Robert Newhouse

Professor Dimock

Literary Cities

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To Make An Exit

*Intro*

One an established mecca of culture and commerce, the other a beckoning metropolis of immigrant dreams: New York and Chicago have shaped not only generations of Americans, but also some of the nation’s most important literary achievements. This latter notion is certainly not lost on Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*. Further, more than any theme or plot device, it is the role of the cities in which the novels take place—Chicago and New York, respectively—that serves as the main fountain from which the cultural and literary significance of either novel is drawn. To that end, let us consider the two main characters of each novel, Jurgis Rudkis and Newland Archer. Outwardly, the two couldn’t be more different: Jurgis—an immigrant and menial laborer versus Archer—lawyer by profession, socialite by occupation. And even beyond these most obvious of differences, (counting, as well, the difference in class) the two are dissimilar in that whereas Jurgis’ main responsibility in life is to provide for himself and his family by putting food on the table and a roof over their heads, Archer’s equivalent is the maintaining of his, and, by extension, his family’s good name. Still, Jurgis and Archer share one fundamental similarity: the framework for their respective responsibilities is rendered by the cities in which they live. Moreover, to grasp the nature of the influence Chicago has over Jurgis and New York has on Archer, one might consider the effect leaving either city has on the two protagonists. Because the power Chicago has over Jurgis manifests itself in tangible terms—the survival and wellbeing of him and his family—his extricating himself from Chicago allows him to thereby distance himself from the devastating losses he experienced in Chicago. Yet whereas Jurgis’ woes are concretely linked to Chicago—that is, his family fell apart in Chicago—Newland’s struggle is against the abstract notion of New York’s inhibiting social norms. Thus, because it is a set of ideals Newland is wrestling with and not a series of distinct misfortunes, his leaving New York does not, in turn, lead to his escaping those New York values[[1]](#footnote-1) he so desperately wishes to scape.

[Need one more sentence?]

*Section 1*

Though they couldn’t come from more distant walks of life—Jurgis, an immigrant and Newland, a pseudo-aristocrat—when it comes to being caught in the riptide of society, neither character is able to escape.

*Section 2*

Leaving Chicago gives Jurgis the necessary distance to reflect on his experience there and thereby, at least ostensibly, remove himself from the societal hamster-wheel that characterized the earlier part of his life.

* Evidence (need more quotes):
  + “He was fighting for his life; he gnashed his teeth together in his desperation. He had been a fool, a fool I He had wasted his life, he had wrecked himself, with his accursed weakness; and now he was done with it he would tear it out of him, root and branch 1 There should be no more tears and no more tenderness; he had had enough of them they had sold him into slavery. Now he was going to be free, to tear off his shackles, to rise up and fight.”

*Section 3*

Conversely, Newland Archer’s struggle against the inhibiting social expectations of Old New York cannot be remedied by simply leaving The City. No, because Newland has so devoutly internalized the tenets of decorum and class that inform his every act, he can’t scape New York’s grasp like Jurgis did Chicago’s.

* Evidence:
  + “What was or was not "the thing" played a part as important in Newland Archer's New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his forefathers thousands of years ago.”
  + “Few things seemed to Newland Archer more awful than an offense against "Taste," that far-off divinity of whom "Form" was the mere visible representative.”
  + “It was the old New York way of taking life "without effusion of blood": the way of people who dreaded scandal more than disease, who placed decency above courage, and who considered that nothing was more ill-bred than "scenes," except the behavior of those who gave rise to them.”

*Conclusion* [May be too simplistic a structure]

* Restate original claim in new way🡪expand in some meaningful way I haven’t thought of yet.

1. (ha—will change, but, still, ha) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)