abilities of men may differ, their stomachs are essentially the same" (278).

Amory acknowledges the novelty of and reason for his curiosity with their conversation topic when he says, "This is the first time in my life I've argued Socialism. It's the only panacea I know" (280). Ferrenby considers socialists to be "bomb throwers (272), and he prompts Amory to defend the bloodshed in Russia. Amory admits the violence is "overflowing just as the French Revolution did, but I've no doubt that it's really a great experiment and well worth while" (277). Amory knows that a different type of society would likely improve his circumstances. He honestly admits, "My position couldn't be worse. A social revolution might land me on top" (280). And he goes on to explain to the other men why his exasperation justifies the mayhem of revolution.

Amory says, "I've been a fish out of water in too many outworn systems. I was probably one of the two dozen men in my class at college who got a decent education; still they'd let any well-tutored flathead play football and I was ineligible, because some silly old men thought we should *all* profit by conic sections. I loathed the army. I loathed business. I'm in love with change and I've killed my conscience" (280). His experiences in education, the military, and commerce have disappointed Amory. His reference to a dead conscience evokes his pragmatic sacrifice in the hotel room a week earlier.

The unveiled connection between Amory and Ferrenby reminds them that concrete realities are superior to abstract ideals. Only at the end of their conversation does Ferrenby learn that Amory was at Princeton, and does Amory realize he is with Jesse Ferrenby's father (281). Amory sympathizes with the

father of his classmate who was killed in France. He tells Ferrenby, "I knew him very well. In fact he was one of my particular friends" (281). Though they disagree on agendas and policies, Amory realizes that "the fact that he had known Jesse more than outweighed any disfavor he had created by his opinions" (281). When they arrive at Ferrenby's mansion, Amory is invited to lunch but declines by saying, "Thank you, Mr. Ferrenby, but I've got to get on" (281).

Amory's self-reflection on his walk to Princeton summarizes his pragmatic transition to collectivism. This journey allows him the opportunity to ponder many of his favorite themes, which is a reminder of how his thinking has changed. Here is his internal speech with regard to nature: "Nature as a rather coarse phenomenon composed largely of flower that, when closely inspected, appeared motheaten, and of ants that endlessly traversed blades of grass, was always disillusioning; nature represented by skies and waters and far horizons was more likable" (282). Amory's preference for skies and water has not changed any more than his desire for comforts and security. The new Amory, however, notices the concrete aspects of nature. The old Amory would not notice the decomposition of flowers and grass by moths and ants. Additionally, Amory, who idealizes spring, now is "thrilled" by "[f]rost and the promise of winter" (282). Once again, Amory's philosophical conversion to pragmatism has not caused his old desires and likes to be exchanged for new ones. Instead, this transformation has enlarged his vision of life.

Amory's change in philosophy has also diminished his moral sensibilities. He recollects "two pictures together with somewhat the same primitive exaltation" (282). The first is a St. Regis football game he recalls as "a wild battle," and the second is a war mission in France in which his platoon crawled through tall grass to "tap the shoulders of a Lewis gunner" (282). War jargon in sports is common. However, the euphemism of tapping the shoulder for the killing of an enemy soldier is callous. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the expressions highlights their incongruity, and demonstrates that Amory's perspective is askew.

Another example of Amory's diminished moral sensibilities is his adaptation to or accommodation of his selfishness. He does not expect that it will change. Instead, Amory decides that "transcending" rather than "avoiding" his selfishness is the way he will achieve the "poise and balance" that he needs (282). To do this he will use every "virtue of unselfishness" (282). These are the unselfish things that he recognizes: "I can make sacrifices, be charitable, give to a friend, endure for a friend, lay down my life for a friend – all because these things may be the best possible expression of myself; yet I have not one drop of the milk of human kindness" (282). Amory does not seek to alter his selfishness. In fact, he considers it his "most living part" to the degree that he describes acts of love as "unselfishness," or the negation of his preferred existence (282). Amory does not seek to be a kinder person either through human effort or divine grace. Rather, he wants "poise and balance" (282), which are virtually synonymous and

describe an attribute that he considered himself to have at age thirteen (26).

Amory's choice of language here is especially noteworthy. To rationalize his outlook, Amory substitutes "transcending" for "avoiding" (282). He is dehumanized by his own abandonment of moral absolutes.

Amory's renunciation of beauty neutralizes his artistic identity. His pragmatic relativism allows him to restructure his moral code. Therefore, Amory equates "[t]he problem of evil" with "the problem of sex" (282-83). The problem of sex includes "strong phallic worship" and "beauty" (283). In order to deal with his lust, Amory rejects all the types of beauties he enjoyed such as music, nighttime, water, and women. If his sexual desire is difficult for him to manage, then he could make efforts in that particular area, as Darcy had encouraged him to do (110). However, Amory feels that beauty "had too many associations with license and indulgence" (283). Therefore, he determines that "beauty must be relative," and that there would be a "new loneliness" for the purpose of "greatness he might achieve" (283). Amory repudiates beauty for the sake of self-discipline, but he also feels "that he was leaving behind him his chance of being a certain type of artist" (283). The self-denial of his artistic ambitions and aesthetic interests is a pragmatic and excessive desire for self-control.

Amory's provisional dismissal of religion recognizes its value as an instrument. The fact that he considers "any acceptance" of the Church to be "for the present, impossible" suggests that one day he might embrace it (283).

However, Amory's motivation for any hypothetical approval of religion would

be pragmatic. Indeed, he acknowledges the contemporary social need for the Church as “the only assimilative, traditionary bulwark against the decay of morals” (283). Amory sees the practical value of religious codes until the time when “the great mobs could be educated into a moral sense” (283). He recognizes that “there was a certain intrinsic lack in those to whom orthodox religion was necessary” (283). Therefore, Amory can ignore the truth claims of the Church while employing it for social or personal ends. Darcy cautioned him that he would need religion to be a personage. However, for now, Amory “wanted to keep the tree without the ornaments” (283). He is content to be a personality for the present, and to see where “this new start” takes him.

Amory leaves behind his romantic self in the graveyard twilight. The description of the day suggests resurrection when he reaches the cemetery in mid-afternoon. The time was between “the purging good of three o’clock” and “the golden beauty of four” (283). The weather likewise hints at death, because “even the clouds seemed bleeding,” and there was “the ghost of a new moon” (283-84). “On an impulse,” Amory thinks about opening “a rusty iron vault built into the side of the hill” (284). His spontaneous and instinctual action is precisely the kind of blind experimentation that pragmatism proposes. The vault is described as “washed clean and covered with late-blooming, weepy watery-blue flowers that might have grown from dead eyes” (284). This detail points to Amory’s rebirth in a few ways, including the picture of him opening a small enclosure, like the one from which he escaped into the labyrinth (267). The

reference to washing suggests purification, and the blooming flowers connote flourishing. The “dead eyes” they grow from are his old way of looking at the world (284).

The reason Amory wants to open the vault is “to *feel* William Dayfield, 1864” (284). This desire for raw sensory experience is a marked contrast to his former idealism. Amory finds optimism about life in “the broken columns and clasped hands and doves and angels [that] meant romances” (284). Amory is pleased by these embellishments that imply experience-based elaborations of truth. Amory expresses his belief in the immaterial as well as the material when he considers that “in a hundred years he would like having young people speculate as to whether his eyes were brown or blue, and he hoped quite passionately that his grave would have about it an air of many, many years ago” (284). Amory’s eye color is as meaningful knowledge about him as any other, because the young people in the future determine its significance. And Amory’s wish for an ancient aura about his grave demonstrates his equal allegiance to immaterial reality. Amory’s final graveyard observation is that “out of a row of Union soldiers two or three made him think of dead loves and dead lovers” (284). The uncertainty between two or three suggests that he considers Clara and Eleanor to be “dead loves” (284), but he is not sure if Rosalind is one.

Amory’s midnight return to Princeton reveals he has found a new peace with the world. He thinks of the “new generation” and is “sorry for them” (284). Amory sympathizes with those “shouting the old cries” and “learning the old

creeds," because they are "still fed romantically on the mistakes and half-forgotten dreams of dead statesmen and poets" (284). Amory pities the new students who will be indoctrinated with bourgeois ideals that he has abandoned. In her article, "Princeton as Modernist's Hermeneutics: Rereading *This Side of Paradise*," Nancy P. Van Arsdale poses this question about Amory's relationship to Princeton: "Amory leaves Princeton in the acceptable fashion, as a soldier. But does he ever really let go of the idea of Princeton as a paradise-on-earth for the upper classes?" (48). Amory does have an attraction to the University. However, it ceases to be a paradise to him when he fails math and loses his social status. He is disillusioned with the school's resistance to change.

Amory exemplifies the American preoccupation with improvement. His "grail" is to surpass the artificiality of the age that shaped him, the "days when the great gardener clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud" (12). Amory's idealism, however, is frustrated by life's bitter realities. The consequent overhaul to his belief system brings him to think skeptically that contemporary society is "all a poor substitute at best" (285). The pragmatic desire to construct a better replacement without the benefit of objectivity, however, leads to reliance on utility. The resultant deification of change opens Amory to the allure of social control and collectivism, which demean individual dignity.

CHAPTER THREE

“I’ve got to find out what my work is”:
Calling and Egalitarianism in *Main Street*

[I]f one asked me to what do I think one must principally attribute the singular prosperity and growing force of this people, I would answer that it is the superiority of its women.

Tocqueville 576

Just as the prime work for the average man must be earning his livelihood and the livelihood of those dependent upon him, so the prime work for the average woman must be keeping the home and bearing and rearing her children. This woman is not a parasite on society. She is society.

Roosevelt, “Parasite” 236

Decades after the Civil War the effort to emancipate women continued. Recognition of the New Woman was a major project of the Progressive era at the turn of the twentieth century. Feminist author Winnifred Harper Cooley, in *The New Womanhood* (1904), described this effort as a “groping for individual expression” (6). The problem, she explained, was that the contemporary woman was “a willing slave to public opinion” and “a hopeless slave to poverty” (5). She listed patriarchy and religion as primary causes for women being dependent, confined, and voiceless.

Cooley acknowledged the presence of significant but not sufficient advancement for American women at the advent of the twentieth century. Despite the increased educational and labor opportunities, women continued to

be sexually objectified and socially controlled by a male-dominated society that remained skeptical about them. She wrote, “[A]s long as any one class is watched suspiciously, even fondly guarded, and protected, so long will that class not only be weak, and treacherous, individually, but parasitic, and a collective danger to the community” (31). Women were stifled, Cooley suggested, because they were too often viewed as incompetent burdens or materialistic schemers, and, therefore, were residual sponges either way. Therefore, she wrote, “Woman asks no more gratified ambition, no more opportunity for expansion than is the possibility of man” (6). In this way, Cooley asserted that women are equal to men with regard to function. Historian Christopher Lasch noted, “In the long run women were forced into the workplace not only because their families needed extra income but because paid labor seemed to represent their only hope of gaining equality” (96).

Former president Theodore Roosevelt also addressed this idea of women as millstones, in his book *The Foes of Our Own Household* (1917), a summons to an American society freshly braced for war. In his article “The Parasite Woman; The Only Indispensable Citizen,” TR affirmed, “any woman should be allowed to make any career for herself of which she is capable” (232). However, the standard bearer of the Progressive Party also claimed that traditional womanhood is the backbone of American culture. He continued, “[T]he primary work of the average man and the average woman and of all exceptional men and women whose lives are to be really full and happy must be the great primal

work of home-making and home-keeping, for themselves and their children” (233). Thus Roosevelt acknowledged equality between the sexes with regard to marketplace entry. But he espoused a national duty, based on their natural differences, for men and women to fulfill traditional roles. This in no way diminished women, he argued, for the wife and mother ought to “be treated as the full equal of her husband” (238).

Cooley and Roosevelt both defend vocational freedom for women, and sought to refute the idea of them as burdens. Yet their specific prescriptions on this matter relied upon significantly different concepts of equality. Cooley believed that men and women have callings that are ontologically equal. She called for “[a] new society in which women shall share the economic burden” (59). More recently, Lydia Blanchard similarly suggests that “[p]ower” for both sexes comes from “having the freedom to choose marriage or career or some combination of both, from having no artificial limits on potential” (132). In contrast, Roosevelt argued that national prosperity requires the average man to be “at some business or trade or profession” where he “earns enough to make a home for himself and his wife and children” (235). In this way, he assumed a natural distinction between the sexes by which, on average, men are providers and women are nurturers. The issue of vocational calling and its importance to modern women is central to Sinclair Lewis’s novel *Main Street* (1920) and its protagonist, Carol Kennicott. Carol Wershoven, in her book *Child Brides and Intruders* (1993), comments, “[T]he typical reading of the novel focuses on nearly

everything but Carol Kennicott's development" (245). The present interpretation agrees with the centrality of Carol's development, particularly her greater understanding of her calling.

Like three other significant American novels from 1920, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White, Main Street* addresses the transition of America from local communities to a national community during the Progressive years, loosely 1900-1920. *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* have contemporary settings in the 1910s. *The Age of Innocence* and *Poor White* have earlier settings but culminate in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. *This Side of Paradise* is the *Bildungsroman* of a Princeton student who becomes disillusioned with World War I-era bourgeois society. *The Age of Innocence* is set in 1870s New York and portrays patrician Newland Archer's battle against his social class so that he can leave his conventional wife for her bohemian cousin. And in *Poor White*, inventor Hugh McVey's assimilation into community life promotes his business ethics. These novels express the Progressive reaction against the intermediate associations of traditional civil society.

Communities such as family, church, class, guild, and town are considered intermediate associations because they intervene between individuals and government power. The deliberate and voluntary natures of these structures, along with their disciplinary capacities, provide the moral context in which individuals flourish.

In this study, Carol's individualism that prompts her alienation from her husband, Will Kennicott, is examined first. Next, Carol's individualism that prompts her alienation from Gopher Prairie is considered. This is followed by a look at how Carol's separation from Kennicott and Gopher Prairie prompts her to revise her individualistic calling. The final section analyzes how Carol's communalism prompts her reconciliation to Kennicott and Gopher Prairie.

This close reading in the light of historical and sociological context shows that Carol's alienation increases as she increasingly disengages from the morally influential social bonds of local communities. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities. Analysis of the novel in light of the New Woman question demonstrates that Carol's clarity about her calling enables her reconciliation with her husband and with Gopher Prairie.

Carol's Individualism Prompts Her Alienation toward Kennicott

Carol is an example of the New Woman. Born about 1887, she is independent, ambitious, and educated. A Minneapolis native, she obtains a liberal arts degree from nearby Blodgett College, and "[t]hroughout Senior year she anxiously related all her experiments and partial successes to a career" (5). Carol's dream of "get[ting] my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful" (8) is in jeopardy, however, after she marries conventional Dr. Will Kennicott, and moves to unreceptive Gopher Prairie. However, Carol and

Kennicott have disagreements about their expectations of one another as husband and wife.

Kennicott's appeal to Carol's vocational interest is a significant reason she marries him. He appeals to her reformist desires during their yearlong "conversational courtship" (24), and gives her unrealistic expectations about her future in Gopher Prairie. They are introduced by the Marburys, friends of Carol's sister, and Kennicott is a consultant for Mr. Marbury's insurance company.

Kennicott's and Carol's appeal to one another is largely based on their professional situations. His attraction is that of "a well-to-do unmarried man encountering a pretty girl"; Her's is that of a girl who "is slightly weary of her employment and sees no glory ahead nor any man she is glad to serve" (18). When Kennicott asks about her work at the St. Paul library, Carol indicates her indifference to it. The reason she feels this way is telling. She replies, "It's pleasant, but sometimes I feel shut off from things – the steel stacks, and the everlasting cards smeared all over with red rubber stamps" (16). The feeling of being "shut off" often suggests a desire for more human interaction. However, Carol's regret concerns the aesthetics of her environment: the uniformity of the bookshelves and the ugliness of the lending slips. Though Kennicott arouses Carol's interest in social change, he does not comprehend that her individualistic desire for a career outranks her desire to be a homemaker.

Kennicott largely persuades Carol to join him in marriage and life in Gopher Prairie with his proposal that she will achieve influence toward civic

change. In fact, he interlinks the town with himself to the degree that her union with Kennicott is indistinguishable from a metaphorical one with Gopher Prairie. He suggests to her, "What we need is women like you to jump on us. It'd be you that would transform the town" (17) and "[m]ake the town – well – make it artistic" (19). He also adds, "We're ready for you to boss us!" (20). His enthusiastic and explicit plea for Carol to influence Gopher Prairie gains her attention. To this point, she has not been particularly drawn to Kennicott. In fact, she initially perceives that he is "rather drooping of bulky shoulder" and has "clothes which you could never quite remember" (15). Yet after his pitch for Gopher Prairie, Carol saw "the healthy solidity of his chest" and his "suddenly virile" nose (17). Carol's interest in Will increases primarily because he casts a vision of opportunity for her to beautify the town.

Carol's willingness to marry Kennicott is largely due to the vocational opportunity she envisions in Gopher Prairie. She had earlier rejected a similar marriage offer from her college classmate and future lawyer Stewart Snyder. He sought to persuade Carol that she would be helpful as "a lawyer's wife" because she would "understand his clients" (7) and provide the sympathy for others that he lacks. Carol likes Stewart and prefers him to her various admirers because he has "worked on the farm" (6) and is "manlier than the others" (11). However, he is ultimately "not interesting" to Carol (7). Her desire to help others is on a grander scale than assorted misunderstood law clients. She wants to "enormously improve a horde of grateful people" (7).

At their graduation Stewart tries once again to interest Carol in marriage. This time, however, he emphasizes a domestic appeal. When she tells him, "I want to do something with my life," Stewart replies, "What's better than making a comfy home and bringing up some kids and knowing nice homey people?" (11). Despite her confidence in Stewart to be a good husband and lawyer, Carol has ambitions other than being a wife and mother. She explains, "I do love children. But there's lots of women that can do housework, but I—well, if you *have* got a college education, you ought to use it for the world" (12). Stewart's attempt to placate Carol's concerns fail because she is unconvinced a domestic life would satisfy her. She concludes her decline of marriage to Stewart by saying, "I can't settle down to nothing but dishwashing!" (12). A marriage to Kennicott, however, promises her more opportunity to explore her calling. Although Kennicott is older than Stewart, both have rural backgrounds and professional careers. Their recreational interests are even alike. Stewart seeks to tempt Carol with promises of "sleigh-riding" and "fishing" and "an auto picnic" (12) just like Kennicott vows to take her skating and boating (21). The main difference between these suitors is that Kennicott speaks to Carol's desire to reform a town.

However, Kennicott and Carol have divergent ideas about the condition of Gopher Prairie. This becomes evident when they first arrive in town and see the locals after their honeymoon. Carol asks him about "waking them up" with "scientific agriculture" because "they're so provincial" (24). Kennicott responds,

“These people? Wake ‘em up? What for? They’re happy” (24). This exchange demonstrates the dissimilarity in their outlooks. Carol desires radical change to improve the economic and social situation for the common laborers and their families. In contrast, Kennicott appreciates the status quo and expects Carol to affect Gopher Prairie in muted ways through her personality and good taste. When they leave the Clarks’ welcome party for Carol, she asks Kennicott how his friends liked her. He tells her, “You were the only up-and-coming person in the bunch” (56). He also mentions similar comments from others, such as Sam Clark, who said, “That little lady of yours is the slickest thing that ever came to this town” (56). Kennicott also relays the praise of “dried-up old bird” Ma Dawson, who said, “Your bride is so quick and bright, I declare, she just wakes me up” (56). These recitations demonstrate Kennicott’s devotion to Carol, but they also show that his idea of her transformational influence is through relationships as a wife and mother rather than as a full-time reformer.

Kennicott’s and Carol’s different views on Gopher Prairie are indicated even in their courtship. When he pulls out snapshots of the town to show her, he says, “Here she is!” (21). This personification reveals his affection for the place. To Kennicott, Gopher Prairie has “the best people on earth” (20). He then proceeds to tell her about many of the denizens who are dear to him. On the other hand, Carol views Gopher Prairie with impersonality. She does not hear Kennicott’s information about the town with same enthusiasm that he offers it, for she “half listened to the names” and “could not fancy their ever becoming

important to her" (20). Also, he qualifies his challenge to her: "you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does" (20). The "if" indicates that, in Kennicott's mind, Gopher Prairie may not need to change. This difference of opinion about the town is not incidental, for it illustrates their disharmony about Carol's calling.

Kennicott's and Carol's conflict about her reform efforts in Gopher Prairie illuminates the New Woman debate. Carol estimates herself to be "a woman with a working brain and no work" (88). Her viable options, the "three things which she could do" (88), are to be a mother, a reformer, or a participant in "the activities of the church and study-club and bridge-parties" (88). Motherhood temporarily is not an option because Kennicott desires to wait for children for financial reasons. And because "outside employment" for "the village doctor's wife" is "taboo" (88), her work is not only unnecessary to their family budget, but even if she wanted, Carol cannot pursue an occupation. Thus Carol's situation as an ambitious, educated, young wife without children removes ancillary matters, such as openings or compensation, to the central issue of comparative vocational calling between men and women. She possesses the time, education, and motivation to do volunteer work in town planning. These circumstances, therefore, simplify her case to that of a married woman with an opportunity to pursue her vocational dream.

Carol's opinion of her new home, which Kennicott had shared with his mother (32), is another instance of her sensitivity to aesthetics. She notices the

house's "dinginess," "lugubriousness," and "airlessness" (32). The bedroom, perhaps, most depresses Carol, for "its full dismalness crawled over her" (33). Her perception of it, given here, suggests oppression and death: "She saw the furniture as a circle of elderly judges, condemning her to death by smothering. The tottering brocade chair squeaked, 'Choke her — choke her — smother her.' The old linen smelled of the tomb" (34). Carol is greatly distressed by her initial exposure to the conditions in Gopher Prairie and even those in her own home. Her desire for beauty and willingness to further it in her home and community demonstrate a unity between Carol's personal identity and her vocational aspiration.

Kennicott consistently fails to help Carol into satisfactory roles after their marriage. He does not encourage her in any definite responsibilities that engage her interests and talents. Kennicott does not want children yet. He believed that "in the insane condition of civilization, which made the rearing of citizens more costly and perilous than any other crime, it was inadvisable to have children till he had made more money" (89). Although Carol connects children with "beauty" (66), she also wants to delay starting a family. In fact, on her first day in Gopher Prairie she panics that she might be pregnant. This is her reaction:

I'm nervous this afternoon. Am I sick? . . . Good Lord, I hope it isn't that! No[t] now! How people lie! How these stories lie! They say the bride is always so blushing and proud and happy when she finds that out, but — Please, dear nebulous Lord, not now! Bearded sniffy old men sitting and demanding that we bear children. If *they* had to bear them — ! I wish they did have to! Not now! Not till I've got hold of this job of liking the ash-pile out there! (34-35)

Carol's vehemence is not about finances but about her calling. Though she follows Kennicott's lead on the decisions to postpone, for monetary concerns, further remodeling and having children, these areas of home and family are pertinent, if not central, to Carol's undeveloped sense of vocation and, therefore, her wellbeing. His veto of them, without an attempt to identify meaningful alternatives for her to pursue, leaves Carol to falter.

Carol's reluctance to having children weakens steadily after her first year in Gopher Prairie. In the fall of 1913, Carol muses, "I wonder when we will begin to have children? I do want them" (166). And that December she resentfully compares Kennicott's attitude toward his old useless hunting equipment, "Well, you can't tell; they might come in handy some day," to his "thinking of the child they would have when, as he put it, they were 'sure they could afford one'" (202). However, the following summer, when Kennicott secures "an excellent land-deal," and announces the time is right, Carol "assented, and wished that she had not assented" (240). This disinclination reflects Carol's overall dissatisfaction with married life and continued anxiety about her calling. She feels, "In the plodding course of her life there was nothing changed, and nothing new" (240). Carol's interest in motherhood increased in a period of relative personal satisfaction. Now she is once again more pessimistic about her prospects as a reformer. She experiences normal early pregnancy sickness in the fall of 1914. However, Carol's vocational anxiety heightens her psychological discomfort as well. She feels that she is "being initiated into the assembly of

housekeepers,” and that “with the baby for hostage, she would never escape” (248).

Kennicott similarly frustrates Carol’s ability to satisfy her calling to manage her home. Carol tries in different ways to be efficient. He does not consider an allowance for Carol because “[h]is mother never had one!” (74). The “honeymoon jest to beg prettily” quickly became unsatisfactory to Carol. When she informs him, “I haven’t a cent in the house, dear,” Kennicott responds, “You’re an extravagant little rabbit” (74). His impromptu funding hinders Carol’s ability to establish a baseline by which she can plan and evaluate the purchase of goods to benefit their home. Instead, his response, despite its teasing tone, makes the unfounded judgment that she is imprudent in her spending. His response belittles her efforts to serve their household, and creates unnecessary resentment between them. The implicit message in his comment is distrust, which carries over to make her feel “self-conscious” (74) the next time she requests money.

Carol does not help herself, however, because she fails to discuss the matter with Kennicott. Because she laughed once at “his joke about trying to keep her out of the poor-house,” it became “his daily *bon mot*” (74-75). She considered a frank conversation “too much trouble to explain to Kennicott’s kindly stubbornness that she was a practical housekeeper as well as a flighty playmate” (74). Carol does the best she can under difficult circumstances and “bought a budget-plan account book and made her budgets as exact as budgets

are likely to be when they lack budgets" (74). However, she is unable to plan without any foreknowledge of funds. This forces her "to ask for money at breakfast" or "to run down the street after him because she had forgotten to ask" (75). Carol attempts to solve the impasse in a non-confrontational way by having the bills sent to Kennicott. She learns, however, that the merchants "do business for cash" (75). Carol's bind could be improved if she explained her position with the kindness that she defers to his preference for "the lordliness of giving largess" (75).

In his defense of the traditional home, Roosevelt declared the need for women to have a share in household financial management. He wrote, "the woman who keeps the home has exactly the same right to a say in the disposal of the money as the man who earns the money" (238). Kennicott does not follow this principle, because he does not allow Carol an equal voice in their allocation of resources. Kennicott's implied rationale is that he earned the income and should control it. Roosevelt, however, dismissed this notion. He argued, "Earning the money is not one whit more indispensable than keeping the home. Indeed, I am inclined to put it in the second place. The husband who does not give his wife, as a matter of right, her share in the disposal of the common funds is false to his duty" (238). Carol's frustration over the money situation builds to where she does confront Kennicott but fails to make a complete case like Roosevelt.

Carol's pragmatic protest omits a moral punch and, therefore, achieves only a partial solution. When she marches down to Kennicott's office above the drugstore, Carol finds Maud Dyer demanding ten dollars from her husband, Dave (75). He proceeds to ask, "Where's the ten dollars I gave you last year?" to the laughter of Kennicott and the other men present (76). Carol gathers that Maud "was accustomed to this indignity" (75), and informs Kennicott to speak with her in private upstairs. She references the incident downstairs and one the day before, when she witnessed the wife of a farmer beg her husband for a quarter to buy their child a toy, before saying, "I'm in the same position! I have to beg you for money. Daily!" (75). Carol continues her theme of supplication, and says, "I now humbly beg you to give me the money with which to buy meals for you to eat. And hereafter to remember it. The next time, I shan't beg. I shall simply starve. Do you understand? I can't go on being a slave" (76). Carol's emotional appeal is effective at gaining Kennicott's momentary sympathy to her anxiety but not to her thesis that she is the rightful household purchaser. Joining her in tears, he responds, "Dog-gone it, I meant to give you some, and I forgot it. I swear I won't again," and gives her fifty dollars (76). Kennicott only remembered "sometimes" in the future to fulfill his promise (76).

In fact, a year later this argument resurfaces in connection with their discussion about Carol's difficult assimilation into Gopher Prairie culture. Kennicott suggests that the reason "we never will have more than a beer income" is because "the grocery bills are about twice what they ought to be" (174). Carol

confesses, "I'm not economical. I can't be. Thanks to you!" (174). Despite his earlier apology and consistency to give her money since then, she wants a defined cash flow. Kennicott's objection that the unpredictability of a rural doctor's income makes such a request impossible seems reasonable until Carol demonstrates an equally sensible solution by asking for "a percentage" (174). Kennicott resentfully considers this "a kind of alimony" (175). Carol, similarly indignant, expresses the "humiliation" of feeling like a "mistress" (175). Therefore, she threatens, "I shall choose my lovers," unless Kennicott gives her enough money to cover more than necessities.

Carol requests to be Kennicott's "partner" who is "in charge of the household department of our business" (175). She must have discretionary funds to buy more than "double-boilers and socks" (175) to fulfill this role. Without knowing the frequency and amount of her shopping allowance, Carol explains, "I can't shop around, can't buy in large quantities, [and] have to stick to stores where I have a charge account" (175). That is Roosevelt's argument: The wife cannot properly buy for the home without a budget. Her alternative, she explains, is that "I shall choose my lovers" (175). Kennicott relents, saying, "[Y]ou may be right" and "[y]ou ought to run the household as a business" (175). He agrees to give the regular percentage and to her own checking account (175). This battle over household finances is significant because it reveals how Kennicott and Carol view themselves and their marriage. Kennicott thinks he is generous to Carol, but she feels degraded by his attitude. If their domestic

economy were the only issue then their new arrangement would commence marital bliss. Instead, there are more “fundamentals” that they must “get together on” (178).

However, Carol is also at fault because “daily she didn’t do anything about it” (76). Her plea is pragmatic and not ethical. Carol makes her husband understand that his meals are dependent upon her ability to acquire food. However, she does not insist that she deserves it on account of her work in their marriage. Roosevelt explained this here: “It is not his money that he gives to her as a gift. It is hers as a matter of right. He may earn it; but he earns it because, she keeps the house; and she has just as much right to it as he has” (“Parasite” 238). Neither Kennicott nor Carol identify her calling.

Kennicott’s and Carol’s reservations about starting a family reflect different priorities with regard to the traditional home. Kennicott’s reason to delay having children concerns the required resources. Carol’s primary concern, on the other hand, is the potential distraction motherhood would be from her other ambitions. After a few weeks of acclimation to her new town, she muses, “It would be sweet to have a baby of my own” (67). But she also thinks, “Not yet! There’s so much to do” (67). Kennicott’s attentiveness to the costs of a child is responsible though possibly overly cautious. However, it is only tangential in the consideration of a traditional home. Kennicott’s outlook is time-honored in his expectation to be the breadwinner. The custom that a doctor’s wife does not work allows for the possibility that Kennicott’s presumption is perfunctory.

However, his generally conservative outlook suggests that this would be his assumption were he not a doctor. Carol's desire to pursue an occupation instead of or in addition to being a mother is an egalitarian outlook that is contrary to the early twentieth-century traditional home.

Carol maintains certain traditional ideas about sex roles despite her progressive philosophy. In her courtship with Kennicott, both of them affirm ontological differences between males and females. He explicitly expresses this when he makes "remarks upon suffrage" (17). He tells Carol, "You have ideas without having lost feminine charm. Say! Don't you think there's a lot of these women that go out for all these movements and so on that sacrifice—" (17). Kennicott does not complete this thought, but his distaste for suffrage implies a distinction between the sexes. He also believes that females who fully commit to social reforms make a tradeoff. Whether he believes such women sacrifice femininity, motherhood, or something else, his implication, once again, is that men and women are functionally different. The normally opinionated Carol expresses no external or internal aversion when he expresses this attitude. Her refrain from disagreement might be for politeness or to avoid upsetting her beau. However, she likely supports suffrage, though she favors labor issues to politics. Thus Carol might very well agree that women reformers do sacrifice something, and are justified.

A final indication of Carol's subscription to traditional distinctions between men and women is her reaction to the Kennicott's final photograph of

Gopher Prairie, which he shows her at the end of their courtship. He prefaces the image by saying, "Here's where you come in" (21). The image has a frail woman holding an untidy infant in front of an unwieldy log cabin. Kennicott says, "Look at that scared baby! Needs some woman with hands like yours. Waiting for you! Just look at that baby's eyes, look how he's begging—" (21). Carol emotionally replies, "Don't! They hurt me. Oh, it would be sweet to help him—so sweet" (21). Kennicott again affirms a traditional view of marriage in his plea to Carol to be his wife and helper. He assumes that she will respond favorably not only to the vulnerable baby but also to the idea of assisting him in his practice. Indeed, Carol is moved by the image, and affirms the idea of helping the little one. By implication she supports the idea of being a helper to Kennicott as well. Significant is Carol's visceral first reaction to his sentimental talk. She herself begs for relief from the infant's eyes, which cause her distress. Carol's sensitivity to the baby, and disposition to help it, indicates her inclination to vocational nurturing.

Carol adheres in other ways to traditionally feminine roles. When she first meets Kennicott at the Marburys, Carol immediately excuses herself and says, "I must go out to the kitchen and help Mrs. Marbury" (15). Her decision to aid with the food preparation follows their handshake, in which his hand is described as "strong" and "firm" (15). The contrast between traditional feminine behavior and masculine strength emphasizes the differences between the sexes. And when they are on a bridge over the Mississippi River she feigns fear to be rescued by

Kennicott. After she faked distress, Carol found “it was an extremely human satisfaction to have a strong male snatch her back to safety, instead of having a logical woman teacher or librarian sniff, “Well, if you’re scared, why don’t you get away from the rail, then?” (19). Here Carol distinguishes the male with power and heroism, and the female with an authoritative occupation, impassivity, and criticism. Carol’s reverie not only emphasizes distinctions between the sexes but also delights in them.

Carol’s rescue fantasy on the bridge expresses a recurring theme in her expectations about life. She is “a born hero-worshipper” (5), especially in regard to “her smiling understanding father, dead these twelve years” (101). Her close bond with her father, who died when Carol was thirteen, is particularly influential because her mother died when she was nine (9). She acknowledges the paternal hold on her when Kennicott asks, “Why can’t you take folks as they are?” (179). She replies, “I think perhaps it’s my childhood” (179). Carol equates her father with “divine love” and “perfect understanding” (359). For her, he was “the tenderest man in the world” (179). One of the options Carol unsurprisingly considers as a college senior, along with being a lawyer, a nurse, or a scriptwriter, is “marrying an unidentified hero” (6). Her experience with and devotion to her protective father results in Carol’s idealistic view of life. She is disappointed when reality does not match her romanticized outlook.

As a self-described “book-worm” (47), Carol develops a romantic view of life. Upon her college graduation, pursues library work in Chicago (12) and St.

Paul (13). One appeal of such work was the idea of “persuading children to read charming fairy tales” (10). She wishes others might experience their profound effect. Carol is comforted by “pure love stories in the magazines” when Kennicott is away (88). The quixotic influence of such reading is seen in her attempt to write poetry: “The sky is bright, the sun is warm, there ne’er will be another storm” (88). In her desire to make things better, Carol attempts to romanticize one peeve about Kennicott. However, after “[s]he could not remember any fascinatingly wicked hero of fiction who chewed tobacco,” Carol acknowledged that the habit “merely bound him to Gopher Prairie” (109). The contrast between reality and her expectations is seen when she accompanies Kennicott to an injured farmer. She notes that the “unwholesome dead white” leg was not “the rosy shining tissue of the amorous poets” (184).

Carol’s disturbed experiences in Gopher Prairie brought on by the uncertainty of her calling stimulate her doubts regarding her marriage. Within months after becoming a newlywed, Carol ponders, “Was it all a horrible mistake, my marrying him?” (109). This feeling subsides, given her moodiness, but does not leave. A year after their marriage, Carol thinks, “[T]hat he was a rustic, that she hated him, that she had been insane to marry him, that she had married him only because she was tired of work” (178). She focuses on her son, Hugh, for two years, following his birth in the spring of 1915 (249). Carol is engaged in everyday life, during that time, and “[h]er opinionation seemed dead” (249).

Her heaviness returns in the summer of 1917, about the same time Gopher Prairie's favorite son, auto manufacturer Percy Bresnahan is in town (284). Carol's "admiration" for the cosmopolitan and perceptive Bresnahan causes her "to tear at the shroud of intimacy" that is her life with Kennicott (294). Carol expresses her doubts: "Was she a fool? She doubted her world, doubted herself" (299). She meditates upon Kennicott's beloved shabby and dilapidated field sport jacket and wonders, "Wasn't her whole life like that hunting-coat?" (299). Carol's frustration of unrealized vocational aspirations re-emerges as her child grows older and her husband becomes "as fixed in routine as an isolated old man" (299).

Carol contrasts the happiness of her faithful friend Vida in her young marriage against the sadness her own. Their different views of housework seem to Carol to be the reason. Through the narration, she considers that "[t]he greatest mystery about a human being is not his reaction to sex or praise, but the manner in which he contrives to put in twenty-four hours a day" (270). She applies this idea to Vida's situation: "Vida was hungry for housework, for the most pottering detail of it. She had no maid, nor wanted one. She cooked, baked, swept, washed supper-cloths, with the triumph of a chemist in a new laboratory. To her the hearth was veritably the altar" (270). Carol's day includes much of the same routine but she does not enjoy it like Vida. Carol dresses, feeds, cleans, and walks Hugh. She goes shopping, directs the maid, Oscarina, in her duties, handles deliveries, mends clothes, and reads while the baby naps. Carol

recognizes that Vida, at thirty-nine years old (263), is grateful to be a newlywed. She also knows that Vida and Raymie have similar intellectual and religious interests (264).

Kennicott contributes to Carol's overall unhappiness, although he is not the cause. She never seriously thinks about divorce outside of a heated exchange, but she does consider leaving him and eventually does for twenty months. Kennicott is self-sufficient in his practice, which makes it difficult for him to comprehend how Carol is struggling to find her calling. Their argument about Carol's budget showed that he is not intentionally inconsiderate, but he fails too often to account for her viewpoint. Though he has taken Carol on some house calls, Kennicott does not regularly seek to incorporate her into his work, even though she expressed interest. He persuades her to wait on having children. He restricts her ability to renovate the house, to the point that she considers it "his house" (298). He does not encourage her toward employment or any other volunteer or reform interests. He does not recognize her loneliness. He does attend the play she directs, and he does take her to the Twin Cities for a review of avant-garde plays. In the areas where he feels justified in being firm, he does not seek alternative measures. And in the more flexible areas he seems oblivious to the idea of compromise. Thus Carol considers cooking the "one medium in which she could express imagination" (299). Yet Kennicott, after "liking her experiments" for a while, now "wanted only his round of favorite dishes" (299).

When Carol hints at the idea of moving to a new area he will not discuss the possibility. One area in which Carol has hope for improvement is the new home that Kennicott had said was the reason for not putting more money into the current one. In the summer of 1917, he tells Carol, "I'm getting to the point now where I feel we can afford one" (305). Carol suggests, "a low stone house with lattice windows and tulip-beds, of colonial brick, of a white frame cottage with green shutters and dormer windows" (305). She would discover that he wanted "a house exactly like Sam Clark's, which was exactly like every third new house in every town in the country" (305). When the Smails next visited, Kennicott sought Aunt Bessie's support for his choice of "a nice square house" with "a crackerjack furnace" instead of "all this architecture and doodads" (305). Bessie voted for "closets and a good furnace" (305). And Whittier weighed in with this: "What d'you care what folks think about the outside of your house? It's the inside you're living in" (306).

Kennicott's ideas for their home improvement cause Carol to lose hope that her dream home will become a reality. His sketches for a sewing-room and a garage suggest that their expectations for a home are irreconcilable. She reasoned that because "Kennicott was past forty, and settled" that the new house would be his last time to build (307). Therefore, she concludes that a move to the "sound example of the Sam Clark school" means "there she would sit for all the rest of her life" (307). However, remaining in their current house means a beautiful new home is still possible (307). After "ten days" Kennicott did not remember the new

house, and Carol did not remind him (307). Once again he fails to defer to her out of kindness nor out of deference to her expertise in aesthetics. His overriding concern for practicality and conformity stifles her interest in the remaining project that holds her interest and for which she has sacrificed and patiently waited. His decision fails to encourage Carol in her effort to find her calling and, in fact, it leaves her more discouraged.

Carol updates Kennicott's waiting room and office from "shabby chairs" (188) among other "brown and scaly" (187) pieces. After his mild resistance, he is pleased and says, "Does look a lot better. Never thought much about it. Guess I need to be bullied" (188). Their kitchen left even more to be desired, but Carol "painted it white" and "put up curtains" (299). Her hopes for a new sink, stove, and oven went unfulfilled because "Kennicott always postponed these expenses" (299).

As a supportive helper to Kennicott's practice, Carol expresses genuine interest in learning about his work. He professes enthusiasm for the idea but does not follow through. She entreats, "Dear, you must tell me a lot more about your cases. I want to know. I want to understand" (97). Yet after agreeing to her request, he immediately goes to work on the furnace (97). Later, she tries again, and says, "But dear, *please*, will you tell me about the next case that you do think is interesting?" (97). And once again he assents, but then he asks where she got the tasty salmon (97).

Carol's has a positive experience in accompanying Kennicott on some housecalls. Their first summer together in Gopher Prairie she rides with him, and "admired him as she saw with what respect the farmers obeyed him" (152). That December Carol accompanies Kennicott on a routine call to treat Nels Erdstrom for jaundice (192). He offered little conversation during their carriage ride in the cold, but "she was happy" (193), and enjoyed the "magic of sunset and cool air and the curiosity of lovers" (194).

At the farm, Carol meets the child who was the baby in the photograph that "lured her to Gopher Prairie" (193). She is captivated by the boy and proceeds to spin an impromptu tale for his pleasure, which he receives "stoically" (194). In contrast, Kennicott remarks with "bluffness" about the child's healthy growth, which makes him "squirm with a delight which Carol could not evoke" (195). Kennicott and Carol are both sincere in their admiration for the little guy, but they please him in their own way. Kennicott's success makes her "humble" so that "her ambition was not to play Rachmaninoff better, nor to build town halls, but to chuckle at babies" (195).

Carol's most exceptional help of Kennicott in his vocation is mutually rewarding for the couple. Kennicott is called to treat Adolph Morgenroth's severed arm (194), and she must administer the anesthetic. Kennicott is minimal but efficient in his encouragement to both his devoted wife, acting as stand-in nurse, and to the unconscious farmer in mortal danger of blood loss. He declares, for both to hear, "Look who's here! Real anesthetist! Ochsner hasn't got a better

one!" (197). She successfully delivers the ether drip before she is eventually overcome by "the grating of the surgical saw on the living bone" and retreats outside for air (197). Carol is overwhelmed with a "haze of nausea" at the sight of the injured man's arm, "which, below the elbow, was a mass of blood and raw flesh" (196). Carol is captivated by Kennicott's performance during the amputation, for she "stared at her husband with the abandon of hero-worship" (197).

She is especially impressed by Kennicott's effective use of his limited knowledge of the German language to direct Mrs. Morgenroth in practical duties that both calm her and benefit her husband. Kennicott confidently guides her to offer a quick meal of "beer, rye bread, moist corn-beef and cabbage" that will nourish him for the operation ahead, and keep her occupied while her husband suffers (196). Later, he instructs her to hold the light the lamp that allows enough "streaky glimmer" for him to perform (197). Kennicott's proficiency causes Carol to think, "He speaks a vulgar, common, incorrect German of life and death and birth and the soil. I read the French and German of sentimental lovers and Christmas garlands. And I thought that it was I who had the culture!" (198).

Carol's Individualism Prompts Her Alienation toward Gopher Prairie

Carol's efforts to remake the village are largely resisted by the people and organizations she approaches. She struggles to seek her calling through the beautification of Gopher Prairie negatively influences her in at least three

significant ways. Her efforts toward the improvement of Gopher Prairie and the resistance to them affect the following: her individual identity, her relationships in the village, and her desire for greatness. Grebstein states, "In *Main Street* the focus is directed at the environment rather than at the individual, at what the protagonist sees and suffers rather than what he is" (67). Undoubtedly much of the novel's focus is on Carol's environment and antagonist, Gopher Prairie. However, the development of her sense of being is no less important. Carol is anxious about her immediate function in life, whether to be a town reformer or a conventional housewife, to the point that she is "poisoned with doubt" (89). She also has difficulty in adjusting to the town and its people. Carol returns from her first-day walk around Gopher Prairie "too seriously worried for hysteria" (40). She saw "unsparing unapologetic ugliness" (40) and perceived "a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer" (37). For these reasons, Carol felt that "[h]er dreams of creating a beautiful town were ludicrous" (36-37). And in addition to the confusion about her individuality, and the coldness of Gopher Prairie, Carol's vocational crisis jeopardizes her ability to achieve something significant. She wants to "[b]e an inspiration" (8) to a revitalized town, or to "enormously improve a horde of grateful poor" (7), or to be "a great liberator" (6), where she would be "visibly affecting lives" (13). Carol's senses of purpose, community, and success flourish to the degree she embodies her calling.

Carol's concern for design is demonstrated by her consistent reactions to the aesthetics of her environment. She is horrified, on the train ride to Gopher

Prairie from her honeymoon in Colorado, by the scenes of local color and people. The highly descriptive narrative passage is third person subjective. As a segue between her courtship and her arrival in Gopher Prairie, the scene effectively emphasizes both the negative first impression the young bride has upon seeing her new locale and her harsh judgment of it. The “[t]owns” are described “as planless as a scattering of pasteboard boxes on an attic floor” (22). On board the “moving mass of metal,” Carol endures “[a]n irritable clank and rattle” and “the soggy smell of unbathed people and ancient baggage” (22). These “slatternly” (23) passengers include “[a]n early-wrinkled, young-old mother” (22), “[a] soiled man and woman” who “munch sandwiches and throw the crusts on the floor,” and “[a]n old woman whose toothless mouth shuts like a mud-turtle’s” (23). When Carol takes her walk around town later in the day, she is appalled once again.

Her “first view of the empire [she’s] going to conquer” (35) makes her as miserable as did the train ride into Gopher Prairie. She dislikes “the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors” (40). Just as on the train, Carol notices the sounds and smells as well as the visuals of the town. She covers the town in “thirty-two minutes,” and, afterwards, she “despaired” (35). Grebstein asserts that this passage is “equalled earlier in the mercilessness of its scrutiny only by Sinclair’s description of the meat-packing houses in *The Jungle* and by a few of Dreiser’s descriptions” (64). Carol’s attention

to her surroundings and her aversion to that which she finds upon her introduction to Gopher Prairie is apparent in her homecoming.

Carol's frustration with home interior improvements reflects the indeterminate nature of her calling. Her extremely negative reaction to the bedroom suggests it might be her first project. However, Kennicott curtails her desires, on account of finances, so that she "decorated only one room" (72). She has a wall removed to enlarge the parlor (71), which enhances their ability to entertain guests. And she is able to purchase a new sofa and some decorations (72). He affirms these changes, saying, "it's worth all it cost, I guess" (72). However, he clips Carol's plans for "a fireplace" (72) as well as a new sink, oven, and stove (299). His reason is that they will "have a new house in a couple of years, anyway" (72). Kennicott's restraint toward Carol's other wishes for renovations is a reasonable desire to minimize present expenses in order to save for a better house in the future. Given his income, however, the decision appears austere without additional details about a savings plan and timetable for the new house. More important, his judgment disregards Carol's forte of aesthetics. Her obsessive attention to detail is noted by young hellion Earl Haydock. He tells his buddy Cy Bogart how he "died laughing" when he peeked in the Kennicott's window and saw that Carol "must 'a' spent five minutes getting a picture straight" (108). Her ideas for the refinement of their home would benefit Kennicott and their future guests. His unnecessary fiscal cautiousness about

additional home improvements inhibits Carol from building on her modest achievements, which, in turn, hinders the discovery of her calling.

Her uncritical intake of romantic stories creates for Carol overly optimistic expectations about marriage to Kennicott and life in Gopher Prairie. When she and Kennicott ride home from the train station, after their honeymoon, she has these thoughts: "Why do these stories lie so? They always make the bride's home-coming a bower of roses. Complete trust in noble spouse. Lies about marriage. I'm *not* changed. And this town—O my God! I can't go through with it. This junk-heap!" (31). Carol's judgment of Gopher Prairie is quick and severe. Her mindset that yearns for an unrealistic beauty in an imperfect world is established in her early life and stays with her. Carol even questions how fiction has shaped her mental health when she fantasizes about murdering Whittier Smalls at the dinner table (341). She is exasperated by the small-minded attitudes of Kennicott, and his Uncle Whittier and Aunt Bessie, as they criticize artistic young newcomer Erik Valborg over dinner (340). Carol, who imagines herself in love with Erik, envisions how "the carving-knife would make an excellent dagger with which to kill Uncle Whittier" (340). She then scolds herself in this way: "Fool! Neurotic impossibilist! Telling yourself orchard fairy-tales—at thirty" (341).

Carol's mercurial mood contributes to her unhappiness with her marriage and with her life in Gopher Prairie. When Kennicott first suggests, during their courtship, that Carol could transform the town, she replies, "No, I couldn't. Too

flighty" (17). She tells Kennicott, "You must tolerate my frivolousness," on her first night in Gopher Prairie (56). The third person subjective narration describes her as "a practical housekeeper as well as a flighty playmate" (74). Soon after her disastrous inaugural walk around town, Carol and druggist Dave Dyer trade playful jesting and "everything had changed proportions" (66). When the winter sports season began, she "was certain that she had found the perfect life" (86). However, after a "hen fight" at her first women's club meeting, Carol went home, "wept in terror," and felt like "an outcast" (96). Her perspective vacillates momentarily. One day she goes to see the reverend's wife, Mrs. Warren, to propose a churchyard garden. Carol's melodramatic impression of the brief conversation is this: "[A]t two minutes to five a town of demure courtyards and welcoming dormer windows had been erected; and at two minutes past five the entire town was as flat as Babylon" (135). These are only a few examples of Carol's self-admitted fickle temperament. Her capricious attitude means that she is able to turn quickly from a negative disposition to a positive one. Yet when she is down, she is susceptible to unnecessary doubts and unrealistic suspicions that aggravate her already poor outlook on the town.

In her first winter in Gopher Prairie, Carol felt that "the lambs" to whom she was called had become "wolves" with "fangs and sneering eyes" (102). In a passage of unrelieved paranoia, Carol's daily experiences are marked by delusional persecution from those she encounters in her routine. Her changeable mood encourages her mind to assume negative motivations from others she does

not know or trust. Thus she heard “a cruel sniggering” in the greetings of people “who a week ago had been amusing objects of study” (103). At the grocery, Juanita Haydock’s idle chatter about celery has Carol wondering, “She didn’t make fun of me. . . . Did she?” (103). Another day at another store, three people “babbled about onions” and Carol “felt guilty” (104). And to shop for clothes was the equivalent of having the whole town “investigate her” (105). Carol crossed streets to avoid people and affected behavior for “the ambushed leering eyes which she did not see” (103). For Carol to arrive home was to make it past “a thousand enemies armed with ridicule” (104). She knew her behavior was irrational, and “that her sensitiveness was preposterous,” but she could not stop (103). These difficulties for Carol compound the normal ones of adjustment to marriage and a new town. Her perceived calling to fix Gopher Prairie fuels Carol’s unreasonable expectations to be accepted on her own terms, for she is an outsider to them. Additionally, Kennicott’s failure to help Carol understand her calling further encourages her to misunderstand the town and herself.

Carol had been Vida’s “little sister” (257), and Vida is Carol’s best friend and most thoughtful critic. The two enjoy a “mystic bond” (262), even though Vida was in love with Kennicott a year before he married (259), making Carol “the girl who had stolen her place” (261). For these reasons, “Vida loved her and hated her” (257). Vida, a local native, is sympathetic in ways to Carol’s ideas for Gopher Prairie. However, she considers herself “a reformer,” who “believes that all the essential constructing has already been done” (262). In contrast, she views

Carol as “a revolutionist,” who expects “in one year to change the whole town into a lollypop paradise” (262). Vida resigns from her high school teaching position in order to take care of her new house and vegetable garden (269). She increases her activity in the Thanatopsis Club, takes Carol’s position on the library board, and teaches girls Sunday school (268-69). She also helps Raymie, a salesman, get an overdue promotion at the department store by threatening “to start a rival shop” (269). Vida is not a starry-eyed young newlywed who is preoccupied with her own wedded ecstasy. In fact, she becomes “less obviously admiring of marital bliss” and “sharper in demanding that the entire town share her reforms” (269). Her mature outlook combines with her new experience to refine her thoughts and re-direct her actions. She is more realistic about marriage and more specific in the changes she champions for the town. These include a new park and a backyard rubbish regulation (269).

The narrator ironically critiques Carol when she is infatuated with Erik. When he visits her while Kennicott is away, Carol half-heartedly suggests he leave. The narrator adds, “[I]t is women who are the calm realists once they discard the fetishes of the pre-marital hunt” (375). Vida is indeed more realistic after her marriage but Carol is not. Although she is married, the truism holds because Carol continues to “hunt” for self-realization. She discovers in time that hers is not found in Erik or any other man. Vida’s behavior demonstrates that, in her new life, she “exploded into self-confidence and happiness” (269). Carol “to the casual eye was not discontented” during her first couple of years of

motherhood (256). Hugh altered her perspective so that “Gopher Prairie and the brown house” became “natural places of residence” (257). However, she remains “enfeebled by loneliness” in the moments when she is not engaged with Hugh (271). She thinks that she would “gladly have been converted to Vida’s satisfaction” if it solved her isolation. Vida’s flourishing as a married woman is partly because “her draining thoughts were by marriage turned into energy” (269). The implication is that Vida remains unhappy. Yet, Vida channels her discontent into constructive thinking and actions in her new marriage. Carol’s inability to thrive after five years of marriage comes from distorted expectations caused by her continued uncertainty about her calling.

Carol observes the enervation of an abandoned calling in Guy Pollock. Carol begins to fantasize about this intelligent bachelor in her frustration and unhappiness with her life in Gopher Prairie. In her one extended conversation with Guy, she asks why he remains in the town. He answers, “I have the Village Virus,” which he explains affects “ambitious people who stay too long” (160). Guy considers himself “a living dead man,” and explains that no longer does he “want to face new streets and younger men—real competition” (161-62). Carol empathizes, and asks, “Can’t we do something with the town?” (163).

Later that evening, in her conversation with Kennicott, Carol repeatedly imagines Guy’s grin (170-71). Earlier, Carol and Guy discussed why females have discontentment. She asks him, “[W]hat has made the darkness of the women” (207). Guy suggests they want the return of “charming manners” and

“good taste” (207). Carol disagrees, and thinks “a more conscious life” is the desire (207). She explains, “We’re tired of seeing just a few people able to be individualists. We’re tired of always deferring hope till the next generation” (207). Guy says, “I’ll admit there are industrial injustices, but I’d rather have them than see the world reduced to a dead level of mediocrity” (208). Guy’s “mystery” was lost to Carol before their kitchen conversation finished, and they rejoin Kennicott and Vida in the living room (208). She saw that “[h]e belonged to Gopher Prairie” and was “but a frame on which she had hung shining garments” (208).

Carol’s flirtation with the much older Guy occurs before Hugh is born. After his birth, youthful Erik is Carol’s new “herald from the outside” (339). He tells Carol that only recently he has discovered “a world where beautiful things counted” (349). Raised on a farm, Erik’s interest is drawing, but he has been making money as a tailor. His desire is to “make something beautiful” (350). Carol encourages him to pursue his dream and to enroll in “one of these correspondence courses in drawing” while he saves money to go East (366). Carol finds in Erik “both her need of youth and the fact that youth would welcome her” (368). Carol and Erik’s mutual infatuation leads her to think that “some one rather like Erik, an older and surer Erik, ought to be Hugh’s father” (376). Carol tries to resist his advances, and tells him, “You’ll be the one thing in which I haven’t failed” (377).

To avoid the temptation of Erik's advances, Carol begs Kennicott to take her on vacation. Weeks later, in November 1917, Carol still vacillates about her feelings for Erik. One evening when Kennicott is in the country, Erik persuades Carol to walk with him in the woods. They hold hands. Kennicott arrives in his car (400). As he drives Erik home, he casually talks weather, hunting, and cars with the young man seated next to him while Carol listens from the back seat (400-01). After Kennicott helps Carol get out of her wet clothes, he says, "I'm not going to do the outraged husband stunt. I like you and I respect you, and I'd probably look like a boob if I tried to be dramatic. But I think it's about time for you and Valborg to call a halt" (402). Kennicott's caution to Carol regards the constant surveillance that exists in the small town. Carol explains that she is "fond of Erik" because "[h]e's an artist" (403). Kennicott proceeds to explain the life she would have as the wife of a starving artist. This picture of reality moves Carol. She confesses, "I don't think I could actually leave you. This marriage, it weaves people together. It's not easy to break, even when it ought to be broken" (405). Kennicott asks, "And do you want to break it?" She responds, "No!" (405).

Carol's romance with Erik intoxicates her because in it she most fully experiences her calling to nurture. Guy showed himself as an incomplete fantasy, corrupted by the Village Virus, who no longer could be nourished in ideals. Erik's youth is potential for Carol to cultivate, like a baby, or a new town, or a doctor who says, "You say I'm so darn materialistic. How can I help it, unless I have you to stir me up?" (20). Carol's indecisiveness about whether or not she

loves Erik is not the comparative confusion of a girl with two beaux on her doorstep. Neither is it the moral confusion of an unappreciated spouse who wonders if infidelity is the solution. Instead, Carol's equivocation about Erik is the joy of her recognition that with him she is able to express her calling. On their boat ride, she encourages him, "Erik, you've got to work! You ought to be a personage. You're robbed of your kingdom. Fight for it! Take one of these correspondence courses in drawing – they mayn't be any good in themselves, but they'll make you try to draw and –" (366). Carol sustains this young prince with idealism, pragmatism, and realism. She encourages him to flourish by practical means with the expectation of imperfection.

On the November night, when Carol is with Erik in the woods, she fears discovery when she sees the headlights. Her thoughts are these: "I won't be robbed! I *am* good! If I'm so enslaved that I can't sit by the fire with a man and talk, then I'd better be dead!" (399). Although she does not know the headlights belong to Kennicott, she rightly suspects her relationship with Erik, in which she has finally experienced her calling, is over. Her first utterance, "I won't be robbed!" does not refer to the loss of a lover or friend. Rather, it expresses her outrage at being deprived of the one area in her life in which her sense of purpose is being realized. Carol had the same feeling of being "robbed of her work" in college when she saw "an item about small-town women's clubs or a photograph of a straggling Main Street" (10). Her efforts to nurture a club or town had not materialized. Carol earlier had explained to Erik that he was being

“robbed” of his “kingdom” if he did not pursue his calling to be a writer (366). Significant is Kennicott’s use of the phrase when Maud Dyer comes to his office one night to entice him to “drop round by the house this evening” while her husband is working at the drug store (316). He asks, “Where’s the subscription-list? What cause do I get robbed for, this trip?” when she enters (314). Kennicott reveals that money is his primary concern.

Carol’s declaration of being “good” (399) is not primarily a protest of moral excellence. Rather it is an announcement of significance or value based on purpose. Erik once told Carol during a walk along the railroad tracks that he would go to art school to “learn what I’m good for” (351). In the same sense Carol asserts that to be robbed of her kingdom or calling is to be stripped of her identity and meaning.

Her third cry upon seeing the headlights – “If I’m so enslaved that I can’t sit by the fire with a man and talk, then I’d better be dead!” (399) – is not a libertarian complaint against puritanical standards. Rather it expresses the serious nature of a calling. She and Erik did not have a fire, although he suggested the idea. For Carol, figuratively, there is a fire, because that is where she fulfills her natural role of cultivating beauty. Carol’s third utterance concludes her mini-discourse on the essence and importance of her calling. Conversation by a fire with a man summarizes, for Carol, the generation of creativity in others. The amorous quality is secondary.

A fireplace to Carol suggests beauty, mystery, and relationship. Therefore talking by a fire is creativity-inspired conversation, at which she is good. She desired to interest Kennicott in poetry and imagined them “bending over large fair pages by the fire (in a non-existent fireplace)” (115). Yet he refused to build one in their current house out of practicality (72). Kennicott’s thermal efficiency and financial sensibility overlook her emotional satisfaction. His continued failure to recognize Carol’s stifled sense of purpose encourages her to seek affirmation elsewhere. Thus when Guy tells her, “It would be rather nice to have you literally sitting at my feet, by a fire,” Carol asks, “Would you have a fireplace for me?” (162). Guy’s sentiment is flirtatious. However, though Carol is smitten with him, her question is a platonic search to confirm that he understands her essence.

However, Erik is in love with Carol, and his proposal that they build a fire in the woods affirms his appreciation for her being. Carol perceives in that moment with Erik that she is truly living as intended, and as she has been unable to do with Kennicott. She concludes her thought by saying that her calling is what makes her life worth living.

This idea is continued when Erik’s father comes to censure Carol for leading his son astray. When he threatens to go to Kennicott, Carol’s anger surpasses Mr. Valborg’s. Enraged she replies, “Go tell my husband, go tell him, and don’t blame me when he kills you, my husband kills you – he will kill you” (407). She once fantasized at a Sunday dinner about protecting Erik from the

criticisms of Uncle Whittier and Aunt Bessie. She imagined that, with the use of “the carving-knife,” their “[b]lood on the whiteness of a table cloth might be gorgeous” (341). Now to protect Erik, she lunges at Mr. Valborg and threatens to have Kennicott kill him (407). Her bloodbath scenario and her violent reaction to Mr. Valborg indicate the emotional life or death significance of calling to Carol.

She conceives of him as her romantic hero because she associates marital love with calling, and Kennicott has failed her in this regard. Conroy suggests that Carol resists Erik “because she has grown to fear Gopher Prairie” (350). However, she is already skeptical about Erik as a suitor because of his youth. She thinks, “Dear Lord, am I really *thirty*? That boy can’t be more than twenty-five” (341). Carol matter-of-factly listens to Kennicott’s explanation of the dangers of the town’s communal judgment. Her interest in Erik is as a friend by the time Kennicott finds them in the woods. That is why she fervidly tells Mr. Valborg the improbable truth that her gentle husband will kill the father of the rival he just treated with extreme restraint. Carol’s threat is not another fantasy for the protection of Erik. If it were, Carol herself would threaten to kill Mr. Valborg. Instead, her warning is the embodiment of her third utterance from a week earlier. Calling is essential to life. She knows that Kennicott, her “husband” (407), considers her part of his calling, and would kill if she were attacked.

The best example of Carol’s reform influence is her friendship with Miles, Bea, and Olaf Bjornstam. Miles is an “irreligious socialist,” his wife, Bea, is Carol’s former “hired girl,” and Olaf is their son and winner of the “Best Baby”

title at the inaugural Gopher Prairie child-welfare week (254-255). Miles is an outsider because of his radical politics and Bea is an outsider as a foreigner from Sweden. They have a loving marriage and Carol is instrumental in their happiness.

Carol facilitates the relationship of Miles and Bea. In contrast to others in the Gopher Prairie community, she employs and befriends both of these outsiders, which enables the social outsiders to become acquainted and eventually marry. Carol hires the Swedish farm girl to do maid work at the premium rate of six dollars a week (41) despite criticism and “universal glower” from the other housewives (94). Similarly, regarding Miles, Carol avoids the attitude of others who “either laughed at him or hated him” (85). She is pleased to find him an informed and independent thinker, a reader of history, and a fellow nonconformist who is “irreverent to the village gods” (122).

Miles becomes a family man and community member because of his love for Bea. He is “hypnotized,” he explains, by this “jolly, square, faithful woman,” (325). Carol neither instructs him about the benefits of home ownership nor badgers him to be less cynical about the town. Instead, he transforms his hovel into a sparse cottage suitable for a wife and baby because of his love for Bea.

Similarly, he moderates his public criticism of Gopher Prairie, so Bea is welcome in the community. He excitedly tells Carol, “Oh, we got lots of friends. You bet!” (255). He also predicts that Olaf will “go East to college along with the Haydock kids” (255). Carol is not devoid of bias against the Bjornstams and

“hated herself for it” (255). Yet she countenances them despite the “indifferent cruelty” (255) of many, including Kennicott, who “steadily disapproved of the Bjornstams” (323). Miles and Bea are able to build a home and contribute to Gopher Prairie because they are together with the support and endorsement of Carol.

The Bjornstams exemplify contentedness in their calling. Miles knows that having his own farm allows him more potential income and better working conditions than the mill or maintenance work available. He saves enough money to start a dairy farm (255) and to buy Bea a phonograph (326). He knows that the music brings her “rapture like that of cattle in a warm stable” (326), and that she can listen while she does her never-ending work that includes “washing, ironing, mending, baking, dusting, preserving” (326). This work is “exciting and creative” to Bea because she is “Miles’s full partner” (326).

Carol learns from Bea’s example that hard work brings fulfillment in the context of calling. In her article “‘Gray Darkness and Shadowy Trees’: Carol Kennicott and the Good Fight for Utopia Now,” Lydia Blanchard writes, “Carol knows that hard physical labor destroys the imaginative life. It promises exhaustion rather than satisfaction” (130). Carol knows first-hand that physical labor by itself brings exhaustion. However, Bea demonstrates that hard work in the context of a larger purpose can yield satisfaction. Bea delights in the rigorous work of a farm wife, because she loves her husband and son. The phonograph that Miles provides for her makes her feel appreciated and lifts her morale while

she does tedious work. Carol is not satisfied with her housework because she does not feel like an equal partner to Kennicott.

The joy of the Bjornstams in their work permeates their lives. It is the reason that Carol and Hugh consider it “high adventure” to visit the Bjornstam farm (323). Hugh loves to trail Uncle Miles as he tends the animals. He thinks Miles is “the most heroic and powerful person in the world” (323). And Hugh considers Olaf to be “lord among mortal men” (323). Carol knew that Olaf was “more beautiful” and “more gracious” than her own son (323). Carol saw that “Hugh was a vulgarian; a bustling businessman,” and “Olaf was a Norse chieftain” who was “resplendently amiable to his subjects” (323). Carol observes natural hierarchy in addition to parent-child influence. Her belief in the superiority of Miles’s natural dignity to Kennicott’s conventional materialism is expressed in Hugh’s delight with the farm tools. In third person subjective narration, the child contrasts the difference in these tools with his father’s “sterized” ones (324). Hugh also notes that “Uncle Miles, who was a person altogether superior to Father” (324), allows him to play with his tools “except the saws” but “the tools on the glass shelves in Father’s office” “were not for boys to touch” (324). Hugh is conscious of the boundary Miles sets with the saws. However, the limitation by Kennicott demonstrates that his work is inappropriate for boys. Kennicott has included Carol in his work at times. However, he needlessly restricts his wife and child from being part of his calling.

Carol's interest in town planning satisfies some of her desire to nurture. She is particularly influenced toward this area by the field trips her university sociology class took to "the prisons, the charity bureaus" and "the employment bureaus" (6). Carol's sensitivity to the people she sees in distress makes her "indignant" at her classmates for their "staring at the poor as at a Zoo" (6). The organizational framework to social problems that she learned in sociology class inspires her problem-solution approach to community life. Carol's desire to be a caretaker would be fulfilled even though she would not have a child for a while, because "Her eyes mothered the world" (6).

Carol's attempt to find her primary calling through community development fails while her role at home is uncertain. The first night she and Kennicott arrive in Gopher Prairie as newlyweds they attend a welcome party in her honor, where begins Carol's difficulty in bonding with her neighbors. Desiring substantive talk, Carol finds "conversation did not exist in Gopher Prairie" among "the young smart set, the hunting esquire set, the respectable intellectual set, and the solid financial set" (49). So she boldly asks Professor Mott about experimental education (46), and banker Ezra Stowbody and lumber mill owner Jack Elder about labor issues (52-53). And to animate the dull tone of the gathering, Carol for fifteen minutes "enacted the comedy of being the Clever Little Bride of Doc Kennicott" (48-49). Her bit alternately amuses and stupefies the stiff group. On their walk home, Kennicott's feedback characterizes the mixed feelings throughout the novel between Carol and the town. He tells her,

“You gave ‘em a good time, but I’d watch out for that (56). His caution to Carol not to upset the conservative sensibilities of Gopher Prairie is underwhelming because it only concerns what she should avoid. He omits any guidance for her about ways to engage the town while being a doctor’s wife.

Carol Reconsiders Her Individualist Perspective

Frustrations with her marriage and her civic aspirations increase Carol’s uncertainty and anxiety about her vocational calling. She decides to leave Kennicott when their discord over the wartime anti-German mood causes her additional feelings of inadequacy and incapacitation as a progressive woman in the conformist village of three thousand. Carol tells him, “I’ve got to find out what my work is” (427), and moves to Washington, D. C., with their son, Hugh.

Carol finds their three and a half months in the West in early 1918 does not resolve her underlying anxiety. That summer, the Gopher Prairie booster campaign, “Watch Gopher Prairie Grow” (423), makes Kennicott and the town unbearable for Carol. Kennicott calls Carol “seditious” for defending a pro-farmer political rally that was labeled pro-German at the height of wartime patriotism. Since Carol did not support the booster leader, she asked Kennicott, “Am I pro-German if I fail to throb to Honest Jim Blauser, too? Let’s have my whole duty as a wife!” (427). She announces, “[S]olitary dish-washing isn’t enough to satisfy me” (428). She tells him, “I’ve got to find out what my work is” (427). When Kennicott asks, “Carrie, what the devil is it you want, anyway?” she

replies, "I think it's a greatness of life" (428). She declares, "I have a right to my own life" (428). When Kennicott responds that he does too, and she is his life, Carol challenges, "You have a right to me if you can keep me. Can you?" (428).

Carol's experiences in Washington and in her clerical work at the Bureau of War Risk Insurance (431) gives her "renewed courage" (437). She confirms that the big city and the occupational life have their advantages and disadvantages. After she sees Erik in an unimpressive movie role (439), Carol finds "a personality" in Kennicott's recent letters (440). He brings photographs when he comes to visit after her first year away (441). They charm her again as they did years earlier. Kennicott is on his best behavior and, in his practical wisdom, acknowledges to her, "[Y]ou won't ever stand G. P. unless you *want* to come back to it" (444).

Kennicott's stroke of genius is to invite her to "run down to Charleston and Savannah and maybe Florida" for "a second wooing" (445). He explains, "I just want the chance to chase around with you. I guess I never appreciated how lucky I was to have a girl with imagination and lively feet to play with" (445). When Carol asks, "Shall I go back to Gopher Prairie with you?" Kennicott explains the decision has to be hers. Carol's growth in sympathy for Kennicott is expressed in this narration: "It had not occurred to her that there was also a story of Will Kennicott, into which she entered only so much as he entered into hers" (446). Kennicott's developed appreciation for Carol's imagination and her

increased sympathy for his story reveal the dual growth necessary for their marriage to succeed.

Carol's Communal Perspective Prompts Her Return

Carol returns to Gopher Prairie after being away for twenty months, which includes "a second honeymoon" with Kennicott (451). The experience of full-time employment in a large city helps Carol to decide "her task" (451) is to be with him. She also concludes, "I've come to a fairer attitude toward the town. I can love it now" (449). She confidently sees herself more realistically, her town more sympathetically, and her family more enterprisingly, with her newfound priority of being a wife and mother. Stephen S. Conroy, in his article "Sinclair Lewis's Sociological Imagination," asserts that Carol's "individual-culture struggle is resolved by solving the marital struggle" (356).

A conversation with a feminist leader, the "generalissima of suffrage" (446), provides the confirmation Carol needs to return to Gopher Prairie. Carol hopes that the older woman will make her decision for her. Like Kennicott the wise woman explains why Carol must choose for herself. With self-candor the generalissima admits her love of children as the greatest of the sacrifices she has made. She also openly explains the disappointments and hypocrisies in the Uplift movement. The generalissima's advice stimulates Carol to challenge conventional wisdom, to focus on Hugh, and to be courageous in her outreach.

Carol's quiet return to Gopher Prairie reflects the town's inertia. Her newfound sympathy for others is demonstrated in her recognition that Aunt Bessie "was waiting in hope of being asked for a recipe" when she arrives "with a jar of wild-grape jelly" (454). And when her feelings are hurt that no one asks her about Washington, Carol "laughed at herself" (454). Carol and Kennicott go hunting with the Clarks, where he gives her "a first lesson in shooting" (455). As they head to the car for their return home, Carol says, "I'll sit back with Ethel" (456). In her inaugural use of Mrs. Clark's first name, Carol displays her desire to develop community with the women of Gopher Prairie whom she formerly considered impenetrable. And her willingness to ride in back acknowledges a new relationship with Kennicott based on interdependence and not equality. When Ethel suggests they go to the movies the next evening, Carol assents even though she had planned to read a new book (456).

Carol's modifications reflect the lessons she learned in Washington. She has not given up her reform ideas. She tells Kennicott their new daughter is "a bomb to blow up smugness" (457). Conroy observes, "This hope is, of course, the culturally approved way in which a defeated rebel may find solace" (354). This point, while true in its own right, insufficiently regards Carol's perspective. The defeated rebel's solace is a hope against hope. That Carol is not defeated is demonstrated by her active interest in her childrens' education. In his book *Sinclair Lewis* (1962), Grebstein accurately identifies Carol as a "tamed" rebel who "has found a *modus vivendi* (70). Kennicott's yawning and distracted assent

throughout Carol's discourse demonstrates the same apathy he shows toward her civic concerns.

Their bedtime ritual indicates both continued traditions and improvements. Kennicott agrees that some privacy is beneficial for them, so he kept Carol's separate room for her upon her return. However, Carol lovingly "patted his pillows" and "turned down his sheets" (457). She also declares, "I am happy," even though she is disappointed about the format of the upcoming "Community Day" (457). Kennicott is also baffled in his bureau search for "a collar which ought to be there and persistently wasn't" (457). His sigh, "That darn collar certainly is gone for keeps" (457), evokes Carol's challenge on her way to Washington, "You have a right to me if you can keep me" (428). The missing collar is a reminder that Kennicott will need to maintain his appreciation for Carol in order to keep her.

The novel closes with an optimistic follow-up touch to this image of caution. As Kennicott says goodnight, he mentions the snowy forecast and the need to put on the storm windows. He closes the novel with the mundane question, "Say, did you notice whether the girl put that screwdriver back?" (457). The question looks back to the beginning of their second year of marriage. This was a time of "new intimacy," when Carol "was eager to understand his hobbies," and Kennicott "was more communicative about his practice" (203). In this period of interdependency early in their marriage, Kennicott asks, "Where did I put that lug-wrench?" (203). The question sends a shivering Carol from the

garage into the house. The reprise of the question is a reminder that they experienced growth in their marriage when communication and sympathy were priorities with each other.

Mencken astutely notes in his review: “[Lewis] is far too intelligent to take sides – to turn the thing into a mere harangue against one or the other. Above all, he is too intelligent to take the side of Carol, as nine novelists out of ten would have done” (“American” 323). Similarly, Grebstein smartly writes, “It is the work of neither the satirist nor the romancer, but the realist” (70). As these critics observe, Carol and Kennicott are both sympathetic and unsympathetic because their strengths and weaknesses are true to life. However, their opposition is more than a battle between the sexes.

In his essay “Self-Reliance” (1841), Ralph Waldo Emerson asked, “Is not a man better than a town?” His rhetorical question suggests that, indeed, the independent thinker is superior to mindless imitators. In this sense, Carol’s desire for a career might have priority over the town customs. Similarly, the question might be put this way: Is not a woman better than a marriage? Framed this way, the balance is more personal. To remove the wife or husband from a marriage is to destroy it. Yet the same is true with the man and the town. The Generalissima reveals to Carol that her choice of home or career means a sacrifice is necessary. Carol’s return to Gopher Prairie is made possible by her newfound communal spirit, in which neither man nor town is better, because they need each other.

CHAPTER FOUR

“[T]he dread argument of the individual case”:
Individual Autonomy and Tribal Code in *The Age of Innocence*

Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions of customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.

Mill 102

As long as family spirit lasted, the man who struggled against tyranny was never alone; he found around him clients, hereditary friends, close relatives. And if this support were missing, he still felt sustained by his ancestors and roused by his descendants. But when patrimonies are dividing, and when in so few years races are merging, where to locate family spirit?

Tocqueville 300

The frequency of divorces in America increased from one in twenty marriages in 1880 to one in nine marriages in 1916 (O'Neill 203). Historian Christopher Lasch connects this dramatic change to the acceptance of a more individualistic understanding of freedom. He wrote, “The rising divorce rate, already a source of alarm in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, seemed to reflect a growing impatience with the constraints imposed by long-term responsibilities and commitments” (95). And historian Michael McGerr, author of *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (2003), acknowledges the broader transformation of culture that occurred during this time in light of the societal shift toward a more

individualistic understanding of freedom. He writes, “over the two generations from the end of the Civil War to the 1890s, the Victorians became progressives, with new views of the individual, society, gender, and pleasure” (xiv).

Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* (1920) addresses this late nineteenth-century shift in America from a communal culture to an individualistic one. Protagonist Newland Archer is a lawyer and member of the social elite in 1870s New York. He is engaged and subsequently married to the equally well-heeled May Welland. However, their relationship is threatened by Archer’s romantic interest in May’s free-spirited cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, who is estranged from her Polish husband, Count Olenski, and who has returned to New York from France. Class mores ultimately keep Archer faithful to his marriage. However, his exemplary life is eclipsed by his disappointment that rigid social class standards denied him a more rewarding life with his soul mate, Ellen. Years later, however, new insights about his family and generational changes bring Archer contentment that enables him to once again affirm the old New York society. This study argues that, in its portrayal of old New York society’s protection of Archer’s marriage against his autonomous pursuit of Ellen, *The Age of Innocence* demonstrates the necessary moral influence of communal bonds for the good life.

One of Archer’s chief joys is the arrival of “a box of new books from his London bookseller” (81). On one occasion he receives “a new volume of Herbert Spencer” that “he had been waiting for impatiently” (87). Although there is no

explicit mention that Archer reads John Stuart Mill, Archer's interest in the individualist writers of the day suggests that he would be familiar with Mill's *On Liberty* (1859). In *The Quest for Community*, sociologist Robert Nisbet calls Mill's work "perhaps the noblest of individualistic testaments of freedom in the nineteenth century" (211). Nisbet goes on to say that, in his theme of individualism, Mill suggests "that membership in any kind of association or community represents an unfortunate limitation upon the creative powers of the individual" (211). Archer's rebellion against his social class is consistent with Mill's concern about the restraining power of groups over individuals.

Like three other significant American novels from 1920, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, and Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*, *The Age of Innocence* addresses the transition of America from local communities to a national community during the Progressive years, loosely 1900-1920. *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* have contemporary settings in the 1910s. *The Age of Innocence* and *Poor White* have earlier settings but culminate in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. *This Side of Paradise* is the *Bildungsroman* of a Princeton student who becomes disillusioned with World War I-era bourgeois society. *Main Street* concerns New Woman Carol Kennicott's career ambition and consequent rebellion against her conservative husband and town. And in *Poor White*, inventor Hugh McVey's assimilation into community life promotes his business ethics. These novels express the Progressive reaction against the intermediate associations of traditional civil society.

Communities such as family, church, class, guild, and town are considered intermediate associations because they intervene between individuals and government power. The deliberate and voluntary natures of these structures, along with their disciplinary capacities, provide the moral context in which individuals flourish.

This study will first examine how Archer's devotion to May is an affirmation of his social code. Next, Archer's pursuit of Ellen as a rejection of the social code is addressed. Then Archer's fidelity as a demonstration of the communal power of the code is explored. In the last section, Archer's reversal toward May as a reaffirmation of the code is considered. This analysis shows that Archer flourishes to the degree he is engaged in the morally influential social bonds of his social class. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities.

This close reading in the light of historical and sociological context shows that as Archer's alienation increases as he increasingly disengages from the morally influential social bonds of his social class. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities.

Archer's Devotion to May Is an Affirmation of the Code

Historian Barry Alan Shain, in his book *The Myth of American Individualism* (1994), argues that American society has historically been communal in nature and not individualistic. He defines communalism as “a particular moral vision wherein human flourishing is to be pursued through familial and communal shaping of the individual” (23). An important distinction, Shain notes, is between the communalist vision, which seeks “the moral formation of the individual,” and collectivist communities, in which “serving the public and the collective good first is the precondition for the subsequent exercise of a measured amount of autonomous individual freedom” (23). The tightly knit upper class community in 1870s New York presented in *The Age of Innocence* illustrates the potential for communal bonds even in decline to have moral influence on individuals.

Archer comes full circle in his trajectory with regard to the social customs known as the “old New York code” (200) that govern his extended family and upper class cohorts. In his idealistic frustration, Archer generalizes certain problematic aspects of his group’s standards to fault the entire code rather than entertain the possibility of nuanced improvements. However, even in his disillusionment with the code, Archer remains a gentleman of his era. His rebellion is never absolute, and he never completely forfeits his in-group status. As the novel opens, Archer is a proud society insider who is completely satisfied with his engagement to May, a consummate debutante. Later, in his extramarital pursuit of Ellen, Archer’s subtle exclusion from family councils suggests his

tenuous good standing in society subject to his continued fidelity to May. In the coda, Archer is a middle-aged widower who accompanies his oldest son, Dallas, to Paris. The trip affords Archer the opportunity to recollect the bittersweet memories of his life that has been marked by his forsaking of his ideal woman, Ellen, for a life of conventionality. When Dallas reveals to him that May was aware of this sacrifice, Archer reassesses the old New York culture that he had been alienated toward. This news leads Archer to a new and sympathetic understanding of May and the code she embodied. In his consequent acknowledgement that the younger generation “had swept away all the old landmarks, and with them the sign-posts and the danger-signal” (215), Archer affirms the necessity for a culture to have moral boundaries.

In his disillusionment with the code, Archer believes that the traditions of New York society have become too conservative and oppressive. However, according to nineteenth century philosopher William Graham Sumner, cultural codes have significant biological and sociological functions. In his systematic study of group manners titled *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (1906), he defines mores as “the way of doing things which are current in society to satisfy human needs and desires, together with the faiths, notions, codes, and standards of well living which inhere in those ways, having a genetic connection with them” (59). This gloss suggests that mores and codes aid society because they yield practical benefits, originate from moral beliefs, and sustain one generation to the next. The mores of

Archer's culture protect his marriage to May, the interests of Ellen, and their society.

The trajectory of Archer's attitude toward the code from enthusiasm to disenchantment to renewed appreciation suggests the importance of his reasons for both his opposition to the code and his improved outlook toward it. Archer's commitment to the code varies inversely with his romantic interest in Ellen. She arrives in New York as an independent-minded foreigner and an outsider to the code in contrast to Archer, who is fully invested in it. However, as Archer's alienation toward May and his society increases, Ellen becomes more appreciative of American communal society, and becomes more assimilated into the New York social conventions. Yet just as Archer's alienation toward the code is never complete, neither is Ellen's assimilation. An examination of Amory's alienation toward the code, of Ellen's assimilation into it, and of Archer's reconciliation with it demonstrates how the moral influence of communal ties is fundamental for people to experience the good life.

The reason for Archer's surprising and abrupt alienation toward the conventions of old New York society is his growing perception that the code is responsible for the lifeless conformity that he observes in society. This growing perception of Archer's occurs with the arrival of Ellen, who becomes his exemplar of an independent life. As the novel opens, Archer is not yet alienated, and is fully content with his place in the old New York "world of fashion" (3). He draws "a breath of satisfied vanity" as he settles into his opera seat for a

performance of *Faust* (5). He is soon disturbed, however, by “the commotion” (10) among the elite crowd because of Ellen’s presence with May’s family. Archer and others who are “among the initiated” (8) in the code are surprised that her family would so audaciously exhibit her “black sheep” (9) cousin in the box of their grandmother, Catherine Mingott. The gossip about Ellen involves her leaving her “brute” of a husband and her having “bolted with his secretary” (11). Larry Lefferts, “the foremost authority on ‘form’ in New York” (6), remarks, “My God!” (7). And Sillerton Jackson, the “reigning authority on ‘family’” (7), proclaims, “I didn’t think the Mingotts would have tried it on” (8). Archer’s loyalty to the social rules is evident in his response to the faux pas committed by his intended’s family.

Archer’s beeline that night to the Mingott opera box, where sits May and Ellen, demonstrates his initial enthusiasm for the code. Archer takes “decisive action” (11) to reassure the “critics” (10) in the audience, with their “low-toned comments” (8) about Ellen, that propriety is in effect. He desires to publicly align the sterling reputation of his own family with that of May’s family by being “the first man to enter Mrs. Mingott’s box” (11). He later considers this response as “having publicly done his duty as a future member of the Mingott clan” (25). Archer’s show of solidarity with the Mingotts is a gallant defense of the honor of May’s family, and demonstrates his exalted status in and enthusiasm for elite society.

Archer's desire to hasten the announcement of his engagement to May similarly represents his affirmation of the code that he will eventually oppose. In the Mingott box, he informs May that he desires to announce their engagement later that night at the Beaufort ball as a way to show greater solidarity between their extended families. This would further mitigate any criticism of the Wellands and the Mingotts for their appearance with Ellen. Archer knows that his and May's engagement "was to be announced within a few weeks" (9), but he is anxious to accelerate the notification in order "to see [May] through whatever difficulties her cousin's anomalous situation might involve her in" (11). Both Archer's support for May's family at the opera and his request to announce their engagement early demonstrate his reverence for the social conventions that he later comes to resent in conjunction with the emergence of his idealistic individualism and his interest in Ellen.

Archer's devotion to May is itself another indication of his loyalty to the code. She is an exemplary young woman from a prominent family. However, Archer's interest in May is largely dependent upon his romanticized expectations about her and about their future together that are culturally conditioned. These expectations are unchallenged before Ellen's arrival. And since Archer is "at heart a dilettante," he is one for whom "thinking over a pleasure to come often gave him a subtler satisfaction than its realization" (4). For this reason, he quickly develops idealistic anticipations about May. For example, on the day of the opera, she modestly "let him guess that she 'cared'" (6). Based on her ordinary

revelation, Archer romanticized their future by “leaping ahead of the engagement ring, [and] the betrothal kiss” (6). In this way, Archer’s ideas about May depend more on cultural expectations than upon personal experience.

In his embrace of cultural attitudes about young women, Archer places unrealistic expectations on May. He muses, “What a new life it was going to be, with this whiteness, radiance, goodness at one’s side!” (16). Archer unrealistically assumes that May “was always going to understand” and “was always going to say the right thing” (17). He is so enthralled by his idealized perception of her that he does not need May to speak for herself. At the Beaufort ball after the opera, Archer joins May on the dance floor after she has just announced their engagement, and he says, “Now we shan’t have to talk” (16). Archer subtly stifles May here because his conditioned expectations for her do not include independent thought. Later in their courtship, when he visits her in Florida, Archer similarly takes no interest in May’s thoughts. He ignores her as she describes her day, because “[t]o let her talk about familiar and simple things was the easiest way of carrying on his own independent train of thought” (88-89). Archer consistently discounts May’s thoughts because “her point of view had always been the same,” which was the same as “that of all the people he had grown up among” (123). Archer’s enthusiasm for May correlates to his zeal for his cultural standards. Their match is, therefore, as strong as their shared allegiance to the code.

Archer's first tension with the code is evident in his disappointment at the announcement of his engagement at the ball. This moment, like his earlier beeline to the Mingott opera box, is to benefit to May's family in light of the controversy with Ellen. The announcement reveals a clash between duty and privacy, two principles emphasized in society. As an adherent to the code, Archer values privacy and dignity with respect to personal matters. On the other hand, he senses an obligation to publicize his betrothal on behalf of the honor of the Mingotts. After May, at Archer's request, discloses their betrothal, his internal reaction is this: "[I]t was not thus that he would have wished to have his happiness known" (16). Yet only hours earlier at the opera, Archer had burst into the Mingott box with a desire "to proclaim to the waiting world his engagement to May Welland" (11). He told her, "I want everybody to know—I want you to let me announce it this evening at the ball" (12).

The discrepancy between his eagerness at the opera to announce publicly their engagement later that night and his disappointment after the fact is the result of Archer's perception that his independence has been subtly cheapened. He regrets "that the necessity of their action had been represented by some ideal reason, and not simply by poor Ellen Olenska" (16). Archer is distressed that a "blurring of the surface" (16) has occurred because the location of the announcement is a "crowded ballroom" that "rob[s] it of the fine bloom of privacy which should belong to things nearest the heart" (16). The narration had earlier noted how social authority Sillerton Jackson was "a register of most of the

scandals and mysteries that had smouldered under the unruffled surface of New York society within the last fifty years" (8). The code seeks to maintain a smooth and unruffled surface in its public relationships. Yet Archer finds the merging spheres of his idealized personal romance with the messy cultural etiquette dispute to be distasteful. Archer's incipient resistance to the code arises because he perceives a discrepancy between individual autonomy and communal expectations.

Archer's admiration for the noble expression of personal autonomy is demonstrated by his fondness for the renunciation scene in the play *The Shaughraun* (1874). The moment of significance to Archer occurs in the silent parting of two lovers. The suitor says goodbye to his beloved while she is "standing near the mantelpiece and looking down into the fire" (72). However, before he leaves, he secretly returns to her, and kisses "one of the ends of velvet ribbon" in her hair that trails her back, and leaves again "without her hearing him or changing her attitude" (72). Archer found that this tender moment "moved him more than the most famous histrionic outpourings" (73). In his article, "Tableaux of Renunciation: Wharton's Use of *The Shaughraun* in *The Age of Innocence*," James W. Gargano finds that "all of the scenes of self-denial" between Archer and Ellen "have a greater or lesser affinity to the charged moment from *The Shaughraun*" (10). Wharton's use of the play is enigmatic, however. Gargano notes, "The scene Wharton uses as a paradigm for her theme of resignation in *The Age of Innocence* does not reflect the genial spirit of *The Shaughraun*" (4). He

explains that the play actually ends happily with the lovers headed toward marriage, and with “not the least hint of renunciation” (4). Also, not until the coda in *The Age of Innocence* does Archer renounce Ellen with any of the dignity expressed in the play.

That Archer’s favorite scene is irregular to the tone of the play and that it does not particularly correspond to his own experience makes its thematic prominence in the novel perplexing. Indeed, at the performance of the play, Archer is reminded during that scene of his recent leavetaking from Ellen’s house, yet he finds it “difficult to discover any resemblance between the two situations” (73). He concludes that the connection lies in “Madame Olenska’s mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience” (73). Archer theorizes that “chance and circumstance played a small part in shaping people’s lots compared with their innate tendency to have things happen to them” (73). An autonomous individual, then, does not shrink from duty but transcends conformity. This scene models, for Archer, how his ostensibly countervailing impulses of duty versus autonomy can be reconciled. In the scene, the silent departure between the lovers causes no disturbance, yet there is great drama. However, at the engagement announcement, Archer senses that the personal drama becomes tainted by the intrusion of social demands. In this way, Archer later resents society for interfering with his pursuit of Ellen.

Archer’s initial contentment with his life, his society, and his fiancée is based on his cultural training and its attendant expectations. An example of

Archer's conditioned loyalty to his social system is his reaction to a provocative invitation from Ellen. As he leaves with May and her mother from the customary betrothal visit to Granny Mingott, Ellen tells Archer to "come and see me some day" (21). He reflexively has these code-inspired thoughts:

'[S]he ought to know that a man who's just engaged doesn't spend his time calling on married women. But I daresay in the set she's lived in they do – they never do anything else.' And, in spite of the cosmopolitan views on which he prided himself, he thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind. (21).

Archer's first thought is critical of Ellen's foreign presumptions about the appropriateness of a married woman requesting the attention of a newly engaged man. Yet he then acknowledges that he shares her ecumenical attitude. But his moral objection and his cosmopolitan view are incompatible. His resolution for these conflicting cognitions is a chauvinistic affirmation of his culture. The novelty of Ellen's European background and individualistic style is forcing Archer to examine his deepest beliefs about the New York standards. Thus in this moment of reflexive adherence to the code, he takes pleasure at being a New Yorker and at being betrothed to one. Archer initially demonstrates unqualified allegiance to the code at the opera. Later that evening, his disappointment at the announcement of his engagement shows a fissure in his outlook toward the code. And now Archer's response to Ellen's invitation further reveals how her presence is the first challenge to his belief in the code. This early

testing of his fundamental loyalties launches his later conscious opposition to the code for the sake of his romantic interest in Ellen.

Archer's turnabout with regard to Ellen illustrates how she is the first significant test for Archer's adherence to the code. Before her arrival, he is satisfied with his life and with May, but "he had never taken the time to think out" how a young woman formed under the code, and how such a "miracle of fire and ice," could "sustain itself in a harsh world" (6). His initial lack of interest in and even irritation toward Ellen supports the idea that her presence is the stimulus for Archer to rethink his commitment to the code. His first response to Ellen's appearance at the opera is "a momentary rush of indignation" (8). Also he is offended by her comments about New York society upon his introduction to her in the Mingott box. At that time, Archer is fully committed to the code, and solemnly considers the opera audience to be "the august tribunal before which, at that very moment, [Ellen's] case was being tried" (12). That is why he finds her joke, "I see everybody here in knickerbockers and pantalettes," to be an inappropriate moment of "misplaced flippancy" (12). Archer finds Ellen's follow-up comment on his world, referring to it as "heaven," to be "an even more disrespectful way of describing New York society" (12). Ellen's unfavorable first impression on Archer at the opera illustrates his dramatic change of heart and reversal toward her and toward the code. Archer's move towards the individualism he finds in Ellen and away from the communal expectations of the code preconditions him to eventually desire an adulterous relationship with her.

An understanding of Archer's growth in appreciation for Ellen helps to explain his concurrent decreased enthusiasm for the code. However, an understanding of Archer's initial disinclination toward Ellen is necessary to grasp his change in attitude toward her. Initially, Archer is mortified that Ellen's controversial appearance at the opera is associated with May, yet he seeks to be reluctantly supportive of Ellen. However his opinion of her becomes more unfavorable in light of his conditioned allegiance to the code. In fact, he is so "distinctly nervous" about her possible attendance at the Beaufort ball that he purposely avoids a visit to his club before he walks to the soiree (15). Archer is "afraid" that May's family "might have Granny Mingott's orders to bring the Countess Olenska to the ball" (15). He does not want them to bring her because he senses "how grave a mistake that would be" (15) in light of the code. The negative reaction to Ellen at the opera raises Archer's concern for his own reputation, which makes him "less chivalrously eager to champion his betrothed's cousin than before their brief talk at the Opera" (15). Also, Archer's poor estimation of Ellen is why he does not fulfill May's request to tell Ellen about their engagement. He had not told Ellen because "[s]ome invincible repugnance to speak of such things to the strange foreign woman had checked the words on his lips" (17). In the same way that Ellen's awkward situation tainted the announcement of his engagement, her outsider status makes him averse to sharing the purity of his socially sanctioned news with her. Archer's

reaction to later learning that Ellen is not at the ball is “happy indifference” (17). Following the opera and the ball, Archer is ambivalent about Ellen and the code.

The initial hostile reaction toward Ellen weighs on Archer to the point that he questions any further chivalric action on behalf of May’s family. At first, Ellen’s disruptive presence leads Archer to instinctually reject her based on her outsider status. However, the protracted New York society hostility toward Ellen contributes to Archer’s opposition toward the code and to his affirmation of Ellen. The extended hostility toward Ellen leads Archer to perceive arbitrariness in the code that displeases him. This results in his enthusiasm for individualism, and leads to his extramarital pursuit of Ellen.

Archer’s surprising disappointment about the announcement of his and May’s engagement occurs within a few hours of his unadulterated optimism about life under the code. Within days of Ellen’s arrival, Archer’s core convictions about the code are examined for the first time. The quick reversal of his opinion about the announcement of his and May’s engagement illustrates his confusion. En route to the ball, Archer reflected upon the mysterious Julius Beaufort. This consideration is the turning point for Archer’s growing opposition to the moral authority of his community.

His meditation upon the social prominence of the dubious Beauforts is prompted by Archer’s preoccupation with the present crisis concerning Ellen. Archer’s contemplation of the substandard backgrounds of Julius and Regina Beaufort suggests his recognition of inconsistency in the code, which raises doubt

for him about its authority. The recognized view of the couple is that they “were not exactly common; some people said they were even worse” (13). Regina was “penniless” prior to her marriage, but came from the Dallas clan, “one of America’s most honored families” (13). Julius is problematic, however, because “his antecedents were mysterious” (13). His origins are unknown, although “[h]e passed for an Englishman” (13). And his arrival in New York is suspicious, for it was said “that he had been ‘helped’ to leave England by the international banking-house in which he had been employed” (14). In his consideration of Regina Dallas’s exalted social status, Archer muses, “[D]id [she] not forfeit it in marrying Julius Beaufort?” (13). Archer is troubled that the couple, on account of their wealth, has become distinguished socialites despite “whatever was regrettable in the Beaufort past” (13). Archer’s behavior at the opera earlier in the evening demonstrated his idealistic view of the code. His reflection upon the unseemliness of the Beauforts while in transit to their ball, with Ellen’s indecorous situation weighing on his mind, suggests that, for the first time, Archer perceives something objectionable about the code. Namely, the code is hypocritical if it permits the Beaufort past to be overlooked in light of their wealth while poor Ellen’s history is cause for her ostracism. Archer’s perception that the code is inconsistent and, therefore, morally compromised influences him toward the autonomous perspective that later will enable his rationalization of adultery with Ellen.

Archer's unexpected defense of Ellen to Sillerton Jackson demonstrates his diminished confidence in the code. Jackson, New York's informal historian of the social register, dines at the Archer household two nights after the ball. Archer remains personally apathetic about the matter of Ellen, for "the subject was already beginning to bore him" (25). However, she is the focus of the evening's conversation because Archer's mother and sister, Janey, are eager to hear Jackson's opinions about Ellen. Archer's contrarian spirit to the criticism of Ellen by Jackson and Mrs. Archer suggests that Archer's reassessment of the code is in process. When Mrs. Archer disparages Ellen, Archer becomes "suddenly argumentative," and asks his mother, "Why shouldn't she be conspicuous if she chooses? Why should she slink about as if it were she who had disgraced herself?" (26). Later, with "a bombshell in the pure and tranquil atmosphere of the Archer dining room," Archer boldly declares that he desires for Ellen to get a divorce (27). Thus within two days of the opera, Archer shifts from being a critic of Ellen to being apathetic towards her to being her defender. Archer is frustrated by "the hypocrisy" (27) that uses innuendo to condemn Ellen for living with another man after leaving her adulterous husband. He privately tells Jackson, "Women ought to be free – as free as we are" (27). Archer's vindication of Ellen before such society stalwarts as his mother and Jackson reveals his burgeoning hostility toward the code for its inconsistently harsher judgment of a woman's sexual history than of a man's. Ellen's arrival in New York leads Archer to examine his previously complacent attitude toward the code. Although

originally a critic of Ellen himself, Archer now reacts to his community's continued judgment of Ellen and unwittingly takes up her cause. The transfer of his allegiance from the moral authority of the code to himself prepares Archer to contemplate an affair with Ellen.

The growing opposition Archer has to old New York society is rooted in his dissatisfaction with the hypocrisy he sees in it toward Ellen. Within days of being introduced to her, Archer is conscious of the contrast between his society's critical judgment of Ellen's estrangement from her husband and its tolerance of Beaufort's shady financial past. Archer is cognizant that this double standard is inconsistent with the code in which "New York's business conscience was no less sensitive than its moral standard" (14). Archer's increased awareness to the variance in society's attitudes toward the Beauforts and toward Ellen leads him to consider its similar variance with regard to his relationship with May. Analysis of his own situation causes Archer to distrust the social system that formerly had his full devotion.

In his contemplation of the old New York culture, Archer concludes that the marriage tradition under its code is artificial and unproductive. On the night the Archers host Jackson for dinner, Archer stays up late to ponder his "old settled convictions" about old New York morality that "Countess Olenska had stirred up" (28). Archer's judgment of the system effectively forecloses his emotional love for May because he now understands it to be based in his

culture's myth of the young man with a concealed past and the young woman without a past.

The premier example, for Archer, of the arbitrary nature of the genteel manners is the double standard between men and women with regard to sexual behavior. At "the center of this elaborate system" was "the young girl" who was "plunged overnight into" sexual knowledge (29). Archer's and May's situation described here exemplifies the custom: "What could he and she really know of each other, since it was his duty, as a 'decent' fellow, to conceal his past from her, and hers, as a marriageable girl, to have no past to conceal?" (28). Archer finds the tradition objectionable because it produces marriages that are "held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other" (29). However, in her book, *Domestic Tranquility* (1998), lawyer F. Carolyn Graglia suggests how the double standard actually benefits women. She writes,

The crucial biological difference, woman's ability to conceive, is the basis of the double standard of sexual morality. Just as aggressive and undifferentiated lust enables a man to compete most effectively for the woman who will bear his children, so feminine modesty enable a woman to stand back [. . .] until she chooses the man she finds most suited to father and provide for her children. (162)

Archer's egalitarian criticism of the double standard ignores the possibility that a moral justification for it is based in traditional sex roles. Moreover, he does not consider that the disparity in sexual expectations for men and women might be balanced by more self-discipline for males as well as by more sexual liberty for females. Archer's critique of marriage customs, however accurate, comes from a

progressive vantage that diminishes the values of experience and tradition that are found in mores, according to Sumner. Archer's eschewal of communal moral tradition, rather than a reformation of it, readies him for self-determined ethical judgment by which he can justify his infidelity to May.

For Archer, the socially constructed roles for men and women that inhibit individuality necessarily damage the possibility for a meaningful marriage. Archer now sees the "frankness and innocence" of debutantes like May to be an "artificial product" (30). Consequently, she seems like "a stranger" to him, for she is "a terrifying product of the social system he belonged to and believed in" (28). Archer finds that his ideal for marriage contrasts with that of his culture. His wish for his and May's marriage to be a "passionate and tender comradeship" (29) corresponds to the contemporary move toward a more individualist culture. Historians Steven Mintz and anthropologist Susan Kellogg, authors of *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Life* (1988), describe how the perceived functions of marriage and the family changed in the late nineteenth century. They write,

[T]he family had acquired new burdens and expectations. The middle-class family was assigned primary responsibilities for fulfilling the emotional and psychological needs of its members. Along with providing economic security and a stable environment for children, family life was now expected to provide romance, sexual fulfillment, companionship, and emotional satisfaction. (108)

For Archer, his cultural system based on artifice undermines the possibility for such a union, because it "presupposed, on her part, the experience, the

versatility, the freedom of judgment which she had been carefully trained not to possess" (29). In fact, Archer can think of no marriages among his friends that exhibit his ideal. Instead, their unions are pretenses. In Archer's estimation, the code encourages marriage failures because men and women are not free to pursue their own interests. Thus Archer foresees "that marriage was not the safe anchorage he had been taught to think, but a voyage on uncharted seas" (28). It also primes him to be romantically interested in Ellen who, as an outsider to old New York culture, symbolizes a genuinely independent woman.

Archer's loss of faith in the code inclines him away from May and toward romantic interest in Ellen. Archer's esteem for Ellen is inversely proportional to his esteem for the code. After his initial criticism of Ellen for her awkwardness with regard to New York expectations, and his neutral defense of her as he perceives hypocrisy in the code, Archer develops an emotional attraction toward Ellen. The impetus for his romantic interest in Ellen is old New York's coordinated ostracism of her. This occurs a few days after Sillerton Jackson dines at the Archer's, and is cryptically described in the narration as the time when "the bolt fell" (30).

The reference is to old New York's "unexpected" and "uniform" rejection of invitations to a dinner in honor of Ellen, hosted by May's aunt, Mrs. Lovell Mingott (31). Archer believes that Lawrence Lefferts is "using Madame Olenska as a lightning-rod" (36) in order to avoid disfavor with his wife for his affairs. In addition to the lightning bolt connection to Lefferts's manipulation of

community opinion against Ellen as a lightning rod, the “bolt” metaphor also connotes the figurative bolt on the door of New York society being engaged to exclude Ellen from their fellowship. A third shade of meaning for “bolt” is an arrow from Cupid. Archer is struck with with romance for Ellen. Thus as the close-knit society collectively bolts its symbolic door in defense against a perilous intruder, Archer is struck by a bolt of romantic imagination for the independent outsider. The reaction against Ellen, however, increases Archer’s interest in her. This is evident in his heightened response to the rejected invitations. In contrast to the Mingotts, Ellen’s original backers, who respond “gallantly” to the affront, Archer is “aflame at the outrage” (31). He even proceeds to entreat his mother, who has remained a critic of Ellen, to call upon her cousins, the venerable van der Luydens, for help in their support of Ellen.

The involvement of Henry and Louisa van der Luyden in Ellen’s cause considerably demonstrates the potential for moral influence in communal life. The couple are one of “three families in [New York] who can claim an aristocratic origin” and, with regard to prominent families, “stood above all of them” (32). Henry and Louisa are naturally “shy and retiring” (36) despite “Mr. van der Luyden’s least gesture as having an almost sacerdotal importance” (34). Their significant influence as “the arbiters of fashion” and “the Court of Last Appeal” (36) derives from the persuasion of their exemplary lives and their sage counsel instead of from authoritarian control.

Henry affirms Archer and his mother's efforts with regard to the shunning of Ellen. He explains, "As long as a member of a well-known family is backed up by that family it should be considered – final" (36). The van der Luydens immediately extend a formal invitation to Ellen to their upcoming reception dinner for the Duke of St. Austrey. This show of solidarity with Ellen lets New York society know that she is in good standing with their most authoritative family. In this way, the misguided ostracism of Ellen and the undeserved affront to the Mingotts is corrected by the moral formation that is possible through communal interdependency. People and families voluntarily work together to solve a problem and to achieve a goal. In their loyalty to the Mingotts and Ellen, the Wellands begin the process and tell Archer about the snub. Archer then persuades his mother to take the matter to a higher authority, and she presents it to the van der Luydens. The news then spreads throughout the community. People will be more informed about Ellen and perhaps about similar cases in the future. The effect of the van der Luyden's act is seen that night at the opera, where "the younger men in the club box exchanged a smile at this announcement, and glanced sideways at Lawrence Lefferts" (37). More people are now aware of Lefferts's abuse of his authority to manipulate people against Ellen for his own benefit. He now might be less likely to try the same thing in the future for fear of losing status. The smiles from the young men suggest that they did not agree with Lefferts and are pleased that his mischief has been restrained.

Archer's desire for Ellen to pursue a divorce case shows his increasing opposition to the code. However, as her legal counsel, Archer represents the desires of both the Mingotts and his firm when he successfully persuades Ellen against a divorce. But, as her romantic suitor, Archer favors a divorce for Ellen for the following reasons: he sympathizes with her hardships, he finds her behavior during her estrangement to be acceptable, he wants to safeguard her future, and he wants to contradict the conservative outlook that would oppose her effort.

Archer sympathizes with Ellen about her difficult marriage. He considers her to be "an exposed and pitiful figure" (60) for having been "practically a prisoner" of a "brute of a husband" (26). Archer also supports a divorce for Ellen because his sympathy for her is not mitigated by the possibility of her affair with the secretary. Archer is aware that Ellen and Olenski's secretary, who helped her escape, were said to be "living at Lausanne together" (27). Archer assumes the rumor is true, but he does not condemn her for it. Nevertheless, Archer understands that in a lawsuit such hearsay will become public and, regardless of its verity, will probably ruin Ellen's reputation if not her case. Another reason Archer favors a divorce for Ellen concerns her future. He agrees with her aunt Medora, who has raised Ellen from childhood, and who has lived with her in Europe. She points out that if Ellen stays in New York, and "is still a wife" to the Count (101), then she is likely to become "Beaufort's mistress" (91). Ellen's desire for a divorce involves a complexity of European and American legal, religious,

economic, and social considerations. Archer is constrained to represent his firm which, in turn, represent the Mingotts. However, Archer's personal opinion gives priority to Ellen's and his individual interests rather than to those of their family and community.

A final reason Archer favors a divorce for Ellen is to oppose the social system he resents. He knows that "[t]he whole family are against divorce" (62) because they know that the Count wants his wife to return (152). Archer's antagonism toward traditional society is confirmed by his response to his boss, Letterblair. When Archer arrives to discuss the case with his boss, he is "in full agreement with Mr. Letterblair's view" (62). In general, Archer thinks "the idea of divorce" is "distasteful" (59). However, when he listens to Letterblair explain that the Mingotts are against divorce, Archer's response is that he "instantly felt himself on the other side of the argument" (62). Archer's reversal on the matter occurs when he hears the establishment position "put into words by this selfish, well-fed and supremely indifferent old man" (62). Archer considers Letterblair to be callous and "the Pharisaic voice of a society wholly absorbed in barricading itself against the unpleasant" (62). Aunt Medora, the Mingott family, Letterblair, and even, initially, Archer himself are against Ellen's pursuit of a divorce. Archer's change of his personal opinion on the matter reveals his antagonism toward the conservative establishment of old New York.

In her book *Child Brides and Intruders* (1993), Carol Wershoven, like Archer, is critical of the New York society for intentionally avoiding "the facts"

and “the truth” about Ellen’s abominable marriage (229). Wershoven claims that the callous upper class “will not acknowledge her right to a divorce, or even her reason for wanting one” (229). In adopting a practical position, the Mingotts, as Wershoven notes, do not seem to sympathize with Ellen as much as they could. However, their desire to avoid unpleasantness is not necessarily the same as an aversion to reality. Their concern that a divorce suit would be futile if Ellen can be smeared by the hint of impropriety with the secretary is a realistic and practical one. In that case, she might do better to take the settlement and spare herself and her family unnecessary defamation.

Despite his emotional aversion to the position held by the Mingotts, Archer makes a communal appeal to Ellen when he helps her to “see these things as the people who are fondest of [her] see them” (71). This is significant because Ellen’s life abroad has led her to believe that the liberty-minded American culture will support her desire for a divorce. Archer culminates his argument against Ellen’s divorce with a perfunctory but effective appeal to the idea of family. Archer acknowledges the traditional rationale that it “keeps the family together” (71). With “stock phrases,” he explains, “people cling to any convention that keeps the family together – protects the children, if there are any” (71). This “convention,” in which “the collective interest” takes precedence to that of “[t]he individual” (71), exemplifies the mores that Sumner explained. This is the fundamental communal principle. Even though Ellen has lived with

an individualistic code for much of her life, she accepts the argument. This is also the argument that she later uses against Archer for not becoming his mistress.

Archer's desire to hasten May's and his wedding date conflicts with the code. He criticizes long engagements for their "uselessness" and "foolish conventionalities" (94). Even liberated Granny Mingott refuses, at first, to support Archer's push for an earlier date. He asks her, "Can't I persuade you to use your influence with the Wellands, Mrs. Mingott?" (95). Her refusal to give assistance to Archer is based in her distrustful reading of him. She explains, "You've got a quick eye. When you were a little boy I've no doubt you liked to be helped first" (95). May prefers to follow social tradition, the wishes of family, and the example of friends. Mrs. Welland has asked for the extended time to make "a hand-embroidered trousseau" (51), and she thinks a longer engagement gives May and Archer "time to get to know each other a little better" (20). May is also inspired by the examples of the lengthy engagements of their friends Isabel and Reggie, who were betrothed for two years, and of Grace and Thorley, who were for one and a half years (52). Candace Waid, editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Age of Innocence*, notes that traditional engagements were a year or more. More time allowed the families to demonstrate that a marriage was not being hurried for financial or maternity reasons (52). Archer's only response to the reasonable request of the Wellands, which is rooted in customary practice, is to criticize convention and to appeal to novelty. His disregard for tradition in this matter demonstrates Archer's increasing opposition to custom and to the code.

May, who embodies the traditions of the code, is skeptical to Archer's request to advance the wedding day. She senses his uneasy manner, and maturely challenges him to "talk frankly" (92). Her question, "Is it – is it because you're not certain of continuing to care for me?" (92), correctly ascertains his anxiety. Archer later confirms this to Ellen: "May guessed the truth" (104). Although May incorrectly guesses her rival, her response would remain the same. She surmises that Archer has an obligation to Mrs. Thorley Rushworth, a former paramour (93). Her offer to break off the engagement with Archer so that he can fulfill his obligation is a community-centered gesture. She explains: "I couldn't have my happiness made out of a wrong – an unfairness – to somebody else" (93). May's honesty contrasts with Archer's deceit. Her suggestion puts the potential welfare of Archer, Mrs. Rushworth, and the community before her own. However, May's welfare is also served by a break, for it would save her from a husband with divided interests. Archer's motive, on the other hand, is for his own advantage.

The Wellands eventually assent to Archer's desire once Ellen intercedes on behalf of Archer. She beseeches, "Surely, Granny, we can persuade them between us to do as he wishes" (96). Archer's pattern of impulsive desires toward May consistently work against him since he later wants out of their marriage. His hurried efforts to propose to her, to advance the engagement announcement, and to hasten the wedding are initiated by himself without evidence of forethought. The acquiescence he ultimately obtains from the

Wellands and the Mingotts comes through emotional and evasive pleading rather than rational and honest discussion. In the end, Archer's individualistic approach toward his relationship with May lands him in a marriage that he regrets.

Archer's diminished interest in May corresponds to his alienation from New York society. His affection for May, described as "sincerely but placidly in love" (29), is qualified like his fondness for his community. May embodies the code and excels in the attributes that New York society encourages in young women such as beauty, congeniality, sportsmanship, and popularity. Archer's demanding and society-conscious mother holds May in high esteem. She tells Archer, "It's just my old-fashioned feeling; dear May is my ideal" (95). Mrs. Archer feels that "[t]here was no better match in New York than May Welland" (24).

In contrast, Archer is dispirited by May's utter conventionality. Archer knew that "[May's] point of view had always been the same" because it mirrored "that of all the people he had grown up among" (123). He considers her to be "the tutelary divinity of all his old traditions and reverences" (119). For this reason, Archer considers it useless to try to liberate May from her circumstances, because, "There was no use in trying to emancipate a wife who had not the dimmest notion that she was not free" (119). Archer believes May is oblivious to her oppression. Yet May's experience suggests otherwise. Her contented and well-adjusted life contrasts with Archer's persistent anxiety. May finds liberation

in her allegiances to her family and friends. On the other hand, Archer believes liberation is achieved by the diminution of social commitments. He anticipates their marriage with the fear that “his fate was sealed” (46) because the immutable tradition it represents will suffocate his individuality. He worries that the sterility of married life with May will obliterate the “narrow margin of life in which his real experiences were lived” (80). And he feels that with her, he will be “buried alive under his future” (87). Archer’s assessment of New York as “damnably dull” (147) could equally apply to May. He foresees a future with her to be an “endless emptiness” in which he would be “a man to whom nothing was ever to happen” (139). Archer’s dramatic change of opinion toward May corresponds to his disillusionment with the social system he perceives to be oppressive and that will doom him to a life of monotony.

The clearest example of the validity of Archer’s dissatisfaction with May is her discouragement to Archer’s intellectual interests on their honeymoon. In London, Archer is fascinated with M. Riviere, a French tutor who is later revealed to be Olenski’s secretary and Ellen’s abettor. To Archer’s delight, Riviere proclaims, “The air of ideas is the only air worth breathing” and “[G]ood conversation – there’s nothing like it, is there?” (122). May does not understand Archer’s enthusiasm about Riviere, and finds him “dreadfully common” (123).

The recurring themes of Archer’s complaints about May are her conventionality and incuriosity. With regard to intellectual pursuits, May takes after her grandmother Catherine Mingott, in whose home “[t]here was not a

book or a newspaper in reach" (179). Because May is representative of the code and esteemed in her community, Archer's unhappiness with her is more about his dissatisfaction with the general culture. That is why Ellen, as an outsider, has become his ideal. Although Ellen's cultural interests are more suited to Archer's, May is not deficient in any character quality that would hinder her abilities as a wife, mother, and member of society. When Catherine Mingott asks Archer, "Now, why in the world didn't you marry my little Ellen?" he replies, "For one thing, she wasn't there to be married" (95). Catherine is an astute reader of human nature, and she recognizes the aptness between Archer and Ellen. However, as Archer recognizes, Ellen was not a part of his world and his culture. His attempt to separate from May and his culture to obtain Ellen opposes the moral boundaries and warrants of tradition that support the community that has shaped him and looked after him.

As an educated thinker, Archer finds meaning in the world of "books and ideas" (29). His emphasis on this area of his life to the exclusion of others contributes to his further separation from his community and to his increased alienation. He is troubled by the different expectations for men and women with regard to learning. Archer is Harvard educated, an experienced traveler, and interested in culture and the arts (120). May, however, does not have the same education, experiences, or interests. His desire for a marriage of intellectual companionship is not practical with May. Although she appreciates when Archer tutors her in literature, he avoids doing so after they are married, because "he

could always foresee her comments on what he read" (177). Archer expects "his artistic and intellectual life" will continue "outside the domestic circle" (120). This is possible at his clubs, such as "the Knickerbocker" (125), where he can satiate his appetite for "good conversation" (122). The reality, however, is that with regard to culture, New York only offers "a few little local patches, dying out here and there" (79). Winsett attributes this dearth of intellectual and cultural stimulation to a paucity of "hoeing and cross-fertilizing" (79) of the European traditions by the elites. Winsett's observation correlates with the late nineteenth-century capitalist industrialism and its attendant individualism that democratizes the aesthetic tastes that were a mainstay of refined society. The only man besides Riviere with whom Archer discusses culture is Ned Winsett.

Archer's lively exchanges with Winsett reveal the prospects and limitations of class interplay in old New York. Winsett worked as a journalist but, like Riviere, "was a pure man of letters, untimely born in a world that had no need of letters" (78). Winsett's inability to earn a living as an essayist gives him "a sterile bitterness of the still young man who has tried and given up" (78). He tells Archer, "[L]ife isn't much a fit for either of us" (78). Despite their class differences, Archer found "their talks exhilarating" and "was always stimulated by Winsett" (78). The men typically meet at a club or restaurant because they are from different cultures. Archer is unfamiliar with Winsett's wife and child. Their class differences are apparent in Winsett's "savage abhorrence of social observances" while Archer "dressed in the evening because he thought it cleaner

and more comfortable to do so" (78). Archer accepts Winsett despite their class differences. Yet he is not able to accept May, who shares so many of his cultural assumptions, because of their differences in cultural interests.

Winsett optimistically believes in the unifying power of common interests while Archer sees the limitations of cultural boundaries. Not realizing the vocational borders for elite society, Winsett suggests that Archer "go into politics" (78). According to Archer, however, "a gentleman couldn't go into politics" (78), for a "melancholy fate" met the "few gentleman who had risked their clean linen in municipal or state politics" (79). Winsett thinks the upper class must enter politics or emigrate to survive. Archer laughs here at the suggestion: "Emigrate! As if a gentleman could abandon his own country" (79). Archer believed that "[a] gentleman simply stayed at home and abstained" (79). Archer is more in agreement with the uncompromising outlook of Riviere. The French tutor left opportunities in diplomacy and journalism and accepted "duller work" in order to protect his "intellectual liberty" and "moral freedom" (122). Archer's enjoyment of intellectual comradery with Riviere and Winett over their shared interests in cultural conversation affirms the power of art to transcend social borders. At the same time, Archer's difficulty relating to these men of different backgrounds illustrates the significance of cultural barriers. These men understand that while Archer has fewer financial limitations than they do, he also has limitations with regard to social intercourse and vocation that they do not.

Although he was not inclined toward law, Archer chose it as a profession because it “was accounted a more gentlemanly pursuit than business” (80). His work at Letterblair, Lamson, and Low (58) provides him with little vocational satisfaction, for it “made no difference whatever to anyone” (79). The men are “fairly well-off” and therefore “without professional ambition” (79). Their days consisted of “accomplishing trivial tasks” and “reading the newspapers” (80). Archer’s frustration with the limited outlets for his cultural and vocational interests is evident. His society, as Winsett noted, must adjust to the changes brought by the new economy. Yet Archer’s individualistic retreat from the code merely exacerbates his alienation because improvements to the problems he sees can only be accomplished through collective effort.

Archer does not share Winsett’s interest in Bohemian attire or politics. Neither is Archer able to live, like Riviere, as a European nomad. Even in his emergent individualism, Archer understands that to abandon his country, as Winsett suggests, is to abandon his cultural identity, which is impossible. This explains why Archer keeps returning to May even after his first inklings that he wanted a different life. In his frustration with the limitations of old New York society, he overlooks its fundamental strengths as well as hers. Because he knows that the abandonment of country is unrealistic, he seeks escape in one who is free of the cultural ties from which he seeks extrication.

Archer's Romantic Pursuit of Ellen Is a Rejection of the Code

Archer's desire for a full life brings him to pursue Ellen. Her years outside of the United States make her free from the New York cultural burdens that Archer detests. Her aimless travels in Europe with her aunt Medora have made her a free spirit. And her marriage to Count Olenski gave her access to extraordinary cultural opportunities. Her combination of cultured individualism appeals to Archer far more than conventional American life. Ellen's arrival in New York opens Archer's eyes to what he finds disagreeable about traditional social norms with regard to areas such as sex roles, vocational opportunities, and cultural pursuits.

Archer and Ellen have overlapping common interests but inverse trajectories. Archer's frustration is with the hypocrisy and restrictions of conservative old New York. His critique of his culture lacks balance, however, for he fails to acknowledge its positive aspects including its moral influence. Ellen, on the other hand, has lived a vagabond lifestyle without her natural parents. Although she has experienced cultural privileges, she has also endured an abusive marriage. In her return to New York, Ellen seeks a more normal and secure life in the communal context of family and friends. Archer and Ellen find each other's backgrounds to be appealing in certain ways. Archer's individualistic inclination helps him to relate to Ellen in ways that her other family members cannot. Similarly, Ellen's experience of aristocracy during her marriage allows her to relate to Archer with his elite background.

Archer's disillusionment with May and the communalism of the code lead him to pursue the individualism and autonomy that he sees embodied in Ellen. At the same time, Ellen is alienated from an autonomous European culture and desires a more communal experience. In his 1921 essay "The Irony of Liberalism," philosopher George Santayana notes how the liberal notion of freedom is opposed to tradition. He writes, "Whatsoever was not the fresh handiwork of the soul and true to its present demand was bad for that soul. A man without traditions, if he could only be materially well equipped, would be purer, more rational, more virtuous than if he had been an heir to anything" (183). This passage illustrates the kind of freedom Archer desires, with an absence of external forces that restrict individuality. For Ellen, freedom is the absence of consequences. When she comes to Archer for a divorce, she tells him, "I want to be free; I want to wipe out all the past" (69). He suggests that she already has that when he asks, "[A]ren't you free as air as it is?" (71). But Ellen understands better than Archer that actions often have lasting effects. For Archer, Ellen is free because he imagines that she is without responsibilities. For Ellen, Archer is free because he is accepted as an insider.

May's beauty and Archer's romantic past show that his desire for Ellen is primarily philosophical. Though both have beauty, May's draws more attention. He finds her "one of the handsomest" (126) women, and he "delighted in the radiant good looks of his betrothed" (29). He takes pride when others appreciate May's beauty. When he walks in the park with May, he is "proud of the glances

turned on her" (52). Her beauty receives compliments from others as well. At the van der Luyden dinner in his honor, the Duke finds her "the handsomest girl in the room" (43). And at her farewell dinner for Ellen, when May kisses her cousin goodbye, Reggie Chivers comments, "[O]ur hostess is much the handsomer of the two" (204). Also, unlike his earlier affair with Mrs. Rushworth, Archer considers his feeling for Ellen to be a "passion that was closer than his bones" and something "not to be superficially satisfied" (148). Ellen is not more beautiful than May, and Archer acknowledges that his motivation toward Ellen is different than it was toward Mrs. Rushworth. For these reasons, Archer's interest in Ellen distinctly relates to his disillusionment with his community and his emergent individualism.

Archer loves Ellen because she awakens his imagination. His admiration for her spirit of independence invigorates his own perceptions toward the insular social atmosphere he and May inhabit. He is pleased that Ellen helps him "look at his native city objectively" (49), and he is aware that she has "reversed his values" (66). Archer's reversal in perspective is described this way: "Far down the inverted telescope he saw the faint white figure of May Welland – in New York" (50). Ellen's influence upends Archer's outlook as if he were looking through the wrong end of a telescope. The imagery suggests how May's significance in Archer's estimation has decreased while Ellen's has increased. Moreover, the specific connection of May with New York expresses how the

New York society that May personifies is receding in his estimation as the cosmopolitan outlook that Ellen personifies is advancing.

Ellen's habit of speaking freely contrasts with the mannered silences of old New York. Archer's admiration for Ellen corresponds to his identification with her as a social system rebel. On his first visit to her home, Ellen gives "an electric shock" to Archer, for she "dared to call the stately home of the van der Luydens gloomy" (47). Archer once took offense at her unflattering observations about New York society, but now he finds them refreshing. Another time, she tells him that the Duke is "the dullest man I ever met" (41). And when Archer explains that her street is "not fashionable," Ellen asks, "Why not make one's own fashions?" (47). These examples of Ellen's nonconformist attitude appeal to Archer as he becomes more critical of the code he once revered.

Archer is conflicted between the competing visions of the traditional communal society embodied in May and the autonomous individualism embodied in Ellen. Archer's steady pursuit of Ellen before and after his marriage suggests the extreme nature of his dissatisfaction with the old New York code. He twice acknowledges that life with May is reality. However both times, once before their marriage and once after, are attempts at positive self-talk to accept his life with May. The first time is upon his arrival in Florida when he visits May, who is on vacation with her family, in the hope of advancing their wedding date. Upon seeing her, he introspects, "Here was truth, here was reality" (88).

Similarly, a year and a half into his marriage, at Granny's summer home, when

Archer is requested to leave May's company and to go find Ellen at the shore, he reflects, "That vision of the past was a dream, and the reality was what awaited him in the house on the bank" (132). The first time, Archer jealously flees to Florida after he believes Ellen is romantically interested in Julius Beaufort. The second time is another ineffective attempt by Archer at self-control with regard to his idealizing Ellen. Both of these efforts to renew his focus on May are short-lived, for in each case, Archer shortly resumes his preoccupation with Ellen.

Archer's visit to the bohemian Blenker family farm brings into relief certain distinctions of an individualistic lifestyle that Archer associates with Ellen and that contrasts with New York society. Believing that he might find Ellen at the bohemian family's farm, Archer, now married, sneaks away from May and her family, who are all at the Welland summer home. The farm is in poor condition. The rundown property includes a "tumbledown" house, "peeling" paint, and an "overgrown" garden (137). The homestead also has "a wooden Cupid who had lost his bow and arrow but continued to take ineffectual aim" (137). Moreover, the porous nature of the unconventional community is illustrated by the ease with which Archer penetrates the Blenker home. In addition to "the arrowless Cupid," its "open windows" and "grizzled Newfoundland dozing before the door" (137) suggest looseness and vulnerability. The sleeping dog is "as ineffectual a guardian as the arrowless Cupid" (137). These images of defenselessness imply indifference toward outsiders. The unrestricted access to the bohemian camp contrasts with "the tight

little citadel of New York" (20). While there, Archer unexpectedly encounters the oldest Blenker daughter, who has stayed behind with "a sore throat" (138). The "blowsy" young woman displays a "lumbering coquetry" and looks at Archer "with increasing interest" (138). The unkempt and unsecured homestead and the slattern demeanor of the young woman present a contrast to Archer's mannered, cautionary, and conservative culture. The neglected grounds and casual manners illustrate the cultural differences that result from distinct ethics of the communal New York society that emphasizes order and the individualistic bohemian one that emphasizes liberty.

Archer's justification for an earlier affair demonstrates his egocentric outlook. In his contemplation of an adulterous relationship with Ellen, Archer reflects upon his former "secret love-affair with poor silly Mrs. Thorley Rushworth" (61). He does not express compunction but rationalizes that he was a "free man, who was accountable to no one for his actions" (183). This individualist perspective suggests that as an unmarried man he had no duties toward Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth, his relatives, or society. Moreover, Archer acknowledges that custom allowed "a recognized season for wild oats" (183). He also learned from "the after-dinner talk of his elders" that the "code" made such a relationship permissible because "the laugh was always against the husband" (183). He soberly realizes, however, that "the laugh" would be on May now. But this concern does not deter Archer in his pursuit of Ellen. Nor does the fact that

such behavior is condemned because “men who continued philandering after marriage” faced “a certain measure of contempt” (183).

Archer rationalizes his previous affair by a hypocritical appeal to the code. The same code he has become disillusioned with is his justification for his dalliance with Mrs. Rushworth. Moreover, Archer’s intended affair with Ellen would violate the code in which he finds refuge for his liaison with Mrs. Rushworth. The code allowed for a season of wild oats, which no longer applies to Archer. Additionally, the code allowed for cuckolded husbands but it protected wives. Yet Archer willfully intends to violate his marriage with May. Archer was a man of the code before Ellen’s arrival. Since then, he has become increasingly disenchanted with the standards of New York society. If he has jettisoned the code then his appeal to it to justify his affair with Mrs. Rushworth is unnecessary and inconsistent. On the other hand, if Archer still abides by the code, as he seems to be, then his intended affair with Ellen is hypocritical, for it does not sanction what he envisions. Archer has been critical of other men for doing what he intends. He knows that Lefferts “formed a wife so completely to his own convenience” that “she went about in smiling unconsciousness” with regard to “his frequent love affairs” (29). And Archer knows that Beaufort “had only one object in view in his pursuit of pretty women” (86). Archer has been roundly critical of “vulgar” (86) Beaufort and of “despicable” (183) Lefferts for their overt womanizing. For him to justify an affair with Ellen because these men of social standing have extramarital affairs would be hypocritical.

Ultimately, Archer's justification for an affair with Ellen is "the dread argument of the individual case" (183). Archer considers Ellen to be "like no other woman," and himself to be "like no other man" (183). Therefore, he rationalizes his and Ellen's "situation" is different, because it "resembled no one else's" (183). Archer is willing to abandon his responsibility to May, his family, and his community, in order to justify a relationship with Ellen that he would consider repugnant if it were done by others. Archer reckoned, as he did in his relationship with Mrs. Rushworth, that he and Ellen "were answerable to no tribunal but that of their own judgment" (183). Archer's decision to plan a tryst with Ellen marks the moment of his greatest opposition to the code. After he walks home from the museum where he and Ellen made plans for their affair, Archer is confronted by the reality of "his own doorstep" (183). He reflects that inside are "May, and habit, and honor, and all the old decencies that he and his people had always believed in" (183). The hearth imagery reminds Archer of the family solidarity that is at risk if he continues in autonomy, yet it does not deter him.

In contrast to Archer's transition from community-based ethics to autonomy, Ellen's transition is away from individualism and toward communal morality. Ellen arrives in New York as a young woman far more independent than the women of local society. Yet she becomes more accepting of community norms as Archer becomes less accepting of them. Her desire is to identify with American culture. When Archer tells Ellen, "[Y]ou *are* among friends here" (42),

Ellen affirms that she feels that to be true everywhere she goes. She then tells him, "I want to forget everything else, to become a complete American again" (42). Also, Ned Winsett recounts to Archer a moment of neighborly kindness from Ellen. Winsett's boy "gave himself a nasty cut" when he was "chasing his kitten" and fell down by Ellen's house (77). She proceeded to return the boy, "carrying him in her arms" and "with his knee beautifully bandaged" (77). Another brief but telling moment when Ellen identifies as an American is when she affirms her support for Archer with regard to persuading the Wellands to permit a short engagement. She elaborates, "In Europe people don't understand our long American engagements; I suppose they are not as calm as we are" (103). The text explains that Ellen "pronounced the 'we' with a faint emphasis that gave it an ironic sound" (103). Thus Ellen's pronunciation suggests that she is consciously trying to assimilate with her new people.

In addition to her desire to be an American, Ellen demonstrates in other ways her wish to integrate into society. She affirms Archer's guidance of her to forego a divorce suit. She tells him, "I *do* feel you were right" (76). Ellen's intense desire to be legally free from her husband is countermanded by the opinion of the Mingotts that Archer presented to her. She neither contests their decision nor does she express bitterness. Her willingness to accept gracefully a contrary decision on such a personal and emotional issue demonstrates her trust in and commitment to her family. Ellen's move back to New York from Washington, D. C., to live with her Granny Mingott further exemplifies her desire to live under

the New York society code. The arrangement benefits both of them and strengthens the family bond between them. Ellen is able to care for the ailing woman, and wealthy Catherine is able to financially support her granddaughter.

Ellen's controversial public endorsement of Regina Beaufort, her scandalized cousin, is another demonstration of her increased sense of community. When Julius Beaufort's financial improprieties bring him disgrace, the Mingotts shun both of the Beauforts. Regina is ostracized too, even if she is innocent of the matter, for "New York was inexorable in its condemnation of business irregularities" (162). Ellen, however, knows the experience of exclusion for being "the wife of a scoundrel" (181) and is empathetic toward Regina. Ellen commits a faux pas when she leaves "her grandmother's carriage at a defaulter's door" (191). The van der Luydens become "quite alienated" (189) by Ellen's "imprudence" (191). In Ellen's defense, Granny Mingott did "let her have the carriage" (181). Initially, Catherine shunned Regina, telling her, "[Your name] was Beaufort when he covered you with jewels, and it's got to stay Beaufort now that he's covered you with shame" (164). However, Ellen, being her grandmother's favorite, is able to change her mind about Regina. Even May defends Ellen. At the van der Luyden dinner, May boldly offers, "I'm sure Ellen meant it kindly" (191). The affirmation of Catherine and May, two staunch defenders of the code, suggests that Ellen's behavior has merit. Archer has sympathy for Regina but understood that "absolute financial probity" is "the first law of a gentleman's code" (165). Therefore, he believes "the tie between

husband and wife, even if breakable in prosperity, should be indissoluble in misfortune" (165).

Shunning is a powerful reinforcement of moral behavior in honor-based societies. The divided opinions about the ostracism of Regina Beaufort and Ellen's countenance of her illustrate the importance of communal codes for moral development. Ellen acts out of compassion for Regina. Her response imitates Archer's desire at the opera to show solidarity with family who are under scrutiny. However, Ellen's action interferes with the traditional communal discipline. Ellen, as an outsider, cannot be expected to fully understand the code. Ellen's is an individualist response toward Regina, but it conflicts with communal principles of discipline that seek to protect family and community honor.

Initially, Granny, in her ostracism of Regina, has a communal perspective; however, Ellen persuades Granny to an individualist perspective. The Regina Beaufort controversy demonstrates why old New York has been so defensive against outsiders. Despite all of the community-oriented things Ellen has done since her arrival, she may never be able to fully assimilate into her new culture. Moreover, she may be a liability if she introduces individualist elements into the communal structure of old New York society. For Ellen alone to countenance Regina causes little disruption of the social code. However, for an influential member of the community like Catherine Mingott to fall out of line makes it likely that others will follow her example and not that of the van der Luydens.

The van der Luydens could regret their decision to align with the Mingotts in solidarity with Ellen.

The most significant way Ellen shows adherence to society standards is her steady discouragement of Archer's romantic advances. Ellen realistically closes the door to a future with Archer after he travels to St. Augustine to persuade May to hasten the wedding. Ellen's availability to Archer is, in fact, inversely proportional to his commitment to May. Ellen initially communicates to Archer her romantic interest in him through conversation and flirtation. At the van der Luyden's party, Ellen requests "I want you to talk to me about May" (41) to determine his commitment to May. After Archer evades her request, Ellen tries again and asks, "Are you very much in love with her?" (41). He craftily answers, "As much as a man can be," (41). Ellen recognizes Archer's equivocation, and then she flirts with him by "touching his knee with her plumed fan" (42). After Archer influences her not to divorce her husband, Ellen has little optimism about her future prospects with Archer. And once he hurries to May in Florida in order to accelerate their wedding, Ellen knows any realistic possibility for her to be with Archer is gone. That is why, in Archer's presence, after he has returned from Florida, she enlists Granny's help, on behalf of Archer, to persuade the Wellands to advance the wedding. From that point, Ellen does not encourage Archer that they have a potential future together.

Ellen's realistic acceptance of their situation contrasts with Archer's impracticality. Therefore, in her effort to assimilate into society, she must

repeatedly resist his intentions. Archer feels that his kiss with Ellen “alters the whole of life” (106). Yet her reaction is dispassionate: “You’re engaged to May Welland; and I’m married” (106). Archer unrealistically replies, “Nonsense! It’s too late for that sort of thing. We’ve no right to lie to other people or to ourselves. We won’t talk of your marriage; but do you see me marrying May after this?” (106). Ellen understands that community mores have both prevented her from a divorce and ensured Archer’s marriage to May. Moreover, Ellen has no bitterness about the situation. However, Archer continues to romance Ellen during his engagement and after his marriage. During the engagement, he unrealistically suggests, “Nothing’s done that can’t be undone. I’m still free, and you’re going to be” (105). Even after they kiss, however, Ellen maintains her realism, and affirms, “I suppose this had to be. But it doesn’t in the least alter things” (106).

Ellen’s community-centered desire is that “the perfect balance” between her and Archer requires “loyalty to others” and “honesty to themselves” (149). Archer emphasizes that Ellen and he be transparent about their feelings for one another, but she stresses their need to be loyal to their community. She tells him, “You say that because it’s the easiest thing to say at this moment – not because it’s true. In reality it’s too late to do anything but what we’d both decided on” (106). Archer’s individualistic commitment to abstract freedom contrasts with Ellen’s willingness to realistically accept their situation. He is unwilling to

relinquish his idealism that believes that he and Ellen can be together without consequences to themselves or others.

Her consistent discouragement of Archer's romantic overtures after he clarifies his intent to marry May demonstrates Ellen's realistic perspective. As she intimates to Archer her understanding that they have no future together, she tells him, "I shan't be lonely now. I *was* lonely; I *was* afraid. But the emptiness and the darkness are gone" (107). Ellen has adjusted to the disorientation of her return to New York, with the help of Archer and others. She recognizes her need for fellowship more than for a lover. However, Archer clings to an unrealistic outlook. His reply, "I don't understand you!" reveals his distress at her disclosure (107). In contrast to Ellen's increased appreciation for community, Archer is desperate to escape from it, so he clings to an unrealistic perspective. For him, Ellen is his means of emancipation. Her prompting of Granny to encourage the Wellands to consent to a short engagement shows that Ellen has moved on from a possible life together with Archer. She ducks Archer and May's wedding and does not seek communication with him. Ellen also purposely avoids Archer after the Archery competition at the Beaufort's. After she "recognized [Archer's] ponies" (143) and knew he was at the event, Ellen goes "down to the beach" so as to not see him and risk stirring his emotions. Ellen's intentional avoidance of Archer reveals her realistic view of their situation, and corresponds to her desire to integrate into society.

Ellen's respect for their family and friends demonstrates her communal desire to put their interests before her own. She explains to Archer that she will not "lie to the people who've been good to me" (187). Also, she challenges his idealism when he escorts her from Jersey City to her ill grandmother. When he acknowledges to Ellen, "you look at things as they are," she explains, "I've had to. I've had to look at the Gorgon" (173). She continues, "She doesn't blind one; but she dries up one's tears" (173). Ellen's mythology metaphor suggests that being realistic about their situation is the way to resolution. She expresses that her sorrow, in fact, has diminished because she has accepted things as they are. On the other hand, Archer laments that their "being together – and not together" cannot last (173). His solution is to continue in illusion and imagine he and Ellen can be together merely by "quietly trusting it to come true" (174).

Ellen's balanced perspective on their community contrasts with Archer's continued cynicism towards it. With respect to New York society, Archer pessimistically comments, "We're damnably dull. We've no character, no color, no variety" (146-47). Ellen's criticism, however, is more even. She laments "the blind conformity to tradition" that she sees "among [their] own friends" (146). Yet in her disapproval, Ellen specifically mentions blind conformity, which suggests her recognition of an acceptable kind of conformity. Also, in naming those she disagrees with as "friends," Ellen calls attention to the communal bond that exists even when there are differences.

Archer's continued need for reassurance from Ellen demonstrates his unhealthy psychological dependence upon her. Thinking that Ellen would want to return to Europe, Archer sullenly asks, "[W]hy don't you go back?" (147). Ellen explains that, despite its flaws, traditional society has benefits. She answers, "[U]nder the dullness there are things so fine and sensitive and delicate that even those I most cared for in my other life look cheap in comparison" (147). Though she acknowledges the faults of New York society, Ellen recognizes its comparative strengths to life in Europe. Archer's imagined world, on the other hand, permits no compromise with imperfect systems. After Archer asks a second time, "[W]hen will you go back?" Ellen responds, "I promise you: not as long as you hold out. Not as long as we can look straight at each other like this" (148). Her solution envisions a realistic balance for them in their society of manners. She tells Archer that she is okay with her status quo life "as long as it's a part of yours" (148). But when Archer asks a third time, "You won't go back—you won't go back?" (149), Ellen assuages, "I won't go back" (149). The tone of Archer's three questions is increasingly insecure, from confident proposition to sober question to desperate plea. This suggests that Archer's imagination has overwhelmed his capacity to reason and is responsible for his fragile state of mind.

Ellen's realism and desire for assimilation leads her to suggest greater boundary between her and Archer. When Archer meets her in Jersey City, he annoys Ellen with his implication about their future. She asks, "Is it your idea,

then, that I should live with you as your mistress?" (175). Ellen's question provokes Archer to espouse his unrealistic vision: "I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that – categories like that – won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter" (174). Ellen encourages Archer to face reality. She asks, "[W]here is that country?" (174). She understands that Archer's continued irrationalism makes it impossible for them to fraternize. Therefore, she concludes, "We're near each other only if we stay far from each other" (175). Ellen recognizes that Archer is increasingly less reasonable about their situation. Therefore, while sensitively affirming her desire to associate with Archer, she asserts the need for separation between them.

Archer's failure to accommodate Ellen's request for separation recklessly jeopardizes her ability to remain in America. After his surprise visit to Ellen in Boston, Archer knows that his actions alone could force Ellen's return to Europe. He muses, "[S]he would go only if she felt herself becoming a temptation to Archer, a temptation to fall away from the standard they had both set up. Her choice would be to stay near him as long as he did not ask her to come nearer" (150). Archer understands that Ellen will reluctantly depart the States if he continues to pressure her romantically.

Desire for self-determination drives Archer's fantasy about Ellen and pulls him further from reality. When Archer does not see Ellen for months, he creates "within himself a kind of sanctuary in which she throned among his secret

thoughts and longings" (159). This imaginary world is where "real life" for Archer developed (159). In like manner, Archer had "a growing sense of unreality" in "his actual life" (159). He had become "so absent from everything most densely real" that he is "startled" to find that those who know him "still imagined he was there" (159). When he and Ellen take a ferry ride in Boston, he feels that "everything in the old familiar world of habit was receding" (145). And he imagines that "they were drifting forth into this unknown world" (145).

Archer prefers the hypothetical and perfect notion of Ellen to the imperfect reality of life with May and their communal society. She remains an abstraction. When he sees her in a winter coat and holding flowers, she seems a "pure harmony of line and color" that should never "suffer the stupid law of change" (186). After learning of her plan to return to New York from Washington, D. C., Archer tells Ellen, "I shall see you now – we shall be together" (184). The order of these clauses is significant. Archer first utters the idea that is most essential to him. To be with Ellen is important, but to see his ideal woman is even more so. Ellen is Archer's idealized version of a self-determined reality. She is his protest against the communalism that has disillusioned him. However, Archer unrealistically assumes Ellen's move from Washington to Granny's signals her desire for an illicit relationship. He believes Ellen's decision to move to Granny's could not be "from interested motives" and, therefore, "must be for a different reason" (182). That reason, Archer surmises, is her fear that he might be "mediating a decisive step" to be done with her (182).

Therefore, in his self-deception, Archer imagines that Ellen thinks it “better to accept the compromise usual in such cases, and follow the line of least resistance” and become his paramour (182). Archer, from his unrealistic perspective, continues to misread Ellen’s realistic actions and ignores her determination to respect the code and assimilate into New York society.

Archer’s Fidelity Demonstrates the Communal Influence of the Code

Ellen’s departure for Europe is her final adherence to the code. Her explanation to May, “I have at last made Granny understand” (195), suggests her participation in the plan for her departure. Catherine’s social status and fondness for her granddaughter make it unlikely that Ellen would be excommunicated without Granny’s blessing. May informs Archer, “Granny approves and understands, and has arranged to make [Ellen] independent of her husband” (194). Ellen’s voluntary departure is out of respect for the mores that protect those who have helped her. Wershoven agrees that the decision to leave “is largely Ellen’s choice” (232).

Archer’s obstinate pursuit of Ellen, however, is the reason she leaves New York. It is also the culmination of his dissent against its social conventions. At the museum, when Ellen consents to an adulterous rendezvous, Archer fantasizes her response like this: “[H]e saw that her face, which had grown very pale, was flooded with a deep inner radiance” (188). The contradiction of the phrase suggests that she actually turns “very pale” (188) at the request, but he

intentionally misperceives her true reaction to comport with his desired one.

Ellen recognizes that Archer's rising defiance is perilous to people they love, and who have helped her, and whom she is unwilling to betray. Ellen's quick exit from the museum and curt plea, "No, don't come any farther," demonstrate her discomfort with Archer's proposition (188). Archer has consistently opposed the customs and traditions of his society. Moreover, his antagonism has increased in scope, from his desires to hasten the engagement announcement and the wedding date to his desire to pursue an extramarital affair.

May's invocation of the code encourages Ellen's departure. After Ellen leaves Archer at the museum, May sees her and tells her, "in a long talk" (205), that she is expecting. May's explanation to Archer of her change in attitude toward Ellen telegraphs to him that the code and its consequences are in effect. May repeatedly uses the term "fair" in her account to emphasize that a standard is in view. In her explanation to Archer, May uses these statements: "I'm afraid I haven't been fair to her lately," "I haven't judged her fairly," and "I don't want to judge her unfairly" (189). And the next evening, after they return from the opera, May informs Archer that Ellen is leaving. After being told of May's pregnancy, Ellen presumably approached her grandmother about a return to Europe. In telling Archer that Ellen is leaving, May uses the word again, and says, "I told her I was afraid I hadn't been fair to her" (195). May's stress of "fairness" echoes Archer's earlier explanation to Ellen that she should forsake a divorce because the code is against it. He told her, "[I]f I didn't show you honestly how they

judge such questions, it wouldn't be fair of me, would it?" (71). May reminds her adultery-minded husband of the code like Archer let Ellen know of the communal standards with regard to divorce.

The subtle working of the communal authority or code of old New York is evident in May's interaction with Ellen. May's apologetic explanation to Archer about misjudging Ellen is problematic to the reader because May is known for exemplary behavior. Additionally, May always seems to be supportive of Ellen and even encourages Archer to be kind to her cousin. Years later, while Archer and May vacation with their children in Europe, May encourages Archer to visit Ellen though he declines. And while Archer keeps silent, May boldly defends Ellen before prominent society members for her visit to Regina Beaufort in Catherine's carriage. Thus May's self-attributed unfairness toward Ellen sounds like the reaction of a suspicious wife, which one incident seems to affirm.

The only time that May is unsympathetic toward Ellen is at the Thanksgiving dinner, when Ellen is not even present. Mrs. Archer criticizes Ellen "for being the first person to countenance Mrs. Struthers" (157-58), who is considered the vulgar widow of a parvenu. May responds, "Oh, *Ellen* –," with an "accusing and yet deprecating" expression (157-58). May's face has "[a] sudden blush rose," upon saying this, that everyone including Archer notices (157). In fact, he observes, "May's blush remained permanently vivid" (158). He later reflects, "What was the meaning of May's blush when the Countess Olenska had been mentioned" (159). The references to May's color suggest that the cause

is significant. Archer's puzzlement suggests her reaction is one of shame at her husband's behavior. Later that evening, in his library, Archer realizes in a conversation with Sillerton Jackson that he has been excluded from family discussion (160-61). Thus May's uncharacteristically critical comment and rosiness seem to be expressions of her humiliation at the knowledge gained from recent private family conferences that her husband is in pursuit of Ellen, who is now her rival. Once May is presumably put on alert about Ellen's possible affection for Archer, she is distrustful of her. However, when May tells Ellen that she is pregnant, Ellen's apparently favorable response turns May's suspicion from her cousin to her husband. May receives help in the protection of her marriage through the effective communal authority of old New York.

Claire Virginia Eby suggests that the sacrificial acts of May and Ellen lead to "old New York's triumph in silencing the free woman" (102). However, while these women do make sacrifices to support the social order, their actions also help themselves and do not consign them to silence. May offers to break their engagement so that Archer can fulfill any outstanding responsibilities. And Ellen forsakes her chance for a divorce to protect her family's reputation. However, May's frank proposition could save her from an unfaithful husband or a loveless marriage. And Ellen benefits from her relinquishment by not having to face scandalous accusations from a powerful and disagreeable husband. Also, May and Ellen together employ the code to maneuver against Archer and keep him with his family. Archer's dissension from society's standards leads to Ellen's

return to Europe, to his lost opportunity to enjoy friendship with her, and to her lost opportunity to have a life in America. Although an outsider, Ellen observes the code when she forsakes a divorce, when she moves in with Granny to avoid Archer, and when she leaves New York to protect Archer and May's marriage. Archer's plan to oppose the code once more and follow Ellen overseas is trumped by May's news that she is pregnant (205).

Archer's Reversal toward May Is a Reaffirmation of the Code

The novel's coda sees Archer reconciled to the code toward which he has been alienated for nearly thirty years. The narrative jumps twenty-six years forward, with Archer as a fifty-seven-year-old (215) widower, father of three, and a disappointed idealist. Visiting Paris with his oldest son, Dallas, Archer reflects upon his life. He has had a successful career in "municipal work," which has gained him the friendship of Theodore Roosevelt (207). His municipal efforts, affinity for Roosevelt, and "occasional articles in one of the reforming weeklies that were trying to shake the country out of its apathy" (207) show his sympathies toward Progressive politics. The work gave him "full" days that were "filled decently" (207). Archer's conclusion is that "his small contribution" to public life "seemed to count, as each brick counts in a well-built wall" (207). He also considers that his achievements were "all a man ought to ask" (207). These recollections about doing one's part and having low personal expectations connote the language of duty and realism. His perfunctory tone suggests

Archer's grudging acknowledgment that his meaningful accomplishments were made possible because May, Ellen, and ultimately he observed their social code.

Ellen dominates Archer's ruefulness over a career in which he was able to express himself more than he could in the refined society of his younger years. Archer is at peace with his "dull duty" of a marriage because it "kept the dignity of a duty" (208). Yet Ellen represents "the composite vision of all that he had missed" (208). Archer's life remains deficient without Ellen. For him, she represents the ideal of an unconstrained life. As good as his life has been, it remains bounded. His solace for missing "the flower of life" is the realization that his loss is equivalent to being deprived of "the first prize in a lottery" (208). Archer's realistic acknowledgement that no one reasonably expects to be a lottery winner is offset by the sadness of his admission that "his life had been too starved" (215). Contentment is forever elusive to Archer because he dwells in the theoretical. Reasonable people do not expect to win the lottery, but Archer is idealistic. Mores, Sumner explained, bring "the world of abstractions" to "the world of action" (59). Archer's adherence to the code in his decision to forsake a speculative life with Ellen for the reality of life with May exemplifies this concept. He ultimately made the conventional choice and secured considerable lifetime success even though he regrets that choice.

Archer is brought to a fundamental change of heart toward May and, consequently, toward the code and toward Ellen, in an exchange with Dallas. His son discloses that, on "the day before she died," May told him that she trusted

Archer to look after their children because “when she asked you to, you’d given up the thing you most wanted” (214). A stunned Archer replies, “She never asked me” (214). May understood his heart, and this revelation “moved him indescribably” (214). Archer now reevaluates the major events of his life, for “[h]e had to deal all at once with the packed regrets and stifled memories of an inarticulate lifetime” (214).

Archer’s rebellion against tradition in the 1870s was a part of the early cultural wave of individualism whose momentum carried into the early 1900s. His unemotional response to the dramatic changes is because he recognizes seams in the egalitarian world that Dallas now embraces. To jettison “the old landmarks,” Archer notices, is also to discard “the sign-posts and the danger-signal” (215). He recognizes that people, cultures, and history require moral standards, mores, and codes for their development.

Archer declines to visit Ellen because the knowledge that May understood his desire for a fuller life means that he successfully achieved a sense of individualism without blurring the surface, like the departing lover in *The Shaughraun*. All these years Archer considered he sacrificed his ideal for a monotonous existence. Now Archer sees that his sacrifice was a dignified duty. He understands that he and Ellen are widowed, so the visit arranged by his son Dallas is completely decorous. Yet he tells his son to go on ahead with this instruction: “Say I’m old-fashioned: that’s enough” (217). Here Archer echoes his code-conscious mother’s sentiment about May, when she told him, “It’s just my

old-fashioned feeling; dear May is my ideal" (95). The standards he resented were necessary for the good life he has enjoyed. The inter-generational change, he notices, but these changes correspond to their standards. Archer has come full circle with regard to old New York. He affirms that, once again, May, and the code she embodied, is his ideal.

CHAPTER FIVE

“[H]alf hideous, half beautiful in its possibilities”:
Community Formation and Capitalist Alienation in *Poor White*

All greatness of character is dependant on individuality. The man who has no other existence than that which he partakes in common with all around him, will never have any other than an existence of mediocrity. In time, such a state of things would annihilate invention and paralyze genius. A nation would become a nation of common place labourers.

Cooper 183

Among the laws that rule human societies there is one that seems more precise and clearer than all the others. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases.

Tocqueville 492

The milieu of Sherwood Anderson’s novel *Poor White* (1920) is the arrival of industrialism in the American Midwest in the 1890s. Socialist, progressive, and Social Gospel supporters feared capitalist predation and the exploitation of individuals. Critical reaction to this economic and social change is evident in the contemporary popularity of utopian fiction. Edward Bellamy’s novel *Looking Backward* (1888) was the most influential of these works. *Poor White* cites discussion of it by “[t]he schoolmaster and the country lawyer” as an illustration of the serious thought occurring in that day (23). Bellamy portrays America in the year 2000 as a socialist paradise that is free of the materialism and alienation

attributed to capitalism. Protagonist Julian West receives this explanation for the success of the new social order:

The account of every person, man, woman, and child, you must understand, is always with the nation directly, and never through any intermediary, except, of course, that parents, to a certain extent, act for children as their guardians. You see that it is by virtue of the relation of individuals to the nation, of their membership in it, that they are entitled to support; and this title is in no way connected with or affected by their relations to other individuals who are fellow members of the nation with them. That any person should be dependent for the means of support upon another would be shocking to the moral sense as well as indefensible on any rational social theory. What would become of personal liberty and dignity under such an arrangement? (188)

Bellamy's futuristic society's emphasis on collectivism highlights the desire for an omniscient State to be the protector of and advocate for individual welfare. The traditional family and voluntary intermediate associations are obsolete because they are deemed immoral and deleterious.

Poor White's ambiguous presentation of capitalism acknowledges its problems but also suggests the context in which it promotes the social good and its liabilities are constrained. Protagonist Hugh McVey's inventions of industrial agricultural machinery encourage his calling, creativity, and interdependence; yet, they also discourage the self-worth, ethics, and social loyalties of others. In this way, the novel reflects a conclusion of sociologist Robert Nisbet in his book *The Quest for Community* (1953). He argued that the potential of private enterprise to empower or disrupt lives is contingent upon the condition of their intermediary allegiances. He wrote, "Economic freedom has prospered, and

continues to prosper, only in areas and spheres where it has been joined to a flourishing associational life" (221). Nisbet claimed that aspects of a market economy such as entrepreneurship, property rights, and business collaboration indeed promote the purpose, excellence, and cooperation of individuals in the context of social ties. Conversely, these facets frustrate, demoralize, and isolate those without the communal functions and codes found in family, faith, and voluntary affiliation. In light of Nisbet's observations, *Poor White's* divided portrayal of industrialism suggests that intermediate group relationships avert the alienation caused by commercial enterprise.

Like three other significant American novels from 1920, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, *Poor White* addresses the transition of America from local communities to a national community during the Progressive years, loosely 1900-1920. *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* have contemporary settings in the 1910s. *The Age of Innocence* and *Poor White* have earlier settings but culminate in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. These novels express the Progressive reaction against traditional civil society. *This Side of Paradise* is the *Bildungsroman* of a Princeton student who becomes disillusioned with World War-I era bourgeois society. *Main Street* concerns New Woman Carol Kennicott's career ambition and consequent rebellion against her conservative husband and town. *The Age of Innocence* is set in 1870s New York and portrays patrician Newland Archer's battle against his social class so that he can leave his

conventional wife for her bohemian cousin. These novels express the Progressive reaction against the intermediate associations of traditional civil society.

Communities such as family, church, class, guild, and town are considered intermediate associations because they intervene between individuals and government power. The deliberate and voluntary natures of these structures, along with their disciplinary capacities, provide the moral context in which individuals flourish.

This analysis shows that the characters in these works flourish, with regard to their senses of belonging and purpose, to the degree they are engaged in the morally influential social bonds of local communities.

This close reading in the light of historical and sociological context shows that as Amory's alienation increases as he increasingly disengages from the morally influential social bonds of local communities. In this way, the investigation seeks to demonstrate the significance of intermediate groups for the good life of individuals and their communities.

The plot concerns the ascent of Hugh McVey and the effects of his inventions on life in Bidwell, Ohio. Hugh rises from impoverishment and isolation on the bank of the Mississippi River to success and fame. Bidwell is transformed within a decade of his arrival in 1889 from a sleepy farm town to a booming industrial center. Joe Wainsworth's murder of Jim Gibson highlights the novel's critique of capitalism, and Hugh's wedding to Clara Butterworth culminates its endorsement of it. These characters and others, become alienated

or are further disassociated by market forces to the degree they are separated from community

The influences of capitalist industrialism on social life in light of community-centered relationships are evident in three important ways. These concern vocation, relationships, and the professional conduct. An examination of Hugh McVey's notion of calling to be in relational community will be contrasted with Steve Hunter's sense of opportunism. The context of Hugh's relationship with the Shepards provides him with a moral perspective that Steve's dysfunctional family background does not provide him. A second way that the modern industrial economy influences perspective is how people view their relationships with others. Tom Butterworth's treatment of people as commodities will be contrasted with Clara's view that people have priority over possessions. The context of Tom's business world fuels his acquisitiveness while Clara's experience with Jim Priest and Kate Chancellor inspire her humanist outlook. A third way that capitalism affects social life is in the market relations of society. Hugh's ethical consideration for another inventor will be contrasted with Joe Wainsworth's violent outburst against those he perceives to be his economic enemies. The context of Hugh's marriage to Clara promotes his moral imagination while Joe's isolation fosters his paranoia and resentment. A consideration of vocation, interpersonal relationships, and the market economy in light of community and individualistic contexts demonstrates that

community-centered social bonds prevent the alienation associated with capitalism.

A Family Bond Influences Hugh's Communal Outlook

Hugh's impoverished early childhood offers little hope for his success. The futility of his dreamy existence in Mudcat Landing, Missouri, is described this way: "[L]ying on the river bank through long summer afternoons or sitting perfectly still for endless hours in a boat, had bred in him a dreamy detached outlook on life" (4). Hugh has minimal contact with other boys and prefers "to be left alone with his dreams" (17). The absence of supervision and structure in Hugh's life encourages his idleness.

Hugh's impaired family situation provides no incentive towards productive activity. Born in 1866 (15), he lives in "a tiny fishing shack by the river" (3) with his father, John McVey, until he is fourteen. John, a former farm hand and tanner, became a loiterer and drunkard after the death of his wife (3). Baby Hugh is "left shut up in the shack" or "carried about wrapped in a soiled blanket" (4) when his father takes a day's work or makes merry with other loafers. Hugh is "left often without money and with but a few loaves of bread" (16). This neglect and lack of training in Hugh's early years stunt his social and intellectual development. Thus he finds it "hard to be definite and to do definite things" (4). His present irresolute course is "the sort of animal-like stupor in

which his father had lived" (4). Without a positive example of purposeful and sustained labor Hugh will remain a sluggard.

The arrival of the railroad provides Hugh foster parents, work, and an education. Stationmaster Henry and Sarah Shepard show him a purpose in life and support his pursuit of it. Sarah is Hugh's "second mother" (7). She is an "ambitious energetic little woman" from Michigan with "the blood of the pioneers" (7). Her work ethic is evident in her maxims like "Do little things well and big opportunities are bound to come" (11). Odd jobs such as sweeping, loading rail cars, and mowing the lawn teach Hugh responsibility and accomplishment (4) so that "for the first time in his life he began to fare well" (5). The non-stop activity helps Hugh "to keep his naturally indolent body moving and his sleepy mind fixed on definite things" (5). Sarah's tutoring (6) displaces "the stupidity and dullness out of his mind" (8). Hugh responds to the Shepards' outreach with resolve toward exertion and considers his time of living with them as "a kind of paradise" (6). Hugh's five years of tutelage from Sarah (23) instills in him "a peculiarly persistent determination to make something alive and worth while out of himself" (23).

The Shepards' emphasis on discipline and industry influence Hugh toward self-motivation. Henry taught Hugh "every task had to be consciously carried on from minute to minute" (11). Sarah influences him "to overcome his inclination to give himself up to vaporous dreams" (8). She tells him that dreams "would lead to his destruction" (141). Her counsel affects him so that he "looked

upon his tendency to sleep and to dream as an enemy to his development" (23). Sarah's encouragement of practicality provides him with the means to move forward in life.

The Shepards have a limited perspective with regard to progress. This naivety undermines her dream of "a larger town and a better position in life" (7). She expects Henry to become "a railroad president or a millionaire" because "[i]t was the way things were done" (7). Her anticipation is based in her belief that if "you can do perfectly the task given you to do" then "you will be given a chance at a larger task" (7). However, Henry's faithful work goes unrecognized, which leaves Sarah "[s]tripped of her assurance as to the purpose of life" (10). In their shortsightedness, the Shepards place too much reliance on work itself. Hard work is a component of success but not the only one. She has Henry retire and turn over the station master responsibilities to Hugh so she can "turn her face eastward" and "live again among her own people" in Michigan (10). In contrast to the Shepards, Hugh's primary desire for relationship allows him to keep work as a means to an end.

Because Sarah's dream fades she finds it "impossible" to "assure" Hugh that "if he would but work hard and faithfully promotion would inevitably come" (10). Nevertheless, Hugh leaves for the east following his father's death to pursue the opportunities in the east that Sarah mentioned. John McVey's pointless demise "in a senseless quarrel with a drunken river man over the ownership of a dog" suggests the lack of purpose instilled in Hugh by his

biological kin. (13). The motivation in Hugh to find “the better way to form his own life” (13) was not present in his natural heritage and comes through relationship with his adopted family. The familial context of the Shepards helps Hugh learn a strong work ethic in contrast to Steve’s ethic of pure self-interest.

Hugh’s socially deprived upbringing leads him to correspond success in life with meaningful human connections. Sarah steers Hugh away from interaction with the riverbank locals in her desire to protect him from bad influences. Her attack on his people lead Hugh to refrain from the personal contact he intensely desires. She tells him, “Look at your own people – poor white trash – how lazy and shiftless they are. You can’t be like them. It’s a sin to be so dreamy and worthless” (8). Hugh accepts Sarah’s judgments about his people and dutifully keeps away from others in town. This leads to his becoming “utterly lonely” (12). Separation from others caused the “loneliness” that “drove him to labor” (12). Hugh learns to channel his energy into work until his desires for association with people are possible.

Hugh’s real longing is “to become acquainted with and be the friend of people whose lives were beautifully lived and who were themselves beautiful and full of significance” (14). Hugh knows the ugliness of life from his own background. But Sarah conveyed to Hugh a different kind of life

where the houses were all painted in bright colors, where young girls dressed in white dresses went about in the evening, walking under the trees beside streets paved with bricks, where there was no dust or mud, where stores, were gay bright places filled with beautiful wares that the people had money to buy in abundance

and where every one was alive and doing things worth while and none was slothful and lazy. (13)

This vision of the east cast by Sarah particularly entices Hugh because it offers an opportunity for him to know and to be known by admirable people. He perceives such relationships to be essential to a satisfying life. For Hugh the east is “the place where happiness was to come to him and where he was to achieve companionship with men and women” (20). Hugh’s personal mission is to enter into community with people. He wishes to “penetrate the wall that shut him off from humanity” (29). He does not seek to become rich or famous although he achieves these through the habits he learns from the Shepards.

Henry proves capable in his responsibilities but he does not think expressively. Therefore, he never attains the greater stations that Sarah fancies because he does not take creative risks. However, Hugh’s ability to think unconventionally frees him from bourgeois suppositions and bitterness over unmet expectations. Hugh is uninterested in trivial work for its own sake or for materialistic rewards, and instead prefers to accept greater risks in the pursuit of magnanimous goals.

The work ethic Hugh learns from the Shepards aids his calling. He first learns to do “sums on a slate” from Sarah (24). The growth in his analytical thinking is evident after he leaves Mudcat Landing when he estimates “the number of pickets in all the fences” of one Midwest town (24). Hugh is uncertain about “the road his life should take” (37). However, he finds “the study of

mathematical problems" helps "relieve his loneliness" and "cure his inclination to dreams" (37). Therefore, he continues to do calculations at his new job because "the citizens of Bidwell would not take him into their town life" (46). Soon he moves beyond "sums" and "fence pickets" and wonders "if a machine might not be made" to cut corn (44). His imagination allows him to see "a thousand new machines" in his mind (45). The diligence Hugh learns from the Shepards makes possible his ultimate success as an inventor.

Diminished Social Bonds Influence Steve's Opportunistic Outlook

Steve Hunter, Hugh's business partner, embodies the competitive side of capitalism in contrast to Hugh's creative side. Steve is a dealmaker and an "embryo industrial magnate" (71). He represents the "young men of Bidwell" who "dream of suddenly acquired wealth" (44). Like "all the other American youths of his generation," Steve had accepted that "greatness" is "in connection with the ownership of money" (61). Thus he considers "the American captains of industry" to be "supermen," but he "had never read a book" (62). He wants to be "the one great man of the community" (71) unlike Hugh, who wants "to be a man among men" (14). Steve's combativeness toward Bidwell comes from how he "had not been highly regarded in his home town" because he had been "a noisy boastful youth" (55). His goals are "to become a manufacturer" (56) and "to marry Ernestine Horn" (49), the daughter of a wealthy soap factory owner, whom he met while at business college in Buffalo (55). His materialistic nature is

apparent in his thinking of “the magnificence of the big stone house in which she lived with her father” when he thinks of Ernestine (56). Thus he wants to “achieve a financial position that would make it possible for him to ask for her hand” (56). Steve’s association of love with money also appears in his “physical alliance” with the daughter of a farm worker he arranges for “the cost of two new five dollar dresses” (56). In his view women are secured through deals, and relationships are primarily a means to material and physical gratification.

Steve’s cynical perspective derives from the Hunters’ lack of strong family bonds like Hugh has with the Shepards. His mother died when he was little, and Steve and his father “did not in private get on well” (64). Steve does not treat his sister Elsie with dignity, for she “was always a source of unhappiness to her brother” (64). Elsie suffered because “[s]ome obscure nervous disease had twisted her body out of shape,” and she had a “face that twitched” (64). When their father dies, Steve, as “guardian,” puts her “with one servant in a small house” (65). His visits to her were rare and “she would not see him” because “she lived by her hatred of him” (65). However, Steve self-servingly tells others, “It’s the dream of my life to make the poor afflicted soul happy” and “I shall always do my duty by her” (65). A lack of trust and harmony in the Hunter home fosters Steve’s selfish behavior.

Steve is opportunistic in his desire for personal gain. In contrast to Hugh who wants to know people and is conscious of them, Steve was often unaware of people and “saw his fellow townsmen as through a haze, and sometimes did not

see them at all" (56). Steve reveals apathy towards meaningful relationships when he considers having a partner with him in the corn-cutter factory. He muses, "I don't want to burn all my bridges behind me," in regard to the likely consequences of his real desire to own it by himself (111). Here he continues to mull reasons why he should take a co-owner: "I've got to do business with these rubes, maybe all my life. I can't shut myself off too much, at least not yet a while" (111). Steve uses people, including family and business associates, as means to his financial goals. Also, in contrast to Hugh, who seeks to emerge from isolation, Steve anticipates it with satisfaction.

Steve is Machiavellian towards others for the sake of his materialistic ends. He speaks to people with a style of "something gracious to the edge of condescension" (56). He learned from soap manufacturer E. P. Horn about the potency of financial "control" (49). Consequently, he has "a tremendous sense of power" when he sees "hurrying people" rushing to avoid an approaching storm with a sky "extraordinarily black as from the smoke of a mill" (70). Seeing a multitude dominated by soot-colored factory-evoking clouds thrills him. He also thinks his financial partners are "mere puppets, creatures he could use" (70). And he thinks of Bidwell as "a city, bathed in the smoke of his enterprises" (71). Steve's callous attitude towards people inspires his mercenary approach to business.

Hugh's benevolent treatment of Allie Mulberry contrasts with Steve's self-seeking outlook on people. Allie is a "half-wit," has "weak legs," and is an expert

whittler (32). He is a local “hero” for making “a ship that would float in a beer bottle half filled with water and laid on its side” (32). Steve shrewdly suggests Hugh use Allie to create machine models from Hugh’s designs (66). Yet Steve’s cynicism about the trustworthiness of others is evident when he tells Hugh, “He’s half crazy and won’t get on to our secret” (66).

Allie shines in his work “[u]nder Hugh’s direction” (68) and “was like a strange dog that at last found a master” (73). Hugh was “unembarrassed by the presence of the half-wit” and “spent hours trying to explain [to Allie] the workings of some intricate part of the proposed machine” (73). One time Hugh made a gadget that was unusable but Allie made one that “worked perfectly” (73). Allie responded by “cooing with delight” because “he was so happy that he could not sit still” (73). Hugh’s kindness and humility towards Allie spurs him to greater productivity. This is because for Allie “[l]ove and understanding began a little to do for him what words could not have done” (73). Steve and Hugh’s venture gives Allie an opportunity to apply his skills in a cooperative and useful way. The narrator explains, “Intelligence began to come into the eyes of the man who all his life had whittled meaningless wooden chains, baskets formed out of peach stones, and ships intended to float in bottles” (73). Hugh’s humane management of Allie demonstrates that capitalist labor need not be a hostile and alienating experience.

Steve’s lack of integration into the Bidwell community prompts his dishonesty. His original plan for enterprise is sound and ethical. Steve first wants

to “lay low and see what [Hugh’s] up to” (49). He then projects suitable business partners, for he “selected with great care certain men he intended to ask to go in with him” (56). The following reflection of his about his objectives in relation to Hugh suggests their logical order: “If he’s got an invention, I’ll get up a company. I’ll get money in and I’ll start a factory” (49). However, Steve’s detachment from and distrust of others cause him to make his fundraising appeal prematurely before he knows Hugh or his situation. Steve decides to “bluff” (57) wealthy farmer Tom Butterworth and banker John Clark, “the two solid moneyed citizens of his town” (57). He tells them that Hugh “is my man” who has “an invention that will bring millions in profits to those who get into it” (57). To further manipulate them he takes “a bundle of letters out of his inside coat pocket” (58) and falsely claims they are from “city bankers anxious to furnish him with capital” (60). Steve had previously gained Tom’s and John’s attention by “dropping hints” that there would be “something mysterious and important about to happen” (56). When Tom and John eventually inquire further (57) he senses they want “to bully him” and “to laugh at him” (58). However, Steve wants “to impress the two older men” (59) and does not wish to be “made a fool” (60). Therefore, he tells “a story, the falsehood of which could be discovered in a few minutes” (59). Steve lies to ingratiate himself to the men who can make his dream of financial success a reality.

Steve’s suspicion towards others also arises from his poor relationships. The narrator acknowledges Steve’s paranoia: “Like most shrewd men he had an

exalted notion regarding the shrewdness of others" (59). An example of his mistrust is evident in his original discussion with Tom and John about Hugh. Steve fears that they "might well have been making plans to get the better of him" even while they "had seemed to be impressed by his words" (62). Another instance is when Steve first goes to see Hugh at the train depot and finds insurance man Dick Spearsman has come to inquire about a ticket. Steve wonders if Dick is there "to make an investigation of the truth of the statements he had made in the bank" (63). And Steve thinks, "There's some one in the background" when Hugh states that he needs money for his plant-setter (66). These examples of Steve's consistent doubts about the motives of others in relation to his business proposition demonstrate the absence in his life of trustworthy relationships.

Steve's intuition about Hugh demonstrates entrepreneurial vision. His deception of Tom and John is based on assumptions about the "mysterious stranger" (59) that prove true. Hugh's "study of mechanics" (44) and "drawings for parts of mysterious machines" combined with his "tall, gaunt, slow-speaking" (47) persona makes him a legend among the Bidwell grapevine. The villagers presume Hugh "went about always thinking great thoughts" (47). Steve hears "the talk regarding Hugh McVey and his inventive genius" when he returns from Buffalo (49). This information stirs Steve's imagination about the idea of a factory. He then aspires to raise the finances required to manufacture a salable device for the sake of profits. Free enterprise requires both invention and

funding. Steve does not have scientific talent: "It was enough for him that a machine was to be made and he wanted to share in its ownership at once" (66). Similarly, Hugh does not have financial expertise. However, he does recognize his need for a promoter when he "absent-mindedly" tells Steve, "I will have to find money now" (66). The two men pool their natural abilities. However, Steve's lack of a work ethic and selfishness lead him to take shortcuts.

The plant-setting machine debuts in 1892 (77), and its account attests to the socially destructive nature of greed that Steve promotes. The town divides over the matter so that "[e]very one declared himself either for it or against it" (73). Many farmers claimed "[i]t isn't practical" (73). The highly-regarded opinions of the veteran cabbage farmers were negative "[a]lmost without exception" (74). On the other side, those with "[v]isions of suddenly acquired wealth" defended Steve and the project (74). Their support of the invention is not based on expertise about the machine's feasibility but on the hope for easy returns. This clouded judgment contributes to their unwarranted lionization of Hugh. When he returns from Cleveland to see about a prototype he is "a hero in the town's eyes," because "[e]very one dreamed of becoming suddenly rich by the power of [Hugh's] mind" (76). And the building where Hugh and Allie work on their model is like a shrine to the materialistic locals, for they "gazed with something like worship in their eyes at the old pickle factory" (76). Their fever for wealth is stirred by Steve's hype and misleading information. Steve's desire to get rich fast produces a climate of unscrupulous behavior.

Steve manipulates the model he has in a downtown display window that sows little plants in a box filled with earth to promote the machine (74). He agrees to let the plants grow to maturity to appease the skeptics. However, he surreptitiously rigs the demonstration to mislead the public: "When some of the plants showed signs of dying he came secretly at night and replaced them with sturdier shoots so that the miniature field showed always a brave, vigorous front to the world" (75). The machine works inconsistently and Hugh acknowledges its failure to Steve (77). However, Steve's pursuit of social importance remains undeterred. Therefore, he has Ed Hall "go at night and replace the plants that did not live" in their test field with "ideal soil conditions" (80). Steve's rationalization that the plant failures might be from causes other than the machine (80) illustrates his departure from sound judgment.

Steve's dishonest scheme "to have the entire stock control" among his directors shows the abuses of capitalism when it is free of moral allegiances. Hugh is naïve about Steve's unethical tactics. Upon the imminent failure of the plant-setting machine, Steve tells his board, "If we let word of the failure of this machine get out, where'll we be?" (78). Therefore, he decides to sell the machines until demand wanes, and then buy the factory, which "will have to be sold cheap" (78). He explains, "we'll simply buy up the plant at a low price and make something else" (78). Steve delights in the benefit he and his partners will reap at the expense of the other stockholders. He gloats, "It isn't every day men get a chance to sell themselves a fine plant full of new machinery" (78). Moreover,

Steve instructs his co-directors in the “promotion company” (70) – his father, jeweler E. H. Hunter, banker John Clark, farmer Tom Butterworth, and bank cashier Gordon Hart (56) – “to be loyal to our enterprise” in any discussion of the stock (78). Under Steve’s leadership these men violate their fiduciary responsibilities in order to minimize their own losses at the expense of their shareholders. The disingenuous justification Steve offers for this strategy again reveals his detached outlook.

Steve rationalizes his unprincipled directives with the excuse that the company’s continuation is vital for Bidwell. He confesses to his partners that the plant-setting machine failure creates “a case of the survival of the fittest” (78). John Clark crystallizes this sentiment: “The few men who see clearly have to think first of themselves. They have to save themselves in order that they may save others” (79). In this way Steve, John, and the others transcend appropriate self-interest by their excuses that their financial welfare has priority over other investors to the point that they conceal material facts. Steve’s selfishness negatively influences his board and many residents of Bidwell.

Banker John Clark and cashier Gordon Hart are examples of those affected by Steve’s self-centeredness. “The lives and happiness of many people,” John thinks, “depended on the clear working of his brain” (79). Indeed his positions as a banker and as a corporate leader are significant. However, he overlooks the importance of interdependency and transparency in the capitalist system. His philosophy belittles the community of customers and stockholders who make his

enterprises possible: "I can't see that it does a carpenter or a farmer any good to own a little stock in a factory. It only takes their minds off their work. They have foolish dreams of getting rich and don't attend to their own affairs" (78). Gordon Hart largely agrees with John, for his ideas "ran in the same channel as those that played through the mind of the bank president" (79).

Steve, John, and Gordon's attitudes color free enterprise with ruthlessness that is not inherent to sound business practices. Nisbet states that capitalism succeeds because of "the continued existence of institutional and cultural allegiances" that are "precapitalist" (219). A social order that promotes purpose and meaning for individuals prepares the way for mutually beneficial free market exchanges. Honest competition has the potential for failure and rewards prudent planning and social cooperation. However, the haughty attitudes and shady actions of the founders of the Bidwell Plant-Setting Machine Company yield inner circle collusion, clique factiousness, and atomistic loyalties that result from corroded social relationships.

The skepticism of the directors toward one another reflects their own abstracted perspectives toward life. A community of self-interested men is an oxymoron. As a silent partner, Hugh does not directly affect the board. However, Steve's example of mistrust and self-interest permeates among the other directors. Gordon does not identify with John who is older. As "a younger man," Gordon thinks he and Steve "will have to take hold of things" (79). And John and Gordon take the fact that Steve "told them nothing" as "a kind of insult" (69).

Additionally, Steve's underhanded plan to obtain the factory abundantly exposes the mistrust among the men. His intention "from the beginning" is to "get the plant for himself" (111). However, he decides for public impression "it would be better to take some one in with him" (111). Tom anticipates "some kind of proposal" from Steve that will "shut Gordon Hart and John Clark out" (113). Steve indeed chooses Tom because John "was not to be trusted" (111). Steve's only condition, also for appearances, is that Tom assumes half his shares in the new corn-cutting machine company (114). He explains, "I can't take you in with me and have it said around town you were one of the fellows who sold out the small investors (114). Steve even threatens that if Tom does not partner with him that he will "advertise what you three fellows did to the small investors after I asked you not to do it" (114). Steve knew that John, Gordon, and Tom were "secretly selling their stock" (80) after he requested they not do so (78). This "disloyalty" made Steve "indignant" (80). For his part, Tom rationalizes his acceptance of Steve's offer because Gordon and John "would have done the same thing had they had the chance" (113). The bad faith between these business associates presents the unfavorable aspects of private enterprise that arise when financial gains are valued above solidarity.

Former carpenter's apprentice Ed Hall is an up-and-comer who is influenced by Steve. Ed's rise to foreman at the corn-cutter plant (130) further depicts the same dehumanizing potential of capitalism that the directors exhibit. His outspokenness on behalf of the factory endears him to Steve. Ed becomes "a

Demosthenes on the subject of progress” and believes it is “the duty of the town to awake and stick to Steve Hunter and the machine” (76). Steve praises Ed when he hears him “berate a farmer who doubted the practicability of the machine” (75). Steve tells Ed, “We’re going to need live young men who know how to handle other men” (75), and teaches him to be expedient. Ed helps him rig the plant-setter experiment (80). He then commits further trickiness as superintendent at the corn-cutter factory when he entices the workers in a contest “to outdo the boss” and then installs a “piece-work plan” that pays a normal rate for extraordinary output (160).

This antagonism toward his workers eventually triggers “Bidwell’s first industrial strike” (207) in which “three men [are] killed” (223). Socialist proponents decry “the whole system that built and maintained factories” (207). But Steve and Tom use “strike breakers” to win the dispute (207). This hostility of Ed, Steve, and Tom against labor fails to acknowledge the importance of the psychological aspects of work. Moreover, their hard-line stances aggravate employer-employee relations and lead to increased worker alienation. Ed’s “rough, misunderstanding” hands are also responsible for the brutal capture of disillusioned craftsman-turned-murderer Joe Wainsworth (219). His disdain for the harness maker is another reflection of his materialist outlook that minimizes the humane and spiritual qualities to labor.

In contrast to Ed’s conscienceless behavior, his former mentor, Ben Peeler, has a spiritual crisis. Ben has a dream experience in reaction to Bidwell’s

industrial transformation. The town's growth influences Ben away from his carpentry trade. He goes from a team of three that includes Ed Hall to having twenty-six men, a bookkeeper, and a stenographer in three years (124-25). This additional manpower allows Ben to concentrate on sales so that "for two years [Ben] had not driven a nail or held a saw in his hand" (124). He also branches into lumber sales with Gordon Hart (125). Ben's departure from his craft is not because of his weariness of carpentry but because he "was no longer satisfied with his income as a workman" (125).

This new focus on increased profits, however, negatively affects Ben's relationships. For example, his new schedule does not allow "time to stop for a half hour's gossip with a prospective builder of a barn" or a chance "to loaf in Birdie Spinks' drug-store at the end of the day" (125). Ben had enjoyed building barns in the country as a tradesman. In addition to the pleasant surroundings and chance for interaction, such work enabled him to obtain "winter potatoes," "hay for his horse," and "a barrel of cider" (125). The busier schedule allows Ben "no time to think of such things" (125). Now he tells farmers who need barns, "I can't bother. I have too many houses to build," and he directed them to "a barn-building carpenter" (125). Ben's new responsibilities also bring increased anxiety along with decreased leisure. He worries after the discovery of three vagrants sleeping on a stack of their lumber (125). This inspires a nightmare for Ben in which he shoots an intruder while guarding his lumber with a gun. Ben then recognizes the man as his elder brother Harry, who had died as a boy (126). Ben

is particularly shaken because the body “still breathed” even though “the whole side of his head was torn away” (126). Ben’s destruction of his brother to secure his lumber signals his unease with the preoccupations of his new bourgeois life. The graphic dream suggests the imminent annihilation of Ben’s boyhood imagination by the commercialism that eliminates time for conversation and reflection.

Industrialism edifies many in Bidwell such as Steve Hunter and Ed Hall while it disturbs others such as Ben Peeler and the labor strikers. Judge Horace Hanby, an amoral former carpetbagger, is the town prophet of change to “the minds of Bidwell young men” (34). He tells them, “[T]here’s going to be a new war here” (34). He explains this war will first be “between individuals to see to what class a man must belong” (34). Then there will be war “between those who have and those who can’t get” (34). The outcome of the struggles will be that “[s]ome’ll grow rich and some poor” (34). Hanby aptly summarizes the opposition between Steve and the other directors and the small investors in the corn-cutting factory. Hanby also accurately predicts the tension between the factory management and the workers. Ergonomics and compensation are other concerns of Hanby. The monotony of factory work he describes this way: “Some of the men stand at one bench and do one thing not only for hours but for days and years” (34). The tradeoff for these men, he explains, is that for “more money” the factory experience is “like being in prison” (34).

One night Hugh overhears such a complaint from a son of cabbage farmer Ezra French. The disgruntled young man says, "I wish the old days were back. I don't see how that inventor or his inventions ever helped us workers. Dad was right about him" (161). The speaker is disillusioned because he heard about "the factory work being so easy" and now, as a married man, he must keep his job "no matter what they do" (161). The charge is a mixed bag like capitalism. Assembly line jobs are more or less onerous to different people. However, French's son along with his brothers and sisters had worked "like slaves" in the cabbage patches during spring plantings when their father "became a tyrant" (50).

The natures of field and factory labors are different. Farm work has seasonal rhythms that allow restoration for the body and mind. As a family enterprise, cabbage farming gave the hardworking French children a clear purpose and a sense of ownership to their efforts. Conversely, the routine nature of factory work is typically arrhythmic. Similarly, the common centralized-organization style of businesses marginalizes individuals through their tedious and specialized responsibilities unless the workers are purposely integrated into corporate cultures that bestow intention and meaning to their experiences.

Hugh's inventions are labor saving, production-oriented devices and are not intrinsically pro-management or pro-labor. Machines are devoid of will and therefore of morality. The plant-setting machine does not fail because of its bias in labor relations. Rather, it misses because it is unsuccessful in its design. The

ineffective design of the corn-cutter makes Hanby's labor war prediction only a possibility; Steve's cynical ownership makes it a reality. Similarly, adoption by the Shepards opens a new world for Hugh. His creativity is almost snuffed out, however, by their resistance to imagination. The Shepards have good intentions for Hugh but they do not comprehend the complete effects of their influence on him. Likewise Hugh is unable to foresee all the positive and negative uses for his creations. The Shepards make possible Hugh's technological achievements but are not responsible for them. In the same way, Hugh has noble motives for his designs, but he can neither anticipate nor be responsible for how others use his designs.

Hugh and Steve bring the sums of their experiences to their business vocations. They are talented, motivated, and have imperfect family backgrounds and educations. Steve has more formal education, but Hugh experiences a better home life in his five years with the Shepards. The plant setter bust deters neither of them. Hugh learns from the experience "as he never could have done by studying books" (77). And the subsequent success of the McVey Corn-Cutter and the coal car un-loader bring fame to Hugh and fortune to both men (139). The difference in their approaches to their capitalist callings is their dissimilar outlooks about their social relations.

Poor White portrays the disparate effects of industrialism in its contrast between Hugh and Steve. These successful men realize their dreams through their vocational activities. The Shepards help Hugh with his self-discipline but

are unsupportive of his imagination: "The dreams he had tried so hard to put away from him and that the New England woman Sarah Shepard had told him would lead to his destruction had come to something" (141). Hugh considers his creativity an outlet but not a means to the human association he desires. On the other hand, Steve thinks the control of people will bring him the significance he wants. He walked home in a storm after the first directors meeting and triumphantly

lifted his tiny hands to the skies. "I'm a man. I tell you what, I'm a man. Whatever any one says, I tell you what, I'm a man," he shouted into the void. (71)

Steve's debased sense of masculinity is based on the domination of others. In contrast, Hugh continues to perceive that success in life consists of connections between persons.

Clara's Communal Outlook Values Relationships over Possessions

Clara's poor relationship with her father, Tom Butterworth, illustrates how capitalist materialism impairs communication. In contrast, her positive experience with farm hand Jim Priest shows the advantages to fellowship of trust and sympathy. The novel most powerfully illustrates how market forces encourage or discourage meaningful human bonds in Clara Butterworth's relationships with her father, Tom, and with his loyal farmhand Jim Priest. The wall of emotional separation between Tom and Clara exists because his acquisitive nature engages her more as a possession than as a person. Contrarily,

Jim's demonstration of understanding and sensitivity towards Clara contributes to their reciprocally gratifying relationship.

For Tom Butterworth possessions are more important than people. He is self-described as a man who "made things move and kept them on the move" (175). However, Tom's persona masks his energy, for he is a man "who appeared to do nothing, but his shrewd mind was always at work" (90). He is a wealthy farmer and widower with one child, whose home is "the most pretentious place in the county" (89). Tom assigns longtime friend Jim Priest to supervise the farm when his manufacturing endeavors require more of his time. Tom's penchant for the acquisition of valuables is seen when he tells Jim, "You look out for the farm. Don't bother me with details. You just tell me about it when there is any buying or selling to do" (119). Tom's primary devotion is to the ownership of property. This motivation harms his relationship with Clara, for "the possessive passion in him destroyed his ability to love" (90).

Clara's feeling of isolation stems from her lack of intimacy with her parents. Her favorite spot as a child was the kitchen alcove seat. She desired siblings and "imagined them coming to her across the wooden bridge out her window (180). Clara's mother was "feverishly active" and thus "often did not hear when the child spoke" (181). Her mother would say, "You run outside," when she was distracted by "something cooking on the kitchen stove," and then she "turned again to her work" (181). Tom's five sisters care for Clara after her mother dies (90). His one unmarried sister lives with Tom and Clara; her

anonymity indicates the aloofness between her and her niece (90). Tom's distant attitude with regard to Clara is described this way: "For many years the farmer did not appear to pay much attention to his daughter" (90). And his poor relationship with Clara does not improve because it is not a concern for him and because he "never understood the quality of his own daughter" (97). Her alienation is illustrated in this account of her train ride to college: "The walls, like life itself, were shutting in upon her youth and her youthful desire to reach a hand out of the beauty in herself to the buried beauty in others" (112). The absence of closeness to any of her family members contributes to Clara's desire for meaningful associations.

The wall of misunderstanding between Clara and Tom is firmly established in the summer before her high school senior year. The development of her "boyish" figure accompanies Clara's mood swings and her "greater hunger for understanding, love, and friendliness" (90, 93). Tom incites their estrangement by his resentment of Clara for her interchange with lustful twenty-two-year-old hired hand John May. The narrator indicates his pattern of aggressiveness with women, for he had voluntarily left the employ of a doctor when "something happened between him and the doctor's wife" (94). John misinterprets Clara's innocent flirtation and pursues her, but she escapes his embrace "in [a] dark corner of the shed" (95). Later, Tom sees John give "a gesture with his hand" toward Clara with "a leering confident smile" and dismisses him from the farm (96). Tom reproachfully asks her, "Where have you

been with that fellow? What have you been up to? (96). This reaction embitters Clara towards her father because he “accused her of seeking the thing that had happened” (96).

Her maturity is in relief to her father’s injudiciousness. She empathetically considers that John was “confused by her presence” (96). However, she finds her father’s “attack made on her spirit” to be “more terrible and unforgivable than the attack upon her body” (96). Clara receives his criticism as “a blow in the face at the hand of God” (106). Their inability to communicate is evident when Tom seeks resolution “outside the door of his daughter’s room” (97). He sustains his condemnation of Clara because he finds her calm composure to be “evidence of guilt” (97). Therefore, he addresses Clara “as he might have talked to a mature, sophisticated, and guilty woman” because “[h]e forgot she was a girl” (97).

Tom’s incongruous treatment of Clara derives from his marriage.

Tom’s Individualistic Outlook Values Possessions over Relationships

Tom’s suspicion of his daughter mirrors his egotistical behavior toward his wife when they were newlyweds. He had a misgiving about “something between his wife and a young man who had worked on the farm” (97). Later he unnecessarily scares her by stealthily tracking her walk home from town at night after her horse goes lame even though he had determined his doubt to be “unfounded (97). Tom’s distrust of his wife began early in his marriage and his bizarre response demonstrates poor communication skills and a desire to have

an advantage on others, behaviors that continue into his relationship with his adult daughter. From that circumstantial episode to Clara's, Tom concludes, "like mother, like daughter – they are both of the same stripe" (97). His rush to judgments about his wife and daughter and his unwillingness to accept their positions reflects a prideful preoccupation with his own esteem. He obsesses over their perceived insults to his authority. However, Clara's hurt is not permanent, for she believes that if her father would "take her into his arms or say some kindly understanding word" then "all could be forgotten" (98). Similarly, Tom is not completely unfeeling. Occasionally he considered that "he had been brutal and crude in his treatment of his daughter" and would "ask her to forgive him" (100). Ultimately, Tom's pride prevents him from asking for Clara's forgiveness.

Tom's ego and mercenary attitude toward Clara lead him to accept Steve's partnership offer in the corn-cutting factory. He had "intended to tell Steve to go to the devil" after he hears his pitch while they ride in a carriage (114). However, Tom became "furious" and "changed his mind" when he saw the schoolteacher who earlier had romanced Clara in a carriage with another woman (114). He reverses his decision after he "imagined his daughter in her place" (114). The schoolteacher reminds Tom of his perceived financial constraints caused by his obligation to Clara. He muses, "I'm losing the chance to be a big man in the town here in order to play safe and be sure of money to leave to Clara, and all she cares about is to galavant around with some young squirt" (114). Thus Tom

blames his guardian duties toward Clara for lost opportunities to be wealthier, and he “began to see himself as a wronged and unappreciated father” (114). So he agrees to Steve’s terms out of self-pity over his troubled relationship with his daughter.

Tom’s desire for Clara to marry is selfish. He “bitterly” thinks “I’ll be glad when the time comes for her to marry and settle down, so I can get her off my hands” (100). He sent her to the State University and “hoped she would meet and marry some young man while she was away” (100). Three years later, when she returns for good from school, he tells Clara his preference for her marriage: “I don’t know whether you met any one at school there or not. If you did and he’s all right, it’s all right with me. I don’t want you should marry an ordinary man, but a smart one, an educated man, a gentleman. We Butterworths are going to be bigger and bigger people here” (121). Tom’s motives toward Clara are dubious. His desire for her marriage is more for his own comfort than for her benefit. And his resistance to the schoolteacher is driven by his ego and not by concern for Clara. She turns out not to be interested in him. However, Tom had thought him insignificant and immediately showed his indifference to the man “by nodding his head and walking away” when Clara introduced them (98).

Clara’s experience living in Columbus with her aunt and uncle further alienates her from men. Priscilla Woodburn is Tom’s sister and her husband, Henderson, is the treasurer for a plow manufacturer (99, 101). The Woodburns are childless and they live “without words” (101). Henderson engrosses himself

in nightly paperwork and Priscilla knits stockings “for the children of the poor” though they end up “[i]n a large trunk in her room upstairs” (101). The narration describes Henderson’s “rustling of the papers containing the columns of figures” and Priscilla’s clicking knitting needles as “trivial by-products” of the current “industrial madness” (102). Clara considers the “eternal figuring and knitting” is “a substitute for living” (108). Fearful Priscilla thought “the world was a place of terror, where wolf-like men prowled about seeking women to devour” (116). Clara receives no more affirmation from her relatives than from her father with regard to her longing to connect with people.

Clara’s relationship with Frank Metcalf further confirms her desire for a loving and non-materialistic husband. Her steady stream of gentleman callers made Clara “feel that she was being merchandized” (102). Frank is the son of Henderson’s boss and wants to marry Clara because of “the needs of his body” (104). However, he bluntly informs Clara that he forfeits an eleven thousand dollar inheritance if he marries before he turns twenty-four in two years (103). He explains, “If I don’t get that money I’ll be just the same as I am now,” by which he means “I won’t be any good” (103). Clara is not romantically interested in Frank but his situation resonates with her. She is pressured by her father to marry soon for financial reasons and he is pressed by his father to wait for matrimony also on account of economics. Clara empathized with Frank and recognized that “there was a restlessness in him that was like the restless thing in herself” (104). He does not want to follow in his father’s business and she

“thought with horror of the probability of marrying a maker of plows” (104).

Clara believes that “men like her uncle” who are devoted to “some tremendously trivial thing” offer women only basic needs as well as “a show of prosperity” and “a stupid acceptance of dullness” (104-05). Clara wants “a man who respects himself and his own desires but can understand also the desires and fears of a woman” (107). Frank’s struggle to develop his individuality encourages Clara in her own self-realization.

Frank’s amorous play for Clara on the Woodburn porch one night increases the misunderstanding between her and her relatives. Once again a libidinous male with “hunger to possess” Clara’s body misreads a friendly gesture by her (109). She tells Frank goodnight and sympathetically “stroked the sleeve of his coat” because she suspected his “wanting love and understanding” was like her desire “to be loved and understood by her father” (109). However, Henderson sees Clara “trying to escape Frank Metcalf’s embraces” (115). This causes the bewildered Woodburns to withdraw even further from Clara.

Henderson tells his wife, “Let’s be polite, but act as though she didn’t exist” (116). Priscilla is apprehensive that “something dreadful would happen to her niece” (116). She attempts conversation and tells Clara, “If you don’t want to tell me anything, it’s all right” (116). A confused Clara declines her aunt’s sincere but inadequate offer and muses, “I would only hurt her and make things harder than ever” (117). Clara’s decision not to speak candidly is for her own protection as well as for her aunt’s. She pities Priscilla as “a prisoner” and does not want to

“grow afraid of marriage” (117). In fact, Clara’s experience with Frank and the Woodburns makes her more eager to discover a suitable partner. She thinks, “I want to be married as soon as I can find the right man” (117).

At school Clara does not adopt the skepticism towards men or capitalism of her feminist friend Kate Chancellor. Kate’s approach to sex roles and politics is a stark contrast to the timidity of the Woodburns. She is in “nature a man” and believes that the “rules for living” have been “manufactured” by men (105). Kate is also “a socialist” and talks to Clara “of capital and labor” (105). Clara is “dimly conscious” that Kate wished “to kiss and caress” her and “would have loved her” (152). However, Kate is sensitive to Clara and “continually fought the impulse” to dominate her emotionally or intellectually (117). Clara enjoys that she can talk to Kate “as to a man” but without “the antagonism that so often exists between men and women” (105). Clara tells Kate about her disappointments with men and confesses, “With the schoolteacher I was as unfair as John May and my father were with me” (106). She asks Kate, “Why do men and women have to fight each other?” (106). Kate does not fear men, but she has a poor opinion of them. She explains that men and women have conflict because “[t]hey are both too much one thing” (106). She elaborates, “Love is the most sensitive thing in the world. It’s like an orchid. Men try to pluck orchids with ice tongs” (106). One night they walk in a park when two men ask to join them. Kate grievously scolds them, “What have you got to offer that you think will make it worth while for us to break up our conversation with each other and

spend the time talking with you?" (118). However, Clara has "[a] flash of doubt" about "the infallibility of Kate's method with men" (118).

Clara sees men more sympathetically and attributes opposition between the sexes to selfish behavior. She tells Frank, "We all want something we are not willing to pay for. We want to steal it or have it given us" (108). Here Clara acknowledges the human impulse to take advantage of others whether in romantic relationships or in economic ones. In essence she acknowledges that parties in romantic or economic exchanges are vulnerable and often desire advantage in the relationship. Her affirmation to Frank that "the possibility of friendship between men and women" (108) exists suggests that the sexes need not be antagonists. In the same way, alienation between owners and labor is behavior driven and not intrinsic. Thus Clara finds Kate to be a loyal friend but does not echo her disregard for men. She returns to Bidwell after three years at the university and had "forgot the words of Kate Chancellor in regard to the independent future of women" (119). Clara remains unclear about her path but she knows "it concerned some close warm contact with life that she had as yet been unable to make" (119).

Clara's fractured relationship with her father worsens because of his increasing commitment to commercial activities. He greets her at the train station with a "business-like air" and "something like suspicion hung over them" (119). Clara and her father appeared to be "strangers, meeting for the purpose of discussing some business arrangements" (119). Clara hoped that he would either

“receive her into fellowship” by “taking her hand” or “receive her as a woman” by “kissing her” (119). However, Tom felt “uncomfortable” and “did neither” (120). Clara’s attempt at conversation on the ride home with “the usual home-coming questions” only receives “generalities” (120). Yet Tom becomes animated when his new factory comes into view. He enthusiastically tells Clara about the corn cutting machines that will be manufactured there. He proceeds to boast about the changing town: “I had more to do with it than any one else” (120-21). He considers himself “the big man in this town,” and tells Clara, “I’m going to take care of every one in Bidwell and give every one a chance to make money” (121). Clara is “startled” by Tom’s talking “like a prince in the presence of his vassals” (120). Her father has plans for her in the same way he has plans for Bidwell. He tells her, “I want you should marry pretty soon now” (121). Moreover, he promises to build her “the biggest place Bidwell ever seen” if she marries “a good man, a smart one” (121). This makes Clara “angry” because she feels like “a possession” rather than “his child” (121). The most important man in Clara’s life is more distant to her than ever because he esteems financial achievements over people.

Tom’s most egregious behavior toward Clara in this way is the Alfred Buckley affair. Buckley is a charlatan from New York who gains Tom’s confidence and proposes to Clara “by writing her a letter” (150). She thinks he is “too much occupied with work to be personal” (150). The two men ignore Clara and “talked only of making money” when she sits on the porch with them (152).

She perceives that they seek to exploit Hugh and Steve (149). Tom considers Alfred “one of the family” and is hurt when he is arrested for counterfeiting, swindling, and unlawfully marrying (162). However, Tom is also “filled with joy” that he “had signed no papers and written no letters that would betray the conspiracy he had entered into against Steve” (162). Tom has no compunction about aligning with Buckley for financial gain at the expense of his partners and even his daughter.

Tom admits to Clara that he had “whispered the suggestion about town” that she was “to marry Alfred Buckley” (163). Tom has a sense of guilt about his subversion of Clara: “The fact that he had betrayed his daughter into an ugly position gnawed at his consciousness” (163). However, his pride stifles any potential apology and he denounces Clara as the wrongdoer. He says, “Don’t you know you’re disgraced, have brought disgrace on my name?” (162). He continues, “Why haven’t you married and settled down like a decent woman?” (163). Tom is not concerned for the embarrassment he deliberately caused Clara, but for how her singleness supposedly burdens his business interests. His imagined grievance provokes his anger and he “wished she were a son so he could strike with his fists” (163). Clara had desired violence against John May for his carnal treatment of her. Similarly, Tom wants to assault his child for his wounded pride. Both resort to vengeance instead of communication to express their disappointments with the other sex. Tom resents that his pecuniary affairs

cannot be disconnected from his family obligations. Likewise, Clara realizes that any future marriage for her involves her father.

Tom's lavish marriage feast for Clara and Hugh increases her alienation from him. Jim Priest suggests that Clara's news deserves a large celebration. He tells Tom, "We got to give that girl and her husband the biggest blowout ever seen in this county" (175). The normally uncharitable Tom agrees and sends Jim to retrieve carriages and an orchestra and not to worry about prices because "the sky's the limit" (176). However, the wedding feast is miserable for Clara. She finds it a "display of ugliness and vulgarity" (181). Clara has "hate" for "her father's guests" (182). The busy kitchen causes her to reflect upon her mother's experience as "a beast" and her "story of submission" (183). Clara blames her mother's degradation on the "prosperity and money" of her father. Clara resents that her father "would have been satisfied to see his daughter led into just such another life" (182). Clara is unimpressed by Tom's costly party because it epitomizes the indifference that she faults for the disenchantment in her life.

Tom's capacity for generosity is evident in his intercession into Clara and Hugh's troubled honeymoon. For a week after their marriage Clara "had not yet become his wife" (193). A nervous Hugh retreats to his boarding house, but Tom helps him return to Clara. He instructs Hugh, "You'll be needing your things. You won't be back here to-day" (191). That evening Tom takes him to Clara and entreats her, "Don't be hard on him. He was a little drunk" (192). Tom is "concerned over the outcome of their adventure" and acts "like a mother bird

whose offspring had been prematurely pushed out of the nest" (194). Nightly he joined Clara and Hugh and told them "of his affairs, of the progress and growth of the town and his part in it" (194). Tom's unexpected gentleness toward the newlyweds is a glimpse of the potential the man of affairs has for building relationships as well as portfolios.

Tom's sensitivity is fleeting, however. Clara's disappointment with her father continues three years into her marriage. Riding with Hugh circa 1900, as guests in her father's new car, Clara dislikes "the shrill tone of the new age" that is heard in "the purring engine" and in her father's voice (214). Clara prefers to think of "the soft landscape," the walks with Kate "through the streets of Columbus," and "the silent ride" with Hugh "that night they were married" (214). She dislikes how the noise of technological progress has superseded the natural quiet that encourages human communication. The automobile tour makes Clara think of childhood rides with her father. She remembers that he did not speak much but occasionally "words did come to him" (214). Clara thinks that "[e]verything worth while" has been separated "very far from the old sweet things" by "machines" (215). As Clara mourns the disappearing old ways, her father waxes on in the driver's seat about "the mechanical triumphs of the age" (216). However, Tom's remnant of humility impels him to share the recognition for the industrial growth. "There's enough credit for all," he announces (216). But his irrepressible ego manifests in his conclusion. "All I got to say for myself," Tom proclaims, "is that I saw the hole in the doughnut" (216). Tom's success as a

farmer and businessman is indisputable, though his fractured relationship with his daughter remains. Yet Clara's difficulty at making connections with others including her father preceded the arrival of Hugh's inventions. Clara's lack of functional family relationships has repressed her understanding of her status and purpose as a daughter and woman. However, a father figure aids her just as a foster family helps Hugh.

Family friend and veteran farmhand Jim Priest gives Clara paternal protection, empathy, and guidance that strengthen her self-confidence. Originally he was responsible for "attacks of teasing" (92) on Clara at the kitchen table though he "had never said anything that had in any way hurt her" (93). Moreover, he demonstrates his wisdom in dealing with Clara when he halts the kidding of her by the other farm workers "when she was no longer in the mood" (92). Jim explained to the men, "Now we'll have to treat her in a new way," and he "brought the practice to an end" (92). Jim demonstrates affinity for Clara in his own jests as well as in his bringing them to a stop out of respect for her maturation.

One poetic comment from Jim about Clara is particularly meaningful to her self-esteem. She hears him tell the men, "The sap has begun to run up the tree" (92). The words confuse and fascinate Clara although she gathered "something of the import of the words" (93). She suspects they are "in some way connected with the idea of love," for they seem "the kind of words a lover might use in speaking to his beloved" (93). The saying evokes "The sap of youth

shrinks from our veins" (1.1.6.99) from Edward Bulwer's 1832 novel *Eugene Aram*, and suggests the natural transition into adulthood.

Clara's romantic frame of mind leads her to imagine Jim as a youth kissing a girl (93). And her incipient idealism sees Jim as a lover and a guardian, for she "wished he were still young" (93-94) and "half wished" that he "had been her father" (93). Clara's immediate environment in which bees "heavily laden with honey flew in droves about her head" (93) convey her new consciousness of sexuality. She thought that Jim's words "seemed a part of the same song the bees were singing" (93). Therefore, Jim becomes "a figure full of significance" to Clara with this cryptic observation that stimulates her procreative desires (93). The mysterious expression causes her to reevaluate the avuncular field hand: "A hundred minor points in the character of Jim Priest she had never thought of before came sharply into her mind" (93). Jim's earthy sentiment affirms Clara in her lonely and confusing time of maidenhood.

Jim's kindness encourages Clara after her estrangement with her father. Jim considerately buys her "a costly present" while at the horse races in Cleveland (92). He takes Clara to the train, helps her with her baggage, and waits with her until it arrives when Tom's headache prevents him from seeing Clara off to college (100). In doing so, Jim displays affection towards Clara that her father does not. He kisses Clara "on the cheek" and tells her, "Good-by, little girl" (100). Clara is "so grateful" that "she could not reply" (100). Jim's expression of "rough gentleness" helps "to take the growing bitterness out of her

heart" (100). His comforting presence nudges Clara towards Tom, for in light of Jim's tenderness she "wished she had not left the farm without coming to a better understanding with her father" (100). And Jim expresses joy when Clara returns from Columbus. He leaves his horses in the cornfield and "took both her hands in his" when he first sees her (123). Jim inquires about Clara's engagement status but "his asking did not annoy her" (123), even though she is flustered by her father and aunt's fixation on the topic (122). In fact, Clara laughs to Jim and says, "I seem to have made a failure of going away to school. I didn't get me a man" (123). He reassures her that she will have a husband soon because she is "the marrying kind" (123). Jim's is the only consistently positive male influence in Clara's life during her coming of age.

Jim and Tom's different opinions on horses illustrate their dissimilar approaches to Clara. The two men bond over "their common love of fine horses" (173). Tom claims that "the debonair, the dramatic, the handsome" Bud Doble was "the greatest of all race horse drivers" while Jim sides with "shrewd and silent" Pop Geers (172). Jim admires that Geers "doesn't think of the people but of the horse" (174). He also likes that at "just the right time" he "lets the horse know" when to make his move (174). Tom thinks about how Clara makes him look to other people just as Bud Doble cares more about his own image than he does the horse. In contrast, Jim is concerned about Clara for her own sake just as Pop Geers thinks of his horse more than his own reputation. Tom selfishly deals

with Clara in terms of his ego while Jim respectfully treats “the mare colt, Clara” (175) as an individual with inherent worth.

Jim’s past shapes his understanding of decisions and consequences. His mother exhibited “nobility and sacrifice” but his father was “a liar and a rascal” (184). Jim’s acknowledgement of these disparate influences from his Pennsylvania family (184) is evident in the preparation for his drinking. He drinks regularly and afterwards “dreamed of becoming one who went through life beating people out of money, living by his wits, getting the best of every one” (185). Jim gets drunk alone to avoid the temptation to exploit others during a high. He chooses “not to go to town with the other men on Saturday afternoons” but has one of them bring him “a half pint” (91). His time to drink is “[o]n Sunday afternoons” when “he crawled into the hayloft” and “drank his weekly portion of whisky” (91). Jim deliberately isolated himself when he drank because he humbly “knew his limitations” (184).

Jim’s Civil War experience similarly illustrates his unwillingness to capitalize at the expense of others. He was unsuited for war and “found himself physically unable to stand up before the enemy during a battle” (184). Therefore Jim circumvents the draft through “the business of enlisting and deserting” (184). He hid in the woods with a bottle of whisky and waited for “his chance” where he “pretended to have been shot” and then “crept away and hid himself” (184). Jim encounters Grant who is on his way “to receive Lee’s surrender at Appomattox” (173). The Union general had sent his aides ahead because “[h]is

clothes were covered with mud and his beard was ragged” and he knew that Lee “would be dressed for the occasion” (173). Grant wanders in the forest to where Jim is and, “thinking him dead,” takes his whisky (173). Their eyes met and “[f]or a moment they had something between them” because “[t]hey both understood that bottle of whisky” (173). Jim identifies with Grant’s unpretentious concern for the battle won over the personality-driven formalities of war. Moreover, he shares with Grant a willingness to acknowledge personal failing.

Jim faithfully serves Clara at her engagement as a surrogate father. He protectively approaches her and Hugh on their way to the justice of the peace thinking she is with Alfred Buckley (168). Assured that she is not under duress, Jim sweetly says, “You’re a woman now, Clara, and I guess you know what you’re doing. I guess you know I’m your friend” (168). Clara responds by “laughing nervously” and says, “This is Mr. Hugh McVey and we’re going over to the county seat to get married. We’ll be back home before midnight. You put a candle in the window for us” (168). In contrast to the resentment and accusation of her father, Jim graciously affirms his confidence in and support for Clara. Meanwhile, Tom is unavailable to help Clara as she departs to be married because he is “fooling around” with a woman in town (175).

Jim endeavors to celebrate Clara’s wedding like a father. He is eager to inform Tom about Clara’s news but “could not find his employer” (175). However, he goes to milliner Fanny Twist’s home after he “remembered a tale he had heard whispered” (175). Jim convinces Tom to do a surprise party for the

newlyweds, and later that night, with the gathered crowd “in winelit suspense,” per Clara’s request (168), he “placed a lighted candle” in the window of the darkened house (179). Having grabbed “a second bottle of wine,” he then goes “to lie on his back beneath a bush” and waits for the returning couple to signal the others (179). Later Jim enlivens the party once he discerns “the riotous laughter and story telling had ceased” even though he is “not invited” to sit at the table (184). He fears the celebration is “becoming a frost” (186), so he performs “a heavy-footed jig” that draws “[a] thunder of applause” from the crowd (184). Jim’s modest service to Clara and his choice of the right moment to dance and turn her party “into a success” from “a failure” (186) evoke his unassuming heroes General Grant and Pop Geers. The expensive soiree supports the local economy and entertains the locals, but it does not mean much to Clara, for she “always remembered her wedding feast as a horsey affair” (184). Yet she senses how the party reflects “the natures of Tom Butterworth and Jim Priest” although she does not make a conscious connection with their love for horses (184). Jim’s personal involvement on behalf of Clara exemplifies the social allegiance that Clara needs to transcend the barricades of maladjustment.

Poor White’s presentation of industrialism in the context of intermediate associations illustrates the effects of market forces upon personal fulfillment as well as upon calling and relationships. Hugh and Steve are encouraged by difficult family environments and pursue their talents for different ends. Hugh’s amorphous background is greatly remedied by the practicality of the Shepards.

On the other hand, Steve's coldhearted home life leaves him paranoid of a predatory world. Tom's consideration of Clara as a financial liability clouds his judgment and strains their relationship. In contrast, Jim's recognition of Clara's inherent dignity and autonomy contributes to their mutual respect.

Beyond a person's calling and connections to others is one's engagement in the market economy in light of his or her nature, talents, and circumstances. Joe Wainsworth's murder of his tormentor, Jim Gibson, demonstrates the dehumanizing potential of technology amid professional and personal deterioration that occurs in personal isolation. On the other hand, Hugh's virtuous business practices are cultivated in the civilizing atmosphere of marriage and exhibit the capability of the marketplace for wholesomeness.

In addition to the dreams that shape the career paths of Hugh and Steve, and to the walls of resentment and selfishness that damage the relations between Clara and Tom, artisan Joe Wainsworth suffers professionally by the advent of machine-made harnesses. However, his social isolation and unwillingness to accommodate new technology causes him such severe alienation that he violently strikes out at those he considers responsible for industrialism. On the other hand, Hugh improves in his social incapacitation by his marriage to Clara. As Hugh becomes familiar with her he loses his preconceived notions about the theoretical perfection of women and therefore becomes less socially inhibited. This growth in Hugh's realistic outlook helps him to personalize a faceless business competitor and forego patent infringement for the sake of profits.

Hugh's Assimilation Leads to His Professional Ethics

Hugh's lack of socialization with women hinders his ability to have a normal life. His ignorance of females is evident in that he "thought of women as beings utterly unlike himself" (144). He has so little knowledge about them because he "had never seen or heard a man express in any way his affection for a woman" (21) until he works on a farm near Indianapolis in his "three years of wandering" (22). In Bidwell Hugh fantasizes about a schoolteacher he helps at the train station. He is awake "half the night walking about and thinking of the wonderful thing that happened to him" after "her dress touched his arm" (43). Hugh is frustrated in his natural development because he "hungered to have a house and a woman of his own" (42) but does not know how to achieve these desires. In fact, he becomes so disillusioned that "[h]e thought women were for other men but not for him, and told himself he did not want a woman" (144). Hugh's general shyness and inexperience with females makes it difficult for him to have contact with women much less court one.

Hugh's inhibition with women is seen in his experience with Rose McCoy. Even after Hugh makes a hundred thousand dollars from "[t]he car-dumping apparatus" (141) he continues to live at the widow McCoy's house (143). Hugh and the widow's daughter, Rose, fantasize about one another but "had never been alone together" (143). They remain separated because there was a "wall of embarrassment and reserve that kept them apart" (157). Rose teaches at a country school and boards during the week. She was enamored with her

mother's quiet lodger and "dreamed of being the wife of the bachelor Hugh McVey" (143). Rose resembles Hugh because she "was a woman of few words" and "gave herself over to dreams" (143). Like him, she is insecure and imagined "that had Hugh remained a telegraph operator at forty dollars a month something might have happened between them" (143). The narration indicates that Hugh desired to express his feelings for Rose in the months before Clara returned to Bidwell: "Hugh made what was for him an almost desperate effort to approach the school teacher" (145). One afternoon he goes to her room and "raised his hand intending to knock on the door, and then lost courage" (146). Hugh and Rose fail to connect because neither dares to express their feelings for one another for fear of disappointment or rejection.

Hugh's calling benefits his socialization breakthrough. Hugh was "overcome with loneliness" (84) because he "had been in town for nearly two years and no one knew anything about him" (60). The day Steve and Hugh launch their business partnership was for Hugh "the first time in his life he was not embarrassed in the presence of another person" (65). Steve's first words to Hugh are "What is it you're inventing?" (65). Hugh's thought after making a deal with Steve was not about potential success but rather how "wonderful that he had at last held conversation with a citizen of Bidwell" (67). After his status grows, Hugh is "puzzled that his new position in the town's life did not bring him any closer to people" (84). His need for community remains unfulfilled because the only association he has established is with Steve, who came to him as

an entrepreneur. He grasps, "That's what I want a woman for, I want some one close to me who understands things and will tell me about them" (161). He is immediately impressed with Clara, for after he meets her, she "took Rose McCoy's place in his mind" (156).

Through their relationship, Hugh and Clara both overcome their insecurities about the opposite sex. He fears that his heritage is not worthy of Clara. Hugh self-critically thinks, "What would she be wanting of me?" because he remembers Sarah "had called his people lazy louts and poor white trash" (159). On his way to be married he thinks, "I'm a poor white" and "It isn't fitten I should marry this woman" (170). Hugh's heritage makes him feel insufficient to the degree that "[t]he notion that he could ever become a man who would in any way be attractive to a woman like Clara Butterworth seemed the greatest folly in the world" (159). Hugh's natural passivity and excessive reverence for women have inhibited him socially to the limits of loneliness.

Clara similarly recognizes that marriage would remedy her individual incompleteness. She is "very hungry for love," and chose not to return to school because she "did not want to be a professional woman" (152). Clara felt that "[t]here was a creative impulse in her that could not function until she had been made love to by a man" (152). In this way, she sees a husband as "an instrument she sought in order that she might fulfill herself" (152). Clara does not approve of the materialism associated with business, but she "became touched with the idea of the romance of industry" because "[l]ike every other citizen in America she

believed in heroes" (154). This aspect of Hugh appeals to Clara. She considered him "a creative force," and he "became a hero" to her although "she knew nothing" about him (154). Clara's indirect knowledge of him inspires her own imagination for "[h]er mind made up stories concerning Hugh" (154). Clara and Hugh have fancied the opposite sexes as the answer to their own deficiencies. Clara's positive experience with Jim Priest has crystallized the kind of husband she seeks. She is then able to awaken Hugh's moral imagination, which guides him away from the infringement upon another inventor.

Clara's recognition that certain self-interest is necessary for romance helps her accept the self-interestedness that she resented in business. Previously Clara had objected to her father treating her like a ware. However, now she is the emptor in her appraisal of Hugh, for she "looked at him in an absorbed, almost calculating way. It was as though he were a horse and she were a buyer" (158). She fixes her sights on Hugh, and while joining her father and Alfred Buckley investigate business opportunities Clara "managed that she be taken to the factory" (154) as well as "that she be left with Hugh while the two men went to look at the half-completed hay-loader" (155). She thinks, "I could set everything straight by getting him to ask me to marry him" (162). Clara knows that "to marry the town's hero" would elevate her "not only in her father's eyes but in the eyes of every one" (163). She sees that Hugh is different from her father and Henderson and Alfred because "[h]e doesn't scheme and twist things about trying to get the best of some one else" (164). She also notes how he is like Jim

Priest: "The farm hand works," she thought, "and the corn grows. This man sticks to his task in his shop and makes a town grow" (164). Clara admires Hugh because he is not unscrupulous like her father and some of his colleagues. In her respect for Hugh, she acknowledges that the factory has the potential to help Bidwell; and in her artful plans to meet him she recognizes that acting for personal benefit is not automatically selfish.

Hugh overcomes his inhibitions with women and his self-doubt about his background through heroism, which is precisely what Clara wanted. The afternoon that Tom tells Clara that her name is being gossiped in connection with Alfred Buckley she walks to town to mail a letter to Kate to say she is "leaving home and going to work" (163). Clara meets Hugh on the street (161) after he has just overheard the laborers who "wished Hugh had never come to town" (162). As she departs from Hugh, Clara tells him that what he hears about her and Buckley is "a lie" (164). Hugh overhears some workmen discussing the "scandalous story concerning her and Alfred Buckley" (167). Hugh first thinks, "She's in trouble – here's my chance" (167). Mild-mannered Hugh senses a "hunger to strike and even to kill" (167) in order to defend Clara. Hugh marches over to knock on Clara's door, and says, "I want you to be my wife. Will you do it?" (167). Clara grabs her coat and directs Hugh to help her ready a buggy to go to the courthouse (168). Hugh and Clara are "married in less than a week after their first walk together" (165).

Three years into their marriage Clara's discontent with Hugh persists because she "felt that she did not know the man she had married" (205). He remained emotionally repressed. In confusion, she wondered, "Am I a failure as a wife, or is Hugh impossible as a husband?" (205). The communication difficulties that make Clara insecure occur because "Hugh did not want to talk of the work at the shop, but could find words for no other talk" (204). Clara concludes that Hugh's work is responsible for "her husband's inability to talk with her," so she "began to hate all machines" (206). Hugh himself becomes less certain about the consequences of his work following the attack on him by Joe Wainsworth. The incident was like a contagion for Hugh because "a virus had got into his veins" that affected him with "[t]he disease of thinking" (228). He lost his focus and could no longer remain "utterly absorbed in the thing before him" (221). The centrality of work is decreased in Hugh's life, but his capacity to engage the world outside of his vocation remains limited.

Four years after the attack, Hugh has an epiphany in regard to human functioning. Hugh is in Pittsburgh, at Tom's request, to explore a retooling of the hay-loading machine, and to "circumvent" (223) the patent of "an Iowa man who had already made application for and been granted a patent on a similar apparatus" (221). Hugh finds "brightly colored stones" in which "[t]he colors blended and then separated" (224). They bring him "into a new level of thought and action" (225). He thinks, "The gods have thrown the towns like stones over the flat country" but they "have no color" (226). Hugh recognizes that his ethics

do not align with the pragmatism of Steve and Tom. They want to “whipsaw this other fellow through the courts” (222). In contrast, Hugh thinks, “If I never complete the machine, it’s all right. The one the Iowa man had made does the work” (225).

Hugh’s calling contributes to his getting married, and Clara’s influence helps him to order his life concerns. His social awakening enables Hugh’s decision to rank justice and the welfare of an anonymous colleague before the advancement of his own professional and financial success. Hugh apprehends the potential for a more abundant life because of his improved communal bonds. Joe Wainsworth, however, experiences the reverse trajectory. The loss of his wife and vocation leave Joe without social bonds that might alleviate his rage.

Joe’s Isolation Leads to His Professional Calamity

Joe’s tragic descent is propelled by his misguided self-sufficiency. His increased isolation makes him more barbarous while Hugh becomes more civilized from his connection with Clara. Joe’s deterioration begins when Tom Butterworth asks him if he would service factory-made harnesses. Joe angrily tells Tom, “Take the damn things to Philadelphia where you got ’em” because he is “a tradesman of the old school” (35) and resents being replaced by “the new age of iron and steel” (84). Joe’s bitter reaction against the new production methods unthinkingly ignores the opportunities he has to market the superior quality of his hand-made harnesses as well as to create a market for repair

business. Additionally as a recent widower (210), he is without the sympathetic ear of his wife who “always understood everything he did or said” (212). Joe represents the craftsmen who are marginalized by technological replacement. However, Joe’s unfortunate situation is compounded by the lack of social and moral allegiances that could bolster his morale and give him a positive perspective.

Joe’s separation from significant association with others prevents him from participation in the industrial economy. However, his disenchantment with the new ways is mixed. He muses about a nice return on his twelve-hundred-dollar investment in the stock company, and thinks, “If machines kill the harness-making trade what’s the difference? I’ll be all right. The thing to do is to get in with the new times, to wake up, that’s the ticket” (84). Joe is open to change and even funds the plant setter company. One night he goes to speak to Hugh. Joe sneaks into the uncompleted factory and contemplates acts of worship to the lathe that can do “the work of a hundred men” (85). He considers whether “to kiss the iron legs of the machine” and “to say a prayer as he knelt before it” (85). Joe even desires to “touch with his finger the hem of Hugh’s coat” (85). This scene evokes the biblical narrative of the diseased woman who touches the edge of Jesus’ cloak to receive a miracle. However, Joe later overhears a neighbor pray for Hugh and “his new-found faith was destroyed” (85). Because of the supplication Joe no longer imagines “that he alone was doubtful of [the machine’s] success” (85). His receptiveness to the mechanical revolution is short

lived because he is unwilling to accept any moral ambiguity about the new realities. Joe's alternating emotions towards the venture suggest his inability or discomfort with nuance. His fearfulness to approach the inventor keeps Joe ignorant about Hugh's humility and his expectations for the inventions.

Joe's reclusiveness also contributes to the demise of his business and ultimately his mental soundness. He hires self-acknowledged drunkard Jim Gibson to handle the boom work (126). Jim has "a faculty for making money" but unlike Tom Butterworth he is uninterested in wealth (126). He says, "I like to work and scheme for money, but it ain't any good to me when I get it" (127). Instead Jim's satisfaction lies in his "ability to get the best of customers" and in the making of "[q]uick sales and profits" (127). Seeing the potential earnings, Jim importunes Joe to sell factory-made harnesses. "Just shut your eyes and give me a chance," he pleads (127). When Joe refuses, Jim critically replies, "What you're doing in business I don't know" (127). Joe's unwillingness to explain his commercial strategy to Jim or to amicably part ways with him permits Jim to terrorize his traditionalist boss.

Joe's failure to ally with or confront Jim merely encourages his aggressive behavior, which leads to the violent breakdown in their relationship. Jim plans an "experiment" (128) in which he will treat Joe disrespectfully like his employee. Joe is initially perturbed but then considers that Jim saves him from customer interaction. Again Jim avoids honest communication and says, "You do as you please here. Don't you pay attention to me" (129). Joe's passivity

emboldens Jim to go around town and boast that “I’m the boss of the shop as sure as the devil” (130). He proceeds to purchase eighteen factory-made harnesses and hangs them up to humiliate Joe (209). Pushed to his breaking point, Joe takes his craftsman’s blade that is “shaped like a half moon and with an extraordinarily sharp circular edge” (210) and kills Jim by “practically severing [his] head from his body” (211). Joe then uses Jim’s knife to methodically shred the manufactured harnesses “into little pieces” (211). Joe goes berserk with frustration at the new economic order that he feels has excluded him. His despair is unrelieved because he is alone without the understanding of family, friends, or a supportive colleague.

Joe’s capture affirms the novel’s ambiguity with regard to industrialism. His piteousness is evident by Clara’s initial compassion for him. She and Hugh are “deeply stirred” (217) by Tom’s recount of “Jim Gibson’s triumph over Joe Wainsworth” (218) as they ride in Tom’s new car (217). Clara thought Joe represented “all the men and women in the world who were in secret revolt against the absorption of the age in machines” (218). Therefore, she wished “to kill” Jim (218). Additionally she is protective of Joe when Ed Hall threatens him in the back seat on the way to the police station (220). Clara warns Ed, “If you touch him, I’ll kill you” after Ed restrains Joe from escaping and “drew back his arm to strike again” (220). The shocking intensity with which she protects the murderer from a punch reveals Clara’s moral outrage at Joe’s plight. Moreover, Clara is the only one to speak or act on behalf of him since Hugh is virtually

absent during the episode. Joe's cold-blooded murder of Jim along with Clara's righteous indignation on Joe's behalf emphasizes the novel's uncertain attitude toward industrialism.

However, Clara's subsequent defense of Hugh and reversal toward Joe exemplifies the priority of social ties to economic ones. Until Joe exits Tom's car at the police station, he is unaware of Hugh's presence in the front seat.

However, after he saw him, Joe told the inventor, "It wasn't me. You did it. You killed Jim Gibson," and then he "sank his fingers and teeth into Hugh's neck" (220). Joe's attack on Hugh depicts the backlash of artisanship against capitalism.

Clara's sympathy toward Joe is the novel's implicit approval of his position against Jim and Steve. However, Joe's hostility against uncorrupted Hugh transforms Clara's outlook on the old-timer. Clara's ferocious rescue of Hugh points to the dramatic change in her affinities: "With the strength of a tigress she tore the crazed harness maker away from Hugh" (227). She even displayed "the surface brutality of another Ed Hall" when she "threw [Joe] to the floor of the car" (227). Clara had just defended Joe from the thuggish treatment of Ed, and then for Hugh's protection she instantly becomes pugnacious. Her response is not a momentary deviation of character but rather a change in perspective.

The evening of the car ride Clara goes from "hating her husband and father" to realizing that "suddenly she loved Hugh" (227). This dramatic conversion of her thought is "like the passing of a shadow over the surface of a river on a windy day" (227). Hugh's being in jeopardy no longer makes him a

“hero, remaking the world” to Clara but “a perplexed boy hurt by life” (227). This transition occurs because Clara “stopped thinking” (227). In fact, her ceasing to reason about industrialism is described this way: “The thing for which Joe Wainsworth stood and that she had thought was so precious to herself no longer existed in her consciousness” (227). Clara had favored certain ideas associated with Joe like “the peace and quiet” of his shop that she remembered from her childhood (219). Yet he had been only “a tale” (216) to her and not a reality. Indeed this explains Clara’s surprising vigilance toward the comfort of a man whom she knew had decapitated one person and shot another hours earlier. In contrast to the artisan Joe she mythologized, Hugh emerges to Clara as flesh and blood in his sudden vulnerability to Joe’s claws and teeth.

Both Hugh and Joe enjoy the satisfaction of their callings and are materially rewarded for their successes. However, their personal outcomes are inversely correlated to their social connections. Hugh’s social assimilation increases with his marriage to Clara. In contrast Joe sinks into isolation as his professional troubles increase.

Sherwood Anderson’s *Poor White* appeared at the conclusion of the most sustained campaign for collectivism in American history at that time. The progressives claimed that the new economy demanded ideological government on behalf of vulnerable individuals. The novel, however, portrays the industrialism at the dawn of the twentieth century as indeterminate. In a 1931 interview Anderson described “the town as the hero of the book rather than the

people of the town" (Copenhaver). Indeed Hugh's story dominates but his experience parallels those of Steve, Tom, Joe, and others.

Shortly after Hugh meets Clara he overhears "a workingman" opine to his "fat wife" (165):

I tell you what, old woman, I shouldn't have married and had kids," he grumbled. "Look at me, then look at that fellow. He goes along there thinking big thoughts that will make him richer and richer. I have to work for two dollars a day, and pretty soon I'll be old and thrown on the scrap-heap. I might have been a rich inventor like him had I given myself a chance. (165)

Hugh would tell this man that his understanding is backwards. Hugh invented machines so that he could meet people and get married. He helps Clara fulfill her calling to be a wife and mother, and she helps him be a full man and ethical inventor. The laborer disappointed with his situation does not realize Hugh's loneliness and frustrations. Similarly, Joe does not understand the financial and social benefits that Hugh's machines have brought to many but not all. Hugh's inventions and the enterprises they stimulate are "[h]alf hideous" and "half beautiful" in their "possibilities" (41). The inventions themselves are potentially hideous or beautiful based on their social contexts. Industrialism can be beautiful in community-centered surroundings; yet, it can be hideous in individualistic environments. The inventor does not flourish in his success apart from human community, and the disillusioned tradesman cannot survive without the affirmation and allegiance of others. Industrialism benefits or threatens

individuals to the extent they associate with others and are willing “to approach human beings directly and boldly” (144).

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

All I ask in civil life is what you fought for in the Civil War. I ask that civil life be carried on according to the spirit in which the army was carried on.

Roosevelt, *New* 10

There is a vast difference between the type of planning – whether in the large State, industry, or the school – that seeks to enmesh the individual in a custodial network of detailed rules for his security and society’s stability, and the type of planning that is concerned with the creation of a political and economic *context* within which the spontaneous associations of men are the primary sources of freedom and order.

Nisbet, *Quest* 255-56

Public disenchantment with Woodrow Wilson’s internationalism and the Progressive policies of the World War I era turned the American electorate to more conservative leaders in the 1920s. The appearances of *This Side of Paradise*, *Main Street*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *Poor White* in the final months of Wilson’s presidency serves as a summation of the contemporary social order. They cover the prominent topics of the Reform era that included economics, politics, morality, and feminism. The unifying theme of these works is the effects of modern social changes upon individuals and traditional institutions. Yet rather than serve as a celebration of the transformation of the American social scene in the previous decade, they issue a note of caution.

The ambivalent conclusions of the novels suggest that frictions between individuals and their communities are not in the interests of either, and that such antagonisms will not be resolved easily in modern America. Each of these novels closes with their protagonists stoically looking to the future. Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine views the Princeton skyline in darkness, having extricated himself from the Catholic and bourgeois traditions that have shaped his life. Lewis's Carol Kennicott frets to her indifferent husband about their town's unimaginativeness. Wharton's widowed patrician Newland Archer prefers to imagine the woman he idealizes than to reconnect with her. And Anderson's Hugh McVey, accompanied by his expectant wife, enters his home to the ominous blast of the factory nightshift whistle. Amory, Carol, and Archer have rebelled against the family, church, business, class, and town. Hugh's social assimilation has sustained him amid capitalism's allures of individualism, yet he remains troubled by the prospect that industrialism will produce more tragedies like Joe Wainsworth's. None of these characters are wholeheartedly optimistic about the condition of their present social allegiances.

Alienation towards traditional communities often results in desires for autonomous personal freedom and fulfillment, which, in turn, leads to greater alienation. The spontaneous groups that form civil society offer social rewards in return for loyalty to their organizational purposes. Membership in intermediary associations such as families, churches, businesses, social classes, and towns demand obedience and loyalty. Yet the privileges and benefits of fellowship may

be withdrawn if members value their autonomy over the objectives of the group. Amory initially explores his skepticism with his priest but ultimately rejects the traditions of the Church, the family, and the marketplace, only to become more socially isolated. Archer's desire for his wife's exotic cousin reverses his perspective about Old New York morality and nearly causes him to become ostracized from his extended family and social class. Hugh rejects the unethical examples of his business colleagues and honors the patent work of another inventor. And Carol's return to her husband and to her community acknowledges her roles as a wife and mother before her career interests. The choices of these protagonists bring consequences that illustrate the exclusivity of voluntary institutions.

The restricted access inherent to civil society makes possible the moral or amoral, in Amory's case, development of these characters. In his rejection of traditional communities, Amory chooses pragmatism over the traditions of his background. In contrast, Archer and Carol reluctantly remain inside their conventional social boundaries, however, because they prefer the advantages of being inside their communities. And Hugh emphatically values his family and his town over unprincipled business success.

The depictions in these works of personal alienation towards families, traditions, and local ties demonstrate the natural human desires for both moral agency and for communal life. When tensions arise between the norms of individuals and those of their spontaneous groups, the time-tested standards of

the corporate body will ultimately reward submission and discipline rebellion for the sake of the common good. The resistance to traditional institutions in these four 1920 novels of social realism reflects the contemporary challenge to civil society in the wake of the country's shift toward a national community and a totalized State.

This investigation analyzed four novels by prominent authors that appeared in a short span at the conclusion of the Progressive period. Further study of the American novel in light of individual-community conflict that reflects the Progressive-era transition to a national community is needed. Earlier novels, from the 1910s, and later ones, from the 1920s, might be covered. Other authors whose works might be fruitful to this theme include Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Booth Tarkington, and John Dos Passos. Additional study might examine how various intermediary associations such as the family, church, town, and university provide possibilities for the moral formation of individuals in similar and distinct ways.

Nisbet's insight remains crucial: the human need for community will be satisfied, either through consent to the authority of local intermediate bodies or through surrender to the coercion of the political state. The recent history of the federal government from the Progressive era through FDR's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society into the twenty-first century supports this conclusion. The continued growth of the national community at the expense of local communities in modern American life confirms the need for further

discussion about the importance of the ordered freedom of civil society, which fosters the moral development that benefits individuals, associations, and the nation alike.

NOTES

Chapter One

¹ When capitalized, “Progressive(s)” and “Progressivism” indicate the philosophy of the political reform movement in early-twentieth century America and its supporters. References to the general advocacy of progress are not capitalized. And references to the American political party founded in 1912 are explicit and capitalized (“Progressive Party”). The concept of a uniform Progressive “movement” is contested. Therefore, “era,” “period,” and other words associated with “Progressive” are not consistently capitalized as proper nouns in the literature and are not here.

² Unless noted otherwise, all emphases are in the original texts.

³ Roosevelt coined the term “muckraker” in his “The Man with the Muck Rake” speech on April 14, 1906, in Washington, DC.

⁴ Warren’s article addresses the contemporary concern of “reformers who claim that the Court stands as an obstacle to ‘social justice’ legislation” (294). For these Progressives, the *cause célèbre* was *Lochner v. New York* (1905), in which the Court overturned the New York law that limited bakers to ten-hour workdays. The most prominent reformer unhappy with the Court was Theodore Roosevelt, who repeatedly denounced the “Bakeshop Case” in his 1912 campaign as an example of judicial tyranny that ignored the popular will.

⁵ Division in the Republican Party, along with the death of Taft running mate James S. Sherman a week before the election, allowed the Democrats their first victory in twenty years. And never before in American history had third and fourth candidates been so successful. Roosevelt’s Progressive Party finished second, winning eighty-eight electoral votes to the Republican Taft’s eight. And the fourth-place Socialist Party, with perennial candidate Eugene V. Debs, achieved its best results ever, with six percent of the popular vote. The three most reform-minded candidates – Roosevelt, Wilson, and Debs – won a combined forty-six out of forty-eight states and seventy-five percent of the popular vote. Socialism grew nationwide. There were 450 socialists in office, five socialist daily newspapers, 262 weeklies, and its largest publication, *Appeal to Reason*, circulated 760,000 (Milkis 231).

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