ISLANDS OF THE PLAIN: PURSUING UTOPIA IN THE FICTIONAL SMALL TOWN

by

ZACHARY P. PERDIEU

(Under the Direction of John Wharton Lowe)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the frontier fictional small town as a utopian space across a diverse American canon. With "no-place" and island-like qualities reminiscent of literary utopian settings, the fictional frontier small town is uniquely positioned to negotiate the ideals of the nation, and American writers have taken notice. Countless American writers have engaged with the setting to interrogate and complicate American utopian master narratives distilled in the space. In establishing the shared attributes of utopian and small-town fiction, I posit this setting as the definitive utopian space of American literature and position this collective presentation as evidence of an ongoing, fruitless search for an American Utopia that was promised. I map this recurring setting in the work of Sinclair Lewis, Toni Morrison, and Louise Erdrich to initiate the creation of an iconography of fictional towns, which speaks to the layered utopian discourse present in the space. I then trace how historically marginalized groups navigate and are manipulated by America's quintessential utopian form, examining the race, gender, labor, and sexual politics that unfold therein. As a result of this analysis, I look to create a model of the fictional small-town space which can be used as an analytical and interpretive tool for countless other works of small-town fiction.

INDEX WORDS: American literature, small town, utopian studies, frontier, Indigenous

studies, African American literature

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DEDICATION

For my family.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BRINGING THE MUSE HOME

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all

people are upon us. So that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we

have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us,

we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.

- "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop, 1630.

Euro-America's literal and literary utopian pursuits started at the same moment. On April 9th,

1630, John Winthrop delivered his "Model of Christian Charity" sermon as his ship approached

the east coast of North America, introducing the first entry of Euro-American utopian literature.

This sermon acted as "a founding U.S. fiction" (Poll 27); embedded in that fiction, Winthrop's

"City upon a Hill" proved to be the unshakeable, unobtainable founding utopian projection of

Euro-America, as well. It is an image of self-perceived divine chosenness, which came to define

centuries of narratives regarding Euro-American exceptionalism. Inspired by this sermon and the

covenanted village-community that developed under its doctrine, variations of Winthrop's vision

spread across the vast expanse of the American continent in pursuit of the promised City upon a

Hill. As Euro-American communities were deposited across what they perceived as a frontier,

the quintessential utopian form of the nation was forged, defined, and tested. The history of these

utopian pursuits and the inherent contradictions they contain can be mapped through what has

been underdiscussed as one of the most dominant settings in American literary history – the

fictional small town.

Near the end of Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918), protagonist Jim Burden reflects on a single line of Virgil's *Georgics*: "For I shall be the first… to bring the Muse into my country" (Cather 169).[1] Jim's professor explains that Virgil's use of "patria" – "country" – did not in this case mean "nation or even a province, but the little rural neighborhood…where the poet was born" (169). The professor says the line is "not a boast" by Virgil, "but a hope… that he might bring the Muse… not to the capital, but to his own little 'country'; to his father's fields" (170). The professor concludes by stating his belief that, in Virgil's final moments, it was not regrets of work left unfinished swimming around in the poet's mind, but this single, "perfect" line from the *Georgics*: "I was the first to bring the Muse into my country" (170). This reflection on Virgil's final moments might act as a statement on the life and work of Cather herself, as she, too, brought the Muse to her "country," – her little rural town of Red Cloud, Nebraska.[2]

If Cather was trying to bring the Muse home to Red Cloud, what then was she hoping might be discovered there? The small town as a space and image has come to define American exceptionalism (Poll 17). In American literature, the setting has become a preeminent space of utopian discourse, a quality of the genre to which Cather certainly contributes. A short while before his professor reflects on Virgil's artistic purpose, Jim goes out into the pastoral space outside of town for a picnic with some friends, including the titular Ántonia. The group enjoys an idyllic picnic, marveling at the vastness and beauty of the plains. The conversation takes an interesting turn, however, when Jim discusses Vasquez de Coronado, a Spanish conqueror who marched from modern day Mexico up to what is now the American Midwest looking for the rumored Seven Golden Cities (Cather 155)**.** Following this discussion, the sun begins to set

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[1] The Muses were goddesses of art and literature for Virgil's Roman culture.
[2] Red Cloud, Nebraska, Cather's childhood home, is the model for the fictional setting of "Black Hawk" in *My Ántonia*.

behind the horizon, and what has become one of the most iconic images of American literature follows. Jim and his friends watch as the sun sets on the plains. The scene around Black Hawk is described as "shimmer[ing] in gold" under a "gold-washed sky" (155, 156). In that moment, Black Hawk seems to be the metaphorical culmination of that search for a city of gold Jim had just discussed, of the pursuit of Euro-America's utopian promise on the plains of North America. The moment shifts quickly, however, as a rogue plough sitting on the horizon is captured in the red orb of the setting sun. The shadow of the plough grows to an impossible size, casting a literal and mythic shadow over the frontier, until the sun completes its journey and shadow and plough shrink back to their diminutive stature. It is a scene which distills much of the thematic undertones of frontier small-town literature across the American canon; homesteading Euro-Americans contending with what their labors on the frontier mean, contemplating the vastness and beauty of a space made empty by their colonizing advance across the continent, in search of the promise of an American utopia waiting to be unearthed somewhere in the uncharted expanse of North America. Returning to the discussion about Coronado, Jim posits that, despite what the history books at his school say, Coronado had, in fact, made it at least as far north as Black Hawk. Jim's evidence is a Spanish sword uncovered in town by a farmer. Jim unwittingly insinuates with this information that Black Hawk is most certainly *not* an analogous counterpart to the oft-pursued city of gold, as Coronado's search was deemed fruitless, with the explorer dying "in the wilderness, of a broken heart" (155).

Indeed, this desire to "bring the muse to my country" as outlined by Cather and the reflection on what might be discovered or forged in that country could be said to play a formative role on 20th century American literature at large. Many authors like Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, and Ernest Gaines followed suit by fictionalizing their own hometowns as a

setting for their work.[3] Other American writers took inspiration from communities they called home but located their setting elsewhere. Writers from both of these groups piece together various raw materials of the small-town space to create new iterations of the quintessential Euro-American community form, only to locate it somewhere within the real geographic space of America. Fictional small towns like Cather's Black Hawk thus act as amalgams of real, distinctive regional details that become something unreal, even mythological, reminiscent of Alexander Gerard's description of Homer's *Chimera*: "When Homer formed the idea of the Chimera, he only joined into one animal parts which belong to different animals; the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent" (qtd. in *Archaeologies* xii).[4] Fictional small towns are pieced together with bits of reality, but, in their construction, they become something new – a speculative, eerily familiar "no place" capable of acting as both representative of reality and as a distillation of American ideals disconnected from that reality. The setting acts as a sense-making form through its familiarity while also being capable of embodying mythic proportions. In this malleable dual existence, the fictional small town became an orientating paradigm of 20th century American literature where America's utopian ideals were tested.

   This project examines the role of the fictional frontier small town in American literature as a utopian space across a multi-ethnic literary canon. Mirroring the "no-place" and island-like qualities of many literary utopias, fictional frontier small towns like Cather's Black Hawk have become the definitive setting of American utopian discourse. Forwarding John Winthrop's "City upon a Hill" as the founding utopic projection of Euro-America, I will explore how American writers challenge hegemonic cultural (and literal) conquest by co-opting Winthrop's model and

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[3] Anderson's Winesburg is based upon his hometown Clyde, OH; Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County upon Lafayette County, MS; Lewis's Gopher Prairie upon Sauk Centre, MN; Gaines's Bayonne, upon New Roads, LA.
[4] In his seminal text, *Archaeologies of the Future*, Frederic Jameson uses the construction of the Chimera to imagine the invention of utopian spaces broadly.

upsetting its utopic assumptions. For non-Euro-American communities, Euro-American utopian

pursuits were often antithetical to their own prosperity, however. When writers of color engage

with the fictional small town, it is often presented as an antagonistic force. A diverse critical

survey of this setting would thus deliver a layered, complicated, and often contradictory

iconography of American utopian pursuits. Through analysis of three writers whom I have

identified as central to the setting's outsized role in American literature – Sinclair Lewis, Toni

Morrison, and Louise Erdrich – I look to initiate such a project, providing a framework for how

the utopian qualities of fictional small-town literature can be analyzed and mapped. I will map

this recurring setting in the work of these three authors to create a layered model of the fictional

small town which resembles a utopian-island form; a model which can be used to analyze other

works of small-town fiction. I will then trace how historically marginalized groups navigate and

are manipulated by the small-town space, examining the race, gender, labor, and sexual politics

that unfold therein. The following questions guide my analysis: what utopic ambitions do these

representative communities hold, and what dystopic realities manifest as a result? I will conclude

that the collective rumination of the small-town setting by American writers distills a history of

exploitation and alienation for marginalized populations inherent in America's founding utopian

pursuits.

Euro-American Utopian Master Narratives

Early Euro-American utopian master narratives had a formative impact on the process of

European colonization of North America, and the small town quickly became a vital component

of those narratives. Winthrop's Massachusetts Bay Colony, along with the Pilgrim Plymouth

Colony established a few years prior, created an archetypal model, both physically and

philosophically, which many early New England communities mirrored. Winthrop's model,

imbedded with the structural debt it owed the nearby Pilgrims, constituted a "society of expectation," founded upon a pursuit of the "final establishment of a utopian Christian community" which continued to motivate Euro-Americans for hundreds of years (Smith 8). Page Smith summarizes Winthrop's model as:

> composed of individuals bound in a special compact with God and with each other. The ties extend vertically within the society, uniting the classes and the society to God. This community, so covenanted, was the unique creation of New England Puritanism. It found an ideal social form in the township, modeled on the English original. Adopted self-consciously by the Puritans, it became the matrix into which innumerable communities were poured (6).

This was the crucible in which both Euro-America's founding utopian model and its practical settlement matrix was forged. These communities, spreading, initially up the eastern coast of North America, were defined by this "vertical line" binding the individuals to each other and upward to God. This connection was originally solidified by a literal pact that each member must sign, a covenant that was not "a vague theological formulation but a specific compact, signed by all communicant members of the church, stating their expectations as members of a Christian community" (Smith 8). This social form created a panoptic system of community observation where the "individual had to be concerned not only with his own behavior but with that of the total community," as "one's own sins imperiled the group" (7). Each individual's actions stood as both the promise and the threat of the community, and "failing to observe the strict demands of the covenant" could "bring down God's wrath upon one's neighbor's as well as oneself" (Smith 8), situating each individual in the community as both beholden to and purveyor of an observational society enforcing its own covenant.

Smith, author of one of the earliest expansive works on the history of the small town in America, contends that Winthrop's model could "reproduce itself almost to infinity once its essential form had become fixed," whereby "each new community was simply a congregation produced as fission from the old community" (Smith 7). Following the relative success of Winthrop's community, New England settlers, "related by various ties to Massachusetts Bay colonists," founded colonies along the eastern shore of North America resembling both the literal and aspirational model of Winthrop (Herron 16). A group of families would move together to a new place of settlement and create a new congregation, mirroring the model of their parent community, traceable on back to the original. But this "Puritan imprint" (3) as Smith calls it, did not disappear with the passage of time nor the distribution of the model across the North American continent. As Euro-Americans began to expand from the earliest settlements on the East Coast, the Puritan mindset of being a "chosen people" transferred to a broader Euro-American mindset (Horsman 3).

The utopian impulse present in Euro-Americans as they began to colonize North America, distilled in Winthrop's City upon a Hill, slowly became codified in the laws of the United States. Charters like the Land Ordinance of 1795 and the Bill of Rights in 1791 set the stage for Western conquest. Such laws worked at "converting revolutionary idealism into practical devices of government for both the older communities of the East and the newer ones of the West" (Merk 5). As had been true for Europeans since the days of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the utopian pursuit drifted ever westward, this time driven by another of Euro-America's utopian master narratives – Manifest Destiny. This new master narrative had many of the familiar markings of the City upon a Hill: a self-perceived divinely chosen people, who would establish an Earthly Christian paradise on the North American continent (Stephanson 7-11). After colonies had been

established up and down the coast, colonizers began to march west, "carr[ying] into Western lands their ideas and type of social organization" (Herron 148). On this march west, Winthrop's model evolved from a literal covenanted community with vestiges of the English village into the quintessential American social form; the small town. As the evolutionary heir to Winthrop's model, the small town became the primary social form used to colonize and conquer the West. From the cradle of Euro-America at Jamestown and Plymouth to the West Coast, "hundreds of small towns grew with each frontier until the rise and expansion of the Pacific coast towns marked the last line of geographic progression" (Herron 21).

Even after the "Puritan break" a turn away from the literal covenanted model, these initial utopian projections served to "invest American nationality with a 'symbology' of exceptionalism or separateness which has survived remarkably intact" (Stephanson 4). In the process of Western conquest, the remnants of Euro-American utopian master narratives thus became imbedded in the small-town form, which itself eventually became a foundational component of those narratives. The small town, a seed for the pursued City upon a Hill, became the markers of progress for Euro-America's western front, as Smith writes: "the organization of America's vast interior space was accomplished primarily through the small town, appearing in its archetypal form as the covenanted community, and re-enacting that covenant with the establishment of every new town" (11). With their perceived destiny in mind, Euro-American conquerors pushed against their western frontier and planted, like Puritan Johnny Appleseeds, both the physical model and the philosophical social structure which sprung up across the American Middle West and onward. As I will demonstrate shortly, following in the wake of this progress of small town's across the continent, fictional small towns began to dot the literary landscape, as well. As such,

the small town and its fictional literary counterparts are the remnants of Manifest Destiny, the deposits of the Euro-American utopian pursuit invading the continental expanse.

Also traceable in the fictional frontier small town is the evolution of a new covenant. This defining and organizing center for the earliest Puritan communities of Jamestown and Plymouth was a literal contract signed by all members of the community agreeing to observe a discipline outlined by the tenets of a Protestant God. Such a center-out form remained central to the Euro-American settlement model even after the literal contract form fell to disuse, as Smith explains that America's "self-conscious creation of the complex social form of the true community was made possible by the covenant and its later substitutions" (Smith 15). While the literal covenant slowly faded, the small towns of the American West remained defined by a center-out model. This new covenant took the form of what has evolved into one of the most prominent symbols of American myth-making – Main Street, which retains a Puritan imprint while incorporating new American master narratives, like capitalism, into the new center.

Smith argues for the existence of two types of small towns; what he calls cumulative and colonized. According to Smith, a colonized town is an intentional community settled by "relatively homogenous ethnic and religious groups," and cumulative towns were "not the result of any prior plan, whose growth was cumulative and often fortuitous" (17). In Smith's interpretation, the former category were spaces of American exceptionalism, and the latter were not. Many critics, Ryan Poll chief among them, have expanded upon or challenged Smith's categorization of towns since his work was published in 1966. The small town as an image in American discourse has certainly evolved since then, but even upon its publication, Smith's project seems to ignore the broader system of Western invasion which motivated those small towns. To say economically motivated frontier towns were not a part of both localized and

national intentional plans is to ignore the meticulous schemes surrounding Manifest Destiny and Western conquest. Furthermore, the economic motivation of those towns became a defining aspect of the Euro-American capitalistic identity.

The frontier fictional small towns of American literature present this evolution, where the capitalistic motivations for Western conquest are incorporated, alongside narratives of racial and religious exceptionalism, into the Euro-American utopian mythology. As I will demonstrate in my forthcoming analysis of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, the frontier fictional small-town of American literature acts as the evolutionary heir of Winthrop's City upon a Hill, organized around an implicit covenant where the "dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map" (Lewis 132), with Main Street at its center instead of God. This history and evolution of Euro-American utopian master narratives is traceable in the pages of America's literature where this founding and definitive utopian form has been poked, prodded, and found wanting. Laden with this utopian baggage, American writers engaged with the small-town space looking to unpack it.

<center>Trends of Small-Town Fiction</center>

Understanding the fictional small-town genre, broadly, as a collective rumination on America's utopian pursuits, calls for a reassessment of the trends as outlined by scholars. By the time Cather's fictionalized Nebraska towns hit the American literary scene, the small town was long established as a prominent setting – one that had existed since the earliest days of an independent American literature. Smith contends that "until the [1950s] the overwhelming majority of American novels… had a small-town setting" (258-259). Even before the rise of the novel, writers like Winthrop, Timothy Dwight, and Philip Freneau documented, in various genres, the early days of the American colony, turned village, turned town. These names and many others defined the early days of the small town in American literature, grounding the

setting, unsurprisingly, in the New England village. From this starting point, the small-town genre mirrored the spreading pattern of Euro-American conquest across what is now the United States.

The western spread of the fictional small town away from the cradle of the eastern seaboard began as early 1823 with the publication of James Fennimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, which considers a fictional Templeton, New York.[5] From here, a slow trickle of formative small-town novels built to a deluge. In the wake of Cooper's book came Mary Clavers's *A New Home* (1840 – featuring a fictional town in Michigan) and Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871 – Indiana), and by the 1880s, fictional small-towns could be found on every corner of the literary landscape of the Middle West. Works like E.W. Howe's *They Story of a Country Town* (1883 – Kansas), Joseph Kirkland's *Zury* (1887 – Illinois), Alice French's *Stories of a Western Town* (1893 – Iowa), Mary Harwell Catherwood's *The Spirt of an Illinois Town* (1897), Booth Tarkington's *The Gentleman of Indiana* (1899), and Zona Gale's *Friendship Village* series (1907-1919 – Wisconsin) marked, in both time and space, the advancing Western invasion of Euro-Americans and mapped the expansion of America across the plains, bringing with it deposits of a watered-down brand of Winthrop's philosophy and establishing what I call islands of the plain.

This particular era of the genre falls into what Carl Van Doren has called "the cult of the village" defined by a championing of the small town's "delicate merits" and "digging into odd corners of the country for persons and incidents illustrative of the essential goodness and heroism which… lie beneath unexciting surfaces" (146). Van Doren, however, asserts that 1915 saw a

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[5] Cooper's *The Pioneers* fictionalizes the New York town of Cooperstown, founded by Cooper's father. Central and western New York were some of the initial thrusts Wests by Euro-American conquerors. See Herron page 154-159.

dramatic turn in the genre to what he coined "The Revolt from the Village," brought on by the publication of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (Van Doren 146). The Revolt, in Van Doren's account, is defined by the antithesis of all that makes the "cult" setting wholesome and idyllic. Van Doren presents Masters' setting as one where "sex slinks and festers," spirituality "dwindles and rots," and "degenerate sons and daughters of a smaller day" embody "the purposelessness and furtiveness and supineness and dullness of the village" (149-150). It was this depiction of one of America's defining settings that Van Doren claims inspired the turn away from the cult of the village and influenced works by the likes of Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. While I certainly contend that the turn from cult to Revolt was not quite so stark, nor that every "cult" novel is absent some attributes of "Revolt" or vice versa,[6] a formative change to the genre does occur in this era identified by Van Doren. The disillusionment with "the village" and all that it represented should instead be identified as a collective reaction by Euro-American authors to the perceived failure of the mythic utopian promise of America, brought on by the disappearance of the American frontier.

When Master's *Spoon River Anthology* hit the literary scene in 1915, Western conquest was, for all intents and purposes, over. When Arizona was granted statehood on February 14th, 1912, that last acre of America's continental frontier had been incorporated. The West, for the descendants of the New England settlers, anyway, was won. The Western utopian promise had been pursued right up to the golden coast of California, where it disappeared into the ocean. Many of the early works belonging to the "Revolt" era, including Cather*'s Great Plains* Trilogy

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[6] Herron cites Howe's *The Story of a Country Town* (1883), published more than three decades before *Spoon River Anthology*, stating that Howe's book "departed from the stereotyped novel of sentiment then flourishing" and "lacked the traditional glorification of village virtues" to "instead…grimly portray the most unpromising small-town living conditions" (Herron 209), though Van Doren addresses this complication of his assertion by stating that the village was "sacred" in that time "in spite of E. W. Howe." (147). Elsewhere, however, Van Doren notes, that Revolt writer Sherwood Anderson "still cherishes memories of some specific Winesburg" despite having "detached himself from the cult of the village" (Van Doren 156).

(1913-1918), Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), Lewis's *Mainstreet* (1920), and Ross Lockridge Jr's *Raintree County* (1948), are chronologically set, at least in part, during the "cult" era – that is, before 1915 but, all were also published after *Spoon River Anthology*, and thus in Van Doren's "Revolt." This distinction uniquely situates these texts as representatives of American literature's definitive utopian space, as they have a foot in both eras of the genre and of Euro-America's Western conquest; the promise and the outcome.

Works of this era can stand as voice for both the era of hopeful conquest of Euro-America from the characters' perspectives and as a reflective conclusion from the perspective of the author. It is unsurprising, then, that this ultimate death of the frontier coincides with the turn Van Doren posits, where writers before the middle 1910s largely endorsed or bought into the idyllic, even utopian potential of the small town, and those on the other side of that date sardonically lament the space's failure to produce on its promise. In this light, Masters should be seen as simply the initial symptom of a historical development, instead of the germ that multiplied to other writers of small-town fiction. Considered in the historical framework of Western conquest, it is perhaps useful to simply understand these eras of the small-town genre as belonging to points on a utopian cycle, containing, broadly, the pursuit of a utopian result, a disillusionment with that pursuit, and then, with the arrival of later authors like Toni Morrison, Marilynne Robinson, and Louise Erdrich, what I identify as a post-utopic period, where the "promise" of the mythic American small-town is perceived to have been realized, but its fruits are accessible only to some. Together, the various iterations of the fictional small town spread across American literary history create an iconography of American utopia pursuits.

While I certainly contend that most fictional American small towns, from the earliest New England models like Sarah Orne Jewett's "Deephaven"[7] and Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Oldtown," Massachusetts[8] to variations found in the American South in the work of writers like Faulkner, Gaines, Mark Twain, Thomas Wolfe, Lilliam Smith, and Eudora Welty, it is in the frontier works of Western conquest where the utopian nature of the fictional small town comes into the greatest focus. These fictional settings, isolated somewhere in the American frontier and laden with the utopian history of small towns in that space take on attributes replicating the "no place-ness" and island-like qualities of the broader utopian literary genre. As such, the frontier fictional small town has proven to be an ideal space for American authors to propagate, interrogate, and upset Euro-American utopian ideals that trace back to Winthrop's initial projection. Fictional frontier small towns located in and after the "Revolt" era constitute what I term here "islands of the plain," and represent what should perhaps be called the golden age of American utopian fiction.[9] Mapping these islands of the plain introduces a definitive model of Euro-America's quintessential utopian form.

<div align="center">Small Town as Utopia</div>

One need not work hard to identify the fictional small-town as a utopian space. Nathaniel T. Booth posits how the small town "serves a similar function to that of Utopia in More's work" in that it "presents a space in which American ideals can be examined and critiqued in a relatively controlled environment" (14). Herron categorizes one of the earliest entries into the genre,

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[7] A fictional seaport town that appears in Orne Jewett's 1877 novel *Deephaven*.
[8] See *Oldtown Folks* (1869).
[9] America's science fiction writers would surely have something to say about this claim, but I preemptively offer three counters to any such argument: 1) America's small-town fiction perhaps more immediately challenges the idea of an *American* utopian vision 2) Many science fiction critics and writers have worked to exclude "Utopian literature" from science fiction, and 3) American science fiction has a long and prominent history of intermingling with the small town (see Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* [1955], Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* [1950], and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* [1952]).

Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* (1703), "an American Utopia, a poet's dream" (Herron 38).

Similarly, utopian imagery frequents the pages of small-town fiction. These images take the form

of various types of utopia. *Raintree County* is dense with the search of an Edenic scene hidden

somewhere in the marshes around "Paradise Lake" at the center of the county. Similar to Jim's

reflection on Coronado, Cather alludes to a mythic golden city in *Song of the Lark* (1915), when

the protagonist envisions the sand ridges around the fictional Moonstone, Colorado as "glittering

gold out to where the mirage licked them up, shining and steaming like a lake in the tropics"

(68).[10] A character in Lewis's *Main Street* imagines the town disappearing in the future, to be

replaced by "a city more charming than any William Morris Utopia" with "music, a university,

[and] clubs for loafers" which "farmers and his local store-manager" would commute to and

from by monorail when their work was done for the evening (Lewis 172-173). All of these

imagined utopias, whichever form they take, rise up in both the space and upon the foundation of

the fictional small towns which the novels take as setting. Indeed, the imagined utopias are all

foregrounded and thus offer sharp contrast against the social apparatus presented as setting.

These utopian visions speak to the trope of a continued *pursuit* of a utopian reality in much

of small-town literature. This is again where the genre, especially works of Western conquest,

finds itself uniquely suited to act as a utopian form for American ideals, as it is positioned

between two poles of American ideology – the founding "Nation" space of the East, and the

mystifying, endlessly promising frontier of the West. Small-town fiction either written in or

taking place during the waning years of America's conquering of the West are primely

positioned in time and space to "neutralize" these two complex ideas and embody them in its

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[10] Sir Walter Raleigh and others believed El Dorado, or the Golden City, was on the banks of a mythic Lake Parima in South America. See Marc Aronson's *Sir Walter Raleigh and the Quest for El Dorado* (2000).

representative, fictional setting. In context, form, and production, these works share much in common with Thomas More's genre defining *Utopia* (1509).

To begin, like More's *Utopia*, works of the frontier small-town are at the forefront of a new age of discovery for Europeans and their descendants. Fátima Vieira explains how More's work was "inspired by the letters in which Amerigo Vespucci, Christopher Columbus and Angelo Poliziano described the discovery of new worlds and new people" and this "geographic expansion inevitably implied the discovery of the Other (Vieira 4). That "new" world led to the European first contact with the Americas, and, eventually, the frontiersmen of Euro-American conquest became the new explorers inspiring a new age of discovery/colonialism, which then inspired a new generation of utopian writers to populate that space. Vieira continues, "More used the emerging awareness of otherness to legitimize the invention of other spaces, with other people and different forms of organization" (Vieira 4). To accomplish this, More turned to the creation of a fictional island. Faced with a similar "new world," American writers turned to the creation of another "sacred island form" (Poll 25) – the fictional small town. Beyond simply being conceived in similar circumstances, the frontier fictional American small town, in many ways, replicates the content, form, and production of More's original model and can be considered an evolution of utopian literature, instead of just a genre with some utopian attributes, as I will demonstrate.

Lyman Tower Sargent simplifies utopian literature as "stories about good (and later bad) places, representing them as if they were real. Thus they show people going about their everyday lives and depict marriage and the family, education, meals, work, and the like, as well as the political and economic systems" (4). Such a description, without alteration, could summarize the content of any one of the "Revolt" era novels I have mentioned, and, indeed, could serve as a

summation of the history of the fictional small town in American literature at large (itself following the "good…and later bad places" arc through the previously discussed turn from the cult to the "Revolt" era, even). Not unlike utopian literature, the narrative of small-town fiction is often (though, not universally) "effaced by and assimilated to sheer description ("Of Islands" 16). In simple mode of presentation, the fictional small-town genre is highly replicative of the literary utopia. The fictional small-town genre is replete with meticulous mapping of social, political, economic, cultural, and familial systems in the presented community. Indeed, some of the most prominent works in the genre mirror the "visiting voyager" method of delivery of early utopian entries, with an account of a voyager traveling to a new land and subsequently reacting to and describing the life in that uncharted civilization, a trope established by More's *Utopia* and subsequently adopted by the likes of Francis Bacon and Tommaso Campanella. Cather's voyager in *My Ántonia* is young Jim, who is traveling to live with his grandparents in the near-frontier Nebraska settlement of Black Hawk, after growing up in Virginia with his recently deceased parents. The language with which young Jim reflects on his journey at the beginning is similar to that of the protagonists of these utopian works, as he considers his destination "a new world" (Cather 5). Lewis's voyager is perhaps the most famous of the fictional small-town genre, Carol Kennicott, who travels from her life in St. Paul to the isolated Minnesota town Gopher Prairie. Upon her approach to the town, she declares her destination to be "the end of the world" (Lewis 42) and "the newest empire of the world: the Northern Midwest" (Lewis 39). Not all entries into the fictional small-town genre are works of discovery, of course, but neither are those of utopian literature, which evolved to include depictions of characters from within the utopian (or, later, dystopian) society as the primary perspective through which the alternative world is received.

In the light of other formative definitions of utopian literature, the fictional small-town genre continues to hold up under scrutiny for membership into the parent-genre. Darko Suvin defines the literary utopia as "construction of a… quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community" (39). Suvin's definition offers an interesting complication, and perhaps, also, a solution to that complication, in considering the fictional small-town genre as utopian literature. Sargent adds to his earlier definition that utopian literature "usually envisions a radically different society from the one in which the dreamers live" (Sargent 5), and it would be misguided to paint small-town fiction as *radically* different from life in an actual American small town occurring contemporaneously with its fictional counterpart. Suvin introduces this complication, as well, with his "more perfect principle" qualification, but it is in Suvin's less extreme definition of the required utopian "otherness" that offers the solution to this complication. While it would be difficult to present any representative survey of American fictional small-town literature as *radically* different from its contemporary reality, many critics argue that "the small town represents America to itself as a kind of idealized state " (Booth 7). Booth goes on to argue that the small town eventually acts as "a fantasy-space where 'ideal' America resided" (17). Poll offers, "the small town has become a national icon that widely circulates in literary, cultural, and political discourses" and "blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, ideology and history, counterfeit and original, general and specific, fiction and nonfiction" (Poll 2, 13). The small town has thus become an idea and an ideal, a "more perfect" representation of the real that "blurs the boundaries between fantasy and real." It is not radically different, only radically idealized. The "different forms of organization" that the fictional small-town genre in American literature depicts is the specter of that City Upon a Hill, a

utopian form which serves the same purpose for American writers that Utopia served for More

by presenting a space where American ideals can be established and upset. Concerned with

similar content of minute social organization, American writers needed a space that could

replicate the unique traits of the utopian genre, and when considering the spaces of utopian

literature, one form takes precedence over all others; the island.

<div align="center">Islands of the Plain</div>

Since the inception of the genre, island-making has been the definitive practice of utopian

literature. Frederic Jameson contends that island-making is the "act of disjunction/exclusion

which founds Utopia as a genre" ("Of Islands" 21), and Gilles Deleuze argues that the creation

or inhabitation of an island is "dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating" (10). This is a

necessary step in creating a utopian space, as Poll explains, because "as an ideological form, an

island is enclosed, protective, and cradling, and it enables the production and reproduction of

fixed knowledge and power regimes" (25). Both ideological and spatial isolation acts as the

foundation of the fictional utopia, for the simple fact that hegemonic narratives, "fixed

knowledge and power regimes," abhor combating narratives. Isolation creates an echo-chamber

for the hegemonic ideology to prosper and reinforce itself. The absence of combating ideological

narratives insulates the society from deviation from the hegemonic ideology and allows the

society to appear "perfect" because it appears organic, obvious – that is, its assertions for social

order go unchallenged, and thus act as the *natural* order of things. Utopian literature is dependent

on island-making to create this ideological and spatial insulation. As Poll asserts, the "sacred,

utopian island form that is ideological central to the U.S. identity and imagination is the small

town" (25). Utopian writers have employed a number of methods to create their island forms,

and the evolution of those island-making practices offers insight into American writers'

fascination with the fictional frontier town.

Early examples of utopian fiction, led by More's *Utopia*, placed their utopias on literal

islands. More's book is delivered as a frame narrative, where a returning voyager named

Raphael, who is said to have been traveling with the real historical figure Amerigo Vespucci (b.

1454), tells of an island society in the New World, called Utopia. The Utopians even found

themselves to be island-*makers* more so than simply island-inhabitants, as Utopia originated as a

peninsula, but the founder, King Utopos, dug a fifteen-mile trench to separate the society from

the mainland. Subsequent works in utopian fiction, like Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602)

and Bacon's unfinished *New Atlantis* (1627) followed More's lead. As all corners of the globe

were mapped over the subsequent decades, however, the trope of the undiscovered island

became untenable, and writers of utopian fiction had to turn to other forms of island-making.

The first turn away from the literal island as the primary means of isolation looked to the

mainland, as utopian writers situated their hidden societies amongst the dense physical

landscape. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) maintains the trope of the discovery of utopic society

during New World colonial activity, while isolating the hidden society of El Dorado in the dense,

unmapped (by the European conquerors, anyway) jungles of South America. Charlotte Perkins

Gillman conceals her utopian society in a similar geographic space in her novel, *Herland* (1915).

This geographic isolation is the route American writers of small-town fiction observe, situating

their settings on the vast, sprawling plains of America. Instead of somewhere in the waters of the

Atlantic Ocean, the islands of the fictional frontier town are tucked in a no-place somewhere in

America's middle; nestled along the fictional Shamucky River of Lockridge Jr.'s Indiana, tucked

in the tilled fields of Anderson's Ohio, on the grass expanse of Cather's Nebraska, or obscured

amongst the archipelago of endless prairie towns in Lewis's Minnesota. When considered alongside this evolution of utopian literature's island-making, America's fictional small towns seem to simply be contributing to a turn in utopian literature, where the waterways all were mapped, the islands all discovered, so new methods of island-making had to be achieved. This reframing of our understanding of the fictional small town fits with an evolution of thought in Western American scholarship, as well, where Euro-American conquest across the American West is now being analyzed as "one chapter in the global story of Europe's expansion" (Limerick 26), and not an isolated, distinctly American event. Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colonies simply became the new London, the Great Prairie Sea the new 'uncharted' frontier, and the small towns the utopian island communities.

Booth takes exception to Poll's positioning of the small town as an "island community," however, especially with the connection Poll makes to Jameson's claim about utopian communities "car[ing] primarily about its contained island form and not with social relation beyond its borders" (qtd. in Booth 12). Booth counters this claim by positing that "More's… Utopia is *not* unconcerned with social relations beyond its borders, though it is certainly primarily interested in its own well-being" (13) and expands on the numerous instances of the Utopians engaging with the outside world. While I agree with Booth's challenge of More's island-form or the small-town island form as an absolute island, I disagree that this is Jameson's conclusion. Booth's challenge misses the broader importance of island-making outlined by Jameson and employed here, which is less concerned with the absoluteness of isolation, and instead concerned with the hegemonic ideology's ability to police and control its island-borders; to decide who and what enters and departs. As I will demonstrate in all three upcoming chapters, the frontier small town island form has ports of exit and entry which both emphasize the

separation from the nation while simultaneously connecting it to the broader utopian matrix of the nation.

This model demonstrates the importance of the island-form for the frontier small town, and it is an importance that is not mitigated by Booth's assertion that the utopian model is not one of absolute isolation. Instead, the island-form allows for control of the borders, which, in turn, creates the components for the propagation of the hegemonic narrative within. The small town is an island-form exactly because of the limited accessibility, its near absolute-isolation. Without these ports of entry and exit, the wayward voyagers of More, Bacon, Lewis, and Cather would have no means of arriving at their islands and reporting on the social apparatus they discover. In other words, no island is….an island. I concur with Booth on his conclusion that neither small towns nor More's island are absolutely "contained," but his premise to arrive at this conclusion is flawed. If his evidence is that Utopia is not an "island community" because the nation "engages in large-scale trade with its neighbors" and "assists them [their neighbors] in governance of their own lands" (13), then he has a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of isolation in utopia – it is not to create a hermetically sealed space – it is to create policeable borders, where the flow of both product and thought can be monitored.

As certain as it is that fictional small-town literature mirrors both the content and form of utopian literature, these two traits are but foundational blocks upon which the most important similarity between the two genres can be drawn: the production of their discourse. As Jameson presents in his essay "Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," utopian literature should not be reduced to "sheer representation, as the 'realized' vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal" (6), a treatment often presented by critics to dismiss the genre and various entries therein as idealized, unattainable fantasy. Instead, Jameson,

in his interpretation of Louis Marin's theory, presents utopian discourse as "a process, as *energeia*, enunciation, productivity" ("Of Islands" 6). Given their shared traits in both content and form, frontier small-town literature is capable of a similar productivity.

Summarizing Marin's conclusions, Jameson presents the possibility of reading a utopian text as:

> a determinate type of *praxis*, rather than as a specific mode of representation, a praxis which has less to do with the construction and perfection of someone's 'idea' of a 'perfect society' than it does with a concrete set of mental operations to be performed on a determinate type of raw material given in advance which is contemporary society itself, or rather, what amounts to the same thing, to those collective representations of contemporary society which inform our ideologies just as they order our experience of daily life ("Of Islands" 6).

Jameson continues to condense Marin's theory by presenting the need to discard the idea of the narrative text as referring to "something 'real' somewhere outside the text to which the latter supposedly makes – or better still, fails to make – allusion" ("Of Islands" 9). Instead, Jameson suggests:

> We try to accustom ourselves to thinking of the narrative text as process whereby something is done to the 'real', whereby operations are performed on it and it is… 'managed' or… 'neutralized,' or… articulated and brought to heightened consciousness, then clearly we will have to begin to think of the 'real,' not as something outside the work, of which the letters stands as an image or makes a representation, but rather something borne within and vehiculated by the text itself, interiorized in its very fabric in order to provide the stuff and the raw material on which the textual operation must work (7).

It is not that a referential "real" does not exist, it is that the text must create that "real" within itself through "obsessive references to actuality" ("Of Islands" 7). To determine the "real" that the small-town literature creates, the "raw material" provided, we must return to Jameson's conclusion that it comes as "collective representations of contemporary society which inform our ideologies," which primes the possibility of a representational textual structure acting as, not just the actual America, but its ideologies, as well. The collective representations that achieve this in the fictional small-town are Main Street and the Church, two apparatuses, working in concert, which contain the remnants, the evolutionary fragments, of Winthrop's City Upon a Hill, both enclosed in a small-town island-form that stands in for the actual America.

Jameson presents the topical allusions in More's *Utopia* as a "ghostly double or phantom England that rises up behind the no-place island of Utopia in the text, a tangible but intermittent historical nation-state to which the scholarly footnotes…make insistent reference, reconstructing it as a sub-text even as they undermine the last chances of the narrative surface to achieve a 'full' representation" ("Of Islands" 9). The "ghostly double" in these small-town texts are created by a distant, though active, United States somewhere to the east, as I will demonstrate in my upcoming chapters. The meticulously mapped (and, often, *literally mapped*, as is the case with *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Raintree County*) frontier fictional small town replicates not only America's founding utopian projection, but a model reminiscent of the very real settlements dotting the American landscape, creating the raw material on which the text will work. But they also embody the pursuit of Euro-America's other utopian master narrative – that of a bountiful, golden American West where a Euro-American paradise can be located. This duality of utopian pursuit, pulled in one direction by the originating utopian thrust and in the other by a mythic,

Eldoradean promise, is perhaps just a continuation of the same dichotomy which inspired More's

work. Jameson translates:

> The blessed isle [Utopia] is located between Ceylon [British Colony in what is now Sri
>
> Lanka] and America, but also it stands outside the toponymic circuit and outside the
>
> trajectory that runs from world to anti-world. It will thus combine – *beyond all space* –
>
> circumstance and diameter, time and space, history and geography, in a place which will be
>
> neither a moment of history nor a sector of the map, a place which will be sheer discontinuity
>
> – a neuter – where alone the island can become manifest once the travel narrative has
>
> demonstrated the perfect equivalence of the two poles equidistant from it (Marin translated
>
> and quoted in Jameson 11).

The fictional frontier small town, as it slowly moves west from America's eastern shore to

obscured spots on the map, replicates this neutralizing island-form, where the two poles are the

America that exists to the east and the Golden City the voyagers of the plain seek (and seek and

seek). This literary structure, the frontier fictional small town, acts then as a representative social

apparatus that "supplies the raw material and sketches out the fundamental social contradictions"

upon which the utopian narrative "must perform its work of transformation and neutralization"

(15).

Similarly to how Jameson describes *Soylent Green's* Manhattan, the frontier small town of

Revolt era literature, should be "…expected to be less a reversal of [the raw material's] ideology

than a confused figural coming to the surface of [its] internal contradictions" ("Of Islands" 13).

This drawing to the surface of internal contradictions is the primary operation of these fictional

small towns, as they do not aim necessarily to reverse the ideology of America's founding

utopian projection with their own, opposite projection, only to upset them. In doing so, they, like

More's Utopia, "function… to provoke a fruitful bewilderment, and to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualizable consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims and structural limits." (12)

Fictional frontier town literature can thus be read as a utopian form, where a projected contradiction of the raw material provided must be identified and neutralized by the text. This results in the presented ideological form, here the mythic American small town, the quested for City upon a Hill, "ends up betraying itself and providing its own self-critique through the very process by which it attempts (in vain) to endow itself with literary and narrative figuration" ("Of Islands" 16). The prominence of the fictional frontier town in American literature, then, acts as a communal version on what Jameson has elsewhere called a "representational meditational" which aims to "[throw] off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet" (*Archaeologies* xii). Or, the small town, as Booth presents it, is a "test-case" acting as "models of America" where authors introduce "stressors… to work through the tensions latent in American life" (Booth 12). In their idyllic, no-place state, the fictional frontier small town acts as a model of America's founding utopian pursuit, that of the City upon a Hill, instead of just America itself, and draws out inherent contradictions of that pursuit.

Throughout this project, I will map a model of the frontier fictional small town which can be used as an analytical tool for other literary small towns. The frontier fictional small town as a utopian model is comprised of four primary spaces: a frontier where the community is isolated and located; a Main Street which acts as the centering, panoptic force which sustains the island-form; a mid-town, where those indoctrinated within the philosophical framework of the island-form reside; and the outskirts, a space which negotiates the inside vs. outside dichotomy of the island-form. While different iterations of the frontier small town may vary on how much

attention each of these component parts receives, the general function of each remains. This model will offer an analytical tool capable of initializing a broader survey of the fictional small town as America's preeminent utopian space. Applying this approach to one of the most dominant settings in American literature presents an opportunity to map America's utopian pursuits, to identify the inherent contradictions therein, and to provoke a "fruitful bewilderment" as we reconceptualize the Utopias we might pursue in the future. I will initiate such a broader survey through the reading of three texts.

In chapter one, "Mapping Main Street: Sinclair Lewis and the Euro-American Utopia," I map the fictional small town of Gopher Prairie in Lewis's *Main Street*, presenting it as Euro-America's definitive utopian model, which speaks to the latent presence of Euro-American master narratives in the small-town space. In chapter two, "No Spot of Ground: The Fictional Small Town and New Black Utopias in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*," I chart how Morrison co-opts the quintessential Euro-American setting to speak to a history of placelessness for Black utopian pursuits in America. In my final chapter, "Reclaiming the Center: Demystifying the Small town and Euro-American Exceptionalism in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," I chart how Erdrich positions the small town as a purely antagonistic and colonial force and counters Euro-American utopian narratives with Indigenous survivance. Taken together, these three works initiate an iconography of America's utopian pursuits through the small town, presenting a history of exploitation and marginalization inherent in America's definitive community form.

Terminology

Throughout this project, I will actively work to decolonize various terms. Unless directly addressing the historical movements of Manifest Destiny, I will call Euro-American movement

across North America "Western invasion" or "Western conquest," taking my lead from Patricia

Nelson Limerick. When speaking of national or group utopian impulses, mythology, movements,

and discourses, I will be group-specific. For instance, the City upon a Hill mythology originated

as an Anglo-American utopian concept. Along with Manifest Destiny, however, it evolved into a

broader Euro-American utopian mythology. As I believe this project, among others, proves,

these movements often excluded, marginalized, and exploited many other American populations,

so it would be inaccurate to describe them as "American" utopian pursuits more broadly. The

term I found most difficult to contend with is that of the "frontier." The space that was perceived

as the frontier to Euro-Americans was no such thing to Indigenous nations which resided in and

were displaced from this space. When discussing the broader utopian discourses of Euro-

America, however, I will continue to call the space a frontier, as that is the function it serves in

their utopian process. I will, however, complicate this positioning of the space by Euro-

Americans throughout my analysis.

CHAPTER 2

MAPPING MAIN STREET: SINCLAIR LEWIS AND THE EURO-AMERICAN UTOPIA

No single author did as much to establish both the utopian-island form of the frontier

fictional small town and the compulsory force of Main Street as Sinclair Lewis. Lewis

sardonically opens his highly influential novel *Main Street* (1920) by explaining that Gopher

Prairie, the novel's fictional small-town setting, could be located anywhere in the United States–

that it is, in fact, "America" manifest (16). Despite being located in Minnesota, amongst the real

Twin Cities and countless authentic prairie towns, Lewis writes that Gopher Prairie's "Main

Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere" and the setting's "story would be the same

in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very different would it be told Up

York State or in the Carolina Hills" (16). Lewis positions this representative Main Street as "the

climax of civilization," the "railway station is the final aspiration of architecture," and the

success of the local hardware store "is the envy of the four counties which constitutes God's

Country" (16). Writing from a collective, satirical perspective of Euro-American exceptionalism,

Lewis concludes this opening passage with, "such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith.

Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress

the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?" (16). By opening his utopian

work with such an address, Lewis introduces the common duality of the fictional small town in

America literature; simultaneously hyper-local while acting as testcase or complication of Euro-

American idealism. Reminiscent of Thomas More's fictional island-community, Utopia, the

fictional small town became a space where American writers conceptualize and negotiate the

ideals and utopian master narratives of the nation. Lewis's *Main Street* condenses this history into a single representative model.

Gopher Prairie and other fictional small towns of American literature are the remnants of Manifest Destiny, the deposits of Euro-American utopian pursuit creeping across the continental expanse. In their construction, the shadow of Winthrop's City upon a Hill remains. With "no-place" and island-like attributes that replicate the qualities of More's Utopia, Gopher Prairie acts as a utopian abstraction and a distillation of a Euro-American Utopia, a literary mapping of the City upon a Hill in progress. Lewis's *Main Street* is the single most influential model of this trend in American literature and should perhaps be considered Euro-America's own *Utopia*, with Lewis acting as its Thomas More, as the novel distills the prominence of the utopian-island form of the frontier fictional small town in American literature and creates a representational model for the continued proliferation of the setting. Lewis's fictional small-town model acts as the evolutionary heir of Winthrop's City upon a Hill, complete with an implicit covenant where the "dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map" (Lewis 132), with Main Street at its center instead of God. Much like More's *Utopia*, Lewis's *Main Street* is the genre-defining work of its era.

<div align="center">Sinclair Lewis the Utopian</div>

An assessment of Sinclair Lewis as one of America's most influential utopian writers is long overdue, and he was uniquely positioned to act as chronicler of Euro-America's utopian impulse, specifically. Like many descendants of European settlers, Lewis's bloodline was thick with access to Euro-America's master narratives, with the shadow of the Puritanical early settling of America and the utopian draw of the West hanging over his familial history. Lewis was descended from Peregrine White, the first English child born in America, on his paternal

grandmother's side, and his paternal grandfather "got the gold itch" and traveled west to

California in 1848, an ultimately fruitless venture to find easy wealth. When the Lewis family

joined the movement west at the tail end of the Manifest Destiny era in 1866, they originally

settled in the Minnesotan town of Elysian, a name which speaks to the settlers' hopes for a

pastoral utopia on the American plains (Lingeman 3).[11] Biographer Richard Lingeman

characterized Lewis's father as possessing "that quintessential New England-Puritan Virtue:

'steady habits'" (6). As the settling and conquering of the West was coming to an end in Lewis's

childhood, he could directly tie his own history to the pursuit of Euro-America's dominant

utopian master narratives.

Lewis was also intimately involved with utopian activity and ideas in many forms

throughout his life. He was an avid reader Edward Bellamy and HG Wells, two influential

utopian writers, the latter of whom Lewis called "the greatest living novelist" (qtd in Lingeman

52). Wells's popularity was rampant amongst Lewis's circle and inspired a sense that these

young American writers were "no longer creatures of the past but creators of the future" (qtd in

Lingeman 52). Lewis wrote a great number of stories characterized by utopian settings and

discourse, including for the magazine called *Nautilus*, a publication of the religious "New

Thought Movement"[12] and "Nature, Inc" a satire set in at a Thoreau-esque colony. Later, Lewis

would publish a more explicit entry into the genre of utopian/dystopian fiction with *It Can't*

Happen Here (1935), which has supplanted *Main Street* as the work of Lewis's to receive the

most contemporary critical and popular attention. Lewis also spent time at several intentional

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[11] "Elysium" is the name of pastoral fields of the afterlife in Ancient Greek religions. Many Euro-American frontier small towns were founded with names alluding to utopian spaces and myths.

[12] It should be noted that many of these jobs were of a mercantile nature, as Lewis would publish short stories to pay the bills. Commissioned "themes" were part of this work, though Lewis did regularly keep company with prominent New Thought Movement figures. See Lingeman.

communities, including an artists' colony at Carmel-by-the-Sea in the California Monterrey Bay area, and, most prominently, at Upton Sinclair's Helicon Hall.[13] Given these circumstances, it is surprising critics have not spent more time considering Lewis as a utopian writer. Even as literary studies have begun to give more serious consideration to genre work, Lewis has most often been considered as a poor representative of America's literary fiction, instead of one of its most accomplished utopians, and as a result the author's literary reputation has suffered.

In 1986, Joel Fisher wrote that "Lewis's critical reputation could not easily be lower than it is at present" (421). For at least the next fifteen years following Fisher's claim, however, the decline in the opinion of Lewis's literary importance continued. The 21st century has seen a slight uptick in critical opinion and attention given to Lewis, thanks in large part to Lingeman's extensive biography altering some discussions of the author's work[14] and renewed interest in Lewis's dystopian novel, *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) following the 2016 U.S. election.[15] All of these discussions about the literary value of Lewis seem to ignore one undeniable fact about Lewis, however; he is certainly one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, and this is largely thanks to the success of *Main Street*.

While Lewis's grandfather came up emptyhanded when he struck out West in search of gold two generations previously, Lewis himself found the bountiful wealth promised by the American frontier in a novel set on the plains of the Middle West, as *Main Street* was a publishing bonanza.[16] This success led to Lewis, although certainly not the first American writer

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[13] See section "Two Yale Men in Utopia," in *Man from Main Street*, ed. by Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane, for Lewis's firsthand account of his time spent at Helicon Hall.
[14] Much of the early criticism of Lewis focused on the inconsistency of his work, with *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Arrowsmith* being seen as a modest peak of literary fiction in a deep valley of popular fiction.
[15] After the 2016 election, *It Can't Happen Here* saw massively increased sales more than 90 years after its original publication. See Waxman.
[16] See Lingeman pages 151-156.

to take the fictional small town or Main Street as setting,[17] playing an outsized role in introducing these spaces to the American conscious as definitively American spaces. At issue with the gap between Lewis's reputation and his undeniable impact is a constant dismissal of the artistic or literary value of Lewis's writing. Like many other writers of popular and genre fiction, Lewis's work is dismissed as overly direct and simplistic. Fisher calls him a "clumsy and overproductive fictionaliser of obvious social problems" (421), and Martin Schorer famously described Lewis, in his own critical survey on the author, as "one of the worst writers in modern American literature (qtd'd in Fisher page 421). The most frequent criticism of Lewis's work is the great variance of quality and inconsistency. Glen A. Love categorized this inconsistency as tied to Lewis's approach to the material, writing that the author "is dull when being positive but delightful when being negative" (559).[18] Lewis's writing frequently justifies Fisher and Love's criticism, but the influence of *Main Street* and Lewis's other work of the 1920s remains undeniable. Contemporaries of Lewis's, including Cather, Anderson, and Masters engaged with similar ideas in their own depiction of the fictional small-town. While these authors have a better critical reputation than Lewis at present, the commercial success of *Main Street*, as well as awards he received in the aftermath of the novel,[19] resulted in Lewis's work piercing the public conscious unlike any of these other writers, establishing the idea of Main Street as a definitively American space and codifying the utopian-form of the small town.

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[17] Lingeman notes that Nathaniel Hawthorne published a short story titled "Main Street," (61) and a great number of writers fictionalized the small-town before Lewis.

[18] Lingeman's biography changed this conversation slightly, by bringing to light extensive journals correspondences of Lewis's which indicate the author's own awareness of the type of literary mercenary work in popular fiction he regularly undertook to make a living. For the early years of his career, at least, the work critics continue to consider Lewis's best is the work Lewis himself saw as important, and the work critics have little use for is that which the author wrote to fulfill a contract or to fund what he believed to be his more vital projects.

[19] Lewis won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, the first American writer to receive the award, and his novel *Arrowsmith* (1925) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, which Lewis rejected.

With his opening passage positioning Gopher Prairie as a symbol of American idealism and exceptionalism, Lewis situates his work as the culmination and distillation of the long tradition of fictionalizing the small town in American literature, explored by forerunners like James Fenimore Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, and E.W. Howe, who had delivered their own testcases of the fictional small-town before Lewis and his contemporaries. When prominent American authors like Faulkner, Wolfe, Wilder, Carson McCullers, Lockridge, Jr., Larry McMurtry, and Welty subsequently engaged with the fictional small-town setting, they did so in the shadow of the national mythology that Lewis's *Main Street* was influential in creating. And when writers of color like Toshio Mori, Morrison, Gaines, and Erdrich subverted the definitive Euro-American utopian form with their own depictions of the fictional small-town setting, it is the mythic figure of Lewis's model which stands in prominent contrast. Like More's *Utopia*, Lewis's *Main Street* serves an outsized role of its genre, and, given the prominence of the fictional small town in 20th century American literature, Lewis's impact is evident at a capillary level. Just as critics do not dismiss More's literary value and importance for lack of perceived artistry of writing, neither should they dismiss Lewis and his impact on American letters.

Main Street is firmly satirical realism, but many of its qualities would be at home in science-fiction. It has the wayward voyager shipwrecked on the shores of an isolated society akin to More's Utopia, the panoptic paranoia of observation of George Orwell's *1984* (1949), the assimilative hive-minding of Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955), and the automaton gendered roles of Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972). Indeed, due to *Main Street*'s contemporary popularity, its likely influence on the latter two is hard to ignore. Both novels can be read as science-fictional metaphors for what Carol Kennicott experiences in *Main Street*.

Main Street, and many fictional small-town works like it, should be read as speculative-utopian fiction in their own right, interrogating the state, trajectory, and the accessibility of American utopian master narratives.

It is not insignificant that much of the criticism Lewis's work has received resembles the same criticism applied to science fiction, or more aptly, utopian fiction. Fisher calls Lewis's writing, "calculably synthetic" noting that "what have been read as limitations are in fact part of a comprehensive and radical intellectual exercise" (422), a description that might have been made 500 years ago about More's *Utopia*. Lewis called himself a "a diagnostician," (qtd in Fisher 423), and this is how his best work should be approached – analyzed for the undeniable impact and role it had as a representative model of a collective rumination pursued by America's best writers on the definitive utopian space of American literature, even if Lewis was not one of America's best writers himself. Through the most critically and commercially successful section of his career, the 1920s, Lewis undertook a project of containing the sprawling ambitions, inherent paradoxes, and realities of Euro-America's utopia pursuits in a practical, representative literary space. Lewis's undeniable value to American literary studies lies in his literary mapping of signature American spaces and symbols and elevating those spaces into American mythology. The accessibility of his language is, in part, responsible for outsized impact his work had in shaping America's self-image, a reality that set him firmly apart from More. More wrote *Utopia* in Latin, creating a privileged barrier of entry for contemporary readers, but Lewis made his "analysis of America in the vernacular… ignoring and thus transcending mode and manner" to "defin[e] America *on its own terms*" (Fisher 424). Lewis's project was responding to the utopian impulses of his time and culture, just as More did before him. While *Main Street* is the first and

most important of Lewis's entries into this project, the author's fascination with Euro-America's utopian master narratives manifested throughout this stretch of his career.

Lewis's follow-up to *Main Street* was the satirical *Babbitt* (1922), where he creates yet another fictional community, this time the mid-size city of "Zenith," further along in its evolutionary development. Zenith is positioned as the aspirational destination into which towns like Gopher Prairie hope to one day become. In the extensive planning stages of *Babbitt*, complete with detailed maps of Zenith and the fictional U.S. state it resides in, Lewis created an intricate founding myth for his fictional city. In these documents, the negotiation of Manifest Destiny and America's continued pursuit of the City upon a Hill go from implicit to explicit. Zenith's founding myth begins in 1792:

> John Dawes White, Rev. Saltonstall Benner, Caspar schnell, William Earthorne and Rufus Chubbuck met on bluff over river (at or near the present foot of the Covenant Street) in a Conclave and signed a Solemn Covenant that Bound 'their descendants in the flesh to the emulating spirit to create a city comely, generous, righteous, and free; devoid of the subtle snares of Mammon and of strife between brother and brother (qtd in Lingeman 175).

Lingeman makes the obvious connection: "The language approximates that used in covenants by the founders of the many seventeenth-century New England towns and emulated by those who moved west. Such covenants were solemn pledges to God that the citizens of the town would live in a law-abiding manner, love one another at all times, and worship the Puritan God" (175). *Babbitt* continues the project Lewis begins with *Main Street*, demonstrating a potential future in the book itself and tying the past of the frontier fictional small town to the social structure of

Winthrop's City upon a Hill. Love notes the evolutionary progress of the City upon a Hill while

identifying a separate conflict in the two novels:

> If *Main Street* shows us the incipient builder deprived of the realization of her goal – a
>
> new town on the prairie – *Babbitt* reverses the presentation to reveal the shining
>
> Midwestern city achieved, but without an appropriate creator to shape or interpret its
>
> destiny. Both novels are concerned with defining humane life for citizens of a
>
> community; both ask at what point in the process of development this humane life can
>
> best be realized. Zenith has clearly gone beyond that point, as Gopher Prairie has failed to
>
> reach it (567).

In these two consecutive novels, Lewis acts as a sort of Utopian-Goldilocks, never quite finding

the Euro-American Island of the Plain that is *just right*. While the fictionalized city of Zenith

hardly had the continued impact as a utopian-model for American literature as Gopher Prairie

did, the former is a useful analytical tool for understanding the construction of the latter, as it

should be taken as a continuation of Lewis's utopian project. Zenith is an extrapolation of the

ambitions of Gopher Prairie, and, as such, it speaks to the new covenant which sits at the center

of Lewis's utopian-island form.

In the opening pages of *Babbitt*, Lewis offers a view of Zenith, which positions it as a

City upon a Hill, just perhaps not the one Winthrop had in mind: "The towers of Zenith aspired

above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone sturdy as cliffs and

delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully

office-buildings" (Lewis 5). Love cites Lewis Mumford's analysis stating "architecture and

civilization develop hand in hand" which results in "the characteristic buildings of each period"

acting as the "memorials to their dearest institutions" (qtd. in Love 567). The evolutionary heir to

Lewis's Gopher Prairie has departed from the covenant with God, typified by churches, and has transitioned to one in contract with office-buildings. *Main Street* is Lewis's initial foray into these ideas, and his most influential; Manifest Destiny deposited Gopher Prairie on the Minnesota plain, and it aspires to be the City upon a Hill promised by Winthrop. In *Main Street*, Lewis crafts a literary cartograph, which documents and models these pursuits in motion. The result is a utopian-island form which stands as America literature's *Utopia*, with this new covenant at its center.

<div style="text-align:center">Main Street: The New Covenant</div>

Briefly, let us return to Smith's description of Winthrop's model, which he describes as "composed of individuals bound in a special compact with God and with each other. The ties extend vertically within the society, uniting the classes and the society to God" (Smith 6). As I presented in my introduction, this social model resulted in a panoptic system of observation where the "individual had to be concerned not only with his own behavior but with that of the total community," as "one's own sins imperiled the group" (Smith 7). Lewis's *Main Street* maintains this short of authoritative, observational order, but the vertical line does not stretch upward onto God, but to the mighty dollar. The promised bountifulness of Manifest Destiny began to consume the Godliness of it. Toni Morrison isolates the dual appeal European settlers sought in the New World, writing, "with luck and endurance one could discover freedom; find a way to make God's law manifest; or end up rich as a prince" (*Playing in the Dark* 34). As Euro-America developed, the latter opportunity began to consume and contain the first – the pursuit of great individual wealth on the American frontier became the pursuit of God, endorsed by God. The dollar did not just chase the crucifix off the map; it became the crucifix.

Contemporary historians like Patricia Nelson Limerick have reframed the very idea of Euro-American expansion into the west away from a romanticized pioneering toward a "legacy of conquest," and a "contest for property… profit… and cultural dominance" (27).[20] Limerick categorizes this conquest as "a literal, territorial form of economic growth" (28), with "the West… providing the prime example of the boom/bust instability of capitalism" (29). These economic aspects of Euro-American utopian pursuits manifest prominently in the new covenant which organizes Lewis's utopian model, where the "dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map" (Lewis 132). Lingeman connects this evolutionary change, what he sees as the central force of American community-building, through the theory of economist Thorstein Veblen, who *Main Street*'s protagonist, Carol Kennicott, reads in the novel (Lewis 282). Lingeman quotes Veblen:

> The country town originates as an enterprise of speculation in land values; that is to say it is a businesslike endeavor to get something for nothing by engrossing as much as may be of the increment of land values due to the increase of population and the settlement and cultivation of the adjacent agricultural area. It never loses this character of real-estate speculation. The businessmen who take up the local traffic in merchandising, litigation, church enterprise, and the like, commonly begin with some share of this real-estate speculation. This affords a common bond and a common ground of pecuniary interest, which commonly masquerades under the name of local patriotism, public spirit and the like (qtd in Lingeman 160).

The presence of this economic interpretation is heavy in Lewis's work, both implicitly and explicitly. Lingeman connects communal impulse of capitalistic production to citing "what

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[20] I will cover this history extensively in my final chapter.

Lewis called boosterism" in Main Street, which "imposes conformity" (Lingeman160). This "common ground of pecuniary interest" thus becomes the new Euro-American covenant, with "church enterprise" still maintaining influence while being co-opted by the new God. *Main Street* maps a utopian-island form designed to maximize that common interest and impose conformity in its name. With this driving social force, Lewis maps a systemically exclusive Euro-American utopia. Every detail about the *Main Street* utopian-island form is directed at reform and control, at the continued propagation of a Main Street philosophy based in conservative, Protestant values, with commerce and the accumulation of personal wealth the most vital trait a citizen can possess. Carol, a naïve proxy for the reader and Lewis's voyager for his utopian work, enters Gopher Prairie believing she is going to transform the drab town into a liberal utopia of art, intellectualism, and communalism, but it is instead she who is being transformed. The Village Virus, as Lewis calls it, is a compulsory force that threatens to infect each individual and morph them into a droll, standard conservative white American. Its vectors are the already indoctrinated, the Main Streeters and Mid-towners, and the small-town island-form is designed like one massive immune system, which can track and respond to all deviations and conversely treat them as the virus, looking to incorporate or expel them. Carol is a foreign body entering the system, and the immune response is strong. The various social structures – marriage, business, community groups, social groups – act as tools to collect data on Carol and realign her. The result is a panoptic and paranoid existence for the naïve and idealistic protagonist.

<div align="center">The Frontier and Utopian Absences</div>

Main Street is the Euro-American Utopia laid bare, and in its absences, it tells of the destruction wrought by the pursuit of that utopia. No narrative of Euro-American utopianism can

be considered fully rendered without a consideration of its absences and the eradicative

campaigns which wrought those absences. *Main Street* opens withsuch an absence: "On a hill by

the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the

cornflower blue of Northern sky. She saw no Indians now" (17). Thus, Lewis reduces an

annihilation, an apocalypse, to five words, "she saw no Indians now" (17). Such a framing

speaks to the *creation* of the first space I outlined as important to the small town's status as a

utopian form by Euro-American conquerors: the frontier. Intentionally or not, Lewis frames his

depiction of a Euro-American utopia with the absence wrought by a destructive Western

conquest which precipitated this coming utopia. Indeed, the line immediately following the

absence speaks to that which has filled that absence: "she saw flour-mills and the blinking

windows of the skyscrapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul," or put another way, shining, towering

cities (17). It foregrounds the utopia which unravels in the pages of the book as a product of

destruction, of conquest. Lewis later confirms the role of these islands of the plain in this

apocalypse, when the founders of Gopher Prairie, "only sixty years ago," were confronted with

the reality that "Indians were everywhere; they camped in dooryards, stalked into kitchens to

demand doughnuts, came with rifles across their backs into schoolhouses and begged to see the

pictures in the geographies" (168). In merely 60 years, a Indigenous population went from

omnipresent to present only in their absence, in the vast emptiness of the plains. This depiction

both contributes to a myth of the disappearing Indian (as presented in *Main Street*, they have not

left, nor were they decimated – Carol simply "saw no Indians now"), and succinctly

demonstrates the callous continuation of this apocalypse in pursuit of utopia, that stretches back

at least as far as America's first utopian writer, Winthrop: "When smallpox devasted the

surrounding Indian population in the 1630s, John Winthrop could thus class it as a divine favor. 'God hath consumed the natives with a miraculous plagey'" (Stephanson 11).[21]

Morrison, one of the pre-eminent writers of the fictional small-town genre whose work I will consider in my next chapter, writes that "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature," and "what seemed to be on the 'mind' of the literature of the United States was the self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the American as a new white man" (*Playing in the Dark* 39). Morrison explains that this identity was forged, in part, in contrast with a European one, but also "through racial difference" of "already existing or rapidly taking form" identities present in the Americas (*Playing in the Dark* 44). Importantly, the site of this developing "new white man" is the American frontier, within what one European settler called "a raw, half-savage world" (*Playing in the Dark* 44). Morrison presents the components of this new white man identity as defined by "autonomy, authority, newness and difference, [and] absolute power," which subsequently "became the major themes and presumptions of American literature" (*Playing in the Dark* 44). These traits are dependent upon a contrast to a "complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism… deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity" (44). While Morrison notes that the American frontier is, in part, seen as a "raw and savage… because it is peopled by a nonwhite indigenous population," her focus is on the role of a "bound and unfree, rebellious but serviceable, black population against which… all white men are enabled to measure these privileging and privileged differences" (*Playing in the Dark* 45).

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[21] Stephanson goes on to demonstrate how another noted Anglo-American writer and shepherd of Anglo-American utopian pursuits shared a similar sentiment hundreds of years later, noting that rum was "'The appointed means' by which 'the design of Providence to extirpate these savages' was fulfilled 'in order to make room for the cultivation of the earth'" (11)

Morrison terms the role of this Africanist presence in white American literature as "romancing the shadow."

The opening scene of *Main Street* demonstrates a similar function and perpetual presence of America's Indigenous populations, especially in Western American literature. Is anything more morbidly romanced than emptying and decimating a land before grandly looking over it and poeticizing its vastness, its emptiness? Someone else's utopia often follows another's apocalypse, after all. This presence appears often as an absence, an echo in American literature, in the names of states and landmarks, like in Cather's Black Hawk," based off the real "Red Cloud," which takes its namesake from an Oglala Lakota leader. This is the shadow cast on Western American literature, what should perhaps be called "romancing the void," and it is the sanguine backdrop of Lewis's reflection on Euro-America's utopian pursuits. Each time Carol or Cather's Jim escapes to the outskirts and marvels at the vast emptiness of the plains, the very isolation which makes their island-community possible, they unwittingly marvel at the destruction wrought by Euro-America's pursuit of its own utopia. Despite the complete lack of Indigenous characters in Lewis's *Main Street*, their presence lays thick on the pages, and, intentional or not, that absence speaks to a deeper truth about Euro-America's Utopia, what it cost, and who is permitted access to it. In its callous treatment of this absence, *Main Street* proves itself a factual representative of Euro-American utopian pursuits.

<div style="text-align:center">Voyagers of the Plains</div>

Keeping to the tradition of the utopian genre of depicting an outsider arriving and responding to the new utopian society,[22] Lewis positions young Carol Kennicott as his voyager. She arrives to Gopher Prairie imagining she is traveling through "the newest empire of the

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[22] See Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*.

world: the Northern Middlewest" (40). It is different than the world she knew, most of which was nearby in St. Paul. The Northern Midwest is a "land of exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos like red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. An empire which feeds a quarter of the world – yet its work is merely begun" (40). Importantly, Carol sees it as the ultimate destination of the utopian thrust west: "It was the end - the end of the world" (42). Much like the explorers before her, both real and fictional, Carol comes wielding ideas of her own utopia only to find that someone else's already exists at the edge of the map. Shortly after Carol's introduction to the narrative, she begins to obsess over the idea of reforming a town. She checks books on town planning and village improvement out at the library, decides she will "get [her] hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful," and spends her time constructing her utopia brick by brick, daydreaming about "completing the roof of a half-timbered town hall" while sitting through her college courses (21, 22). This fantasy is paired with a foreshadowing of Carol's naivety, however, when she imagines a scenario where "one man in the prairie village… did not appreciate her picture of winding streets and arcades, but she had assembled the town council and dramatically defeated him" (22), without realizing that it would eventually be her as the lone objector to the whims of the town's image of itself being soundly though not-so-dramatically defeated.

Carol eventually finds her entry point to one of the prairie towns through Will Kennicott, a country doctor from Gopher Prairie who occasionally visits a family friend of Carol's in St. Paul. Gopher Prairie is a "Minnesota wheat-prairie town of something over three thousand people" (28), which Will champions as dense with "up-and-coming people" in a "a darn pretty town" with "lots of fine maples and box-elders" and "two of the dandiest lakes you ever saw" (29). In courting her, Will appeals to Carol's utopian impulse, imploring, "you say a doctor could

cure a town the way he does a tow. Well, you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does, and I'll be your surgical kit" (33). Despite the implicit warning behind, "if anything does," which Carol ignores, she folds to the dual appeal of traditional security of marriage to a doctor and a purpose-driven life of creating her own island of the plain.

When Carol eventually arrives to Gopher Prairie, she maps both the physical and philosophical space of America's utopian narratives, illuminating who has access to those narratives and how the form polices that access. While writers who came before Lewis and those after introduce variations on the form, Lewis's model offers an interpretative lens through which many such entries in the subgenre of the fictional small town can be analyzed. The Lewis model is a utopian-island form comprised of four distinct parts; the previously discussed frontier where the utopia is located, "Main Street" at the center, what I will call "Mid-town" surrounding it and propagating its philosophy, and "the Outskirts" enclosing both. Lewis's *Main Street* thus delivers the definitive American utopian form, placed between the two poles of Euro-America's utopian master narratives – the utopian thrust of the City upon a Hill, and the pursuit of that utopia driven by the myth of Manifest Destiny. Within this island-form, Lewis upsets the utopian assumptions of America and questions the exclusivity of the American utopian promise. Lewis also demonstrates potential of the fictional small-town genre as an evolution of utopian literature.

Though a native of Minnesotan, Carol remains a true voyager to this new world, as she is "not an intimate of prairie villages" (22). Like Lewis himself, Carol is the descendent of migrants from the East, her father originating in Massachusetts before becoming a judge in Mankato, Minnesota, which itself was "New England reborn" with its "garden-sheltered streets and aisles of elms" (22). As Will and Carol, now honeymooned husband and wife, travel to Gopher Prairie by train, Carol imagines the communal growth the prairie towns could make, as

she mentally maps the social projects she can undertake in pursuit of her shining City upon the Prairie. As they approach Gopher Prairie, however, the two primary pending conflicts between Carol's vision and the reality are laid bare; beauty vs dullness, and community vs the individual. Carol is surprised to not only find the small towns populating the approach to Gopher Prairie incredibly dull, but Will does not see them as opportunity for the advancement of a collective civilization; instead, he sees them as capitalistic ventures, exploitable by the individual. The Manifest of Euro-America's Destiny are not the seeds of the City upon a Hill as Carol envisions it, but hubs of capitalistic production, with a shabby Main Streets at their centers.

Carol is of the mind that "there is no American peasantry" but, as their train passes by the towns, she laments that the "Norwegians, Germans, Finns, Canucks, had settled into submission to poverty," leaving her to conclude that "they were peasants" (37). One settlement along the way is disparaged by Carol as being "as ill-assorted, as temporary looking, as a mining-camp street" (38). Demonstrating the sustained hold the church retains over these communities, Carol notes that "the only habitable structures to be seen were the florid red-brick Catholic church and rectory at the end of Main Street" (39). When Carol expresses her dismay at this particular town, asking Will, "you wouldn't call this a not-so-bad town, would you?" (39), Will latches on to a man he sees coming out of the town's general store, and says:

> he owns about half the town, besides the store. Rauskukle, his name is. He owns a lot of mortgages, and he gambles in farm-lands. Good nut on him, that fellow. Why, they say he's worth three or four hundred thousand dollars! Got a dandy big yellow brick house with tiled walks and a garden and everything, other end of town – can't see it from here (39).

This is Carol's initial introduction into the reality of America's destiny on the plains, where commerce and businessman are king. Carol struggles to comprehend why the money is pooled in an individual instead of irrigated to the community: "Then, if he has all that, there's no excuse whatever for this place! If his three hundred thousand went back into town, where it belongs, they could burn up these shacks, and build a dream-village, a jewel! Why do the farmers and the town-people let the Baron keep it?" to which Will responds, "Let him? They can't help themselves!" (39). Carol quickly comes to realize that in a little "Dutch burg" like this, a single man can be all of Main Street himself, and thus the center of the community's implicit covenant, as she isolates the gap between her intentions and the reality, saying, "I see. He's their symbol of beauty. The town erects him instead of erecting buildings" (39).

As the train finally approaches Gopher Prairie, Carol is further dismayed to not find the clay of her future utopia, but that the town "was merely an enlargement of all the hamlets which they had been passing" (42). The utopian-island form Carol enters is composed of three parts I previously outlined: Main Street, Mid-town, and the Outskirts. Main Street, being both a physical and philosophical space, contains the church, government, and center of commerce. Mid-town is the population center, where the major figures and majority of the community reside. And the Outskirts hold the farms or other means of production which constitute the town's existence.[23] The Outskirts in Lewis's novel are settled by those who are essentially treated as "adjacent" citizens – immigrants, laborers, radicals, and the impoverished. Main Street has the only direct link to the outside world, being the railroad in most texts of the turn of the century, which act as the ports of these islands of the plain.[24] The railroad essentially determined

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[23] In Larry McMurtry's *Thalia Trilogy*, for instance, the Outskirts contain the cattle ranches and oil operations of West Texas.
[24] Indeed, Lewis refers to train engineers as "pilots of the prairie sea" (255).

where the seeds of Manifest Destiny and fledgling Cities upon a Hill would be nourished.[25] Its

role in these towns is essential, sanctified, even, as the only real connection to the outside world

and often the town's only reason for existence:

> The railroad was more than a means of transportation to Gopher Prairie. It
>
> was a new god; a monster of steel limbs, oak ribs, flesh of gravel, and a
>
> stupendous hunger for freight; a deity created by man that he might keep
>
> himself respectful to Property, as elsewhere he had elevated and served as
>
> tribal gods to mines, cotton-mills, moto-factories, colleges, army (254).

Most importantly, the train links the island of the plain to the utopian matrix of the nation. The

surrounding prairie isolates Gopher Prairie, and gives it its island status, and "only the train

could cut it" (255). The town's dependency on the train acts implicitly as a threat of annihilation

as well: "If a town was in disfavor, the railroad could ignore it, cut it off from commerce, slay it.

To Gopher Prairie the tracks were eternal verities, and boards of railroad directors an

omnipotence" (254). The town, even in its island-state, thus exists intrinsically linked to the

America of the East. If it does not produce, if it falters in its implicit covenant, it can be

eradicated, made flat as those cities of the plain that came before – Sodom and Gamora. This is a

fear that drives many characters of Lewis, as James Marshall writes that the author's "major

characters are driven by psychic wolves of fear, namely, fear of failure inherited from the terror

and collapsing idealism of the prairie frontier" (530). This covenant with Euro-American

idealism is thus both local and national. It is serving a higher God than just itself – it is

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[25] "The towns had been staked out on barren prairie as convenient points for future train-halts; and back in 1860 and 1870 there had been much profit, much opportunity to be found aristocratic families, in the possession of advance knowledge as to where the towns would arise" (Lewis 254).

representive in miniature of American idealism. It is the creation of the raw utopian material which can be worked, complicated, neutralized.

This philosophy and infrastructure of Main Street is strongest at its center, and its influence lessens as one moves away from that center. Main Street and Mid-town have a comingled, symbiotic relationship. Those who live in Mid-town benefit from the wealth, infrastructure, and community of Main Street, and in return they disseminate and police its philosophy, maintaining the social apparatus. This relationship creates a panoptic existence for the residents, where the perception of constant observation and micro-exchanges of power reinforce the philosophy. The relationship between Main Street and the Outskirts is less mutually beneficial, though remains co-dependent. Main Street relies on the capitalistic production of the Outskirts (come it in the form of crops, livestock, natural resources, etc.) and the Outskirts rely on Main Street, having the only link to the outside world, to distribute its production. Situated outside the cradling embrace of the symbiote of Main Street and Mid-town, however, the Outskirts are barred from fully accessing the benefits of the island-form. Capital flows into Main Street, but then returns to Mid-town instead of to the Outskirts. Controlling the only major link to the outside (and the only means of bringing the product to market) allows Main Street to perpetuate this imbalance. This triple-layered island-form allows for similar propagation of religious and social ideas, by policing what comes in and diverting the undesirable to the Outskirts. Lewis summarizes this dynamic:

> Carol saw the fact that the prairie towns no more exist to serve the farmers who are their
> reason of existence than do the great capitals, they exist to fatten on the farmers, to
> provide for townsmen large motors and social preferment; and unlike the capitals, they do

not give to the district in return for usury a stately and permanent center, but only this ragged camp. It is a 'parasitic Greek civilization' – minus the civilization (288).

It should be noted, however, that the form need not be inherently exploitative, though it is certainly inherently controlling. The social apparatus of the frontier small town, in its status as a utopian-island form, is theoretically capable of propagating any narrative installed therein. Indeed, Carol imagines the labor reform movement bubbling at the Outskirts might eventually find itself the hegemonic philosophy: "Perhaps someday the farmers will build and own their market-towns" (288). What Carol fails to understand, however, is due to the link to the American empire in the East, such an appropriation of the model would require revolution, not reform. The farmers would need their own railroads spiderwebbing away from their island.

This model demonstrates the importance of the island-form for the frontier small town, and it is an importance that is not mitigated by Booth's assertion that the utopian model is not one of absolute isolation. Instead, the island-form allows for control of the borders, which, in turn, creates the components for the propagation of the hegemonic narrative within. Mapping each of the three sections of Lewis's utopian island form – essentially, treating it as the diagnostic utopian work it is – introduces a definitive utopian island-model to American literature, which highlights the systemic exclusivity of America's earliest utopian pursuits.

<center>Mapping Main Street</center>

Carol enters Gopher Prairie through its control port, the train station, She is met right off the boat by a gaggle of Mid-towners, and a campaign of micro-policing begins immediately. The first proper introduction Carol is given is immediately and irrevocably accompanied by the man's role on Main Street: "Well, I'm Sam Clarke, dealer in hardware, sporting goods, cream separators, and almost any kind of heavy junk you can imagine," followed by another notable

figure and their tether to Main Street, "Dave Dyer, who keeps his drugstore running by not filling your hubby's prescriptions right" (43, 44). This practice of pairing the individual with their Main Street role persists throughout the introductions of the book, as if it is a part of their title, a piece of their essential selves. Women, for the most part, are not tethered to a Main Street business, only to their identity as a male Mid-towner's wife: "The fat cranky lady back there beside you… is Mrs. Sam'l Clark" (44).

Main Street is both a physical space and a philosophical doctrine, a compulsory force. Given the symbiotic relationship between Main Street and Mid-town, Carol thus encounters both the inhabitants of Mid-town and the philosophy of Main Street in these dual introductions. The new covenant of Main Street dominates every facet of the Mid-towners' life. The philosophy is one of standardization to a conservative, Anglo, protestant ideal, which isolates outsiders and foreigners, compelling them to "Americanize into conformity, and in less than a generation losing in the grayness whatever pleasant new customs they might have added to the life of the town" so that "sound American customs….absorb without one trace of pollution of another alien invasion" (285). These standards are the implicit covenant the Main Streeters sign, where God has been replaced by the commerce of Main Street. Those who get to lay claim to defining "Americanism" are the new aristocracy as outlined by Ezra Stowbody, a stodgy, powerful Main Street figure: "all persons engaged in a profession, or earning more than twenty-five hundred dollars a year, or possessed of grandparents born in America" (90). Essentially, the Merchant class is a new ruling party who are "crushingly powerful in their common purpose to… make the town a sterile oligarchy" (287). For Carol, the new covenant "is a force seeking to dominate the earth, to drain the hills and sea of color, to set Dante boosting Gopher Prairie" (287). Those who are assimilated into this standard Americanism do not always gain full access to the benefits of

the new covenant, however, as the "town's principle of perfect democracy was not meant to be applied indiscriminately" (259), and thus outsiders, immigrants, the impoverished, social and political radicals, and women who do not fulfill an assigned role, to say nothing of the conspicuously absent minorities of Black and Native American populations, are marked as threats to the covenant.

Main Street's New God is capitalism and individual wealth, and every detail of the utopian-island form is thus designed to locate, control, and police these populations so they serve the functionality of the new covenant tethered to that God; Gopher Prairie's "conception of community ideal is not the grand manner, the noble aspiration, the fine aristocratic pride, but cheap labor for the kitchen and rapid increase in the price of land" (287). To achieve these goals, it creates a panoptic island-form to enforce its ideology, and each component serves a role in redirecting or realigning those adjacent to its goals. Lewis accomplishes this through the meticulous mapping of a textual "space" representative of György Lukács's concept of literary cartography where the textual structure acts as an "orientating or sense-making form" (Tally 114). Lewis's utopian model relies on a 'self' vs 'the other' ideology, with the self being that new aristocracy of white, Anglo-Americans with access to the production of Main Street's commerce. This 'in' vs 'out' dichotomy is yet another evolution of Euro-America's origins, as Stephenson notes that "for the Puritan, the outside was profane, and the profane was that which had to be overcome, conquered, and destroyed, territory to be won" (Stephenson 11). 'The other' thus plays a scapegoating role where its very presence codifies the hegemonic narrative by threatening it, and "any victory would be a reassuring sign that Providence had in fact singled out New England for special dispensations" (Stephenson 11), only now it is capitalism and the

islands of the plain, the evolutionary heir to Winthrop's City upon a Hill, which are being positioned as exceptional.

As Carol moves through town, she maps the space, creating the model of this uniquely American force which looks to dominate the plains, to conquer the frontier. As Robert Tally, Jr. explains the function of a character moving through the spatial setting of a narrative, Carol acts as both a "surveyor of spaces" and a "rhapsode…. who thus weaves disparate parts into a whole" to "sew these spaces into a new unity" (48). The pieces Lewis, through Carol, weaves together "may include scarps of other narratives, descriptions of people or places, images derived from first-hand observations as well as from secondary reports, legends, myths, and inventions of the imagination" (Tally, Jr. 49). This speaks to the chimera referenced in my introduction, and Lewis's chimera is an amalgam of his childhood home, other fictionalized ideals of the American small town, and, most importantly, American mythology of divine right and a Euro-American utopia on the frontier. Through Carol, Lewis intricately maps this space to create a literary cartograph – one created with such detail that a real, physical map could be created from the description.

Shortly after her arrival, Carol strikes out to see the physical space of the town for herself. She walks the entirety of the space in "thirty-two minutes" and "completely covered the town, east and west, north and south" (48). Carol's movement through town results in the literal mapping of Gopher Prairie, orienting the reading in the physical space of the textual world, and providing a sense-making tool representative of a definitive and universal "America." She finishes her journey at the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue, providing a 'center' for the mapping that will continue throughout the narrative, as Carol expands her cartograph farther and farther from Main Street itself. As she gazes upon the physical Main Street "with its

two-story brick shops, its story and a half wooden residences, from concrete walk to walk" Carol

is cowed by her new island-reality (48). Standing at the town's center, she is daunted by how

"the broad, straight, unenticing gashes of the streets let in the grasping prairie on every side" and

"she realize[s] the vastness and the emptiness of the land" (Lewis 48). The voyager has mapped

the uncharted island and found herself to be stranded. In the process of mapping it for herself,

Carol, acting as literary cartographer, maps it for the reader as well, facilitating "an image of the

world, much like that of a map" (Tally, Jr. 49). From this perspective, Carol then maps both

Main Street's physical space and its implied philosophy of commerce, as the early entry of tying

an individual to their business is reversed:

> Dyer's Drug Store, a corner building of regular and unreal blocks of artificial
>
> stone…from a second-story window the sign 'W.P. Kennicott, Phys. & Surgeon,' gilt on
>
> black sand… Howland & Gould's Grocery… flat against the wall of the second story the
>
> signs of lodges – the Knights of Pythias, The Maccabees, the Woodmen, the Masons…
>
> Dahl & Oleson's Meat Market – a reek of blood (Lewis 50).

As Carol gets to one of these monuments to American Independent Business, she links building

to individual in her mind for the first time: "Haydock & Simons. Haydock. She had met Haydock

at the station; Harry Haydock; an active person of thirty-five" (51). From there, Carol links her

other new acquaintances to their roots on Main Street – "Sam Clark's Hardware Store... Chester

Dashaway's House Furnishing Emporium" (51). Later at a dinner party, held to welcome her to

the community, this pairing between identity and Main Street storefront continues: "Harry

Hayward and his wife, Juanita. Harry's dad owns most of the Bon Ton, but it's Harry who runs it

and gives it the pep… Jackson Elder… owns the planning-mill, and the Minniemashie House,

and quite a share of the Farmer's National Bank" (57). One man, Luke Dawson, has seemingly

graduated from association with a single or even several storefronts, instead just being labeled, "the richest man in town" (57). Carol catches on quickly, matching Chet Dashaway to the furniture store she saw on Main Street earlier that day without prodding from Kennicott. When these introductions are made at the party, the physical space of Main Street which Carol had just mapped shoulders its way into the party. It is a presence which hangs over Carol and the reader as the book unfolds. In her first day in Gopher Prairie, the links between Main Street and Mid-town, in both directions, are firmly established in her mind. They are two distinct spaces physically, but the strength of the Main Street covenant pervades Mid-Town at a capillary level.

The dinner party is also beginning of a campaign of micro-corrections by the Mid-towners: repeated, rhetorical questions about the appeal of Gopher Prairie, indoctrination into local legends like automobile baron and native son Percy Bresnahan, patronizing gazes cast upon a too-flashy golden sash (60). Grounds are laid for continued battles, as well, with invitations to social clubs like the Jolly Seventeen, where Carol's realignment might be continued through the socializing of the town. Carol does not go quietly, however, undertaking her own campaign of micro-resistance and reform, drawing on her broader exposure to set the Mid-towners as the uninformed about more exotic (meaning, non-provincial) customs, just as she is the one uninformed by the local ones.

As the party settles in, however, so too does a stark divide even amongst this uniform set in Gopher Prairie – that between men and women. The two groups separate, women discussing the practical matters, "children, sickness, and cooks – their own shop-talk," of their domain in the town – that of Mid-town (63). Meanwhile, the men hold their own court, that of the Main Street industry they bring home with them. Carol, in her most shocking move of the evening, "defies decency by sitting down with the men" (64). The men are mostly engrossed with

discussion, a lamenting of the past, the founding of Gopher Prairie, and express discontent with the democratization of Main Street. The sometimes-roving perspective settles for a moment on Ezra Stowbody, president of the Ionic bank, who longs for a time some thirty years before: "That was the way it should be; the fine arts – medicine, law, religion, and finance - recognized as aristocratic; four Yankees democratically chatting with but ruling the Ohioans and Illini and Swedes and Germans who had ventured to follow them" (64). Instead, Stowbody sees Gopher Prairie as "heterogeneous as Chicago", with "Norwegians and Germans own[ing] stores," and selling nails was considered as sacred as banking" (64). These "common merchants" made up the new "social leaders" of the town. Stowbody's thoughts identify the new aristocracy of Gopher Prairie – Sam Clark, Harry Haydock, Will Kennicott – the new signatories of the Main Street covenant.

Carol believes she is perhaps overcoming the gendered dynamic of the town's hierarchy during the early stages of the party, shocking and, so she thinks, delighting her new social circle with risqué claims like her intention to "stage a musical comedy," her preference for "café parfait to beefsteak" and admitting to the fact that she owns a "pair of gold stockings" (61-62). But, as her and Will depart, the micro-corrections, the policing of Main Street ideology through the inhabitants of Mid-town, continues. Will warns that she "ought to be more careful about shocking folks. Talking about your gold stockings and about showing your ankles to schoolteachers and all," leaving Carol "raw with the shameful thought that the attentive circle might have been criticizing her, laughing at her" (68). As Will comforts Carol in her moment of doubt, she considers the group left behind as "Main Street" itself (69). The place and the practitioners become one. The deflating micro-correction made by Will is also the beginning of

Carol's marriage acting as a more intimate social unit which drives conformity, but it is only one

component of a vast network of observation which constitutes Lewis's utopia.

The Panopticon of Gopher Prairie

Similar to the omniscient gaze of Orwell's Big Brother, the symbiotes of Main Street and

Mid-Town work together to create a panoptic system of observation to police and enforce its

social order. The goal of such a system of community is to "to induce in the [individual] a state

of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault

201). Those "authorities exercising individual control," in Gopher Prairie's case, the new

aristocracy of Main Street, "function according to a double mode" (Foucault 199). The first of

these is "that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless;

normal/abnormal)" (Foucault 199). Gopher Prairie's Main Street, acting as its compulsory

panoptic force, is primarily concerned with those who are abnormal (by its island-enforced

standards), which thus makes them dangerous to the perpetuation of their philosophy. This is

standard fare for dystopian/utopian literature; an authoritative and compulsory ideology policed

by means of observation and control. Carol comes to conceive of these forces as "spectral

presences" (Lewis 128).

Carol quickly experiences the effects of this surveillance society. In her first view of their

house on the edge of town, Carol is discouraged to see that there is "no shrubbery to shut off the

public gaze" (45). It does not take Carol long to respond to and perform for this gaze, even in

private, as she hides "a chintz-lined silver-fitted bag which had seemed so desirable in St. Paul"

but "was an extravagant vanity" in Gopher Prairie (47). She hides the bag from view "beneath

the sensible blouse" more acceptable to the omniscience of Main Street (47). Soon after her

arrival, Carol is already operating on a sense of "permanent visibility" which enforces the

ideology of Main Street (48). She wants to behave, in however innocuous a fashion, in an abnormal way, but the sense of surveillance polices her, corrects her, turns her to normalcy.

As she returns to the public space, Carol walks through the town imagining "she was slipping through the streets invisible" (48). Despite "supposing only she was observant," she too is being observed, and her habits are already being speculated upon by the town, revealed by a roving perspective: "I wonder if she will pay cash. I bet she goes to Howland & Gould's more as she does here" a shop keeper wonders (48). Main Street, just like Carol, is gathering data, locating her in its system, and preparing an immune response.

Carol goes forth from her first day in Gopher Prairie with an altered understanding of her new reality, and the panopticon of Main Street towers over her. She becomes paranoid, and longs for the obscurity of the city, and begins to alter her behavior based on the corrective gaze. After running gleefully in the streets in an early spring thaw, Carol "saw that windows were gaping" and "their triple glare was paralyzing" (102). Meanwhile, "across the street, at another window, the curtain had secretively moved" (103). In response, Carol "stopped, walked on sedately, changed from the girl Carol into Mrs. Dr. Kennicott" (103). This demonstrates the second of Foucault's double modes: "that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" (Foucault 199). Carol ceases to be an unidentified body moving through space, and instead actively works to fulfill the role outlined for her by the island-community, enforced by its panoptic observational structure.

This response by Carol foreshadows her evolution to that of constant performer for the panoptic Main Street: "Always she was acting, for the benefit of everyone she saw – and for the

benefit of the ambushed leering eyes which she did not see" (117). This paranoia heightens to one reminiscent of Orwell's protagonist:

> The village peeped at her… now she glanced at each house, and felt, when she was safely home, that she had won past a thousand enemies armed with ridicule. She told herself that her sensitiveness was preposterous, but daily she was thrown into panic. She saw curtains slide back into innocent smoothness. Old women who had been entering their houses slipped out again to stare at her – in the wintry quiet she could hear them tiptoeing to their porches. When she had for a blessed hour forgotten the searchlight, when she was scampering through a chill dusk, happy in yellow windows against gray night, her heart checked as she realized that a head covered with a shawl was thrust up over the snow-tipped bush to watch her (Lewis 117).

Main Street and many of its small-town genre contemporaries were Orwellian before Big Brother ever cast its long shadow over the pages of dystopian literature. Main Street is watching Carol, as surely as Big Brother is watching Winston Smith.

Carol imagines that even the youth in town, again acting as an early forebearer to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are "born old, grim and old and spaying and censorious" (120). The exposure Carol senses reaches its zenith when she overhears two young boys discussing her clothes and their attraction to her. Carol "felt that she was being dragged naked down Main Street… The moment it was dusk she pulled down the window shades, all the shades, flush with the sill, but beyond them she felt moist fleering eyes" (122). The recordings of this panoptic gaze manifest publicly in periodic entries from the local newspaper, the *Gopher Prairie Weekly Dauntless*, the first of which recounts the welcome party thrown for Carol (76-77). These entries act as a sort of curation of the data the gaze has been acquiring, a submitted resume and personal

history of Carol for entry to Main Street, and while it accepts her as a member, it also locates her identity publicly. Carol is never met as a stranger again, though many remain strangers to her. When she is shopping, she no longer has the anonymity of the city, where she was just "a customer – a hat, a voice to bore a harassed clerk" (78). In Gopher Prairie, she is "Mrs. Doc Kennicott, and her preferences in grape-fruit and manners were known and remembered and worth discussing… even if they weren't worth fulfilling" (78). When she meets Vida Sherwin, a local teacher, Carol begins to introduce herself, but Vida interrupts her, saying "Oh you needn't tell me. I know all about you! Awful how much I know – this gossipy village" (80).

Sherwin adds another layer to the corrective superstructure of Main Street, while introducing the old utopian debate of revolution vs reform to the narrative. Sherwin is the local teacher and comes calling shortly after Carol's arrival to Gopher Prairie. She is quickly established as the primary representative of a conservative gradualist approach. Sherwin appears to be an ally in Carol's campaign of liberalization and liberation of Gopher Prairie, but she is, in reality, a Trojan Horse; a seeming tribute to Carol's sympathies, but packed densely inside are the morals, values, and traditions of Main Street, of conservative America, ready to spring out and sack Carol's new Troy she hopes to construct on the Minnesota Prairie. Sherwin's alternative priorities come clear in their first meeting, despite the teacher expressing enthusiasm for Carol's messiah-complex, encouraging the outsider to "polish" the "rough diamond" of Gopher Prairie. This is followed, however, with Sherwin's confirmation of her own endorsement of Main-Streetism, as she reestablishes the tether between the island-form of Main Street and the ideals of the nation: "I'm afraid you'll think I'm conservative. I am! So much to conserve. All this treasure of American ideals… I have only one good quality – overwhelming belief in the brains and hearts of our nation, our state, our town" (82). To Main Streeters, Main Street *is* the

nation; it is American exceptionalism Manifest in the prairie mud. Thus, even in this seeming

ally, Carol finds yet another carrier of the Village Virus she must navigate around, less she

become infected. Sherwin seems continually unaware of the gap between her and Carol's goals,

as well. Sherwin sees immigrants and impoverished in the Outskirts as a population in need of

reform, not greater access to the infrastructure and production of Main Street.

Vida's real reason for her first visit quickly reveals her motivations to support the Main

Street covenant, to pull Carol deeper into the system, where her reform mindset can be pruned

and policed. At first, Vida seems to encourage Carol's radical ideas, telling her that "we need

you so much here" to "awaken" the town" (80-81). Carol responds enthusiastically, offering the

idea of having an architect come lecture (81). But Vida redirects her, suggesting she join the

other dominant force on Main Street besides the mighty dollar, and the one more intimately

connected to the original covenants of Winthrop and the Pilgrims: "Ye-es, but don't you think it

would be better to work with existing agencies?... It would be lovely if we could get you to teach

Sunday School" (81). Vida follows this suggestion up with more social structure where Carol

can be contained; the library-board and the Thanatopsis club. Vida Sherwin's radical ideas, her

intentions to "make Gopher Prairie rock to its foundations" are distilled to the satirically

revolutionary idea of "hav[ing] afternoon tea instead of afternoon coffee" (82). Indeed it

becomes evident that Vida's motivations are actually a campaign of indoctrination to

conservative ideas, through means like showing "moral motion picture [to] country districts"

using automobiles as portable propaganda projectors to spread Main Street values to the

Outskirts (82). Vida plays the role of the friendly antibody, coming to say that she thinks and

feels much like Carol, but she does it from within the system, which is exactly where she wants

to redirect Carol, leading to Carol ultimately accepting some of that direction to join another of the policing infrastructure of Main Street: social clubs.

The Jolly Seventeen is "the social cornice of Gopher Prairie" and "to belong to it was to be 'in'" (103). The members were the wives of Main Street principal figures, women who ruled the domain of Mid-town. Their husbands were "associate members" (103). These social groups act as collaborative corrections upon Carol's deviancy. At Carol's first meeting, she feels the corrective gazes of the other members, as those "who had gurgled at her so welcomingly when she had first come to Gopher Prairie were nodding at her brusquely" (104). Small comments inform Carol of her malfeasance, things like, "Are you going to send to Minneapolis for your dress for the next soiree – heard you were," and "Don't you find that new couch of yours is too broad to be practical" (105). Carol does rebel against these corrections at first, championing for better wages for hired girls, scandalously offering "isn't it possibly the fault of the mistresses if the maids are ungrateful? For generations we've given them the leavings of food, and holes to live in" (107). In response to hearing how much Carol pays her own hired girl, the amiable Bea, the other members of the Jolly Seventeen are incredulous with "hostile" eyes (107).

Carol leaves this meeting by pacifying the women but thinks "I can't be one of them if I must damn all maids toiling in filthy kitchens, all the ragged hungry children" (109). At the next meeting, however, the corrective measure begin to take effect on Carol, and she is "at last desirous of being one of them" (138), and the others accept her into the fold warmly. Later still, after several starts and stops in her reform attempts, Carol finds "refuge in the Jolly Seventeen… and she now saw Juanita Haydock's gossip not as vulgarity but as gaiety and remarkable analysis… She looked forward to the next bridge of the Jolly Seventeen, and the security of whispering with her dear friends Maud Dyer and Juanita and Mrs. McGanum… She was part of

the town. Its philosophy and its feuds dominated her" (265). The village virus begins to infect her.

Carol is slowly, inexorably impacted by these systems of discipline and control. It starts slowly, as she outwardly "was not discontented, she was not an abnormal and distressing traitor to the faith of Main Street" (268). When a flamboyant newcomer, a young tailor of Swedish descent, arrives to town, Carol's social circle unsurprisingly laughs at the boy, calling him "Elizabeth" instead of his given name, Erik. When the Jolly Seventeen laugh at an accounting of the boy's sense of style and bookishness, "Carol laughed with them" (346), despite these traits being something she sought desperately early on. Then, in her internal dialogue, Carol begins to classify in the town's dichotomous language, deciding she needs to go by the tailor sometime to "see this freak" (347). As Carol takes stock of these changes within herself, she realizes that "the trap had finally closed" and that she truly is "sick with the village virus" (344, 351). This turn is made even more difficult by that most intimate of social institutions which continue Carol's indoctrination – her marriage to Will Kennicott.

That first micro-correction by Will after the party is yet another foreshadowing of a new policing, panoptic lens. The effects of marriage and homemaking work quickly on Carol, who turns from dreams of city planning to "making her own shrine" in their new home (78). Earlier, she had seen marriage as an opposition to her desire to "do something with life" and use her college degree "for the world" (25), but on their first night in a shared home, Mrs. Dr. Kennicott imagines her husband as "shelter from a perplexing world" (46). She comes to be aware of the regulating nature of this particular social unit in redirecting her attention:

> She knew that if she was ever to effect any of the 'reforms' which she had pictured, she
>
> must have a starting place. What confused her during the three or four months of her

marriage was not lack of perception that she must be definite, but sheer careless happiness of her first home. In pride of being a housewife she loved every detail – the brocade armchair, the weak back, even the brass water-cock on the hot-water reservoir (78).

Carol finds herself succumbing to the minutiae of her role as wife, and utopian reform recedes for a time. She becomes embarrassed, however, when she sees another wife begging for money on Main Street (88). This causes conflict for the couple, as well, as Carol found that she had to constantly ask Will for money so she could do the household shopping, and she refuses to be one of the wives begging in the streets for their husbands to give them money. The panopticon plays a role in the isolation Carol feels brought on by financial dependence, as "she could not have outside employment… To the village doctor's wife it was taboo" (101). Early on, Carol becomes terrified she is pregnant (47), understanding that it would increase her dependency and tether her to a life she is still unsure she wants. Marriage thus boxes Carol in. She could do "only three things…: Have children; start her career reforming; or become so definitely a part of the town that she would be fulfilled by activities of the church and study-club and bridge-parties" (101). Carol stops and starts on each of these options, but when she does have a child, her fears of losing herself are echoed by the town in the form of Will's relative: "Now that you're going to be a mother, dearie, you'll get over all these ideas of yours and settle down" (259). Carol feels as if "she was being initiated into the assembly of housekeepers; with the baby for a hostage, she would never escape" (259).

Despite the mighty dollar taking priority over the crucifix in this evolutionary covenant, the church remains a powerful force in the Euro-American utopian model. The church is often offered as a redirect when Carol pulls new threads in her pursuit of reform. After Carol gives a

long description of her proposed utopian reforms, including a new city hall that will serve as a cultural and artistic center of the community, Mrs. Leonard Warren responds, "I have no doubt that such villages will be found on the prairie – some day" before explaining that Carol's purposed changes fail to understand that "it's the churches… that are the real heart of the community" (149). After Carol revises her plan, she goes to see Mrs. Champ Perry, who is considered one of the last living pioneers of Gopher Prairie. To Carol's proposal, Mrs. Perry, too, counters with the church: "As for the lecture halls – haven't we got the churches? Good deal better to listen to a good old-fashioned sermon than a lot of geography and books and things that nobody needs to know" (153).

In one of the instances when Carol directly focuses her reform efforts on helping the poor of Gopher Prairie instead of improving its beauty or artistic credentials, the group of women she discusses the topic with make it clear that a sense of divine right remains in the system of exclusivity which constitutes their utopia, redrawing those dichotomous lines with the puritan mindset outlined by Stephenson that "the outside was profane, and the profane was that which had to be overcome, conquered, and destroyed, territory to be won" (Stephenson 11). Speaking of the impoverished immigrant populations on the outskirts of town, Mrs. Mary Ellen Wilks, a primary figure in the local Christian Science church, concludes: "If this class of people had an understanding of Science and that we are the children of God and nothing can harm us, they wouldn't be in error and poverty" (160). This is evidential of the Main Streeter's mindset of the fusion between divine right, divine selection, and access to the benefits of capitalism. As Carol continues to map the space and philosophy of this utopia, it becomes clear that the dollar has not chased the crucifix of the map – it has become the crucifix. Individual wealth and divine right

cohabitate the same symbols in this system of Euro-American utopian ideology, and the former begets the latter.

This reality is solidified to Carol when she turns back to Mr. and Mrs. Perry, believing "in the history of pioneers was the panacea for Gopher Prairie, for all America" (167). Carol arrives at this conclusion after discovering that the town has its own founding pioneer mythology, where "only sixty years ago," settlers from Maine had "driven north over virgin prairie into virgin woods" to settle in Gopher Prairie (168). Despite the suppose untouched virtue of the plains, a log stockade was built "as a defense against the Sioux" (168). "Grasshoppers came darkening the sky," however, and "precious horses, painfully brought from Illinois, were drowned in bogs or stampeded by the fear of blizzards" (168). Carol comes to believe that this hardy perseverance might lend itself to a return to a more pastoral utopia, but she is disappointed to learn that the Perry's ideas of utopia are even more conservative than the Gopher Prairie that exists, as the Perrys argue:

> The Baptist Church (and, somewhat less, the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches) is the perfect, the divinely ordained standard in music, oratory, philanthropy, and ethics… The Republican Party, the Grand Old Party of Blaine and McKinley, is the agent of the Lord and the Baptist Church in temporal affairs (170).

The only differences between the Perrys and the new aristocracy of Main Street is that the Perrys place the church first, and business interest of American ideology second, while the aristocracy flip this order, or even conflate it. When Carol moves east near the end of the novel, she enters conversation with a noted suffragette, who frames Main Street as not *less* Puritan than its evolutionary forebearers, but Puritanism compounded: "Your Middlewest is double-Puritan – prairie Puritan on top of New England Puritan: bluff frontiers man on the surface, but in its heart

it still has the ideal of Plymouth Rock in a sleet-storm" (462). All of these various forces work together to enforce Main Street's new covenant, leaving Carol in a state of isolation. As she looks for answers, she is drawn to the Outskirts, where Main Street's utopian model situates all of its undesirables.

<p style="text-align:center">Darkness at the Edge of Town</p>

If Main Street and Mid-town are neatly curated spaces of surveillance, discipline, correction, and compulsory philosophical communion, the Outskirts are a space of liberation, ostracization, isolation, and romanticization of a more pastoral utopian dream in Lewis's novel. It is the Outskirts where remnants of that pastoral American utopia are still hinted at. Carol's first experience with the Outskirts is a hunting trip undertaken by the Kennicotts. On this initial foray, Carol "had found the dignity and greatness which had failed her in Main Street" (74). The Kennicotts "drove into [Carol's] first farmyard" which she classifies as a "private village" (71). Having now seen both spaces, Carol introduces the idea that "we townies are parasites" who nonetheless "feel superior to them [the farmers]" (72). Carol idealizes the difficult lives of the immigrant farmers, saying "I wonder if these farmers aren't bigger than we are? So simple and hard working. The town lives on them" (72). Will responds incredulously with the practical matters of capital: "Parasites? Us? Where'd the farmers be without the town? Who lends them money? Who – why, we supply them with everything!" (72). Despite the debate this initial foray incites, the Outskirts recur as the setting for some of Carol and Will's happiest moments in their marriage.

Select Mid-towners own summer cottages on Like Minniemashie in the Outskirts where they vacation together. The social structures of surveillance and control recede in this space – the carriers of the village virus apparently leave it behind as they do the town: "Here the matrons

forgot social jealousies, and sat gossiping in gingham; or, in old bathing-suits, surrounded by hysterical children, they paddled for hours" (166). Carol "liked Jaunita Haydock and Maud Dyer" in this space and believed "if they could have continued this normal barbaric life Carol would have been the most enthusiastic citizen of Gopher Prairie" (167). But these feelings do not carry over when they return to Main Street. The panoptic gaze awaits them back in town, and Juanita and Maud's "hearts shut again till spring, and the nine months of cliques and radiators and dainty refreshments began all over" (167). While the Outskirts are visited by Main Streeters for a pastoral escape, it serves as the permanent home for many populations vital to the continued function of the town.

The island-form corrals certain populations to the Outskirts, exploiting their labor and production while restricting them from accessing the production of Main Street. These populations serve an important, dual function for the community: they are both the cheap labor and the consumers which fuel the economy of Main Street, and a darkness at the edge of town which must be kept at bay; a scapegoat which helps enforce the surveillance society through its perceived threat. As already established, diversity is limited in Lewis's setting. Gopher Prairie is largely made up of wealthier, third or later generation Americans who populate Main Street and Mid-town, and poorer Scandinavian immigrant or first-generation Americans on the Outskirts. This latter population is the one that serves the dual function of labor and scapegoat. Miles Bjornstam, "The Red Swede," becomes a proxy for this other population. Bjornstam is an "opinionated atheist, general-store arguer… and the one democrat in town" (98). He is the "one democrat in town" and because of his pro-labor views, is designated in a dichotomized, Foucaultian classification of being "slightly insane" (98).

Carol continues her mapping project by journeying to the Outskirts on a freezing winter day. As she crosses the edge of town and enters the Outskirts, she looks back on Gopher Prairie from a small hill, and the snow in the "devouring prairie… whipped out the town's pretense of being a shelter" (130). With this perspective at hand, Carol "circled the outskirts of the town and viewed the slum of 'Swede Hollow" (130), expanding her cartograph to consider that which lays beyond the gridded streets of the town itself. Past Swede Hollow, where individuals live in a "shack of thin boards" and "an abandoned stable," Carol finds an industrial district, with a railyard, wheat-elevator, creamery, and a flour mill busy with laborers (130, 131). Here, she encounters Bjornstam. Bjornstam quickly explains his own status in the town in the dichotomist standards of Main Street, saying "I'm what they call a pariah, I guess. I'm the town badman, Mrs. Kennicott: town atheist, and I suppose I must be an anarchist too. Everybody who doesn't love the bankers and Grand Old Republican Party is an anarchist" (132).

Bjornstam continues outlining his classification in relation to the Main Street covenant, giving the most direct assessment of the acceptable roles within the caste system of Gopher Prairie: "I'm poor, and yet I don't decently envy the rich… and I don't contribute to the wealth of Brother Elder or Daddy Cass" (130). In Bjornstam's contrarian presence, Carol senses that he "assumed she was her own counselor, that she was not a Respectable married Woman but fully a human being," briefly liberating her from the spectral restrictions of Main Street. Carol leaves this exchange fancying Bjornstam as one who is "irreverent to the village gods" (136). This excursion firmly establishes the Outskirts as a site of poverty, of exploited labor, of ostracization, but as a place of philosophical liberation, as well. Furthermore, it positions Bjornstam as the embodiment of all those ideas for Carol and the reader. He becomes the proxy of true exclusion and liberation of thought, distilling all of the Outskirts in one man. Despite discovering some of

the philosophical companionship she sought in Bjornstam, however, Carol soon finds that to Bjornstam, she is the tepid reformer. After exploring all her options to reform the town – appealing to her husband, going to potential allies like Vida Sherwin, asking the wealthiest citizen in town to fund the construction of a new community center himself – Carol comes across Bjornstam in the street, and she is eager to present her plan to who she is sure will be an ally. But Bjornstam is dismissive of her plan, and a stark contrast between Carol's cultural reform and Bjornstam's proletariat revolution is laid bare:

> I never thought I'd be agreeing with Old Man Dawson, but you got the wrong slant. You aren't one of the people – yet. You want to do something for the town, I don't! I want the town to do something for itself. We don't want old Dawson's money – not if it's a gift, with a string. We'll take it away from him, because it belongs to us. You got to get more iron and cussedness into you. Come join us cheerful bums, and some day – when we educate ourselves and quite being bums – we'll take things and run 'em straight (158).

Soon after this conversation, which rattles Carol, she attends the Thanatopsis club and suggests programming which will help the poor of the town, but the other women of the club question the presence of "genuine poverty" in Gopher Prairie and its Outskirts. Ella Stowbody, daughter of the town banker, says "these folks [the impoverished of the town] are fakers. Especially all these tenant farmers that pretend they have so much trouble getting seeds and machinery. Papa says they simply won't pay their debts. He says he's sure he hates to foreclose mortgages, but it's the only way to make them respect the law" (159).

These two conversations, occurring back-to-back, demonstrate the stark break between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' Ella Stowbody's rant works to categorize the poor in Foucoultian dichotomized categories. The new covenant maneuvers to label the impoverished,

the indebted, as the unlawful. If the dollar is the New God, then the poor are adjacent to God.

They are deviants of social order, and thus play the role of scapegoat. This role is a common one

in both literary and human communities. Richard Kearney explains:

> Human societies are founded upon myths of sacrifice. These myths comprise a social
>
> imaginary which operates according to a mechanism of scapegoating generally concealed
>
> from human consciousness. It is this sacrificial mechanism which provides most
>
> communities with their sense of collective identity. But the price to be paid is the
>
> destruction of an innocent outsider: the immolation of the 'other 'on the altar of the
>
> 'same' (1).

As Main Street looks to maintain its social order, it seeks out 'the other' to sacrifice. This

treatment is in contrast to Carol, who, belonging close enough to the center, is offered reform

instead of annihilation. Other figures are not so lucky, however, and these are the figures who are

corralled into the Outskirts and not permitted full access to the benefits of Main Street.

Bjornstam, in his irreverence, is the proxy for all these figures. Carol's fear of revolution

highlights this contrast between those like Carol and the true scapegoats. After another

conversation with Bjornstam, Carol dreads the proletariat revolution he champions: "The

conception of millions of workmen like Miles taking control frightened her, and she scuttled

rapidly away from the thought of a time when she might no longer retain the position of Lady

Bountiful to the Bjornstams and Beas… whom she loved – and patronized" (295).

Tally, Jr. makes another useful connection on this front between narrative map-making,

in that it is impossible to capture the authentic entirety of a given square foot of physical space,

let alone an entire town or nation. Cartography, both actual and literary, is therefore an act of

selection and exclusion: "The writer, then, must select the particulars of a given place or story

that will allow for the narrative map to be meaningful. This is equally true for an actual

mapmaker, who must determine the function of the map and its intended 'meanings' for a map-

reader prior to setting down the elements on paper" (54). When Lewis introduces his literary

cartography as quintessentially 'American,' and then maps a space with a strict system of

surveillance which enforces a systemic exclusivity, the result is a satirical rumination on Euro-

American utopian ideology – a utopian literary cartography where the ideology of the nation can

be neutralized, reduced to raw material which can be worked on. What Carol comes to find,

however, is that Euro-America's utopia is strong, and even she cannot conceive of a place unlike

that which came before. Her reform returns to the concept of Homer's chimera – pieced together

by bits of New England streets, Athenian gardens, and Georgian architecture. Carol cannot

conceive of a new reality – revolution frightens her. Instead, she pieces her utopia together from

images in library books. Bjornstam's utopia, however, is conceptual, theoretical, not about the

physical space but about the compulsory force which controls the apparatus. This is yet another

divide amongst Gopher Prairie's utopians, however, as that other would-be reformer, Vida

Sherwin, has her own ideas about reform and revolution:

> Vida was, and always would be, a reformer, a liberal. She believed that the details could
>
> excitingly be altered, but that things-in-general were comely and kind and immutable.
>
> Carol was without understanding or accepting it, a revolutionist, a radical, and therefore
>
> possessed of 'constructive ideas,' which only the destroyer can have, since the reformer
>
> believes that all the essential constructing has already been done (274).

Thus the efforts of Gopher Prairie's reformers and revolutionists alike are satirically subjective.

The relative leeway they are given in pursuing those reforms, however, speaks to the reality of

the Euro-American utopian form, and who is truly excluded. Euro-American women like Vida

and Carol, while restricted from accessing the full benefits of Main Street's center, like the men of the community, can pursue various innocuous cultural reforms, can even, in the case of Carol, vocalize ideas deemed radical. Others, immigrants like Bjornstam and Bea, are at constant threat of being scapegoated, even if they play by the social rules. In Lewis's novel, other minority groups previously discussed are only present in their absences, and thus completely excluded from the Euro-American utopia.

Eventually, Bjornstam does try to adhere to the values of the new covenant, marrying Bea, who had been the Kennicotts' maid. Bjornstam begins to align more with the expectations of the town by having a family and a farm safely on the Outskirts. The Red Swede "had turned to respectable" and "renounced his criticisms of state and society" (249). Most importantly, he had fallen in line as a laborer, working in Jackson Elder's mill. Bjornstam and his family remain outsiders in the eyes of the town, however. Despite rumor that Bjornstam's boss, Elder, might attend the wedding, the only Main Streeters who attend are those brought by Carol – Will, Guy Pollock and Mr. and Mrs. Perry. When Carol goes to visit the couple after their marriage, she inquires if anyone has been to visit them, to which Bjornstam eventually responds, "Hell! What do we care if none of the dirty snobs come and call? We've got each other" (259). When the award of "best baby," chosen by Dr. Will Kennicott during child-welfare weak, is given to the Bjornstams' son, Olaf, the women Main Streeters, given a collective 'they' voice, say, "Well, Mrs. Kennicott, maybe that Swede brat is as healthy as your husband says he is, but let me tell you I hate to think of the future that awaits any boy with a hired girl for a mother and an awful irreligious socialist for a pa" (266). Even Will "steadily disapproved of the Bjornstams" and "hinted that a former 'Swede hired girl' was low company for the son of Dr. Will Kennicott" (335). All of this is in the face of the Bjormstams' growing pastoral success. They acquire a farm

and build it to "six cows, two hundred chickens, a cream separator" and even that most official

of Main Street signs of personal progress, "a ford truck" (336).

Despite falling in line, Bjornstam begins to understand his role as perpetual scapegoat,

acknowledging that "so long as he stayed in Gopher Prairie he would remain a pariah" (337). He

hopes that his son might outlive his father's reputation, but even so his imagines "pulling up

stakes and going West," thinking that whatever Main Street his family settled near "wouldn't

find out I'd ever been guilty of trying to think for myself" (338). But then tragedy strikes. Carol

arrives to the Bjornstams' one day to find both Bea and Olaf sick in bed with stomach pain. She

quickly calls in her husband, who arrives and diagnoses both with typhoid. Both Bea and Olaf

quickly deteriorate, and several weeks into their illness, the women of Main Street who had

alienated them for so long, come knocking. When Vida Sherwin, Maud Dyer, and Mrs. Zitterel

knock on the front door, Bjornstam says to them, "You're too late. You can't do nothing now.

Bea's always kind of hoped that you folks would come see her. She wanted to have a chance to

be friends. She used to sit waiting for somebody to knock. I've seen her sitting here, waiting.

Now – oh, you ain't worth God-damning" (341). This "rebuff to Vida had spread through town,

a cyclonic fury" and when Carol sees the funeral for Bea and Olaf through her window, herself

bedridden from her hours nursing her friends, only Bjornstam is in attendance. When Juanita

Haydock stops by that same day, she says "too bad about this Bea that was your hired girl. But I

don't waste any sympathy on that man of hers. Everybody says he drank too much, and treated

his family awful, and that's how they got sick" (341). The sacrificial scapegoating cycle is

completed when Bjornstam leaves the town:

> There was talk of arresting him, of riding him on a rail. It was rumored that at the station
>
> old Champ Perry rebuked him, 'You better not come back here. We've got respect for

your dead, but we haven't got any for a blasphemer and a traitor that won't do anything

for his country and only bought one Liberty Bond (342).

Kennicott participates in this scapegoating, saying "In spite of Bea, don't know but what the

citizens' committee ought to have forced him to be patriotic – let on like they could send him to

jail if he didn't volunteer and come through for bonds and the Y.M.C.A." (343). Bjornstam is the

perfect foil to the tenants of Gopher Prairie's new covenant, and his tragedy and expulsion acts

as a reassuring sign that Providence had in fact singled out Gopher Prairie for "special

dispensations" (Stephenson 11). The utopia's island-model of Main Street succeeds in isolating

and removing the threat, thus ensuring its own propagation.

<div align="center">The Main Street Model</div>

Lewis thus delivers the quintessential entry of America literature's definitive utopian

setting, presenting the new covenant of America utopian discourse. Carol Kennicott acts as a

utopian voyager who arrives to the island of the plain and subsequently maps both the space and

social order of the literary structure. The resulting literary cartograph presents a utopian-island

form that is replicated, modified, and subverted across the American canon. This literary

cartograph which I have map in this chapter – a center-out model with a compulsory Main Street

at its center, a Mid-town where the indoctrinated reside and propagate the philosophy of the

center, and the Outskirts where the in vs. out dichotomy inherent in the model is negotiated –

offers a new critical lens through which much of American small-town literature can be

analyzed. Add in a frontier where the given iteration of the utopian-island form is located, and all

the raw materials for engaging with Euro-American utopian master narratives are present. With

Main Street, Lewis created a meticulous distillation of this form, offering a model for Euro-

America's Utopia which generations of writers would replicate and respond to.

In a vacuum, Lewis's Gopher Prairie distills a history of exploitation and alienation for marginalized populations inherent in America's founding utopian pursuits. But, as I presented in my introduction, no island of the plain exists in a vacuum. Gopher Prairie is part of a utopian matrix spiderwebbing across the United States. While Lewis is certainly critical of American conservative, protestant ideals that were being codified on Main Streets across America in his time, the absences of his novel say as much or more about this full impact of Euro-American utopian pursuits. The naivety of Carol plays a central role in the novel, as it is a vital component to her persistent utopian impulse, the utopian improvements she imagines, and her belief in her ability to incite meaningful change. In her most ethereal moments, Lewis's utopian voyager glosses over capitalistic exploitation to argue architecture and floral arrangements. At her more earnest ones, she considers that exploitation and the alternatives which might replace it. Through her own utopian pursuits, her critique takes on layers, as does Lewis's own. But even then, Lewis does not see or dares not name the broader implications of Euro-American utopian pursuits – the histories of genocide and conquest left in the wake of those pursuits. As more and more American writers employ Lewis's model, the iconography of small town takes on layers, as well, and a fuller history can be produced.

While the utopian discourse *Main Street* forwards is not cognizant of the broader utopian picture, of the multitude of dystopian realities Euro-American utopian pursuits have beget, Lewis presents his readers with the raw material to create that layered, diverse image. To return to Jameson, the utopian production of *Main Street* does not reverse ideology of Euro-American with a direct counter; instead, it brings the dominant mythologies "internal contradictions" to the forefront. As a result of this process, Lewis introduces a "fruitful bewilderment" to the American consciousness, and, given the contemporaneous success of *Main Street*, it deeply penetrated that

consciousness. Thus, through the Euro-American utopian model Lewis introduces in the novel, he presented future American writers with a representative form through which they could contribute their own fruitful bewilderment to the American utopian psyche.

As Lewis's literary star all but burns out, his influence upon American literature begins to resemble More's own on the utopian genre that his own work named. More, like Lewis, is hardly remembered as a poetic writer, nor are either writers' narratives especially influential. But the literary cartograph that each work introduces created shadows under which all subsequent writers of their respective genres draw shade. *Main Street* continues to cut through all these debates about the value and quality of Lewis as a writer, to deliver one of the single-most influential renderings of Euro-American utopianism. Lewis's *Main Street* should thus be considered America's *Utopia*, and the fictional frontier small town its island of the plain.

CHAPTER 3

NO SPOT OF GROUND: THE FICTIONAL SMALL TOWN AND NEW BLACK UTOPIAS

IN *SULA* AND *PARADISE* BY TONI MORRISON

Black American writers have engaged with the small-town extensively, and the

utopian/dystopian dichotomy which is so prevalent in the setting is never far behind in these

works. While Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) does not depict a

fictional small-town, as is the primary focus of this study, it is difficult to start anywhere but with

the novel's depiction of the historically all-Black town of Eatonville, Florida when surveying the

setting in Black American literature. Indeed, Hurston's novel had a similar impact on Black

American literature and the small town as Lewis's *Main Street* did for Euro-American writers a

few decades before; it created a model of the setting with which all subsequent entries were in

conversation. Despite the depiction of an historically real locale, critics have seen the utopian

traits of this seminal novel. Isiah Lavender III sees this very quality of "parallel[ing] reality" as

the fulcrum for utopian discourse present in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as it "reflects the

crushing interlocking oppressions of racism and sexism during the Jim Crow era, and yet,

significantly, it also offers hope for Black Americans, hope for the future and the social changes

that could come with it" (217). Despite taking place primarily in New York City, Ralph

Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) opens in an unnamed Southern small town. The Black protagonist

receives a scholarship to an all-Black university, but to obtain the scholarship, he is forced into a

dehumanizing battle royale, with the wealthy white men of the community looking on.

Contrasted sharply in this early section is the utopian impulse present in the all-Black university

against the brutal reality of Black life in the community, controlled by the white social framework.[26] Much like William Faulkner and Louise Erdrich, Ernest Gaines made a career project out of depicting various fictional Southern small towns and their marginalized Black communities in several of his works. Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) foregoes the metaphorical island-making I mapped in both the introduction and my previous chapter and sets her utopian small-town community of Willow Springs on a literal island off the coast of Georgia. Of all these surveyed works, *Mama Day* has perhaps received the most attention from utopian scholars, who have called the setting "a postcolonial utopia," a Black feminist utopia, and an "African American Womanist Utopian vision."[27]

When fugitive slave Cora arrives to a reimagined antebellum South Carolina in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* (2016), where former slaves live alongside whites in an idyllic small town, see looks out over the Main Street and marvels at the seemingly utopian creation she sees before her, wondering how "men had built such a thing as this, a stepping stone to heaven" (Whitehead 119). When it is revealed that the white community is controlling the Black community through forced or coerced sterilization (among other things), however, Cora sees it as an effort to "steal their future" by "tak[ing] away the hope that one day their people will have it better" (139). Even as the formerly enslaved Cora is finally permitted to enter the American utopian model, she sees that it is not accessible for her – that the white power structure seeks to disarm the Black community of all its own utopian impulses. Later, when Cora's fugitive status closes in on her, the Main Street she marveled over earlier is now a dire threat and ground she dare not tread (154). While many of these works do not fall under the geographical

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[26] See Lisa Yaszek's "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" by for discussion of utopian qualities present in Ellison's novel
[27] See Yuan Tian, Megha Patel, and Saskia M. Fürst, respectively.

parameters I laid out in my introduction – none of them take place in the Midwest or West – this robust history of fictional small towns in the American South speaks to a different utopian migration history – one that started in the South before moving north, and, as depicted in one of the novels considered in this chapter, eventually west.

Broadly, engagements with the small-town by Black American writers fall within two categories; depictions of a Black community within and often marginalized by an otherwise white small town, or depictions of an all-Black small town. Gaines, Whitehead, and Ellison fall under the category of the former, while Hurston and Naylor's discussed works depict the latter. Perhaps America's most important writer, Toni Morrison, produced one of each of these subgroups in *Sula* (1973) and *Paradise* (1998)*,* respectively. In doing so, Morrison delivered one of the most important ruminations on American utopianism. All of the above surveyed works, at least in part, engage with the idea of Black Americans' place in American utopian systems and offer useful insight into the function of the small town as a quintessential utopian form, but none have the impact on the discourse that Morrison does.

In her choice of setting of these two novels, Morrison identities the place and space of Euro-American utopian pursuits – the small town – and establishes it as the battlefield upon which a campaign for Black utopianism in America must be fought. *Sula* is set in the all-Black community of "the Bottom," which sits on the margins of Medallion, a fictional Ohio small town tucked in a river valley. The novel opens with the history of the Bottom, where a slaveowner promises land to a formerly enslaved individual, but the offer is a trick. The slaver convinces the formerly enslaved man that the unfarmable land on the hills *above* the valley, and thus, above Medallion, is the better land. From this chicanery, the Black community of the Bottom is born – situated on the margins of the white small town, in the land which the slaver promises is "the

bottom of heaven" (5). This deception "accounted for the fact that white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio, and the blacks populated the kills above it" (5).

With the Bottom, Morrison literalizes Winthrop's City upon a Hill, but for the Black community, it is an ironic taunt, where "they could literally look down on the white folks" (5) without actually being able to access the benefits of the inclusion in the white community. When the time comes for the freed slave to join America, represented in *Sula* in its monolithic ideal small-town form, they are instead tricked into a permanent place on its margins – able to look in but not access it. If the small town is Euro-America's monolith of idealism, as I have argued that it is, Morrison positions the center of her story at its margins, establishing Euro-America's utopia as not just an inaccessible space for Black Americans but as an oppositional force situated to oppress and exclude them, as well. As Maxine Lavon Montgomery writes, "metaphorically, the Bottom is Black America, whose ironic genesis is revealing of white society's failed promises" (128). In her project of interrogating Black Americans' place in the pursuit of prosperity in America, Morrison identifies the small town as the representative model capable of demonstrating Black marginalization and exclusion even after supposed emancipation, and the Bottom's "toilsome existence challenges the motion of America as an ever-expanding Eden of boundless progress" (Montgomery 128). *Sula* was but Morrison's first step in her project of utilizing the fictional small town to undermine the assumptions of Euro-America's utopian pursuits, however.

Twenty-four years after *Sula*, Morrison published *Paradise* (1997), her seventh novel. Morrison considered *Paradise* (1997) to be the concluding entry of a loose trilogy with *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992), but I present it here as a more direct thematic sequel to *Sula*. In his essay on Frederick Douglass's utopian impulses, David Lemke argues that Douglass's pursuit of a

Black utopia is "dependent upon an appropriate space," but his search for such a space "falls short of realizing his utopian desire" (Lemke 24). In these two novels, Morrison is continuing that search for a literal "space" for Black communities in America to pursue the same utopian promises inherent in America's ideals. This chapter looks to analyze Morrison's fictional small-town project in two phases: first in her documentation and eventual rejection of the marginalization of Black communities in Euro-American utopians pursuits in *Sula*, which I examine through a combination of literary cartography, scapegoating theory, and a survey of the history of Black community organization; and second, in her turn to a traditional literary utopia in *Paradise* that Morrison uses to reject the Euro-American utopian form outright, which I analyze through utopian theory and inverted national utopian master narratives.

In his examination of the function of place in *Sula*, Houston A. Baker Jr. argues that "what Morrison ultimately seeks in her coding of Afro-American PLACE is a writing of intimate, systematizing and ordering black village values (237). In *Sula* and *Paradise*, however, Morrison struggles to locate an actual place where these Black village values are permitted to thrive. In Morrison's interrogation of Euro-American utopian master narratives, these two novels act as companion pieces, where the author co-opts American literature's definitive utopian space – the fictional small town – to upset and complicate America's utopian assumptions. In doing so, Morrison presents a placelessness for Black utopian pursuits in America's social organization. Black spaces and places are temporary in *Sula* and *Paradise*. The vibrant communities may persist, but they must remain agile, mobile, adaptable in their navigation of America. Beginning with *Sula*, Morrison challenges the historical marginalization of Black communities in American community building. In *Paradise*, she replicates both of America's primary utopian master narratives, the City Upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny, to present them as inherently and fatally

flawed models of social organization. Taken together, *Sula* and *Paradise* act as a reflection on the system and inherent exclusivity of Euro-American utopian pursuits, a rejection of the Euro-American utopian model, and an assertation for the placelessness of Black utopian pursuits in America. With their vibrant, supportive, and enduring communities, however, Morrison creates the raw material for Black American utopias. In both novels' similar apocalyptic endings, she sounds the call for new Black utopian forms to replace the failed Euro-American models of Manifest Destiny and the City upon a Hill.

Black Americans and the American System

For several decades leading up to the American Civil War and even some years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, proposals for the forced deportation and resettlement of freed slaves were forwarded by many prominent white American scholars and politicians. The proposition of forced resettlement began as early as 1816, when the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America was founded by Robert Finley, the soon thereafter president of the University of Georgia, and Henry Clay, a future United States Secretary of State. The Society, a collection of some abolitionists, but also Southerners who simply wanted to deport freed slaves, looked to establish colonies in Africa of formerly enslaved African Americans (Eaton 135). By 1820, still forty-one years before the beginning of the Civil War, the Society succeeded in its goal by establishing a colony in West Africa, which eventually became Liberia (Staudenraus). Leaders like Clay were motivated by a belief that a society of free Black citizens and white citizens would be untenable (Klotter), but similar sentiments were not isolated to this group; the concept of forced resettlement of freed slaves reached the highest levels of American government.

Thomas Jefferson supported the idea of slave resettlement in Africa as a solution to what he called the "moral evil" of slavery (Helo 7). In 1863, *after* Emancipation, Abraham Lincoln went so far as to sign a contract with a British official to establish a colony of former American slaves in British Honduras, or what is present day Belize (Magness). Evident by this history, a sprawling debate was being held by some of America's most prominent leaders concerning forced deportation of freed Black Americans, a debate that many contemporary Black American scholars decried as damaging to the pursuit of a free and equal Black American population in America. One such offering on the forced deportation of formers slaves came from Dr. Jacob Dewees. His essay, entitled "The Great Future of America and Africa; An Essay Showing Our Whole Duty to the Black Man, Consistent with our Own Safety and Glory," published in the 1850s, outlines a plan to tax gold mined from booming public lands in California to purchase and resettle American slaves in Africa in a one-hundred-year timeframe.

Dewees's proposal does not call for outlawing slavery until the end of the century-long deportation timeline, and, indeed, takes note that emancipation must be done with proper monetary compensation to slaveowners and "without injustice for the master" (85). Dewees goes so far as to say:

> The idea is not to be tolerated that the nation should ask any portion of its citizens to sacrifice upon the altar of liberty, or… the shrine of abstract justice, that which has descended to them from their ancestors as property, secured to them as such by the Constitution itself (85).

Once purchased with money from the taxed public goldmines, Dewees posits a plan for the forced deportation and resettlement of former slaves in African colonies. Dewees paints an abject picture of the "hopelessness of the political condition" (15) of freed slaves in America, while

describing Africa as possessing a "bright future" (15), as being a "land of promise" in which the freed slave can have "a nationality of character" (49), before posing the question, "who can foresee, or even imagine what Africa may become in the short space of three generations?"(49).

Alongside these hopeful descriptions of a prosperous Africa, however, Dewees introduces the idea of slavery being a "disease" of the United States (18), wherein the cause of this disease, as positioned by the author, does not originate with the injustice of those perpetrating the institution, but in the very presence of the slaves in America. Despite his utopic projection of Africa, Dewees forwards the resettlement of slaves and eventual abolition of slavery as the only "rational hope that the plague spots may be removed from the bosom of this country" (32). As framed by Dewees, slaves themselves, not those who institute or perpetuate the enslavement, are the disease, which, if not removed, could "debilitate the whole body in such a way as to produce an unhealthy action throughout the entire system (19-20). Dewees, himself a medical doctor, presents an extended metaphor in which the two "doctors," "Abolition" and "Colonization," are offered to treat and cure the patient, which the author names "Uncle Samuel" (26). In short, Dewees's depiction of Africa is a promising and fruitful one, but it comes on the heels of comparing the removal of slaves to Africa to the removal of "plague spots" from America's bosom, and, elsewhere, to "eradicat[ing] the tumour" (21) from the body of Uncle Samuel, the personified and corporeal white America. Thus, despite the utopian vision Dewees constructs of an African American colony, he positions his plan as more akin to exiling a leprous population from a healthy one than liberating an oppressed people. Acting as a problematic thesis statement, Dewees ends his opening chapter with the following: "The future Africa may look back to the sufferings of her children in this land of liberty as a blessing, and to American Slavery as the mother of African Liberty and Civilization!" (32).

Dewees's sentiments are but one variation of a position and philosophy of the practical

and rhetorical exclusion of former slaves, and the Black population of America at large, from the

prosperity of the nation by a Euro-centric society and its leaders. America was founded as a

utopian ideal, and the United States Constitution is a document fueled by utopian social thought

that did not apply to everyone: "On the eve of the Civil War, the constitution stood as a bastion

of slavery and white supremacy" (Nieman 2115). But even at their moment of liberation, when

the formerly enslaved were granted personhood instead of property-hood in a new interpretation

of the U.S. Constitution, there was a placelessness for Black utopian pursuits in America. For

people of the same mind as Dewees, if there was to be a Black utopia, it was not to take root in

the same soil as America's white utopia. Toni Morrison interrogates this same moment when the

formerly enslaved entered into a free America in her novel *Sula* (1973), and just like the

philosophy of Dewees and others, Morrison's novel opens with an exclusion of Black

Americans.

The opening pages of *Sula* depict a moment where the formerly enslaved man is tricked

by the slave-owner, who "promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would

perform some very difficult chores" (Morrison 5). Once the enslaved person holds up their end

of the bargain, however, the slave-owner feels that "freedom was easy – the [slave-owner] had

no objection to that. But he didn't want to give up any of his land" (Morrison 5). This is a

fictionalization and distillation of the same philosophy outlined by Dewees, wherein slavery can

and must come to an end, but that does not mean that freedom and access to the American

pursuit of utopianism is granted to the formerly enslaved. This moment and the calling of the

slave-owner a "good white farmer" is a commentary on the type of liberal abolitionist outlined

above who, for one reason or another, saw the end or evil of slavery, but still did not see the

formerly enslaved as a part of the free and equal America. With this history and reality in mind,

Morrison returned to the roots of the literary utopia – not a celebration of a good or perfect place,

but a rumination on nowhere, on "no place" – a placelessness. In *Sula*, Morrison's second novel,

the author presents the reticent placelessness of Black utopian pursuits in American which persist

even after the plans of forced removal by the likes of Dewees, Lincoln, Finley, and Clay never

come to pass.

<center>Utopia on the Margins</center>

Morrison's positioning of the Bottom in *Sula* is more than just a metaphorical reflection

on Black Americans' exclusion from American utopian pursuits, but a fictionalization of the real

historical practice of containing and marginalizing Black communities geographically by white

political systems, as well. In their book, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban

South, 1940-1968*, Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser survey the historical practices by

white dominated political systems that worked to segregate Black communities geographically.

These practices included the "systemic removal of African-Americans from the inner core" of

cities like Chicago while "maintain[ing]… a ghetto through the machinations of public policy"

so that "government actions reinforced the social agenda of whites to maintain strict racial

segregation at the neighborhood level" (Silver and Moeser 2). This was a process practiced

across America, where "city building processes, especially city planning" contributed to the

geographical segregation of Black communities at the institutional level (Silver and Moeser 3).

The results of these policies in Chicago specifically was a reality that mirrored the Bottom in

Sula, where the "Black Belt of Chicago embraced the 'most rundown areas of the city'" so that

the vast majority of the Black community, nearly 10 percent of the city's population at the time,

were settled primarily on "a narrow strip of the city to the east and the south of the stockyards"

(Silver and Moeser 6).This process, as outlined by Silver and Moeser, lead to the rise of the "Separate City"; a Black city contained within a white city. This is the history of postbellum American community building which Morrison distills in the marginalization of the Bottom in *Sula*. By bringing this history to the fictional small town, Morrison gives voice to similar practices in less urban areas, where the influence of political power structures were even more profound because of the isolation of the communities, while simultaneously establishing the raw material to engage with the American utopian master narratives which the small-town form represents.

As established in previous sections, the fictional small town has long been one of the definitive spaces of American literature. With the publication of Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California* in 1949, new voices began to join the conversation taking place in this literary space, as writers of color started experimenting with the nation's definitive utopian setting. These writers joined a long history of American authors in using the fictional small-town setting to interrogate American idealism. Moreso than any before them, this group revolted from the village, as they provided critical interpretations of the Euro-American small-town form and its marginalization of communities of color. These writers responded to campaigns of cultural eradication present in Euro-America's utopian master narratives by co-opting the small-town form to both combat the dystopic realities of America's utopian pursuits and introduce new utopian forms to the iconography of the literary small town. Along with Mori, other writers of color like Gaines, Louise Erdrich, and Alfredo Véa Jr. expanded and perhaps even unlocked the true utopian potential of the small-town island-form, which earlier American writers found so elusive, by producing protective, inclusive communities. With *Sula* and *Paradise*, Morrison joined this conversation of American writers of color to provide a collective rumination of the

small-town setting which distills a history of exploitation and alienation for marginalized

populations, highlighting the systemic exclusivity of America's founding utopian pursuits. For

Morrison's Black characters, the American small town is often a threat as much as a refuge, and

the margins, which had typically been the oppositional force to the small town, became the

refuge.

        Sula opens with an exclusion, an adjacency, a marginalization, but, most importantly, the

novel begins with a place – "in that place" (3). A Black place specifically, but before the opening

line ends, that place has already been made past tense: "there was once a neighborhood"

(Morrison 3). Before the reader even enters the Bottom, Morrison foretells of its destruction, its

temporariness. The short opening section acts as both a founding myth of the setting, the Black

community called "the Bottom," and the non-entrance of the formerly enslaved into the free,

bountiful promise of America. Despite the deception upon which the town is founded, a

hopefulness might remain for a gradual acceptance of the Black community into Euro-American

prosperity, but by quickly foretelling its destruction, Morrison rejects this idea. The Bottom, for a

brief moment, seems to be a space and place for the Black community to put down roots and

grow in the American soil, but on the very first page, Morrison tears that space apart, brick by

brick and board by board:

        Generous funds have been allotted to level the stripped and faded buildings that clutter

        the road from Medallion up to the golf course. They are going to raze the Time and Half

        Pool Hall, where feet in long tan shoes once pointed down from the chair rungs. A steal

        ball will knock to dust Irene's palace of Cosmetology, where women used to lean their

        heads back on sink trays and doze while Irene lathered Nu Nile into their hair. Men in

Khaki work clothes will pry loose the slats of Reba's grill, where the owner cooked in her

hat because she couldn't remember ingredients without it (Morrison 3).

Morrison ends this apocalypse with the prophecy from the future: "There will be nothing left of

the Bottom" (3). In this way, the opening lines of *Sula* codify one of the novel's primary

purposes; an interrogation, a searching for a Black space and place in America. Morrison then

quickly ties this Black placelessness to America's utopian form, writing that "perhaps it is just as

well" that the Bottom is destroyed, "since it wasn't a town anyway, just a neighborhood"

(Morrison 4). Morrison stakes the small town as the representative space, both metaphorically

and literally, of Black exclusion into Euro-American utopian spaces and pursuits. This Black

placelessness and apocalypse of the Bottom foregrounds the entire novel. The vibrancy of

community which persists in spite of that reality creates what Jameson has called the "raw

material" for utopia ("Of Islands"). And yet the density of Black experience, joy, community,

and suffering crammed into the subsequent pages are received as uncontained by a physical

space because the physical space does not persist along with the community that inhabited it. The

Black community might endure by the end of the novel, but the space in which they inhabit does

not.

The Bottom, and marginalized communities like it, are thus a liminal space. On one side

of the threshold is the Euro-American utopian form of community, the small town, and on the

other is possibility for new forms of community, or perhaps the failure of such pursuits. As I

mapped in previous sections, the literary utopian small-town form is frequently comprised of

three components, which I identify as "Main Street," "Mid-town," and the "Outskirts." Main

Street is the center of the new covenant of Euro-America's evolutionary City upon a Hill. Mid-

town is where the missionaries of the Main Street philosophy reside, the residential area for those

within the new covenant. And the Outskirts are where the marginalized and the exploited are placed by the Main Street community. As the small towns grow, the Outskirts are pushed further out, but that does not mean the Black community is then welcomed into the embrace of the utopian-island form – instead, they are again displaced, and the former margin where the Black community used to exist is "called a suburb now" (Morrison 5) where primarily white affluent families live. The space becomes the new "Mid-town" and the Outskirts are pressed further and further away from the center and access to the Main Street covenant.

In most small-town texts, the Outskirts are where the scapegoated figure or figures reside, as we saw in my analysis of Lewis's *Main Street*. Main Street is the spatial and philosophical center of these novels. Even when the writer takes a critical view on that philosophy, operating within what Carl Van Doren labeled "The Revolt from the Village," it is often from within the perspectives of characters with access to the benefits of the Main Street model – characters like Lewis's Carol Kennicot and Cather's Jim Burden. The Outskirts, then, become the border which helps define the utopian form of the small town and reaffirms the belief system of the Main Street covenant, a function which I will demonstrate in *Sula* shortly. In *Sula*, Morrison repositions the "center" of the utopian small-town model, however, placing her perspective firmly *within* the Outskirts. The result is a scapegoated community, which is instead threatened by Main Street, by the utopian form of the small town. Throughout the novel, Morrison cycles through a series of scapegoat figures to challenge the notion of such a practice.

Mapping the Margins: The Scapegoat as Mapmaker

Sula, and, subsequently, *Paradise* are dense with characters searching for a place to belong both emotionally and spatially. The circumstances of these searches for belonging result in many of these characters or communities being scapegoated. *Sula* plays out as a series of

various degrees of scapegoating, and ultimately a reflection on the flawed nature of the practice. The first of these scapegoated figures in *Sula* is the entire Black community of the Bottom, and their ritualized scapegoating with which Morrison opens the novel is an essential and vital step in crafting and reinforcing the Euro-American utopian form of the small town. The is a return to the "myth of sacrifice" which "provides most communities with their sense of collective identity" as outlined by Richard Kearney in my previous chapter (Kearney 1). Morrison provides very few glimpses into the lives or perspectives of the white community living in Medallion – a narrative choice which reinforces the Black community's exclusion from that space – but one of the few insights the author does provide demonstrates this "immolation of the 'other'" ritual in action for the white community as presented by Kearney (1).

When the body of Chicken Little, a young boy Sula, the novel's central character if not its protagonist, accidentally drowns as a child, washes up on the white side of the river, a bargeman finds him "stuck in some rocks and weeds" (63). The bargemen "would have left him there" and only decides to pull the Black body out of the water when he "noticed that it was a child, not an old black man," quickly establishing the dehumanizing, othered perspective the white community has of their Black neighbors (63). The man then reflects in a traditional scapegoating "self" vs "the other" dichotomy: "He shook his head in disgust at the kind of parents who would drown their own children. When, he wondered, will those people ever be anything but animals, fit for nothing but substitutes for mules, only mules didn't kill each other the way n*ggers did" (63). In this moment of disgusted, though baseless, reflection, the man not only dehumanizes the Black community, but he positions them as a contrast against which the white community is superior, reinforcing both his own worldview but also subconsciously repressing any shame or guilt he might possess for the treatment and marginalization of the

Bottom by Medallion, an aspect of scapegoating I will cover at greater length shortly. Moreover, the man quickly ties this moment to a mythic framework of self vs the other, which has long been used by white supremacists to tie their perceived superiority to divinity. The bargeman later finds himself "still bemused by God's curse and terrible burden his own kind had of elevating Ham's sons" (63). Just as I mapped for Lewis's Gopher Prairie, the white small town of Medallion is dependent on this 'in' vs 'out' dichotomy. Also just like Lewis, Morrison tethers this systemic function, through a Christian mythic system of supremacy, to the perceived divine right of Euro-America's originating utopian master narratives of Manifest Destiny and the City upon a Hill. The bargeman is operating on the same beliefs as the originators of these narratives, just like those Mainstreeters in Lewis's novel: "For the Puritan, the outside was profane, and the profane was that which had to be overcome, conquered, and destroyed, territory to be won" (Stephenson 11). 'The other' thus plays a scapegoating role where its very presence codifies the hegemonic narrative by threatening it, and "any victory would be a reassuring sign that Providence had in fact singled out New England for special dispensations" (Stephenson 11), only now it was white America, embodied here as the small town of Medallion, which is being positioned as exceptional.

This can be seen, too, as a continuation or evolution of another self vs the other dichotomy baked into America's construction, which Morrison herself identified in her work *Playing in the Dark*:

> Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal

fears about external exploitation was an American Africanism – a fabricated brew of

darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is unique American (*Playing in the Dark* 38).

As slavery ended, white America created new forms to preserve this "projection of the not-me,"

which manifest in systemic exclusivity of their community structures, as well as in their social

and economic models, all of which is distilled in *Sula* through the spatial and economic

exclusion of the Bottom from the white small town of Medallion. The "fabricated brew of

darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" is systemically contained to the marginalized space on

the Outskirts of town, where it can continue to serve its scapegoating role for the white

community. Morrison briefly comments on the absurdity of this literal black and white approach

of supremacy and othering through the phenomenon of passing, when Tar Baby, one of Eva

Peace's boarders, is arrested. The policeman "had always maintained that Tar Baby was white,

said that if the prisoner didn't like to live in shit, he should come down out of those hills, and live

like a decent white man" (133). This moment reveals the centrality of racial perception to the

isolation of the Bottom, where a passing Black man is hypothetically welcomed into the white

community, despite being arrested for public intoxication.

Morrison places not just the marginalized population at the center but the marginal

figures within that community, as well. She closes her opening section turning to two central

figures of the novel – the titular Sula and Shadrack. While both of these figures play ostracized

and scapegoated roles for the community, they also act as new mythic figures for the Bottom –

one as creator and one as destroyer.

Shadrack is a World War I veteran suffering from severe PTSD. After sustaining injury

in the war, Shadrack returns to a world in which he undergoes "a struggle to order and focus

experience" (Morrison 14). All manner of things seem uncontained to Shadrack – from the size

of his hands, which grow uncontrollably as he lays in his hospital bed, to death itself, which he

fears for its "unexpectedness" (Morrison 14). Motivated by a need to contain death, Shadrack

sets out to "mak[e] a place for fear as a way of controlling it" (14). This leads Shadrack to the

"notion that if one day a year were devoted to [death] everybody could get it out of the way and

the rest of the year would be safe and free" so "in this manner he instituted National Suicide

Day" (14). To celebrate National Suicide Day, Shadrack marches through the streets of the

Bottom on the third day of each year, "telling [the people of the Bottom] that this was their only

chance to kill themselves or each other," ringing a cowbell along the way (15).

As Shadrack moves through the space, he begins the process of creating a literary

cartograph. Like Carol in *Main Street*, Shadrack becomes a "surveyor of spaces" (Tally Jr. 48).

As the character moves through the textual space, they "sew these spaces into a new unity" and

"ultimately 'invent' the world so surveyed and stitched together" to create something much like a

narrative map – a textual structure which orients the reader and makes sense of the textual world

(Tally, Jr. 48). Unlike the literary cartograph I outlined of Lewis's *Main Street*, however,

Shadrack's surveying of spaces takes on a broader social and communal function.

While Shadrack's solo parade is initially unsettling to the people of the Bottom, it is

eventually absorbed by the community as an important social function: "Once the people

understood the boundaries and nature of his madness, they could fit him in, so to speak, into the

scheme of things" (15). Shadrack's parade becomes part of the fabric of the community to the

point where "they had simply stopped remarking on the holiday because they had absorbed it

into their thoughts, into their language, into their lives" (15). National Suicide Day becomes *part*

of the social order, a marker by which the people of the Bottom document their lives. In this

way, Shadrack becomes the proxy through which the community of the Bottom tries to contain

all their suffering and death in a single day, but he also becomes their mapmaker – a new mythic figure who, once a year, orchestrates a socially sanctioned ritual mapping of the community to chart a physical space which can contain the prosperity of the Black community on the other 364 days of the year. As much as it becomes a day to contain all suffering, National Suicide Day also becomes a cartographic campaign to map a literal space for Black communal prosperity. While space takes primacy in *Sula*, and placelessness and access to specific spaces is a primary theme, the exclusion of the Black community is hardly *just* a spatial one.

The community of the Bottom is also excluded from participating in the economic and social production of the white small town. The individuals of the Bottom – the men especially – are repeatedly denied the right to enter the economic structure of Medallion. Much has been said by critics about Morrison's depiction of Black masculinity in *Sula*. Montgomery notes how the men of the Bottom are "figuratively emasculated by a society whose tokens of manhood – wealth, prestige, power – are reserved for Whites only" (Montgomery 131). Barbara Lounsberry and Grace Anny Hovet suggest that the "men are diminished, literally and figuratively," and "stunted in growth and development" because of the "diminished opportunities for adult development offered Black males by American society" (128). As Lounsberry and Hovey go on to note, the men of the Bottom crave inclusion in the economic system of America, however. A new tunnel project planned by the town of Medallion eventually becomes the embodiment for the Black community's hope at entry to physical, social, and economic space of Medallion and the America it represents. Medallion intends to build a new road and a tunnel which would connect their town to another town on the other side of the river. The tunnel would link Medallion to the network of small towns in the area, symbolically and economically linking it to

America itself, as well. Jude Greene, the man who eventually marries Sula's best friend, Nel,

perceives this tunnel as his chance to enter into the American system:

> Along with a few other young black men, Jude had gone down to the shack where they
>
> were hiring. Three old colored men had already been hired, but not for the road work, just
>
> to do the picking up, food bringing, and other small errands. These old men were close to
>
> feeble, not good for much else, and everybody was pleased they were taken on; still it
>
> was a shame to see those white men laughing with the grandfathers but shying away from
>
> young black men who could tear that road up. The men like Jude who could do real work.
>
> Jude himself longed more than anybody else to be taken. Not just for the good money,
>
> more for the work itself. He wanted to swing the pick or kneel down with the string or
>
> shovel the gravel. His arms arched for something heavier than trays, for something dirtier
>
> than peelings; his feet wanted the heavy work shoes that the hotel required (81-82).

For Jude and the other men of the Bottom, the construction of the tunnel meant more than just

wages and labor – it meant entry into the American economic and social system. Working on the

bridge would give Jude and the other men of the Bottom a place in the community, a

"camaraderie with the road men" which Jude desired "more than anything" (82). Most

importantly, it would give them shared ownership of the literal infrastructure that makes up

America; it would give Jude a tangible thing that "he could point to" and say "I built that road'"

(82). Jude dreams how "people would walk over his sweat for years," (82) affirming not only a

hand in building America, but an undeniable and enduring place in it, as well.

This does not come to pass, however, as Jude "stood in lines for six days running and saw

the gang boss pick out thin-armed white boys from the Virginia hills" instead of the capable

Black locals of the Bottom. Thus, the thing that offered promise of entry into the prosperity and

social structures of American became a constant reminder of their exclusion, instead. In their

anguish, the Bottom turns to the same old motions to redistribute their problems – scapegoating,

setting their sights this time on that next new mythic figure, Sula.

When Sula returns to the Bottom after a decade away, she is "accompanied by a plague

of robins" (90), which is received as a bad omen by the community and foreshadows the

scapegoating role she will fill for the community upon her return. From this point on in the

novel, Morrison uses the diametric relationship between Sula and Nel to consider the

circumstances of Black community building within a white America while simultaneously

exploring alternative options. When Sula returns, more atypical than ever, Nel has gone the other

way, so that she "belonged to the town and all its ways" (120). Nel has thrown herself into her

role as mother and wife in Sula's absence, while Sula has become a disrupter of the very

ordering social principles to which Nel has dedicated herself (Lounsberry and Hovey 126).

Sula's isolation is magnified by her disinterest in leading what those in the community consider a

normal life. She does not wish to establish financial security or a family. Her pursuit is instead to

lead an "experimental life" (117). Sula is not interested in the standard pursuits of promised

American prosperity, but her relative failure to achieve an alternative prosperity – she dies at a

young age alone and in great pain – indicates an isolated reality for those excluded from the

American Dream. Before this eventual ending, however, Sula rejects outright traditional views

on sex, gender, motherhood, the home, and respect for elders. Through her disruptions of

identified social standards, Sula becomes the new scapegoat of the Bottom. Acting as the

scapegoat, Sula becomes "the other" through which the "self" could be defined, and she begins

to absorb all of the Bottom's anguish and evil.

Sula is perceived to have abstract, supernatural powers of spreading discord and evil throughout the community, as "things began to happen" upon her return (113); Teapot, a young boy of a neglectful mother, falls down Sula's steps, and, despite stooping to help the boy, a rumor spreads that she pushed him (112). Another instance occurs when a man chokes on chicken bone and dies when Sula passes his porch (113); Like her mother, Hannah, Sula sleeps with men, married and single indiscriminately. Whereas the women of the town had seen their husband's affairs with Sula's mother as a compliment due to Hannah's desirability, they perceive that "Sula was trying [the men] out and discarding them without any excuse the men could stomach" (115). Placing this blame on Sula acts as a sort of panacea for the community, as "they begin to cherish their husbands and wives, protect their children, repair their homes and in general band together against the devil in their midst" (118). Teapot's mother "became the most doting mother: sober and industrious" and the wives of Sula's lovers "cherished their men more, soothed the pride that and vanity Sula had bruised," (114, 115).

Through Sula, Morrison places the same scapegoating we see directed at the Black community within the community itself, serving a similar function: "By identifying Sula as evil and rejecting her categorically, people in the Bottom are able to keep their distance from absence they cannot afford to acknowledge" (McKee 4). To return to the bargemen who found Chicken Little's body, this function speaks to how a scapegoat does more than just facilitate a "self" vs "other" dichotomy and can help the community conceal a greater, more horrifying truth (Girard 3). For the bargeman and the white community at large, it is perhaps a deflection of the oppression they force upon the Black community, and a fear that their utopian pursuits are not divine, are not "Destiny" manifest, and that their scapegoating victims might not be guilty, after all. For the Bottom, the more horrible truth for which they use scapegoating to conceal is that

they are systemically excluded, marginalized by the very form which contains the utopian pursuits of Euro-America. Once their scapegoating figure of Sula is gone, they can no longer conceal that darker truth, and they instead turn to the actual culprit of Medallion itself, with the history of their exclusion distilled in the tunnel project.

With the death of Sula, Shadrack begins to see the end of his campaign "to order and focus experience," to contain death and suffering to a single day (Morrison 14). As he moves to carry out one final National Suicide Day, the absence of the Bottom's scapegoat figure initiates a new response to the ritual. Slowly, members of the Black community began to join Shadrack and parade alongside him for National Suicide Day for the first time (159). The communal mapping project is no longer done through the proxy of Shadrack, but instead most of the Bottom marches alongside the mapmaker, crafting a literary cartograph as they march, so that the entirety of the Bottom becomes the surveyor of spaces. In the moment that the cartographic project fails, when Morrison is about to initiate the apocalyptic event that is hinted at in the opening to lines of *Sula* to assert a Black placelessness, the communal cartograph charts the white space for the first time: The Bottom marches into the "white part of town," and "the parade danced down Main Street past Woolworth's and the old poultry house, turned right and moved on down to New River Road" (161). In Shadrack's failure to map a Black space, the community of the Bottom instead enters the white space and maps it and subsequently works to destroy it.

They approach the tunnel, the object which is the location of their hope to enter the broader community of America. Instead, the tunnel and, by extension, the town itself, is "preoccupied by absences" (McKee 4), representative of their exclusion from the utopian network of Euro-America. This moment when the Bottom turns its anger and violence toward the tunnel is a communal acknowledgement of the systemic exclusivity of the American utopian

process, of the placelessness of Black communal prosperity in America. With Sula no longer around to deflect and contain their anguish, the Bottom turns it upon the actual perpetrator of their oppression. As the parade tears down the tunnel, it collapses, and many members of the community are washed away, so that the parade on the final National Suicide Day acts as a sort of communal suicide. This final flood, the washing away of most of the community of the Bottom, is an assertion that the American utopian system, condensed here and throughout American literature in the small town, does not work, and certainly not for those it places on the margins, those it uses as scapegoat to maintain its utopian island form. By mirroring the Bottom's scapegoating treatment at the hands of the white community with that of Sula at the hands of the Bottom itself, Morrison seems to ask the question – if the Bottom cannot exist without its scapegoating figure, could white America exist without its own "other" by which it defines the "self?" In *Sula*, Morrison thus positions Euro-America's pursuit of utopia as a direct, oppositional force to Black American prosperity and asserts a placelessness for Black utopian pursuits in American, but along the way she also creates the raw material for to make up a Black utopia.

Despite the oppression and opposition stacked against them, the Bottom remains vibrant, inclusive, and supportive. Even in their treatment of scapegoats, they differ from the white community in important ways, as seen in their acceptance of Sula and Shadrack, as Morrison writes about her own novel: "there was no other place" Sula could have existed, as "she would have been destroyed by any other place" ("Rootedness" 63). The Bottom, despite its scapegoating of Sula, protects her from the outside world which would ultimately be less understanding of her subversive acts. Or, as Morrison puts it, "no one stoned her or killed her or threw her out" ("Rootedness" 63). Sula is "permitted to be" ("Rootedness" 63) by her

community while they simultaneously position her as a scapegoat. As Montgomery argues, the Bottom develops a distinct culture even in its placelessness, with an "emphasis on the importance of dreams, omens, and, especially, myth and ritual" which indicate "vestiges of a culturally vibrant West African heritage" (Montgomery 129). These components speak to the raw material for the pursuit of a Black utopia, if given a space to pursue one in America.

Montgomery concludes that, in "the limitations society imposes, the narrative assumes… a certain interiority" through which "characters recognize society's resistance to their attainment of their goals and attempt the creation of an intensely private romantic world in which their goals may be achieved" (130). While this certainly plays out to a great degree in *Sula* and elsewhere in Morrison's work, there is nothing private about the way in which *Sula* ends. The ending of Sula acts as a rejection, not of the interiority which Montgomery identifies, but at the continued acceptance for that interiority. Sula and Shadrack act as two new mythic Black figures. Through her disruptions of traditional social institutions, Sula acts as a mythic disruptor who "destroys meaning" (McKee 14) and overturns the social order to reveal its diseased underbelly, creating possibility for new social forms to take the place of those she destroys. Through the creation of the two new mythic figures – Shadrack the mapmaker and Sula the destroyer – Morrison rejects the inherent placelessness of Black utopian pursuits systemically imposed by white political and social structures and calls for the pursuit of new Black utopian spaces where the raw material of America's Black communities can prosper. With *Paradise*, she begins that search.

New Black Utopias and a Rejection of the "American Model"

Let us briefly return to Dewees and two contemporary responses to his work. The first response came in the November 17, 1854 edition of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, founded as an abolitionist newspaper by its namesake in 1851. A brief article titled "Plan for Emancipation"

reviews and responds to the "thin, imposing Essay" ("Plans" 2) published by Dewees. The unnamed author of the newspaper article resoundingly rejects Dewees's proposal, solely on the grounds that "the South will not consent to any such project as that of Dr. Dewees, and nothing of the sort can be affected until after great change shall have been wrought in public sentiment" ("Plans"). The article goes on to state that the writers "have no particular plan for abolishing Slavery, and don't want any at present" ("Plans"). Thus, Dewees's plan is not even deemed worthy of interrogation on its merits as a path to emancipation because public opinion would reject it outright. The unnamed author of the article, ignoring the substance of Dewees's essay, shockingly state that they, a writer for an abolitionist newspaper, are not currently presenting a plan for the ending of slavery on the basis of public sentiment. This is perhaps an insight to an understanding, a foreshadowing even, by Black abolitionists who understood that ending slavery would not end oppression and exclusion from liberty for Black Americans, a theme *Sula* and Morrison are quite invested in.

Conversely, let us next examine a response by a white southern newspaper. The *Weekly National Intelligencer* was published in Washington D.C. from 1810 until 1867. For the majority of this time, it was owned by Joseph Gales, who would serve as mayor of Washington D.C. from 1827 to 1830. Gales was raised in North Carolina by antislavery parents John Gales Sr. and Winifred Gales, and Gales Jr. counted Henry Clay, the co-founder of The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America, among his close friends (Eaton). Despite this relationship, the readership of the *Weekly National Intelligencer* was largely Southern. Under this unique collection of influences, the July 22nd, 1854 edition of the *Weekly National Intelligencer* published an article considering two new publications, one of which was Dewees's "The Great Future of Africa and America." The other new publication under consideration was

titled "Negroes and Negro Slavery: the first an inferior race, the latter its normal condition" by

J.H. Van Ervrie.

The title of this second essay says much about its contents, as does the fact that the writer

of the *Weekly National Intelligencer* article praises the content and quality of both publications

under consideration. The unnamed author champions Van Ervie's adherence to "physiological

and ethnological facts" which are employed in support of the conclusion of "an original

difference, in formation and physical and mental organization, between the white and black man,

as they came from the Creator; that they [Black Americans] were, in fact, created for [their]

positions" ("New" 6). Concerning Van Ervie's work, the article states that the "anatomical and

ethnological facts which have been explained" in the publication prevent "a man of science or

other unprejudiced seeker after truth" (6) from reaching any other conclusion than that of Van

Ervie.

Turning to Dewees's essay, the article states, "Dr. Dewees has taken up the subject under

an entirely different view," approaching the topic of slavery as a "patriot and philanthropist…as

a moral teacher, not as a natural philosopher" (6). The article values Dewees's approach as

"ingenious and attractive, combining many sound political reflections with some fanciful

speculations" (6). The article finds that Dewees "is no abolitionist, in the offensive sense" and

"too just and honorable to desire to deprive his Southern brethren of their chattel without ample

remuneration" (6). At the execution of his plan, the article states the Dewees "looks for the

crowning glory to America and a bright future to benighted Africa" (6), before concluding that

Dewees's plan would perhaps not work, because, as made evident by Van Ervies's previously

discussed work, the African's "original difference" of inferiority will lead to the natives of

Africa extinguishing "the little light that now glimmers among…half-civilized, half-Christianized blacks of [America]" (6).

This reception and interpretation by a white, southern-facing newspaper acts to eradicate much of the pretense of charity Dewees forwards, to speak nothing of his eradication of African culture in preference to an adapted white American culture. Even if Dewees's self-described charitable though problematic stance is an earnest one, it is being received by those he proposes it to alongside other works that "scientifically" argue for the inferiority of the African race. Despite the "Our Whole Duty to the Black Man" portion of his essay's title, Dewees inarguably positions his proposal toward his fellow white Americans, attempting to sell them on his plan's merits concerning American prosperity both domestically and internationally, instead of to the slaves and other African Americans whom he proposes to deport. Evident by who the author directs his plan towards and the reception it receives by that audience, it is clear that Dewees's essay is concerned with white American prosperity and not the liberation of Black Americans. *Sula* represents this reality; this latent, persistent, and systemic oppression and exclusion of Black Americans from white America's utopian pursuits.

Now let us finally return briefly to what I identified early as Dewees's problematic thesis statement: "The future Africa may look back to the sufferings of her children in this land of liberty as a blessing, and to American Slavery as the mother of African Liberty and Civilization!" (32). The great irony of Dewees stating that American *slavery* will be the mother of African *liberty* seems to go unnoticed by the author, as this statement is the crux of the proposal, wherein the enslavement and eventual liberation of people of African descent will benefit future African colonies, as their exposure to "civilization" and the "advice and assistance" of white America will allow for a "march of higher destiny" (77). With this exposure

and "fair start" provided by white America as outlined by Dewees, the author foresees the African American "colonies of civilized negroes becom[ing] the most powerful propagandists for the civilization of interior tribes" (77). Even in their liberation, therefore, Dewees positions the formerly enslaved as carriers of American ideals – the "nationality of character" the author promises proves to be one "organized on the American model" in which Christianity can "redeem the whole continent from its depraved condition" (77). Dewees envisions railroads, churches, and schools led by Christian teachers. In the course of Dewees's plans, the enslaved would trade slavery for cultural colonization, and would exchange the label of African Americans for an Americanized Africa. The American model Dewees outline resembles, perhaps unsurprisingly, the small town which Euro-America was at that very moment using to slowly Americanize the Western expanse, as I will expand on in my next chapter. Dewees now wanted that American model, what would become the nation's definitive utopian space, to be exported as the next great tool of colonization. In *Paradise*, however, Morrison challenges the supremacy of the Euro-American model of utopian community building by co-opting the small town to refashion America's primary utopian master narratives – Manifest Destiny and the City Upon a Hill – into Black utopian spaces.

<div align="center">Down Here in Paradise: Utopian Duality in Toni Morrison's Paradise</div>

In my utopian reading of Lewis's *Main Street*, I demonstrated the structural utopian design of the novel's setting and the latent Euro-American utopianism present in Gopher Prairie. These include the utopian concepts that have entered into America's civil religion dialogue like Manifest Destiny and the City upon a Hill. The very Euro-American utopian forms Lewis maps in *Main Street* are made even more vivid by Morrison in *Paradise.* There is nothing implicit about the utopian models Morrison interrogates. The presence of these historical utopian mythic

forms are so pronounced in *Paradise* that Peter Widdowson calls the novel a "black [in]version of American history" (116). To this point, let us return to the idea of the chimera. When Morrison's utopians seek an American utopia, they piece together their model from the utopian materials which are at hand – that is, Manifest Destiny, the City upon a Hill, and the Garden of Eden. The combination of these chosen mythic and utopian forms "constitute the ideological message" of the utopia itself (*Archaeologies* 24). Jameson identifies Greece, the medieval, the Incas, and Protestantism as the "four raw materials" of More's *Utopia*. The utopian raw materials for Ruby, the fictional small town of *Paradise*, are even more apparent, in the overt references to the aforementioned utopian master narratives present in the novel.[28] These four components come together in *Paradise* to form a synthesis of an inverted American utopianism, which Morrison unsurprisingly packages in a fictional small town.

Explaining Thomas More's process of piecing together various utopian raw materials, Jameson writes,

Utopia is a synthesis of these four codes or representational languages, these four ideologemes, but only on condition it be understood that they do not fold back into it without a trace, but retain the dissonances between their distinct identities and origins, revealing the constant effort of a process that seeks to combine them without effacing all traces of what it wishes to unify in the first place. For these four reference points include superstructure and base, that is to say, contemporaneous or even modern intellectual movements and passions along with social institutions barely surviving from the past. Their combination is a whole political program and in effect implicitly identifies those still-existing social spaces in which the new ideological values might be incarnated (*Archaeologies* 25)

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[28] "City upon a Hill" can be broadened to contain John Winthrop's brand of Puritanism. See essay by Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos.

Each of the raw materials Morrison uses to piece together her utopia contains remnants of both latent influence from mythic narratives which have shaped America and an embodiment of real spaces which come to represent those narratives. Manifest Destiny provides the origins, the search, the divine right – it implies the perfect location and assigns "chosenness" upon those who undertake the journey. The City upon a Hill provides the aspirations – a select community which will establish the earthly link to God. This, along with its evolutionary form of the of the frontier small town, determine the spatial model of the utopia. Both of these components are denoted most strongly in the town's Oven, which both marks its "center" of power and represents its covenant with God in its motto – "Beware the furrow of His Brow."[29] The Garden of Eden speaks to the utopians of Ruby and their presumption of an earthly yet eternal paradise, as well as foretelling their eventual fall. The all-Black Oklahoma towns speaks to the historical urgency for a refuge and place for Black communities in America – a reality that alters the City upon a Hill from a launching point for a spreading pattern to a closed, chosen society – a social totality.

This fourth raw material introduces an inherent contradiction in each of the Euro-American utopian mythologies that precede it, however, as Black Americans were historically excluded from accessing these utopian narratives and spaces. Historically, the motivation of all-Black American communities was an act of escaping Euro-American utopian impulses and social structures which marginalized, excluded, and exploited them.[30] In looking to engage with Euro-American utopianism, Morrison unsurprisingly chose the setting which had come to define America's ideals in the small town. By making it an all-Black community, however, the function of the novel's other utopian mythologies change in small yet telling ways. With *Paradise*,

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[29] The exact words of this motto are debated in the novel, which I will expand upon later.
[30] See Slocum for history of Black communities seeking to find refuge in the American West from exploitation and marginalization in the East and South.

Morrison thus creates a layered literary utopia and introduces a utopian duality. On the one hand, the Euro-American utopian forms she engages with are historically anti-Black. On the other hand, Morrison depicts an all-Black community realizing a purer form of these models. The result of this duality is a dense network of Euro-American utopian narratives, traditional literary utopian spaces, and the utopian impulses of Black American communities.

Morrison creates inverted versions of Euro-America's central utopian mythologies to speak the historical exclusiveness of these models and to demonstrate the moral decay of Euro-America's utopian impulses. Through the recreation of these mythologies Morrison establishes traditional spaces of literary utopias where the inherent contradiction of Euro-America's utopian philosophies can rise to the surface. While *Paradise's* narrative is nonlinear and delivered piece by piece through numerous perspectives, it is essentially a novel of distinct spaces, and the three primary spaces of import are ones which I have highlighted as the foundations of the literary small-town: A frontier, Main Street/Town-Center, and the Outskirts. In each of these spaces, I will chart the Euro-American utopian narratives Morrison engages with and the contradictions she draws to the surface. Taken together, the events that unfold in these spaces represent a distilled version of Euro-America's utopian process. Morrison ultimately undermines the authority of these traditional narratives to complicate the boundary between utopian and dystopian discourse in America, especially for marginalized population.

By analyzing *Paradise* as the pure literary utopia it is, I will position the novel as an important contribution to American utopian discourse. In the process of creating an inverted American utopia, Morrison repudiates not just the model of Euro-America's City upon a Hill, but the concept of an isolated and extreme Black Utopia, as well, and calls for new utopian forms in America.

Ruby and All-Black Towns

Paradise tells the story of an all-Black utopian project, first through the fictional small town of Haven, and then, upon its failure, a second town of Ruby, founded by the children of Haven who fashion themselves as the "New Fathers." Through a series of trials and what they perceive to be heavenly guidance, Morrison's utopians believe themselves and their mission to be one of divine destiny.

Historically, roughly 30 all-Black towns were founded in Oklahoma, of which 12 still existed at the time Morrison published *Paradise* (McAuley S35). These towns rose to prominence in the years following the Civil War up until the turn of the century, as Southern Black Americans migrated to the West to seek out sites for their own communities. McAuley frames the appeal of this migration in similar terms of Manifest Destiny, with some key distinctions, writing that these groups sought "economic opportunities related to the opening of the West, the chance to live with members of their own group and be in charge of their own destiny, the prospect of personal and family safety, and freedom from white domination" (S38). Similarly, in her study on all-Black towns in Oklahoma, Karla Slocum notes how the West was "like a Promised Land" for Black migrating Americans (1). The trend of migration and all-Black towns in Oklahoma was so prominent that there was a brief moment when the idea of the Oklahoma Territory entering the Union as an "African American state" was a real possibility, so much so that one the leaders of Langston met with United States President Benjamin Harrison in 1890 to discuss the idea (McAuley S38).[31] These, like so many other small towns that began to populate the West during this time, were intentional communities with utopian ambitions, which

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[31] While Harrison was open to the idea, the plan fell apart as Black migration numbers dwindled. See McAuley p. S38.

very much resemble a re-imagined all-Black City upon a Hill. Scholars have noted that the "Black towns were utopian in their outlook" and were "race communities… organized around and proud of their Black identity" (Slocum x). Apropos to my own metaphor throughout this project, Slocum likens the all-Black Langston, Oklahoma to "a Black El Dorado" (1).

One advert, distributed in the South by the organizers of the all-Black town Langston City with the intention of attracting new migrant Black citizens, promises that "not a single white person lives" in the newly founded town and declares the town's intention to grow into "a negro city for the exclusive use of and benefit of our own race" (McAuley S38). These Black communities were grounded in "African American racial pride" as they pursued community "enclaves where racial fulfillment and self-realization could be sought without interference from Whites" (McAuley S38). Upon visiting Boley, another of the larger all-Black Oklahoma towns, Booker T. Washington claimed that the town "represents a dawning of race consciousness" (Washington 31). Washington felt the town would resolve that which I argue Morrison was searching for in *Sula* and *Paradise* – the establishment of a literal place in America for Black prosperity – when he wrote that Boley would "demonstrate the right of the negro, not merely as an individual but as a race, to have a worthy and permanent place in the civilization that the American people are creating" (Washington 31). Norman L. Crockett framed it in similar terms, writing that the all-Black towns of Oklahoma were part of a "continued quest" by Black Americans to "secure a position in the American system" (xi). This is the immediate historical background from which Morrison operates within as she formed the fictional town of Ruby, Oklahoma in *Paradise*, and makes up one of the primary utopian raw materials of the novel.

Defining *Paradise*

Paradise, as I will demonstrate, undeniably operates within the broad field of literary utopia, but it remains difficult to locate it precisely in that genre. The issue of defining and categorizing literary utopia and its subfields has been one that has baffled critics for decades.[32] The process of locating it within the utopian nomenclature is useful for our purposes, as *Paradise*'s utopian hybridity is an important indicator of the way in which it engages with utopian discourse.

While I will nuance this statement later, we can safely set *Paradise* outside of the framework of earnest utopias. While *Paradise* certainly recreates many of the foundational components of literary utopianism present in earnest utopias, it does not do so with the aim of presenting a more perfect society. No reading of the *Paradise* could credibly position the depiction of Ruby as an ideal community which should be sought. Eliminating this one sub-category still leaves many to sort through, however. Let me quickly canvas one such catalog of the various utopia sub-genres to demonstrate both the folly of such placement and *Paradise*'s own hybridized status. Antonis Balasopoulos presents ten variations of the two primary negations of an earnest literary utopia – that is, anti-utopias and dystopias – and *Paradise* fits neatly in none of them. It fits most closely with what Balasopoulos calls "critical dystopias." Balasopoulos argues that critical dystopias offer "concerted and coherent analysis of problematic or dangerous tendencies in the existing world" so that "the condemnation of the existent order… takes precedence, but not as something that precludes affirmative investment in the possibility of radical change and different future" (65). *Paradise* does all of these, including ending on a note of utopian possibility.

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[32] See Lyman Tower Sargent's "Utopia – The Problem of definition."

The complication in *Paradise* is that the depicted utopian project contains a duality – that of the explicit attempt of an all-Black group to find a place of prosperity and security in or adjacent to America, and the implicit allusions of Euro-American utopian mythology which the former inverts. Here, we begin to see the web of utopian/dystopian discourse Morrison weaves in *Paradise,* and the difficulties in locating this duality in utopian nomenclature.

At its surface, Ruby offers a radically different and perhaps preferable utopian alternative to experience for an all-Black community elsewhere in America, such as the one Morrison depicts in her other small-town narrative, *Sula*. As becomes evident, however, Ruby begins to break under the systemic failures present in the Euro-American utopian system, which locates that layer of the novel as explicitly dystopian. Morrison's utopians are simultaneously pursuing their own utopian project to escape the danger and marginalization they found in America, while also recreating those same utopian models from which they flee, only in their purest form. To Balasopoulos's credit, he foresees such complications with this particular subcategory, noting that critical dystopias are "effectively an anomaly of their broader group, for they share less with other forms of dystopia than with the tradition of critical Utopianism" (Balasopoulos 66). While it is unlikely such a utopian inversion, laden with contradictions, is what Balasopoulos spoke to when noting critical dystopias as an anomaly even within the already difficult to define framework of literary utopias, it does speak to the fact that this is the closest we might get in labeling the utopian discourse present in the novel.

Complicating such a definition further is Morrison's use of perspective. As Jameson and others note, early utopias like More, Campanella, and Bacon rely on the travel narrative (*Archaeologies* 23). Early dystopias and anti-utopias frequently rely on an internal perspective, where a member of the depicted community slowly responds to the society in which they are

indoctrinated.[33] Morrison instead hybridizes her use of perspective, presenting the narrative through three types of individual: The insider indoctrinated into the utopian philosophy, present in traditional utopias. The New Fathers represent this group in *Paradise*; the insider skeptical of and often undermining the utopian system, a figure common to dystopian literature. We see this figure in many of the women in town, as well as some of the youth Billie Delia; and finally, the outsider who voyages to the utopia and is critical of the model, which we see in the women of the Convent and in the few outsiders who live within Ruby like the Reverend Misner. Through these varied perspectives, Morrison offers another complication and hybridization of utopian forms.

Unlike *Main Street*, where the novel's voyager deliberately and meticulously moves through the space of the town, mapping a textual space for the reader, *Paradise's* narrative form prevents such a straight-forward presentation of a literary cartograph. Instead, the map is created piece by piece, revealed to the reader in fits and starts as various characters, all with unique perspectives on the depicted utopia, move through the space. Literary utopias, perhaps more so than any other genre, relies on a survey of spaces. Thus *Paradise's* very structure defies such a straight-forward mapping which would allow for easy definitions of utopian nomenclature. The entanglement of these various perspectives on the presented utopia might be the very point of the novel – that they cannot be untangled and there is no way forward for the American utopian models and discourses which the novel recreates, and an annihilation must take place to make space for new Black utopian forms. Labeling literary utopias in this complicated nomenclature – at least within the three primary categories of utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia – is an important step in the

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[33] See work by Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin.

process of discerning the utopian production of the work. But Morrison's layering and hybridization of these forms presents a density of utopian discourses which defies definition.

With these contradictions in mind, I will map the utopian spaces, impulses, and motivations in *Paradise* to begin to untangle this web and to demonstrate how each of the three primary spaces of the novel does the dual work of depicting Black utopian potential while anchoring it to a history of domination and control present in Euro-American utopian forms. As with most utopias, Morrison begins her own with blank spaces on the map, often called in its many forms, the frontier.

The Frontier and Chosenness: A New Manifest Destiny and a True Island

Just like with so many other utopias, *Paradise* opens with an island-making process aimed at creating a utopian enclave.[34] The novel's third line establishes the utopian enclave, as the narrator reflects on there being "ninety miles between [Ruby] and any other" town (3), a statement quickly followed by the migration history of Ruby's residents and their ancestors, which I will expand upon shortly. The island-making process imbedded in the community's migration history also initiates the novel's recreation of Euro-American utopian myths by packaging that history in the general motivations and language of Manifest Destiny. When the forebearers to the citizens of Ruby set out, responding to adverts from all-Black towns much like historical ones outlined above, saying "Come Prepared or Not at All," Morrison's utopians "believed they were more than prepared – they were destined" (Morrison 13 and 14). The "158 freedmen" who undertook the journey from the American South to the West believe themselves to be uniquely equipped to fulfill the promise of a plentiful, secure island of the plain. This

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[34] See my "Introduction" section and Jameson's "Of Islands and Trenches" for the centrality of island-making to literary utopias.

journey, taking place in the late 19th century at the tail-end of the conquest era, thus acts as a re-fashioned Manifest Destiny, originating in the South instead of the East.

Manifest Destiny was historically intricately linked with race, however, limiting Black Americans' participation. Manifest Destiny was grounded in the idea of exceptionalism, and the delineation between racial and "American" exceptionalism was difficult to pinpoint during the era of Western conquest. By "the middle of the nineteenth century a sense of racial destiny permeated discussions of American progress and of future American world destiny" resulting in a utopian project which saw "American Anglo-Saxons as a separate, innately superior people who were destined to bring good government, commercial prosperity, and Christianity to the American continent" (Horsman 1, 2). This process of racial exclusion inherent in Manifest Destiny informs the goals for Morrison all-Black utopians in their own destined search for a utopia. The inverted utopian form Morrison depicts in *Paradise* speaks to this anti-Black historical reality in three primary ways: 1) It becomes more dependent on the "noplace" status of the literary utopia; 2) It works toward a more complete isolationist mindset than the "outposts of the empire" concept of fictional small towns by Euro-American writers like Lewis; and 3) It overtly works to insulate its utopians from potential threats stemming from the outside world.

By recreating an all-Black Manifest Destiny, Morrison begins to speak to the inherent exclusiveness present in Euro-America's utopian narratives. For white Euro-Americans, Western conquest was an "image of American freedom expanding into the wilderness" (Merk 6), but for all-Black groups like Morrison's utopians, moving into the West was an attempt to outrun that same image of freedom which had an all-white face, not to expand an American system which had excluded them. Put simply, Morrison's all-Black version of Manifest Destiny is as much an act of running from something as one of running to it. The frontier's very status as *not-*

America is the driving appeal for both the founders of Haven, the original and failed first town in *Paradise*, in Morrison's novel and the historical all-Black towns from which the novel draws its inspiration, giving new meaning to the foundational utopian idea of a "noplace." As Morrison's utopians are denied entry into American systems in the early stages of their journey, they continue west, leaving incorporated America behind to search for somewhere to get lost in "unassigned lands" (14).

"The West" is thus less a wish fulfillment space for the all-Black community of *Paradise*, and more so a potential sanctuary, separated from white oppression, a reality evidenced by the name given to the first community of Morrison's utopians - Haven. For white Americans, the frontier was a place where they could extend their Heavenly Empire on Earth by creating a network of Cities upon a Hill. Very much in the tradition of literary utopias by More, Bacon, Campanella, and Perkins-Gillman, however, the frontier is instead a place in which Morrison's utopians could *conceal* their paradise. This duality of dangers for Morrison's utopians is presented as such in the novel: "Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose" (16). This contains an interpretation of the dangers all Manifesters experienced – the "random" dangers of what they perceived as an empty frontier. For Black Americans, however, another danger existed in the form of all the other small towns that dotted the landscape, as the model with which Euro-America is dominating the West offered "organized evil" wherein "every cluster of white men looked like a posse" (Morrison 16). The empire of the Euro-American small towns simply expanded a utopian system of exclusion, marginalization, and persecution which Morrison had already represented in *Sula*, and so the utopians of *Paradise* seek a social totality in the oldest utopian form of the "noplace."

With this important difference in mind, Morrison's utopians have an altered relationship with the frontier and the utopian superstructure they leave behind in the East and South, resulting in different end goals to their process of island-making. Unlike with Lewis's Gopher Prairie, which operates more as what an "outpost of the empire" as I outlined in my previous chapter, Morrison's utopians seek to instead create a true island-form – a self-sustaining social totality aimed at protecting its citizens from perceived threats of the world they left behind.

A more traditional return to an almost mystic "noplace" is not subtle in *Paradise*, as Morrison quite literally refers to it as such late in the novel when one of the characters reflects on Ruby being "a backwards noplace" (308). In addition to this overt identification, however, many of the voyagers to Ruby arrive there in ways not unlike the voyagers of various utopian texts. Mavis, the first of several women to arrive in Ruby who eventually make their way to the Convent on the outskirts of town, arrives by getting lost as she tries to head to California. Gigi (Grace) arrives to Ruby on her own mythic search, seeking two trees that look like intertwined lovers. The locals betray their own belief in Ruby's status as a noplace when she arrives on a bus at the center of town, as "they had never seen a bus in the town" because "Ruby was not a stop on the way to someplace else" (54). Seneca arrives to town by chance as well, traveling as a stowaway in the back of a pickup truck (126), and Pallas's arrival has the image of one being washed ashore, as she is brought to the Convent after arriving at a clinic following a sexual assault which she escapes by jumping into a lake (179). Such arrivals, mostly a product of happenstance, speak to an intentional barrier to entry put in place by the town's locals, as they prefer to be "accessible only to the lost and knowledgeable" to maintain their "noplace" status. If Ruby is an island of the plain like so many other literary small towns, it is an intentionally uncharted one, and certainly no port for voyaging ships.

The active work toward creating as much of a social totality as possible is further demonstrated through an isolationist mindset which goes well-beyond simple physical disconnect from the outside world. Ruby's New Fathers, the name given to the patriarchs of the original families who traveled from the failed Haven to create Ruby, seek a social totality, an act of "closure" present in most literary utopias, which "enables the existence of system" (Barthes qtd in *Archelogies* 5), in which they have complete control over all aspects of the community. Their reasoning behind such a pursuit is, in theory, grounded in a learned need for protection. The News Fathers work to create a social totality where "nothing… believed" their "women were prey" and "everything needs their protection" (12). They believe if they "stayed together, worked, prayed and defended together… they would never be like Downs, Lexington, Sapulpa, Gans where Colored were run out of town overnight. Nor would they be among the dead and maimed of Tulsa, Norman, Oklahoma City, not to mention victims of spontaneous whippings, murders and depopulation by arson" (112).

In pursuit of a purer social totality than other literary small town utopian forms, the New Fathers work to close off informational pathways as well as physical ones. Newspapers largely go unread in Ruby (208), and the small school in Ruby refuses money from the state (111). This speaks to both a self-sustaining mindset and another method of control of information, as the New Fathers certainly have little interest in a state government having sway in their local curriculum. Reverend Cary, one of the older and more conservative ministers in town who acts as sort of a clergy mouthpiece for the New Fathers, speaks to both the reasoning and the method of sustaining their utopia when he lists the utopian exclusions of Ruby: "Television… Policemen… Picture shows, filthy music… Wickedness in the streets, theft in the night, murder in the morning" (274). Cary presents these points as the things Ruby's citizens have "given up"

to live in "God's beauty, His Bounty, His peace" (274). While he presents this exchange sarcastically at first, minimizing the things the younger generation might miss like television, new music, and movies against a dystopic existence outside of Ruby, the sermon offers insight into the New Fathers' own utopian philosophy, where the exclusion of outside information is seen as necessary to maintain the protective barrier against the outside world. Such informational closure speaks to how the New Fathers look to create a true social totality that can operate outside the tide of social affairs of the utopian text's contemporary age. The frontier remains a space that Morrison's utopians hope to locate and maintain their utopia just like historical Euro-American migrants and the communities many Euro-American writers depict in their own hometown, but the historical exclusion of Black Americans from these utopian narratives and spaces greatly alters the nature of that utopia. Morrison's refashioned Manifest Destiny does more than just codify the space of her utopia, however, as this process of trial, journey, and selection works to position Morrison's utopians as exceptional, as well.

The process of their unique Manifest Destiny establishes a sense of inward chosenness, crafting Morrison's Manifesters into archetypal utopians. Like Euro-Americans, whose "march through the wilderness to the promised destination is itself prophetic and revelatory, for it is a journey toward reconciliation with God" (Stephanson 7), the journey serves a similar function for Morrison's utopians. The journeys associated with the historical Manifest Destiny into land not inhabited by members of Christendom was part of a process to codify their electiveness (Stephanson 6-7). Morrison's Manifesters experience their own set of trials. They flea from disenfranchisement and marginalization in the South, only to be met by rejection and derision as they journey north and west, "unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith" (Morrison 13). They expect some of this rejection, experienced as they are in marginalization

and worse in America, but the rejection extends beyond systemic and localized racism of white America to include other marginalized groups like "Rich Choctaw and poor whites… camp prostitutes and their children" (Morrison 13). The rejection that shapes the group most profoundly, however, is the unexpected one, as they receive "aggressive discouragement… from Negro towns already being built" (Morrison 13). This event became known to Morrison's utopians as "the Disallowing," wherein the original group approaches the all-Black town of Fairly, Oklahoma only to be turned away.[35] This journey and set of trials eventually molds them into a unique, unified group: "Afterwards the people were no longer nine families and some more. They became a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what had happened to them" (Morrison 189). The eventual result is that the "the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody by themselves" (13). This pointed inwardness for Morrison's utopians mirrors how Jameson frames More's Utopians, as the isolationist mindset which comes to define Ruby's New Fathers "decrees the foundational difference between them and us, foe and friend, in a peremptory manner… characteristic in one way or another of all subsequent Utopias intent on survival" (*Archaeologies* 5).

The act of isolation becomes a method to protect them against further rejection and acts as a defining trait of their own self-importance. This chosenness by way of exclusion becomes embedded in the town of Ruby itself, which takes its name from late sister of New Fathers Deacon and Steward Morgan, who died when white hospitals and white doctors of nearby towns refused to treat her (Morrison 113). It becomes the very thing by which they define their utopian philosophy, as Deacon presents the process of selection and chosenness tied to the trials of the journey as responsible for the town's motto, its covenant with God, which is made absolute

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[35] See Slocum, p. 3, for outline of historical conflict between Black groups in Oklahoma.

because the men who wrote it "went through hell" to learn its message (Morrison 86). Morrison

tethers her utopians' uniqueness to racial purity, as well, again placing them in the spirit of

historical Manifesters while inverting the desired race. After the Disallowing, "the sign for racial

purity they took for granted" – that is, their very dark complexion they call "eight-rock" – "had

become a stain," which they perceive to be the reason for their rejection from other all-Black

communities (Morrison 194). This genetic identifier does not become a cause for shame for

Morrison's utopians, however. Instead, it acts as a physical representation of their chosenness, as

they respond to this realization by "consolidat[ing] the 8-rock blood" before continuing their

journey west, a turn which subsequently positions Morrison's utopians as eugenicists, which I

will address shortly (194). This is the first step in the process of chosenness, where the group

becomes defined against all others outside of itself. After solidifying this inwardness, the next

step is for the group to perceive their mission as one of God-given destiny.

Morrison accomplishes this by supplementing the various trials her utopians face with

seemingly divine intervention, presenting them with "signs God gave to guide them" (Morrison

14). After the Disallowing, when the group sets forth into the wilderness with no real destination

in mind, Big Papa, grandfather of the Morgan twins, has a vision that quickly spreads to his sons,

in the form of "A small man… too small for the sound of his steps. He was walking away from

them. Dressed in a black suit, the jacket held over his shoulder with the forefinger of his right

hand" (97). From that point on, Morrison's utopians believe that the apparition is "with us…

leading the way" and "from then on, the journey was purposeful" (97). Slowly, the apparition

leads them to a select spot where they are to construct their utopia. Through this process,

Morrison's utopians are able to locate themselves within the history of chosenness, of a

perceived American exceptionalism, from which they had been excluded, electing them as the

heirs to this chosenness in the line of first the Puritans and then Euro-Americans at large whom had perceived themselves as "'chosen' people" for hundreds of years (Stephanson 7). It is shortly after their most intimate rejection that their uniqueness as a group is codified, that a divine intervention takes place, selecting them and, in the process, selecting the spot of their paradise, as well. The journey thus selects the utopians and the placement of their utopia, both of which are made "unique and isolated" by the trials and divine motivations provided to them in their trek through the frontier (Morrison 8).

This perceived chosenness builds until Morrison's utopians see a divine significance in both the space of Ruby and in the eight-rock blood of its founding members, which I will expand on in the next section.[36] Through the process of trial and selection in their journey through the frontier, Morrison's utopians thus begin to see themselves as more than divinely inspired, and instead divinely touched, capable of living forever in an earthly Paradise. This motivation to live for eternity in a completely closed system again returns to the utopian framework of Manifest Destiny, wherein a "heaven descends to earth" and a "posthistorical utopia" is established – a utopia which historical Manifesters believed they would institute on the North American continent (Stephanson 8). Morrison's utopians have co-opted this chosenness however, inverting the racial purity associated with the historical Manifest Destiny.

The journey through the first utopian space which I have marked as significant produces robust utopian raw materials with which Morrison can construct the novel's utopia. It positions her utopians in the most influential utopian traditions of Euro-America like Manifest Destiny *and* within the utopian project of all-Black American communities who attempted to establish their own sanctuaries on the frontier. Simultaneously, Morrison systemically delinks her utopians

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[36] The divinity of Haven's space is transferred to Ruby through moving the Oven and thus the center of the covenant with God, which I will expand upon shortly.

from each of these utopian narratives, establishing the duality where Morrison's utopians are both emulating these utopian forms while positioning themselves as the truest, purest forms of them.

The process of trial and selection designates Morrison's utopians in their eyes and positions them so that they believe they are the ones who will achieve the truest form of America's promise of a City upon a Hill, and the puritan promise of a Christian Heaven on Earth, and the "one all-black town worth the pain" (Morrison 5). Once the divine chosenness of both place and people is established, every decision the New Fathers make, from organization of the town to arranged marriages, works to enforce their utopian philosophy. As with other small town utopian forms, that philosophy is codified at its center – its Main Street.

<div align="center">An All-Black City upon a Hill</div>

After achieving their own chosenness and completing the island-making progress, Morrison's utopians establish a utopia which returns to the patriarchal, covenant-based, and puritanical structure reminiscent of Winthrop's City upon a Hill and the earliest Anglo-American settlements in North America. As a refresher, Smith describes the covenanted community of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as "composed of individuals bound in a special compact with God and with each other" (Smith 6). As is the case with Gopher Prairie, Morrison's utopians compact with each other is not a literal signed document as was historically the case with Jamestown and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Morrison instead achieves a form of social compact through the trials they experienced on the frontier, which resulted in Morrison's utopian's inability to "tolerate anybody but themselves" (Morrison 13). The result of this social compact in *Paradise* is very similar to that of the literal one in the historical covenanted communities, however. As Smith explains, the social form of the covenanted community created an Orwellian system of

community observation where the "individual had to be concerned not only with his own behavior but with that of the total community," as "one's own sins imperiled the group" (Smith 7). The actions of members of Ruby are highly scrutinized, and "failing to observe the strict demands of the covenant" could "bring down God's wrath upon one's neighbor's as well as oneself" (Smith 8). The narrator notes similar functioning in Ruby, where "the one or two people who acted up, humiliated their families or threated the town's view of itself were taken good care of" (Morrison 8). Such community policing takes place on several occasions in the novel, such as when the Morgans and the Fleetwoods negotiate a punishment for K.D. slapping Arnette in public, and, of course, when the men of Ruby attempt to slaughter the women of the Convent on the edge of town.

The compact with God is also informal in Lewis and other Euro-American small-town writers, present in the latent puritanism and the ways in which it influences social structure, but Morrison positions the covenant between her utopians and God as much more concrete in *Paradise*, as the New Fathers believe they have made a literal compact with God. The topic of immortality becomes a sort of open secret in Ruby, as "nobody in Ruby has ever died" (Morrison 199). Locals, primarily the New Fathers, possess a "claim of immortality" and believe "death is blocked from entering Ruby" (Morrison 199). Importantly, citizens of Ruby *have* died outside the selected boundaries of the town, in the form of "war dead and accidents in other towns" (199). This does not dissuade the perceived immortality, however. Instead, it codifies the symbiotic relationship between utopian place and group, which acts to reinforce both the perceived divinity of their mission and the importance of Ruby as utopian enclave capable of acting as a haven against the outside. The pairing between bloodline and utopian space is made explicit in the novel, when one of the locals reflect on Ruby's divine uniqueness: "Unadulterated

and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For immortality" (217). Through their trials on the frontier, Morrison's utopians believe themselves to literally be in compact with God, just as Winthrop's community did.

The significance given to bloodlines results in a eugenicist philosophy reminiscent of both Euro-American social stratification and many seminal literary utopias. Maintaining eight-rock bloodlines, present in all the original New Fathers of Ruby, becomes a vital component of policing the covenant between themselves and God for Morrison's utopians. Individuals like New Father Roger Best are ostracized in small ways for marrying outside of the eight-rock line. Marriages are arranged between powerful families to produce a new generation of eight-rock children. Eight-rock men like the Morgan nephew K.D. are permitted a wide range of detrimental behavior, whereas a non-eight-rock woman in Billie Delia is judged and ostracized forever due to a childhood misunderstanding. Here again, Morrison inverts an operating utopian philosophy of Euro-America, as the eight-rock superiority complex ingrained in Ruby's utopian philosophy acts as an inverted One-Drop rule with which white America used as a hierarchal organizing philosophy for much of its history. The fervor of this pursuit builds to a racial hierarchy replicative of the One-Drop rule, where the descendants of locals who betray it by marrying an outsider are ostracized in various ways. One instance of this is Billie Delia, who is the granddaughter of a an eight-rock man who married a woman of lighter complexion. Billie Delia is ostracized as a sexual deviant for a misunderstanding when she is a child. Her mother, Pat, locates this treatment as penance for the actions of her father who was the "first to violate the blood rule" of the New Fathers (194): "Pat knew that had her daughter been an 8-rock, they would not have held it [the incident when Billie was a child] against her. They would have seen

it for what it was – only an innocent child would have done that, surely" (203). Jameson argues that even racism and xenophobia, both of which Morrison's utopians certainly display here and elsewhere, possess a degree of "utopian impulsion," what he calls "deformed Utopian impulses" (*Archaeologies* 8), which is precisely how Morrison portrays it.

Through this genetics-based obsession, Morrison positions her utopians as eugenicists, again placing her creations firmly alongside those of some of the earliest and most influential utopian writers, like Plato, More, Campanella, and Gilman, all of whom "were unable to conceive a utopia without controls over the choice of a sexual partner and the production of off-spring" (Parrinder 1).[37] Patrick Parrinder frames the impulse to create unique people as foundational to the literary utopia, nothing that "any utopia… which emphasizes the physical beauty of its inhabitants is likely to be referring to the effects of a deliberate or inadvertent eugenic policy (Parrinder 1). Such moments are not uncommon in *Paradise*. In one of the times Reverend Misner does act as the traditional utopian voyager, processing the discovered society he encounters for the reader, he marvels at the distinctiveness of Morrison's utopians. Misner notes that Ruby is "different from other communities in only a couple ways: beauty and isolation" and calls all of its locally born residents "handsome, some exceptionally so" (160). Elsewhere, those of eight-rock heritage are described a "blue-black people, tall and graceful" with "clear, wide eyes" (Morrison 193). The importance placed on blood replicates the hierarchal structure of early Euro-America, where being male and white placed you at the top of the hierarchy.

Smith continues his outline of the covenanted community by noting how the link between individuals in the community and heaven "extends vertically within the society, uniting the

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[37] Morrison herself does run counter to these other utopian writers, many of whom were unapologetically pro-eugenics, as she is certainly presenting the eugenicist mindset present in Ruby as an inherent failure in American utopian systems. Her utopians remain locked in the eugenicist traditions of those who came before them, however.

classes and the society to God" (6). This is precisely the process we see in the instances when eight-rock men take it upon themselves, sitting at the top of the social hierarchy, to enforce their eugenicist, isolationist, patriarchal, and puritanical mindset in the name of a supposed compact with God. By recreating the various social functions, organization, and impulses of Winthrop's community and pairing these qualities with a literal compact with God backing that social model, Morrison does not demonstrate an evolution of the City upon a Hill as Lewis and other writers operating in the small-town genre have; instead, she returns it to its origins, or perhaps even presents it in its purest, most realized form. The difference remains the inversion of the form, however, and the small ways in which an all-Black City upon a Hill varies from its antecedents. In these differences, it draws to the surface the inherent exclusions and contradictions in Euro-America's originating utopian form. Like Lewis's Gopher Prairie, Ruby's utopian structure and philosophy is revealed by analyzing its Main Street.

Main Street initially speaks to Ruby's utopian philosophy because of what is *not* present. The organizers of Ruby build out their utopia with their goal of complete isolation in mind, as there is "nothing to serve a traveler: no diner, no police, no gas station, no public phone, no movie house, no hospital" (12). From an outsider's perspective this inwardness is even more pronounced, as Gigi notes, upon her arrival to Ruby, that "there was no public place to sit down" and that "all around here were closed doors and shut windows where parted curtains were swiftly replaced" (67-68). These qualities act as the structural application of the New Fathers' isolationist philosophy. We see these structural exclusions in action when some outsiders get lost and wash ashore in Ruby. When a white couple with their sick child pass through and stumble into Anna Flood's store, they cannot locate the drugstore for medication because the drugstore is in someone's house. This revelation hardly helps the travelers, however, as the driver notes that

"houses round here don't seem to have numbers" (121). In the end, Misner has to go retrieve the medication to help the family, as Ruby's commerce is deliberately structured to discourage outside patronage.

This neglectfulness toward commerce speaks to the most surprising exclusion, as Ruby's Main Street also has "no recognizable business district" (45), placing it in stark contrast with Lewis's Gopher Prairie and the many other Midwest and Western towns represented by that model, again demonstrating how Ruby's unique status as an inverted racial utopian hierarchy simultaneously mirrors Euro-American utopian mythology while speaking to the historical exclusion of Black communities from those utopian forms. Euro-American literary small towns like Lewis's Gopher Prairie function as a single point in a network – an outpost of the American empire where the Euro-American utopian order is maintained while the commerce of the small town serves the utopian superstructure of the nation.

For Lewis, the puritanical religious roots tracing back to Winthrop and Jamestown had been absorbed into a civil religion, wherein it informed the behaviors of Gopher Prairie's citizens, but only in a way that served his utopia's true god – American capitalism. Whereas the "dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map" (Lewis 132) for Lewis's community, Morrison returns to a more direct link to the City upon a Hill model of having a perceived compact with God. Despite being a more representative return to Euro-America's founding utopian model, their realities as an all-Black noplace within the place of America prevents Ruby from operating as a point in a national network. Ruby's Main Street has no business distract because the only business they care to do is amongst themselves. The New Fathers do not see themselves as an outpost of the American empire; instead they are separate from it, standing as the one true City upon a Hill and fulfilling the divine promise of Manifest Destiny. Despite these structural

attempts to maintain a true island form, the social totality is not complete, and it remains that no island is, in fact, an island. The outside penetrates Ruby through outsiders moving in, like Misner; and through young people leaving and returning, like Anna Flood, who's unstraightened hair causes a philosophical uproar (119). These fractures eventually result in even the older, more prominent isolationists leaving town to buy cheaper and high-quality merchandise from stores in nearby towns (110, 120). The island depends on the nation, it would seem, and these holes in the social totality allow for a myriad of perspectives to enter the utopia. Despite this failed social totality, maintaining and containing the social order remains the primary concern of Ruby's utopian enclave, but Morrison muddles the utopian discourse by giving voice to marginalized perspectives throughout, a struggle which plays out in some of the most prominent spaces of the literary small town.

At the center of Ruby's Main Street is a communal oven which acts as a representative of the covenant between Morrison's utopians and God throughout the novel. The Oven originated in Haven, where the Old Fathers used it to ensure a sense of community. Zechariah Morgan, one of the Old-Fathers and grandfather of Deacon and Steward, carved the words above the Oven which subsequently become the distilled version of their covenant with God and the primary sources of conflict in the novel. The Oven came to represent the divine nature of both the utopian project and the eight-rock's perceived chosenness. When Haven fails, the New Fathers, the eight-rock descendants of the Old Fathers, pull the Oven and its foundation up stone by stone, and carry it with them further into the frontier. This allows the New Fathers to transfer the divinity associated with the physical space of their utopian project's first iteration. At issue with the motto and, by extension, the nature of their covenant with God, is that the message has literally faded with the passage of time. The extant words which all can agree upon are "the furrow of His Brow," but

there is a debate about whether the complete motto is actually "be" or "beware" the furrow of

His brow. Whatever the originating words may have been, the New Fathers tether their own

chosenness directly to this physical representation of their covenant, as Pat Best reflects that the

blood-rule "lived a quietly throbbing life because it was never spoken of except in the hint in

words Zechariah forged on the Oven" (195). As Pat sees it, the "you" implied in "Beware the

Furrow of His Brow" is "not a threat to the believers but a threat to those who had disallowed

them" (195). That a debate regarding the motto, and thus, the covenant, exists at all demonstrates

a faltering of the social totality which the New Fathers aim to maintain. No spot in their utopia

should be stronger than its center, but this debate begins to speak to how Morrison undermines

the mythic utopian forms which she replicates by giving voice to traditionally marginalized

groups who work against the efforts of the New Fathers to create a social totality. Morrison

accomplishes this by hybridizing the traditional "voyager" trope of literary utopias.

Utopians, Dystopians, and Voyagers

One distinction that often, though not universally, differentiates a utopian narrative from

a dystopian one is the central perspective through which the utopian space unfolds, with the

former regularly being from an outsider perspective and the latter from an inside one. The

voyager arrives to the utopia and through their discovery of its ins-and-outs the utopian map is

drawn for the reader, too. In dystopias, the opposite is frequently true – a citizen of the dystopian

reality comes to terms (or not) with the construction of their society. *Main Street*, as I have

written previously, depicts the former, with Carol Kennicott acting as our voyager and the

utopian cartographer for the reader. *Paradise* hybridizes this approach, presenting the narrative

through a myriad of perspectives. Some of these have a familiar form. Misner, and to some

extent, the women of the Convent, fulfill the traditional role of a voyager to a utopia, who see the

representative parts of the utopian space and translate it for the reader through their outsider perspective. The sections which depict the women of the Convent *outside* Ruby are especially important in this regard, as they define these characters clearly as voyagers, as travelers who found themselves washed up at the edge of Ruby by one circumstance or another.

This accomplishes an important facet of utopian literature that Jameson links to the travel narrative, which he posits "reinforces Utopia's constitutive secessionism, a withdrawal or 'delinking' from the empirical and historical world" (*Archaeologies* 23). Dissenting locals of Ruby – almost exclusively women like Billie Delia Cato, Dovey and Soane Morgan, and Anna Flood – provide a glimpse at the dystopian perspective, as they are often silenced in the public discourse but resist in small ways to highlight the hierarchical explosiveness of Ruby. Finally, we also get the perspective of the conceivers and purveyors of Ruby's utopian philosophy in the form of the eight-rock men, primarily the twined consciousness of Deacon and Steward. The hybridization of traditional literary utopian perspectives leaves the reader to piece together a literary cartograph from snippets of map-making through the surveying perspectives of pure utopians, uncertain dystopians, and voyager-figures who move through the various utopian spaces and nuance the image the reader receives of those spaces. Such a narrative structure advances the layered utopian discourse Morrison is pursuing in the novel.

Many characters move through the center of Ruby, but it is perhaps unsurprising that Main Street is most thoroughly mapped by one of the key patriarchal figures in the novel. Deacon undertakes some of the most essential mapping of Main Street when he slowly drives around town early one morning. Deacon is not on any errand as he does this – he is simply surveying. Deacon's surveying is much different than Carol's present in *Main Street*, where she acts quite traditionally as the utopian voyager who is mapping a formally uncharted space.

Deacon's is an act of observation and control, a show of observational force. While Ruby has no police, it does have policing and Deacon and Steward Morgan essentially act as the embodiment of the community's Big Brother. Unsurprisingly, Deacon completes his patrol by tracing a slow border around the Oven – the very center of town and thus theoretically the place where the utopian philosophy of the New Fathers is strongest. Deacon's slow patrol of the space both charts it for the reader and acts a reminder to the citizens of his authority in the space. Despite this reminder, dissenting perspectives are given voice in spaces like the Oven and its symbiotic paired space of the church, of which Ruby has three "within a mile of one another" (12). These two spaces, the Oven and the church, should be sites of philosophical fortitude for the New Fathers, but they instead become philosophical battlefields as Ruby's grasp on a social totality falters.

The Oven becomes a space where the younger generation gathers for various activities the New Fathers deem unproductive to Ruby's mission. The more innocuous disrespect the New Fathers perceive the youth of Ruby directing toward the Oven and all that it represents, activities like loitering and littering, evolve to an outright challenging of the town's pact with God. Signs of the resistance begin with a graffitied fist appearing on the Oven, which slowly builds until some of Ruby's youth outwardly challenge the town's motto, and thus challenge the nature of Ruby's covenant. This discussion is transferred to the space which should itself be secondary only to Main Street in its authority over the town – the church.

After the discontent between the New Fathers and the younger generation had simmered beneath the surface, Misner calls them to discuss the words atop the Oven at one of the churches. All in town agree that the words "the Furrow of His Brow" are apparent, but the rest of the phrase has faded with age. The New Fathers insist the phrase is "Beware the Furrow of His

Brow," whereas the younger generation wants it to be "Be the Furrow…" Again, this is more than just a debate about a town motto, as the New Fathers make clear when one of their own clerical mouthpieces, Reverend Pulliam says, "Motto? We talking command!... 'Beware the Furrow of His Brow… That's not a suggestion; that's an order" (86). The New Fathers see the Oven as a reminder of their own chosenness as Deacon Morgan reminds them when he says "nobody is going to come along some eighty years later claiming to know better what men who went through hell to learn knew" (86). To the New Fathers, the words above the Oven are the divine codification of their utopian project. Any change to the motto muddles their perception of their own divinity and their compact with God. The New Fathers believe the change speaks to the younger generation's desire to "be God," to which one of the younger generation responds "it's not being Him, sir; it's being His instrument, His justice. As a race –" (87). The irony is that "God," or, at the very least His wrath, is precisely what the New Fathers perceive themselves to be. As previously discussed, the New Fathers see their version of the motto as a warning to those who oppose them, not to themselves (195). Pat Best clarifies this further when she thinks, "It wasn't God's brow to be feared…It was [The New Father's] own" (217). When New Father Nathan DePres tells the youth "you can't be God" (87), he is foreshadowing the fall of his own utopian project, which I will return to shortly.

This debate takes another form later and at a moment when the New Fathers are publicly reinforcing their eugenicist social structure through the arranged wedding between heir to the Morgan bloodline, K.D., and Arnette Fleetwood, which unites the two most powerful eight-rock families. The wedding is to open with a sermon from Reverend Pulliam, followed by a service by Misner. In Pulliam's sermon, however, Misner sees a veiled attack on the debate about the Oven – about whether the town should "be" or "beware" the furrow of God's wrath: "Misner knew that

Pulliam's word were a widening of the war he had declared on Misner's activities: tempting the young to step outside the wall, outside the town limits, shepherding them, forcing them to transgress, to think of themselves as civil warriors" (145). Misner responds by silently holding aloft a crucifix, a repudiation of Pulliam and the New Fathers he represents, who Misner perceives as putting themselves above God. This silent act infuriates the New Fathers in the audience, again highlighting their hypocritical position, as they simultaneously see themselves as God's wrath while insisting it is heresy for others to see themselves as such.

When Misner suggests during the debate about the Oven that the New Fathers were at the church, "not just to talk but to listen too" the "gasps were more felt than heard" (85). Here distilled is the simple danger the New Fathers see present in an outsider like Misner, as he welcomes and encourages input which dissents from their social totality. Given the overt and latent import the church has in the lives and order of the town, no outsider is perhaps a greater threat to the iron grip the New Fathers have on Ruby than that of an outsider Reverend like Misner, whose clerical link to God could contradict their own. The New Fathers understand the dangers of dissenting voices to their grip on social stratification, noting "a man like [Misner] could encourage strange behavior" (56). They see Misner as a germ which can infect little pockets of their social organism, creating an outbreak that eventually brings down their utopian project. Misner, for his part, agrees, noting that if he had not arrived to town and punctured the social totality, "there would probably be no contention, no painted firsts, no quarrels about missing language on an oven's lips" (161). In this reflection, Misner confirms the New Fathers instincts toward maintaining their utopian enclave if they wish to have complete control over the narrative therein. Instead, his presence, he concludes, is responsible for the warring utopian impulses present in Ruby.

Reflecting on the lightly veiled debate at the wedding, Billie Delia thinks how "Senior Pulliam had scripture and history on his side. Misner had scripture and the future on his" (150). This thought, through the perspective of a disillusioned local, acts aa a framing for the utopian philosophies warring in Ruby, one of which belongs to an Afropessimist tradition and the other to an Afrofuturist one. The New Fathers' view represents Afropessimist perspective which sees isolationism and exclusion as the only response to Black history in America, while Misner and the youth possess an Afrofuturist perspective which sees potential in Ruby to be a hub of Black liberation – as the starting place of the Black City upon a Hill which could spill out into the matrix of Black communities in America given the chance. We see this at the debate in the church, when one of Ruby's youth states that "As a race…As a people… we are the power" (87). At yet another moment in the church later, when the New Fathers are simultaneously rewriting their own history and tying it to divinity through a theatrical nativity adaptation, it is again filtered through Misner's dissenting philosophy. As he watches with Pat Best, she calls his Bible class of Ruby's youth a "war class" (207). Misner responds to this by highlighting how his group simply looks outside the isolationist mindset of Ruby, stating "unlike most of the folks here, we read newspapers," and notes how "the world is big, and we're part of that bigness" (208, 209).

The New Fathers want to exist outside of history and outside of the incorporated space of America. They want to create what Jameson calls "a pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change" wherein their isolationists' "Utopian fantasy can operate" (*Archaeologies* 15). But Misner and the younger generation see themselves as part of that history. Presenting this debate between the New Fathers and Ruby's youth at both sites and moments which should be codifying for the philosophy of the former, Morrison punctures the social totality the New Fathers look to create and draws to the service the inherent hypocrisy of a

puritanical and patriarchal utopian model. The dissenting voices in these spaces which should be

the most significant sources of strength for enforcing the town's covenant is only a

foreshadowing of the structural flaws in the utopian model, however. To finalize the flawed

nature of the model, Morrison turns to the space which has traditionally served as both the place

for dissenting voices and the object of scapegoated anger – the Outskirts of town.

Paradise Revisited: Scapegoating and Salvation on the Margins

The Outskirts of Ruby fit firmly within the history of small-town literature where the

outer edges of a community are presented as a place of danger and dissenting voices, as I have

outlined in both Lewis's *Main Street* and Morrison's *Sula*. Just as is the case in both of those

novels, the outskirts of Ruby are populated by those whose identities and lifestyles run counter to

the utopian philosophy when structures the town. The New Fathers use these differences as a

catalyst for scapegoating, to define themselves and their mission against what they perceive as its

antithesis on the margins.

The New Fathers see the Convent as the most fearful "destructive power" that could

threaten Ruby (17). The Convent acts as an immediate oppositional force that the New Fathers

can use to reinforce and enforce their own social and divine covenants. Mapping the space thus

gives insight into that which the New Fathers see as the antithesis of their own utopian

philosophy. The Convent is a male-less, raceless, and eventually paganistic space which

challenges the racially pure, patriarchal, and puritanical structures inherent in the New Fathers'

City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny pursuits. The Convent is itself a utopian enclave – isolated

and distinct – and in it too Morrison offers an inversion of a prevalent Euro-American utopian

narrative. It is like an Adam-less Eden, complete with its own forbidden fruit in the form of

"purply black peppers" which "grew nowhere outside the Convent's garden" and were found

very desirable by the men of Ruby. In the new Eden, "Bodacious Black Eves unredeemed by

Mary" pursue their own utopian enclave to escape the patriarchal trauma which beset them in the

broader American system (18). This triarchy of qualities present in the Convent – malelessness,

lack of racial purity, and the absence of a Christian God – not only presents an opposite to Ruby,

but also acts as an inherent threat to them. As the New Fathers see it, if such women can govern

themselves, then their own utopian philosophy is challenged. For the men of Ruby, the women of

the Convent "managed to call into question the value of almost every woman" (8). Given their

obsession with bloodlines, the fact that they are women outside of a patriarchal structure is the

most unforgivable sin to the New Fathers, as Pat Best notes that "everything that worries them

must come from women" since women are the ones with the power to produce to the next line of

eight-rock men and must be controlled (217).

Deacon and Steward's ideal image of women is just that – a still frame held in their

memory of women they encountered on a trip to another all-Black town in their youth;

conservative, feminine, and immortal in their beauty (279). The Morgan twins see this ideal,

controllable, and containable image of womanhood in their mind as threatened by the very

existence of the Convent, "doomed to extinction by this new and obscene breed of female"

(279). They believe by destroying that which challenges their image, they can protect and

enforce what they see as the role and image of women in their perfect, immortal society.

This oppositional nature builds to the point where the men of Ruby scapegoat the women

in a way reminiscent of the historical treatment of Black communities:

> Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was
>
> knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in
>
> one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons.

Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots were

common. And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed… The one

thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were

those women (11).

Morrison opens *Paradise* at the moment where the New Fathers have turned these scapegoating

thoughts into violent action, pitting themselves against the oppositional force they perceive as a

threat. The opening line of the novel contains what the New Fathers believe to be the threat to

Ruby. When they "shoot the white girl first" they believe they are striking down that which

offers existential threat to their own utopian model – a non-black woman outside of their control,

and they do so believing they have "God at their side" (3, 18). The marginalized women who

occupy this space and scapegoated role, however, are given primary voice in the novel, along

with other marginalized women like Pat Best, Lone, and Anna Flood in the town. By positioning

her narrative in this way, Morrison undermines the utopian authority of Ruby and the Euro-

American models it inverts, and the Convent's eventual destruction at the hands of Ruby's men

speaks to the novel's final conclusion about the utopian systems it emulates.

Broken Covenants and New Utopias

In her layered utopian construction, Morrison positions men of Ruby as both an inversion of

and an allegory for Euro-America's utopian mythology. Similarly, the women of the Convent act

as their own inversion of utopian mythology of Eden while simultaneously acting as allegory for

communities and individuals marginalized by those Euro-American utopian models. The

moment when the men of Ruby assault and destroy the women of the Convent speaks to a

history of Euro-American utopian forms scapegoating those on the margins. The subsequent

failure of the town's covenant with God thus speaks to Euro-America's own failed covenant.

When the men complete their assault on the Convent, they break their own covenant with God by being the furrow of his brow instead of fearing it. After this event, the divine uniqueness of place and people is no more, as the "reaper was no longer barred entry from Ruby" (296). As people begin to die, beginning with the perpetually sick Fleetwood children, Ruby has to contemplate the addition of a social service which had previously informed the town's uniqueness with its absence, as the New Fathers were now "in the awkward position of deciding to have a real and formal cemetery in a town full of immortals" (296). The breaking of the covenant is not subtle in the novel, as Lone reflects that "God … had made Himself so visible and unarguable a presence even the outrageously prideful (like Steward) and the uncorrectably stupid (like his lying nephew) would be able to see it. He had actually swept up and received his servants in broad daylight" (298). The consequences following the slaughter of the women at the Convent, and the subsequent disappearance of their bodies (and their eventual reincarnation), provides the novel's ultimate position on the depicted utopia, and all that it represents as a dangerous failure.

If the men of Ruby are the stand-ins here for their equivalent in the Euro-American versions of these utopian models, the implication then is that Euro-America has broken its own covenant with God, again and again, when they carried out similar aggressions against the marginalized in their own community. If Ruby's own covenant is fractured, and as a result the model has failed, so too has the American model. For its part, Ruby succeeds only in creating new intersectional victims. By depicting such an outcome, Morrison posits a fundamental, systemic flaw of exploitation and marginalization in Euro-America's definitive utopian forms. The small town, grown from the seed of Winthrop's City upon a Hill and spread across the

continent by Manifest Destiny *depends* on a margin, on an "other," on an intersectional adversary by which it can define and enforce its own chosenness.

Through the utopian duality she creates by inverting those models, however, Morrison also posits a need for a place in America where Black communities can be a part of a larger utopian network. Misner frames this perspective when he decrees isolationism not as a tool for liberation, but an historical one of oppression: "We live in the world… The whole world. Separating us, isolating us – that's always been their weapon. Isolation kills generations. It has no future" (210). Despite efforts by the novel's utopians to remove themselves from the current of national affairs, their story is steeped in American history. Ruby cannot escape its place and role in history. The failure to remove themselves from the broader national system demonstrates the folly of a Black island of the plain – the island depends on the nation. Misner concludes this perspective at the end of the novel, and imagines redemption for Ruby in its near annihilation, a renewal or path forward where the enclave could be broken, and "connecting roads" to the outside world would be laid (306).

Jameson notes that some literary utopias offer "blueprints…maps and plans" which should be "read negatively, as what is to be accomplished after the demolitions and the removals" (*Archaeologies* 12). This is precisely the utopian work Morrison undertakes in *Paradise,* discarding the various utopian models of Euro-America and calling for the construction of new ones. *Paradise* is a utopian text operating in the breaking of old utopia forms to create the raw material for new forms. A conscious break from the traditional social structures must be made to imagine radically new ones. With the failure and refusal of each inverted utopian myth, its polemic pairing – Manifest Destiny, the City upon a Hill, the One-Drop rule, Eden – is rejected, as well. Morrison spoke to this motivation directly, saying "I was trying to

move away from the unstated but overwhelming and dominant context that was white history and to move into another one" (qtd. in Widdowson 316). Once all the old forms are discarded, a renewed and new utopian labor can begin. In *Paradise*, Morrison delivers one of the most important literary utopias of the 20th century, and it has been underserved as such. When white writers in America looked to interrogate American utopianism they had real brick mortar locations which they could fictionalize, but Morrison's project with the small town is grounded in a Black utopian placelessness, and so her search for a Black Utopia returned to the genre's roots of the "noplace." *Paradise* not only belongs in the lineage of Black utopian literature alongside the likes of Martin R. Delaney, W.E.B. Du Bois, Pauline Hopkins, Sun Ra, Samuel R. Delaney, and Octavia Butler – it should be considered one of the definitive works in American literary utopianism.

CHAPTER 4

RECLAIMING THE CENTER: DEMYSTIFYING THE SMALL TOWN AND EURO-

AMEICAN EXCEPTIONALISM IN LOUSE ERDRICH'S *TRACKS*

In Alfredo Véa Jr.'s *La Maravilla* (1993) an aging Yaqui man named Manuel reflects: "A

gringo will go to the edge of his city to look 'out' into the desert, while a Yaqui will go to the

edge of the desert and look 'out' into the city" (31). This simple complication of what is

perceived as a "center" and that which is perceived as the 'outside' or the fringe introduces a

primary theme of the novel, but it also speaks to a broader challenge which many Indigenous

writers and the communities they write from within face. It is a moment which recalls Carol

Kennicott from Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* gazing out from the city at the plains of Minnesota

and marveling at their emptiness: "On a hill by the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two

generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the cornflower blue of Northern sky. She saw no

Indians now" (Lewis 17). Carol looks out onto the Great Plains and romances their emptiness, a

void created by the progression of Euro-American communities colonizing the space. Véa Jr.

offers the counter to this moment, imagining a void that gazes back at the Carol Kennicotts of the

world – a different "center" that is not a void at all.

As I stated in my introduction, this project looks to consider the literary small town and

its inherent utopian discourses from three perspectives – Euro-American, Black American, and

Native American. Central to this idea is the space of what I have, with qualifications, called the

"frontier." In the American frontier, Euro-Americans saw a wish fulfillment space where the

American model could be tested and eventually prosper. For Black Americans, it served a

different and contradictory function as a space where they could potentially *escape* an America that historically marginalized and exploited them. For Indigenous communities, it was never a frontier to begin with.

In her influential work, *Legacy of Conquest*, Patricia Nelson Limerick notes that the "frontier" which Euro-Americans invaded between the 17th and 19th centuries was inhabited by "natives who considered their homelands to be the center, not the edge" (Limerick 26). Since the moment Europeans landed on the east coast of North America, Indigenous peoples have been faced with an existential threat. Europeans came to America imagining the continent as a frontier containing the raw materials to pursue their own utopia. But to Native American cultures, they were not historically nor are they presently on the shrinking margins of some Western supercivilization – they are at their own shrinking center. As Gloria Bird argues, Native American cultures know what has been positioned as "physical 'margins' of society as *home/place*" (Bird 41). Bird writes, "Native Americans have a longer intimate history and relationship with a landbase that predates any invasive people's living memories as well as the so-called 'margins' themselves" (Bird 41). The utopian narratives of the City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny which drove Western conquest were dystopian and often apocalyptic realities for Indigenous cultures. Far from the images of pioneering and adventure which remain present in the discourses of the American West, Limerick presents Western expansion as a systemic campaign of consumption and conquest (Limerick 18-19). As Euro-Americans marched west, the edges of what they perceived as a frontier were forcibly incorporated into their center, an historical process which can be, as I have demonstrated, mapped through the literary small town. As Bird states, in Indigenous histories and literatures, "the issue of marginality becomes inverted, the margin/place is the center/source. To come from an Indian reservation is to have

lived *difference*, not 'marginality'" (Bird 41). Because of this reality, many Indigenous writers engage with the small-town setting as a colonizing space that appears on their own cultural margins, wherein the margin/center delineation is inverted, and the Euro-American community functions as an oppositional force; a place where Indigenous futures are curtailed, not realized. When engaging with the small-town setting, many Indigenous writers create literary cartographs which speak to their own physical and ontological centers and position the Euro-American small-town space as the antagonistic force on that center's margins.

Despite its history as the primary social form used to colonize and conquer the American West, the small town has experienced a reification process, wherein its destructive role has been wiped away and replaced with an iconography of cultural symbols – Main Street, Mom and Pop storefronts, manicured lawns, town squares, train stations with loved ones waving goodbye, all surrounded by pastoral scenes – which have come to represent Euro-America in its most idyllic form. In her novel, *Tracks* (1988), Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) utilizes the fictional small-town setting to demonstrate how the quintessential Euro-American community model is antithetical with Indigenous community-building. *Tracks* engages with the dystopian reality inherent in Euro-American conquest of the West and charts a history of the small town being a colonial tool for eradication, assimilation, and consumption of Indigenous cultures. When Indigenous characters in *Tracks* resists these overtures, however, they demonstrate their own utopian impulse, evident in acts of resistance and persistence against the dystopian reality of conquest and the lingering effects it has on the pursuit of Indigenous futures. Despite the intended process of colonization to create cultural and ontological homogeneity through colonization, Erdrich filters the Euro-American utopian narratives present in the small-town form through Indigenous perspectives and traditional Anishinabe storytelling, demonstrating the resistance and authority

of Indigenous ways of knowing within the consumptive, colonial space of the small town. Through these acts of Indigenous resistance, *Tracks* utilizes the small-town setting to actively reposition the "center," not just geographically, but ontologically, as well. By comparing scholarship and historical narratives on the small town and depictions of the setting by non-Indigenous writers to that of Erdrich's, I will demonstrate how *Tracks* demystifies the small town as a space of U.S. exceptionalism and instead positions it as the social model which allowed for the conquering of the American West.

<div style="text-align:center">The Small Town as Lion and Lamb</div>

In my introduction and previous two chapters, I have argued for the small town as the preeminent site for utopian discourse in Euro-American literature and the as site of Black Americans' own grappling with their place in American utopian narratives. In both fact and fiction, however, the Euro-American small town is the antithesis to Indigenous utopian pursuits, as it was the social form through which Euro-Americans colonized and conquered the American West. Limerick reframes the historical narratives of "western expansion" and Manifest Destiny into one of conquest driven by a desire for capitalistic development, calling it "a literal, territorial form of economic growth" (Limerick 28). Western conquest was a competition for control over the capitalistic production of the land (Limerick 27). Many historians of the small town agree with this latter point, and, as I will demonstrate, note the small town's outsized role in that boom, but they neglect the destructive aspect of conquest.

Page Smith argues that "the frontiersman, and behind him the farmer, formed the advanced guard of western expansion, but the appropriation and organization of American's vast interior space was accomplished primarily through the small town" (Smith 11). David Russo combines the two forces proffered by Smith, noting that the small town historically "functioned as 'service

centers' for an overwhelming rural population" (292). Russo goes on to state that the small

towns were "needed" as places for rural homesteaders "to engage with others in economic,

social, cultural, and political activities" (292). For both Smith and Russo, the community form of

the small town was required for the conquering of the West. Without it, the capitalist production

of the frontier which motivated Western conquest could not be realized to serve the nation. The

town's economic infrastructure allows for the continued proliferation of natural resources and the

production of the land, which then could be connected through railroads to the utopian

superstructure of the nation. Russo notes that "most towns grew out of economic need" (292),

but such a presentation requires a centering of the critical perspective within the Euro-American

nation which looked to dominate the land.

As demonstrated by the function of Argus in *Tracks,* Russo has this claim reversed. Small

towns do not spawn based off economic need – it makes cultural and economic exploitation of

the land and the Indigenous communities residing there *possible*. This simple reversal by Russo

speaks to a colonizing mindset, but if the perspective is changed from the town of Argus in

Tracks to the Anishinabe people, then it is evident, as I will demonstrate, that the town is a social

model which propagates the conquering of the space around it. Economic infrastructure is only

part of the work the small town undertook in the conquering of the West, as Limerick argues that

"the contest for property and property and profit has been accompanied by a contest for cultural

dominance" (Limerick 27). Argus in *Tracks* certainly serves economic functions as outlined by

Russo, but it is also concerned with the national "service" of colonizing and assimilating the

Indigenous population. Argus is the link to a national economic network where the production of

the land can be exported, but it is also the center of the Indian Agent and churches which worked

to assimilate.

Despite its history as the vessel for conquering the West, the small town has evolved into the quintessential image of America– the setting for U.S. sitcoms and a literal theme park in "Main Street, U.S.A." at Disneyland. Nathaniel T. Booth notes that the small town has become "a cluster of symbols," signifiers which invoke "a casual, relaxed life, a kind of pastoral existence freed from the pressures of modernity" and imply that "America's truest form is the small town" (Booth 7). Others have called the small town "one of the great American institutions" due to its role in "shaping public sentiment and giving character to American culture" (qtd in Smith vii), or positioned it as a distillation of idyllic American life: "Small town America offers an abundance of order in most Americans' minds, and few images are stronger than ones which the small town evokes – images as comforting as apple pie and bandstands" (Barker 3). Miles Orvell argues that Main Street and the small town became a symbol "we [Americans] all shared, it was symbolically where we all lived, it was the common space, the public space, as opposed to the private, as if all Americans lived in one immense small town" and notes how "Americans dream of Main Street, as an ideal place" (Orvell 2, 7). Richard V. Francaviglia sees Main Street, standing in for the small town itself, as a symbol of progress for an earlier generation that has now evolved into one of "alleged sanctity and security that were part of earlier, slower times" (Francaviglia xviii). Returning to Smith, he notes how the average American desired for a "classic community that would be both means for social redemption for the individual and a 'model' for the redemption of mankind," a desire that individual believed they could find in their own small town (Smith 26).

All of these scholars and others speak to a robust scholarship around the American small town which complicates the mythology and narratives encoded in the space as both place and idea, but few give extensive critique of the community form as a colonizing and conquering

force. Summarizing criticism of the image of Main Street and the small town, Francaviglia notes that these spaces have become "a rallying point for cultural critics who see it as embodying petty concerns" (xviii). It should perhaps go without saying that Indigenous communities, scholars, and writers would hardly consider the genocide and conquest that came with colonization a petty concern – nor is that the concern to which Frachviglia is referring. Rather, Francaviglia and other scholars, with some notable exceptions, of the small town mostly ignore the space's role in America's imperial history, or discuss it in terms like Russo and Smith who locate it at the forefront of Western conquest, but do not interpret it as serving the role of conqueror. As such, much of this discourse perpetuates the small town as a space of U.S. exceptionalism. Furthermore, if we return briefly to the period of small-town literature termed the "Revolt from the Village," those writers, like Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, revolted from endless commercialization, cultural decay, and stagnation – not from a colonialization process which established the community-form their works take as subject. Even in literature by white Americans critical of the small town, it is still seen as a space of utopian potential or of pastoral joy, despite its mundaneness. The small-town space's role in colonization and genocide is only present in these texts in absences, as I discussed in my first chapter. Despite a central role in the discourse about America's ideals, the small town and its cluster of symbols thus escapes robust critical critique as a foundational part of American colonialism. The small town has escaped, and indeed, *transcended* its role as a space designed to colonize, consume, and displace.

The ideological washing of the small town evident in the surveyed texts of this project as well as the critical survey above speaks to how this quintessential American space actually serves the role of *displacing* Euro-Americans' idea of the United States as a colonial and

imperial nation (See Poll 16-17). Ryan Poll, one scholar of the small town who does work to locate the setting within a history of imperialism, writes:

> [T]he dominant small town is a modern from that gains its legibility by appearing and operating as an autonomous, contained island community that disavows knowledge and responsibility for, a globalizing modernity that is inextricably linked to U.S. imperialism. Or to put I another way, the small town is a form of U.S. exceptionalism that allows the United States to not recognize its own imperialist history and identity (Poll 23).

This has been the great magic trick of Euro-American utopian mythmaking – transforming the very tool which made colonization and domination of the West possible into one not just of American ideals and progress, but of American innocence, as well. Such a transformation is a possible through a process of reification. As defined by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann:

> Reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorships of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness (Berger and Luckmann 89).

Euro-American utopian narratives like Manifest Destiny and the City upon a Hill provided the raw material necessary for such a reification process, where the small town's construction as an ideal and repeatable space for colonizing the West can be washed of its role as such because it is part of a mission endorsed by God, undertaken by a self-described chosen people. This process of reification happens on many levels, several of which I have already indicated. In American political discourse, entertainment, literature, and scholarship, the small town has been reified away from its colonizing history. Russo shows the process in action when he writes:

All settlements that were scattered across the North America continent from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century overlaid territory in which native populations have lived for centuries. The continent and, within it, a rapidly expanding nation state afforded the newer settlers vast space, room to settle wherever and whenever they wanted to, and with whomever they preferred. This astonishing freedom over so extensive a terrain over so long a time led to a prolonged orgy of town building and to the creation of several thousand small local communities (Russo 293).

Euro-American communities were not invasive, but "scattered," where they did not displace, destroy, or consume Indigenous communities– they "overlaid," them. The resulting small-town network does not tell of conquest, but of the expansion of the nation. Such a perspective on the process of conquering the West results in a concept of ultimate consumptive freedom for Euro-Americans, who, as Russo frames it, had the restraint of appetite for consumption as one at an orgy.

Russo follows this characterization by noting that "most town dwellers developed communities that mirrored the characteristics of the larger society of which they were a part" (293). Instead of such a link between the local and national implicating the United States for its colonial practices, it cleanses it of them. It is not the imperial force of Euro-America conquering the West, it is a hardy community of pioneers overcoming the hardships of the frontier. Within the many narratives of the small town, the process outlined by Russo has come to be perceived not as one of colonization and destruction, but one of the progress of the nation. Indeed, one of the most prominent early historians of the frontier, Frederick Jackson Turner, positioned this process of dominating the frontier as *central* to American identity, as Limerick explains:

The center of American history, Turner had argued, was actually to be found on its edges. As the American people proceeded westward, 'the frontier [was] the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization' and 'the line of most effective and rapid Americanization.' The struggle with the wilderness turned Europeans into Americans, a process Turner made the central story of American history: 'The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development' (Limerick 22).

Here we see the action of reification in process for the frontier, where Jackson positions the conquest of the West as essential to forging the nation, where land was "free" and the great civilization of America poured into the space – a narrative which Limerick rightly reframes as one of conquest and annihilation instead of one of heartening national progress. The quintessential American community form – the small town – was at the forefront of the process outlined by Turner, where it, too was reified alongside the pioneer. It is thus due for its own narrative reframing. When Erdrich engages with the small-town from within her own cultural center, positioning the Euro-American community as an antagonistic model on the margins, she punctures the small-town form's ability to dispel America's role as colonizer. As I will demonstrate, Erdrich presents the small town as a space which allows for the systemic consumption, assimilation, and annihilation of Indigenous people, land, and ways of life. By introducing such a depiction of the small town into the iconography of the space, Erdrich works to demystify the quintessential American utopian space and reposition it as a colonizing force, contributing to an overdue reflection on the small town as an image of American innocence.

Apocalyptic Renderings of Western Conquest

Erdrich's *Tracks* is the third entry of a loosely connected tetralogy of works which all explore the lives of Anishinabe characters on a reservation in North Dakota. On the margins of this reservation sits the fictional small town of Argus, primarily inhabited by Euro-Americans. The novel unfolds through two perspectives: Nanapush, a Anishinabe elder who remains steadfast in observing Chippewa traditions and ways of life, to the extent that the people's increasingly dire circumstances allow; and the traumatized and assimilated perspective of Pauline, also of Chippewa descent. Other Indigenous characters have levels of engagement with Western culture, many of which can be defined by their relationship with Argus. Before the small town enters the narrative, however, *Tracks* is framed similarly to a post-apocalyptic novel:

> We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall. It was surprising there were so many of us left to die. For those who survived the spotted sickness from the south, our long fight west to Nadouissiox land where we signed the treaty, and then a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers, what descended from the north in 1912 seemed almost impossible. By then, we thought disaster must surely have spent its force, that disease must have claimed all the Anishinabe that the earth could hold and bury (1).

Importantly, the story opens on the reservation, telling of maladies that have come upon that land and its people from the outside, firmly establishing the narrative center with these opening lines. This apocalypse is near total, with the widespread death of the Anishinabe people happening alongside their way of life being shattered and replaced with a new system. Both textually and sub-textually, the town of Argus is positioned as the new social system and the representative force causing these apocalyptic circumstances. Smallpox, the first pandemic mentioned, comes

from the South, a space demarcated soon after as the location of Argus, which has now become

the border of the Euro-American civilization that is consuming the Anishinabe people. From the

Euro-American national center in the east, again facilitated through the empire's outpost of

Argus, bureaucracy rapidly incorporates the Anishinabe land into the American model, as we see

throughout the novel.

This series of apocalyptic events begets a post-apocalyptic generation of Anishinabe, as

Nanapush recounts to his adopted granddaughter and Fleur's daughter, Lulu:

You are the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared when, along with the first

bitter punishments of early winter, a new sickness swept down. The consumption… this

disease was different from the pox and fever, for it came on slow. The outcome, however,

was just as certain. Whole families of your relatives lay ill and helpless in its breath (2).

We begin to see the extent of apocalyptic impact brought on by the colonizing system, as the

governmentally installed reservation model propagates the devastation of the outside illness: "On

the reservation, where we were forced close together, the clans dwindled. Our tribe unraveled

like a coarse rope, frayed at either end as the old and new among us were taken" (2). The

apocalyptic initial stages of the colonial process have far-reaching impact which make, by

colonial design, the continuation of Anishinabe ways of life increasingly unsustainable.

Gesturing toward this later in the novel, Nanapush recounts a story where he led a buffalo hunt

for white hunters, wherein the whites had done "a day's worth of shooting for only tongues and

hides" (140). The remaining buffalo grew "strange and usual" and eventually disappeared (140).

While this has been read by many scholars as an allegory for Euro-Americans' destruction of

Indigenous people, it is also a very practical reference to the excessive consumption of Western

resources by invading whites, which results in Indigenous people's inability to provide for

themselves through the means which had sustained them for hundreds of years. We see the latent effects of this throughout the novel, where starvation is a constant threat for those remaining on the reservation, to the point that Nanapush considers "boil[ing] his moccasins" for the limited sustenance they provide (101). As this situation becomes most dire, rations arrive in Argus from the federal government (171). After creating a post-apocalyptic scenario, the colonizers make the Indigenous population dependent on them, advancing their own control over the area – colonization and assimilation by way of attrition. In such circumstances, post-traumatic stress "becomes a pandemic… and the social institutions, which normally would assist a society in recovery, are weakened or collapse," propagating additional trauma and assimilation by way of desperation (Gross 50). The novel thus opens with a before and after dichotomy, a fracture created by the solidifying of the foothold of Euro-American conquerors in the American West. Nanapush's perspective then unfolds through him passing this history and more to the new post-apocalyptic generation.

Many Anishinabe characters navigate this post-apocalyptic world, but *Tracks* is not a novel of absolutes. It is more subtle in its approach than "good" Indigenous characters versus "evil" white ones. It is instead a novel of systems. Argus is the anchor that has brought the network of apocalyptic circumstances. After opening on this apocalypse, Erdrich presents the town as a cohesive force throughout, working to systemically incorporate the "frontier" around the town into its colonial system to increase exploitation of the land and people. Colonizing and conquering the West via the small town, as depicted by *Tracks*, is a process. First, comes death and destruction, then comes consumption, and finally comes assimilation. Erdrich initiates the first stage within her opening lines before turning to Argus as the tool to achieve the other two.

The Euro-American Small Town as Antagonistic Utopia

As is the case with other works surveyed in this project, the organization of Argus speaks to its intentions as a community, and the framing of that organization through the literary cartograph mapped by the novel's characters informs the work's commentary on those intentions. Argus is pre-occupied with the same two businesses as many other literary small towns, commerce and religion, as we see in the initial portrayal of the town:

> When she [Fleur] got down to Argus in the year of 1913, it was just a grid of six streets on either side of the railroad depot. There were two elevators, one central, the other a few miles west. Two stores competed for the trade of the three hundred citizens, and three churches quarreled with one another for their souls. There was a frame building for Lutherans, a heavy brick one for Episcopalians, and a long narrow shingle Catholic church. This last had a slender steeple, twice as high as any building or tree (13).

The frontier small town serves the interests of the nation in two primary ways: firstly, it colonizes the space in its immediate orbit, forcibly turning "frontier" into "America." Secondly, it adds an economic hub to the American empire, making the exportation of the production of the land possible. This short passage introduces many of the raw materials needed for such functions – sites of commerce, churches, the train station, and infrastructure to exploit the land. The infrastructural properties of the frontier small town are an evolution of a practice that has been foundational to European colonization of North American since the earliest stages. It is a process that Christopher Tomlins calls "planting," which brought the "four constituent elements" of "Christianity, commerce, geography, and law" to the colonizing sites (316). While this little stretch of Argus very much resembles Main Streets in the work of Cather and Lewis, Erdrich

presents it without the same duality of criticism and comfort that these other authors do. Again and again, Erdrich demystifies the traditional function of each of these spaces.

The Main Street of Argus, even filtered through the assimilated perspective of Pauline, possesses none of the romance of many small-town depictions by Euro-American writers. The stores are not positioned by Erdrich as sites of community, but as purely capitalistic ventures, looking to obtain as large a portion of the town's business as possible. They do not serve the community, they simply "compete for the trade." In fact, the few brief moments where the narrative enters the interior of these commercial spaces, they are sites of *conflict*, not community. One such moment happens soon after the town is introduced, when Fleur gets work at a butcher shop. In this space, the detailed cataloging of Argus's systematic exploitation of the land's production remains at the forefront, as Erdrich writes "the men who worked at the butcher's had carved about a thousand carcasses between them, maybe half of that steers, and the other half pigs, sheep, and game like deer, elk, and bear" to "serve farmers for a fifty-mile radius" (13, 16). A space that, in other small-town works, might be a site of community, is instead positioned in *Tracks* as a cog in the machine that decimates the resources of historically Anishinabe land. Furthermore, we soon learn that Fleur's intentions are not to enter and benefit off the economic system of Argus, but to collect the money she needs to purchase her own familial land by whatever means necessary; an effort that plays out by Fleur hustling the men in cards, using their own arrogance and tempers against them, before they brutally assault her. In a moment presented in the book as a response to this assault, a rogue tornado subsequently hits Argus, damaging much of the town but destroying the butcher shop itself with supernatural precision, and killing only the culprits. A site which, in other small-town works, might have been the lifeblood of the community, is thus reflected as a fulcrum for exploiting the resources of the land and a space of

extreme danger for Indigenous women. Even more revealing is a similar framing of the various

churches. Pauline more than any Indigenous character, should possess a sympathetic eye toward

this particular institution, as she eventually becomes a nun in the Catholic church in Argus. But

this institution, too, is equated with the commerce of the town, their own "quarrelling" a

competition of a spiritual economy.

Another common image of small-town fiction is the railroad, and it plays an important

role in the reification process of the setting and the literary small-town's status as an island-form.

It acts as a port of exit/entry that serves the dual function of disconnecting the town and the

nation while also linking it to the national network. As Booth notes, the train station "bring[s] the

traveler to the village, emphasizing its isolation from the rest of the world" while simultaneously

"connect[ing] the community to the rest of the world" (Booth 25). The separation between the

two spaces, emphasized by the journey which must be undergone to reach the isolated

destination, contributes to the reification process of the frontier small-town. While it is connected

to a matrix of other small towns, an isolated Argus could theoretically instead be positioned in

the national narrative as a frontier-community of pioneers pulling themselves up by their

bootstraps, pursuing that City upon a Hill. It is only when the lens zooms out that the campaign

of colonialization happening across the nation in a series of small towns comes into focus. By the

time such a cataloging could take place, the reification process is completed. The small town is

linked to but separate from the nation. Its actions both serve the nation and are separate from it.

The train station makes both of these aspects possible.

We see the emphasis on this de-linking in several of the small-town texts I have

surveyed, and they play an important role in my reading of the setting as distinctly utopian one,

as it often brings the figures I have called the utopian voyager to town. These are the characters

who come from outside and, through their journey, emphasize the de-linking between the "nation" they traveled from and the small town they arrived to. Once they arrive to the island of the plain, they survey the space for the reader, mapping the utopian structure of the small town. *Tracks* does depict outsiders surveying the space of Argus as I have already presented above – indeed, every account we get of the town comes from Indigenous characters who originate outside of the town, but *just* outside the town. These characters thus serve, in theory, the same function as previous 'voyagers' who arrive into the space and chart the social structure they discover there. To that point, let us briefly return to Sargent's definition of a literary utopia: "stories about good (and later bad) places, representing them as if they were real. Thus they show people going about their everyday lives and depict marriage and the family, education, meals, work, and the like, as well as the political and economic systems" (4). As I have argued, this is certainly a cataloging process seen in other small-town texts, including the ones I have previously analyzed.

None of the potential voyager-figures of *Tracks* are concerned with the standard social cataloging of Argus, however. Instead, the culture whose practices we learn of are those on the reservation, where we see family dynamics, social structure, courtship, marriages, and political alliances and rivalries. Such a subtle reframing of the narrative center acts as a counter to small-town works examined previously in Cather, Lewis, and Morrison, where characters like Jim Burden, Carol Kennicott, and Reverend Misner and the women of the Convent arrive into the utopian space and engage with the discourse present there. When Carol Kennicott or Reverend Misner, two utopian voyager-figures in *Main Street* and *Paradise*, respectively, act as a surveyor of spaces in those works, they consider ways in which the utopian project could be improved. Despite Gopher Prairie and Ruby's shortcomings in these character's eyes, the small towns

remain sites of utopian potential for their respective cartographers. No such reflection exists for

Nanapush or Fleur, who engage with the small town only in oppositional terms. Pauline also

does not reflect on the town's potential. Instead, she is infected with a destructive assimilative

force which she has no real understanding of, as I will address at length shortly. Argus is not a

space our characters arrive to, it comes to them. In *Tracks*, the small town is not an island of the

plain, waiting for some voyager to arrive and discover its utopian ambitions and potential – it is a

battleship, there to conquer and destroy. Framed against the reservation and the dire

circumstances the Anishinabe people find themselves in, the paired infrastructure of the railroad

and grain elevators are not a romanticized connector to the utopian matrix of the nation, but the

means by which the syphoning of resources from the land is possible. This difference in

presentation of the small-town space in *Tracks* speaks fundamentally to the dystopian and

apocalyptic implications of Euro-American utopian pursuits for Indigenous people.

As I argued in my introduction and explored further in my analysis of *Main Street*, many

literary small towns contain both aspects of Page Smith's categorization of types of towns. They

are both exploitative capitalistic models *and* sites of U.S. exceptionalism. The exploitative

capitalistic reality of the frontier small town became *part* of the American utopian identity. In

Tracks, however, Erdrich presents Argus only as the functionally consumptive and colonizing

space it is to Indigenous populations. There are no romantic perspectives on small town life in

the novel. It is where land is lost in auctions, where Fleur is assaulted and Pauline is

indoctrinated into destructive, assimilatory activity. From no perspective is Argus presented with

nostalgia indicated by the critical survey above. It is instead a model which systemically

colonizes and exploits the land. The literary cartographs our Anishinabe characters chart of

Argus reflects this reality. This initial map of Argus achieves the planting stage of colonization,

positioning the town as mechanism for consumption. In the first two chapters, Erdrich establishes a post-apocalyptic reality for the Anishinabe people and maps the social form which facilitates continued colonial action. With these aspects set, the rest of the novel charts the systemic consumption and assimilation of the frontier space through the American model.

The Legal and Literary Cartography of Colonization

Legal and literal cartography was a vital component to Western conquest, a history which Erdrich represents in detail in *Tracks.* After the planting stage of colonialism established in the previous section, Tomlins notes how the next step of early colonization of North America were legal charters which "gave the English colonizing impulse specific documentary form and embodiment by elaborating the discourse of planting in a language of legalities" (316). Such a process allowed for European conquerors to "describe or pursue claims to American space in detail" and "to declare… their conceptions of an appropriate order of things and people that would be created by colonizing" (316). It was a cartographic process of creating artificial boundaries in "frontier" space wherein European conquers could "impose that order onto unmapped social and physical circumstance" (316). The process became concrete with the "mass importation of population to confirm boundaries and cement occupancy" (Tomlin 316), much as we see with the arrival of Euro-American conquerors to the newly incorporated space of Argus. This is a process the Tomlins terms the "legal cartography of colonization."

Erdrich presents a similar process with the incorporation of the small town acting as the tool to legitimize the colonizing impulse of Euro-America, returning Euro-Americans to their colonizing identity, which, for all practical functions, has hardly changed over the intervening three-hundred years. This legitimization by bureaucratic cataloging is the apocalyptic stage referenced by Nanapush in the opening lines of the novel – what he terms "exile in a storm of

government papers" (Erdrich 1). In the latter stages of the novel, we see this unfold in the literal

mapping of the space, when Father Damien brings official documents from Argus to Nanapush's

adoptive family, which now contains himself, Kashpaws, and Pillagers:

> We watched as Damien unfolded and smoothed the map flat upon the table… we
>
> examined the lines and circles of the homesteads paid up – Morrissey, Pukwan, Hat,
>
> Lazarres everywhere. They were colored green. The lands that were gone out of the tribe
>
> – to deaths with no heirs, to sales, to the lumber company – were painted a pale and
>
> rotten pink. Those in question, a sharper yellow. At the center of a bright square was
>
> Matchimanito, a small blue triangle I could cover with my hand (173).

This map speaks to the systematic incorporation of Anishinabe land into "America," color

coding the methods employed to accomplish those colonial goals. As with the various symbols

present in Argus's Main Street, such processes of growth and consumption are certainly

represented in small-town fiction by Euro-American writers. Again, however, Erdrich represents

these functions of the frontier small town as purely colonial and destructive by flipping the

center/margin dichotomy.

The first category mentioned on the map includes assimilated Anishinabe who are now

homesteaders, participating in the colonial system. Such figures are common in small-town

fiction and are often the heroes of the story. They reside on the Outskirts of town, negotiating the

space between the "outside" of the frontier and the "inside" of the community. As they farm and

acquire new land, the frontier-space is slowly turned into nation-space, as it serves the nation's

cultural and economic interest. This process, in small-town novels by Euro-American writers, is

often presented as one of progress. When Will Kennicott in *Main Street* or Alexandra Bergson in

Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913) complete a land deal, new space is incorporated into the town and

the town grows. Erdrich's narrative center is located within the land that is actively being

consumed, however, so when a similar process unfolds on the map in *Tracks*, such as when a

homesteader or lumber company complete hostile takeovers of land, Nanapush and his family do

not perceive the town as growing, but the reservation as shrinking. It is a cultural space that has

been lost, and the survival of that culture is only present there in small gaps between the

functions of the Euro-American small town which assimilated homesteaders have adopted.

Anishinabe land is "nibbled at the edges and surrounded by farmers waiting for it to go under the

gavel of the auctioneer" (99).

Far from heroes, these homesteading figures in *Tracks* are instead positioned as primary

antagonists. As she looks at the map, Margaret, the Kashpaw matriarch, notes the doubled "green

square of the Morrisseys," the primary group who represent those willful Indigenous participants

in the new system, and notes "they are taking it over" (173). Margaret focuses on these

individuals as "enemies she could fight," as traitors who "shared her blood however faintly"

(173). Despite the less than heroic opinion Margaret and others hold of these figures, *Tracks* is,

as I noted above, a novel of systems. Nanapush quickly reframes the anger away from this group,

directing the reader's attention to the next category listed on the map – "the lapping pink, the

color of the skin of lumberjack and bankers" who he understands are the true force behind the

colonization process unfolding on the piece of paper in front of him (173-174).

As the map demonstrates, those who refuse to willfully participate in the new system are

inevitably incorporated, as well, as the dire circumstances of fractured families, mass death, and

financial desperation borne through the transformation of the land from a localized economy to a

national one force most Anishinabe individuals to surrender their land. After building out the

apocalyptic circumstances early in the book, Nanapush tells of the progressive shrinking of the

Anishinabe land, taken piece by piece: "we stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step" (4). Later he laments how "so few of us… even understood the writing of paper" (99), ignorant of the process which saw their land consumed into by America, again speaking to the exploitative circumstances created by the colonizing system, which destabilizes and takes advantage of that destabilization. This scene with the map represents a similar cartographic negotiation which unfolded across the West between Euro-American invaders and Indigenous communities, as Limerick notes:

> Conquest basically involved the drawing of lines on a map, the definition and allocation of ownership (personal, tribal, corporate, state, federal, and international), and the evolution of land from matter to property. The process had two stages: the initial drawing of the lines (which we have usually called the frontier stage) and the subsequent giving of meaning and power to those lines, which is still under way. Race relations parallel the distribution of property, the application of labor and capital to make the property productive, and the allocation of profit. Western history has been an ongoing competition for legitimacy – for the right to claim for oneself and sometimes for one's group the status of legitimate beneficiary of Western resources (Limerick 27).

Such a clinical representation of this frontier process acts as a demystification of the frontier small town by Erdrich. The romance of pioneers and homesteaders present in historical narratives and other small-town fiction is reduced to a campaign of consumption, charted on a map like the advance of enemy forces into sovereign land. At perhaps greatest issue, however, is that such commodification of land as documented by Limerick is inconceivable to many Indigenous cultures.

When comparing this literal map to a surveying of space Nanapush subsequently imagines, the diametrically opposed approaches to community building between the Anishinabe and Euro-Americans becomes evident. At a moment of loneliness, Nanapush reflects that he is "liv[ing] in the past, in former times, lost times when game was plenty, companions sharp with humor, times when it would have taken four days to walk the length of this reservation" (191). Nanapush imagines a different kind of map here, a human surveying of the space that builds out a community. A process that would have taken four days previously, walking the community, seeing the three dimensions of the land, hearing the laughter and news of the people, could now be done in an afternoon with Father Damien and a piece of paper sprawled across Nanapush's table. All the history and cultural mythology contained in Matchimanito can be reduced to a small blot on a map in this new system.

Such a transformation of how space is cataloged is unimaginable to and incompatible with Anishinabe ways of life. Father Damien notes how "they're [the federal government] willing to trade for allotment someplace else" (175), but such a suggestion assumes a colonizing perspective on land. Father Damien, even with his sympathetic intentions, thinks of the issues with the land as a matter of monetary value. For many Indigenous communities, however, land is a vessel for memory and essential foundations of their cultural identities. In his seminal text, *God Is Red* (1994), Vine Deloria Jr. posits that "American Indians hold their lands – places – as having highest possible meaning" (Deloria Jr. 62). Nanapush tethers such a statement directly to Chippewa culture when he reflects "land is the only thing that lasts life to life" (33) Deloria Jr. goes on to argue that Euro-Americans conversely "review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history – time – in the best possible light" (Deloria Jr. 62). We see this exact conflict

playing out in *Tracks*, wherein the progress of America is perceived, by Euro-Americans, as the march of their nation and its systems across the space of the continent. Argus is one footprint of that progress, but reframed from an Indigenous perspective, the colonial process is one of apocalypse, not progress. Euro-Americans in *Tracks* see Anishinabe land as a small cog in an imperial machine, but to the Indigenous characters in the book, that same land contains several layers of their cultural realities.

We see these two issues collide when Fleur offers her thoughts on the map spread on the table at Nanapush's, where she speaks "with contempt for the map, for those who drew it, for the money required, even for the priest" saying "the paper had no bearing or sense, as no one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried' (174). Just like Nanapush, Fleur directly connects the process of colonization of space to the colonizing infrastructure of the small town. Argus is the space of cartographers, money makers, and assimilative forces like Father Damien's church. Then, she demonstrates the ontological disconnect between that colonizing network and Anishinabe conceptions of reality. She believes the history contained by the space, and, more importantly, the power of Pillager blood which brings fear to many Anishinabe characters throughout the novel, will prevent the land from being taken. But Nanapush knows better, noting that Fleur is wrong because he had witnessed the passing of ancestral land to the colonizing system, as "dollar bills cause memories to vanish" (174). In this clinical depiction of the legal cartography of colonization, Erdrich reduces the small town to its least romantic form and represents how Euro-American utopian systems are antithetical to Indigenous community building. Alongside the colonizing process of space around Argus, Erdrich depicts a similar systematic representation of the assimilation of the Anishinabe people.

Assimilation and the Village Virus

In *Main Street*, Lewis introduces the idea of the "village virus." It is described as "germ" that "infects ambitious people who stay too long in the provinces" (Lewis 173). It is essentially an assimilative force which slowly infects (metaphorically) any ambitious or progressively-minded individuals and turns them into standard, conservative Americans. After learning of its existence, the novel's protagonist, Carol, becomes obsessed, dreading her own slow transformation into what she perceives as a stagnant housewife.

Such a force emanates from the small town in *Tracks*, as well, but its goals are much more sinister. Throughout the novel, Argus is positioned as a force capable of consuming more than just the land, but the people, as well. Nanapush reflects, "[w]e lose our children in different ways. They turn their faces to the white towns" (170). Pauline's Chippewa father leaves no doubt how some on the reservation see the assimilatory nature of Argus, warning that his half-Chippewa daughter "would fade out there," that she "won't be an Indian once [she] return[s]" (14). His phrasing here is another important moment of centering the story within the Anishinabe culture. The town chipping away at the reservation's borders is now the unknown, the Anishinabe frontier, the "out there" that they feared. The same calculated instability brought on by colonization that allows for the continued exploitation of the land leads to Pauline's own turn toward the colonial mindset.

Pauline is taken in by the Catholic church at her most vulnerable, and the fracturing caused by the colonial presence is what initiates the turn: "I have no family… I am alone and have no land. Where else would I go but to the nuns?" (142). Working exactly as intended, the colonizing force of Argus and its institutions create Pauline's dilemma and then offer what might seem like the only refuge. This assimilation process impacts Pauline deeply, as she begins to see

the Anishinabe as "the Indians… them" and perceives herself as part of the "us" of Argus (134-135). Pauline begins to think with a colonizer's mindset, wanting to convert her former people. She embodies the "civilization" vs "savagery" perspective of Euro-American conquerors of the West, imagining the Indigenous population as "a devil in the land" (137) which must be brought to the light. Pauline becomes obsessed with the economy of souls established in our initial mapping of Argus, as she intends to bring more individuals to Christendom with the "net of her knowledge" (140). Eventually, just as her father predicts, Pauline perceives herself as "not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). Despite her belief that Argus and the church are her only refuge, it does not end up acting as such. Instead, Pauline interprets the tenets of Catholicism and applies them in destructive and self-flagellating ways. While she fails to see it, the non-traditional family of Pillagers, Kashpaws, and Nanapushes continue to show Pauline kindness and community, despite her repeated antagonism toward them. They welcome her to their homes regularly, feeding her when they have very little, and Fleur and Lulu bathe her when she comes to them in a pitiable state. In his trickster ways, Nanapush even tries to help Pauline overcome her own theologically inspired attempts at suffering. Through Pauline's assimilated perspective, Erdrich continues to demonstrate the consumptive force of Argus and its institutions toward the Anishinabe people as well as to their land, but she also demonstrates the persistence of Indigenous community.

If Pauline speaks specifically to the role of religion in the assimilative process, the Morrisseys are the primary figures which speak to that other pillar of the frontier small town – capitalism. The Morrisseys, a family of half-Chippewa, half-French heritage, own land firmly in the green on Father Damien's map. Much like Pauline's turn to Catholicism mission-work, the assimilated family do not only find a way to exist in the colonial system, they become purveyors

of it. Adding to their own original land, the Morrisseys embrace the consumptive model of

Argus, "acquiring allotments that many old Chippewa did not know how to keep" (63). In

addition to this growth of homesteading space, they also sign a contract with a lumber company

and actively worked to encourage other Anishinabe to do the same (111). The family becomes

part of the town system, expanding Argus's contribution to the empire. We see the true extent of

their assimilation to the colonizing model in their conflict with Nanapush and his adoptive

family, however.

Clarence Morrisey and an accomplice from another assimilated family, the Lazarres,

abduct Nanapush and Margaret one day, an act which Nanapush initially locates within a dispute

between their two families. This is a framework of conflict which Nanapush understands, and, at

first, he believes he can negotiate with them. Once he tries, however, he quickly realizes that this

is not just about familial disputes, but a conflict which has branched out to include the colonial

ambitions of Argus: "this had to do with everything. The land purchase. Politics" (113). It is not

just an act of revenge, and as such Nanapush cannot locate it in his worldview. The scene plays

out with the Morrissey and Lazarre committing an unfathomable act, maiming an Anishinabe

elder by cutting Margaret's hair clean down to the scalp. This sets off a series of events which

implicitly indict the Morrisseys and Lazarres for their embracing of the colonial ways of Argus.

Plotting his revenge, Nanapush conceives a snare which will trap and asphyxiate

Clarence. He tells his accomplice, the young Nector Kashpaw, that they must "think exactly like

[their] prey" so that the target will "catch itself" (118). In the execution of this plot, Nanapush

erects his snare "on a path both men take to town," where it eventually snags Lazarre in a

traumatizing but non-fatal manner. While this plot is unfolding, Fleur too goes hunting for her

own revenge, and she also turns to the town. When she sees Clarence there, she "walk[s] the four

streets," like a hunter stalking the tracks of its prey, before following the man to the Morrissey farm and cursing the house with "bad medicine" (119, 120). Both of these revenge plans employ traditional practices of Fleur and Nanapush's culture while simultaneously framing the new natural habitat of their prey as the town of Argus. This is an implied indictment of the change the Morrisseys have undergone, turning away from Anishinabe ways and instead being snared through their engagement with Argus. With both Pauline and families like the Morrisseys, Erdrich presents Argus as a purely consumptive force that works to eradicate counter-narratives.

Survivance and an Extant Utopian Impulse

I have now mapped how the small town of Argus brings about circumstances of apocalypse, assimilation, and exploitation for the Anishinabe people in *Tracks.* Despite such a dire positioning of Indigenous life in the face of Western conquest, Erdrich presents numerous instances of resistance in the novel. Bird is especially critical of *Tracks* for what she argues are the perpetuation of stereotypes like "the Savage" and "the Vanishing Red Man" in such a way that demonstrates how these stereotypes can be internalized (46). While Bird offers some compelling evidence of this taking place within individual characters, I argue that Erdrich counters such narratives within the broader scope of the novel. Instead, Erdrich presents several instances of what Gerald Vizenor terms "native survivance," which he defines as "creat[ing] a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihility, and victimry" (1). Such acts of survivance are numerous in *Tracks*, and they serve as direct counters to the stereotypes Bird argues are present in the novel. Despite a campaign of annihilation and assimilation, Nanapush and his adopted family strengthen their ties: "They formed a kind of clan, the new made up of bits of the old, some religious in the old way and some in the new" (71). Nanapush sits at the center of an Anishinabe clan who find the means to sustain their community in the face of

repeated attempts of separation and consumption. Furthermore, the figures of this new clan are hardly passive figures, with all the members resisting in their own ways.

Nanapush himself sits at the center of this resistance, as Erdrich establishes several instances of native survivance. Vizenor cites an instance from his own history where his name became a negotiating space: "My own surname is a tease, an oral conversion by early federal agents on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. 'Vezina,' selected as a pay name by a native ancestor in the fur trade, was transcribed in the first reservation census as 'Vizenor'" (5). We see a direct correlation between this idea of the power of an Anishinabe tribe name and the damaging nature of cataloging of Indigeneity in *Tracks*: "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file. That is why I only gave it out once in all those years. *No Name*, I told Father Damien when he came to take the church census. *No Name*, I told the Agent when he made the tribal role" (Erdrich 32). Here, Nanapush resists the cataloging of Chippewa culture we see throughout the novel and refuses the colonial force the opportunity to define that name – where it resides, who it is connected to, how much money it owes to the Indian agency. Instead, he passes his name on to Lulu – the one instance of giving it out which Nanapush references above, both as a 'legal' name and through the stories he tells her. This is an act of survivance noted by Vizenor, where "family histories last in active stories" so that "[n]ative names create a sense of presence, a tease that undermines the simulations of absence and cultural dominance" (5). As Nanapush tells the history of destruction and colonization brought on by the invasion of Euro-Americans, he is passing the knowledge to the next generation, which is itself an act of resistance and a puncturing of the utopian enclave that Argus intends to create.

To this latter point, the novel itself speaks to the latent impact of colonialism on Anishinabe culture. Despite Nanapush's statement that his name "loses power" (32) when it is cataloged, here it is on the page written again and again. This is what James Flavin calls Erdrich's "narrative dilemma," where themes of the novel are undermined by the artistic medium (1). Another way to perceive this, however, is that *Tracks* itself is evidence of a history of colonialism *and* Anishinabe survivance. While the Western medium of the novel does run counter to some Anishinabe traditions, it also speaks to the culture's adaptability in the face of assimilation.

Indeed, Nanapush resides in an Anishinabe story tradition which Vizenor cites as central to how he incorporates survivance into his own writing. Vizenor notes how he employs the trickster figure as a way to counter colonial narratives, privileging such stories "over monotheism, linear causality, and victimry" (6) Since the publication of *Tracks* in 1988, Nanapush's status as a trickster figure has been one of primary focus of scholars (See Sergi, Gross, Clarke). By creating an intricate colonial framework through the mythologized space of the small town and then filtering that history through the perspective of an Indigenous trickster figure, Erdrich achieves a similar function to Vizenor, "writ[ing] to creation not closure" (Vizenor 6). Nanapush recounts the space and function of the mythic small town, but he does so in his role as a trickster figure, functioning as "a healer and upholder of ancient and living traditions" (Sergi 280). Mapping the small town as a colonial space through the perspective of a trickster figure incorporates that setting into Anishinabe oral tradition as an oppositional, destructive force, and works to demystify the Euro-American utopian mythology.

Pauline's seemingly oppositional assimilated perspective, which makes up the other half of *Tracks,* actually works to strengthen this puncturing of Argus's intended hegemonic narrative.

Despite Pauline's self-proclaimed turn toward whiteness, she recounts a great number of stories which speak to occurrences that cannot be explained by Western worldviews. As many critics have demonstrated, Pauline is regularly an unreliable narrator, but many of the stories she tells about Fleur's power or the power of Matchimanito are subsequently verified by Nanapush (Bird 45). This speaks to both the lived-in authority of such a cultural reality *and* its persistence against assimilation. In *Tracks*, Anishinabe cultural beliefs about supernatural occurrences are not presented as magical deviations from an objective Western ontological system – they are the reality the Indigenous figures exist within. Moreover, these belief systems persist in assimilated figures like Pauline, who continues to incorporate them into her own accounts of events, and the Morrisseys, who remain certain of Fleur's power despite their turn toward the colonial system.

The final demonstration of native survivance in *Tracks* occurs when Lulu returns from a government school to both Anishinabe land and her family. When she returns, Nanapush and Margaret pick her up from Argus, the center of strength for the Euro-American utopian form. In this space, however, native survivance and resistance is evident. Signs of attempted assimilation are clear on Lulu, through cut braids and attire, but her clothing is a "smoldering orange… a shameful color like a half-doused flame, visible for miles, that any child who tried to run away from boarding school was forced to wear" (226). In these final lines of the novel, we see not only the maintenance of Nanapush's family, but of the resistance passed into the post-apocalyptic generation of that family. It is a moment that counters narratives of cultural relegation or erasure. Through Nanapush's perspective, we see the passing of knowledge and the continued existence of Anishinabe culture. Instead of contributing to "The Vanishing Red Man" myth as Bird argues, Erdrich ends her novel with an insistence that the name Nanapush and the history it contains will be carried into the future. Jace Weaver argues "it is important to insist that Native cultures be

seen as living, dynamic cultures, 'that they are able to adapt to modern life and to offer their members the basic values they need to survive in the modern world'" (Weaver 8). This is precisely the act this final scene and the novel itself accomplishes – demonstrating the evolution of Anishinabe culture, not the vanishing of it.

Because of utopian narratives like the City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny, Euro-Americans believed they were divinely righted to carry out their conquest of the West. Therefore, when Euro-American writers depict the frontier small-town, stories which often contain histories of genocide and annihilation mapped onto romanticized voids, onto rumors of pioneers overcoming Natives, of "civilization" overcoming savagery, they write from a position of assumed innocence. Limerick speaks to this history in the conquering of the West:

> Among those persistent values, few have more power than the idea of innocence. The dominant motive for moving West was improvement and opportunity, not injury to others. Few white Americans went West intending to ruin the natives and despoil the continent. Even when they were trespassers, westering Americans were hardly, in their own eyes, criminals; rather, they were pioneers. The ends abundantly justified the means; personal interest in the acquisition of property coincided with national interest in the acquisition of territory, and those interests overlapped in turn with the mission to extend the domain of Christian civilization. Innocence of intention placed the course of events in a bright and positive light; only over time would the shadows compete for our attention (Limerick 36)

In *Tracks*, Erdrich dispels the innocence of the small-town, instead telling of Indigenous groups and individuals who faced the apocalypse and the dystopian reality that followed and came out on the other end with a utopian impulse intact, a dedication to imagining a better future, an

Indigenous future. What we see in *Tracks* is the island making process, the attempted

construction of an island of the plain. But the Indigenous characters present here regularly

penetrate that island and complicate its attempts at a hegemonic narrative by wielding their own

ontological centers. Such attempts at proclaiming utopian sovereignty are themselves acts of

resistance against assimilation and cultural relegation to history. Much like that mapped in my

previous chapter on Toni Morrison, it is a process which demands space and place to imagine

and pursue Indigenous futures that are not being consumed at the edges by destructive Euro-

American utopian pursuits.

Bird takes exception to the term "Post-colonial" arguing that it "implies that the time of

colonization is past, that we are at a point of comfortably distancing ourselves from the nature of

the relationship between the colonizer and ourselves as colonized peoples" (Bird 41). As critical

as Bird is toward *Tracks*, I argue that Erdrich's presentation of the small-town counters this issue

with the term, demonstrating that, while Indigenous utopian impulses are extant, so too are the

systems and implications of colonization. By positioning the small-town form, which remains

prominent in American political and mythological discourse, as a colonizing space, Erdrich

layers the iconography of the literary small-town and American utopian pursuits.

CONCLUSION

Imagine a map of America, complete with rivers, lakes, mountains cities, towns, reservations, state borders, geological formations. And then remove the cities and towns, leaving everything else. Replace the Clevelands, Fort Waynes, Madisons, Sioux Falls, Lincolns with Black Hawk, Gopher Prairie, Medallion, Ruby, Argus, Winesburg, Waycross, Fingerbone.[38] Such a map would tell of all kinds of histories in America. It would tell of settlement and invasion, of expansion and exploitation, of prosperity and marginalization, of joy and community. Taken together, the islands of the plain dotting this hypothetical map would tell the centuries-long history of the American utopian cycle.

When I initially conceived this project, I imagined an expansive survey of fictional small towns in American literature – a task I soon understood to be impossible given the prevalence of the setting in the American canon. The goal instead became an attempt to isolate the fictional small town as a distinct space, a replicative model. Despite the national mythology around the setting, however, the small town is not a universal American space. Even the model itself needed to be layered, presented from several perspectives who have greatly varied relationships to the setting and to the utopian discourses present therein. While I have selected Lewis, Morrison, and Erdrich as significant and representative of much of the utopian discourse created by the prevalence of the fictional small town in American literature, giving insight into three distinct populations and their relationship to the setting, they remain but three points in a much grander network of utopian iterations strewn across the literary landscape.

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[38] Waycross is one of the towns in Lockridge jr.'s *Raintree County;* Fingerbone is the fictional community in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*.

By mapping the utopian processes in more of these authors, from Lockridge to Anderson, Véa Jr. to Robinson, McMurtry to Twain, a complex iconography of America's utopian pursuits can be charted. Through the division of spaces I have introduced here and the broad role they serve for the setting, countless works of American literature can be interpreted. What is the center of the story? What is the dominant social stratification, and how does it enforce itself? Who gets to move through what spaces of the community, and who is limited in their movement? What threat or scapegoat does the community isolate on its outskirts? Mapping and examining these questions for small towns across American literature would create an iconography which speaks to American utopian pursuits across both time and space, which could then itself become an interpretive tool. I have begun the creation of such a tool, and to demonstrate how it might inform American utopian pursuits, I present a timeline of events, both historical and fictional:

<div align="center">Timeline[39]</div>

1630:	John Winthrop gives his "Model of Christian Charity" sermon off the east coast of North America. In this sermon, Winthrop coins the phrase "City upon a Hill" which remains central to Euro-American utopian narratives
1845:	The term "Manifest Destiny" is first coined by John O'Sullivan, who used it to describe an expansionist mindset already present amongst Euro-Americans
1862:	The first Homestead Act became law, offering free land to many Americans. This became a driving force behind Western conquest
1880s:	Jim Burden moves to his grandparents' farm in Black Hawk (*My Ántonia*)
1890:	The "Disallowing" takes place, shortly followed by the founding of Haven, the forerunner to Ruby (*Paradise*)
1910s:	Sometime at the beginning of this decade (before breakout of WWI), Carol marries Will Kennicott and moves to Gopher Prairie, Minnesota (*Main Street*)

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[39] Some of the dates for fictional events are precise – sections in both *Sula* and *Tracks* are demarcated by the year of the events, for instance. The general timeframe of others are determined by textual references to historical events or other chronological signifiers. Widdowson's essay on *Paradise* was especially helpful in tracking the dates for that novel.

	Also early in this decade, Jim Burden and his friends watch the sunset outside of Black Hawk, before seeing the plough framed by the sun (*My Ántonia*)
1912:	Nanapush recounts the recent apocalyptic history of the Anishinabe people to Lulu (*Tracks*)
1913:	Fleur enters Argus for the first time (*Tracks*)
1914-18:	World War I
1919:	Father Damien comes to Nanapush's home, where he and the non-traditional family look over the map of shrinking Anishinabe land (*Tracks*)
	Shadrack arrives in Medallion (*Sula*)
1920s:	Carol returns to Gopher Prairie after war service in the East and settles into her life there with her husband and son (*Main Street*)
1925:	Nanapush and Margaret are reunited with Lulu in Argus (*Tracks*)
1939-46:	World War II
1941	Shadrack leads the final National Suicide Day parade, resulting in the death of dozens of citizens of the Bottom as the tunnel collapses on the edge of Medallion (*Sula*)
1949:	Town that becomes Ruby is founded by 15 families from Haven (*Paradise*)
1968:	Mavis arrives to the convent outside of Ruby. Other women follow in subsequent years (*Paradise*)
1976:	Attack on the convent by the men of Ruby takes place (*Paradise*)
	Bicentennial of U.S. Declaration of Independence

When events in these various works are positioned alongside historical events and those happening on similar timeframes in other works, the inherent contradictions present in the quintessential Euro-American utopian space are made even more evident. Within a few years of Jim being welcomed into the idyllic, pastoral existence at Black Hawk, the Black families of Morrison's *Paradise* are chased away from every town they approach. In the same decade, both Jim (on his picnic) and Carol Kennicott (standing outside of St. Paul before her marriage to Will) marvel at the beauty and emptiness of the plains. Happening in this same span of years, Nanapush's account of apocalypse and annihilation speaks to how the frontier Euro-American characters in other works marvel at was not always empty – that it was made that way by the

colonizing force of the small town. As the Morrisseys, Kennicotts, the Harlings[40] and other Main

Streeters hypothetically consolidate their grip on the capitalistic production of the frontier

through the 1920s, citizens of the Bottom are excluded from accessing the economic benefits of

Medallion in *Sula*. As the men of Ruby break their own covenant with God in their attack on the

Convent, highlighting the systemic flaw in the American system, the nation celebrates its

bicentennial. What we see in the texts I have selected is that the raw materials of the literary

small town remain relatively the same across time and cultures (locations, symbols, functions,

social structure), but the perspective on those spaces alters drastically.

To this point, let us return to the two poles of More's *Utopia* as presented by Jameson,

and their counterparts which I posit for the fictional American small town. As Jameson argues,

More's island-society of Utopia acts as a neuter because it sits in between "world" and

"antiworld" – that is, between the 'known' of England and the 'unknown' of New World ("Of

Islands" 11). In this noplace space, the island-form negotiates the philosophy, mythology, social

stratification, and more of these two poles. As I argued in my introduction, the frontier fictional

small towns serve a similar role for the two poles of Euro-America utopian pursuits – that of the

established nation in the east and the mythic utopian promise of the "untamed" West. Located

and isolated between these two points, the fictional frontier small town acts as the utopian-island

form of American literature, and neutralizes the various discourses present in the two poles,

turning those discourses into raw material which can be tested.

While every writer I have surveyed in this project is certainly critical to some degree of

the small town and American utopian mythology contained therein, the range of relationships

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[40] The Harlings are a prominent family in *My Ántonia*, who become a sort of arbiter for the philosophy of the town. Throughout the latter stages of the novel, the Harlings and other prominent town figures offer small micro-corrections to Ántonia and other "hired girls," much as is the case for Carol in *Main Street*.

each of these works has to these two poles varies greatly, speaking to inherent contradictions of Euro-American utopian master narratives. For white individuals and Euro-American communities in *Main Street*, *Sula*, *My Ántonia*, and *Tracks,* they are contributing to the national utopian network while searching for the utopian promise of the west. They are mythologized as homesteaders, romanticized as pioneers, as kind country doctors helping the underprivileged. In Morrison's work, Black Americans are either excluded from the American utopian network as is the case in *Sula*, or they are running away from the Eastern nation-pole, hoping to find their own true island on the plain. The frontier is a space to get lost from America, not a place to find it. For Erdrich's Indigenous characters, the nation-pole to the east is an antagonistic force which comes to consume and destroy. Furthermore, no second pole *exists* for Erdrich's Anishinabe characters. The land which constitutes the frontier and the counterpoint to the nation-pole is just their center. Presenting these various islands of the plain alongside one another, as I have done here, not only speaks to a collective rumination of American utopian pursuits, but it demonstrates the great diversity of discourses which can be generated by this form.

No single iteration of the fictional frontier small town can encapsulate the American utopian process on its own. An iconography is needed, a map of America dotted with the fictional small towns of American literature, speaking to the varied experiences of this process. This project has started this work, but much more remains. The model I have presented here can be used to analyze countless other small-town texts, layering and nuancing the iconography of American utopian pursuits along the way. This model could unlock how Lockridge Jr. creates an American epic in *Raintree County*, which filters one-hundred years of American history through the lens of the small town; how Marilynne Robinson contends with the ephemeral nature of the search for an American utopia on the plains in *Housekeeping*, using a house on the edge of town

to negotiate a quaint small-town existence to one of impermanence, transience; how Larry

McMurtry creates a panoptic puritanical force emanating from his fictional Thalia, Texas, that is

so strong that the book's young protagonist, Sonny, feels "the adults of Thalia would somehow

detect even his most secret erections and put them down in the book against him" (34); or how

Alfredo Véa, Jr inverts the small town form completely in *La Maravilla*, delivering a different

kind of "noplace" where all those marginalized by the Euro-American system find refuge.

Mapping each of these fictional small towns would broaden the iconography I have created and

add layers and complications to America's utopian master narratives.

This project makes clear that the fictional small town has not received the critical

attention it deserves considering its outsized presence and impact on the American canon and the

American imagination. Moreover, I argue that the utopian discourse around the setting is so

significant that it is time the frontier fictional small town is considered its own branch off the tree

of the literary utopia. Whatever their motivation – bringing the muse home, satirical repudiation,

inverting American mythology, or repositioning the narrative center of the discourse – every

writer who depicts a fictional small town is engaging with the history of American utopian

master narratives. Each iteration of the space offers a new fruitful bewilderment into the

American psyche and broadens the nation's collective consciousness as we look forward to

future utopias we might pursue.

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