

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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City Girl (1930)

F.W. Murnau (1888-1931)

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OVERVIEW

Auteur: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau was a German film director, screenwriter, and producer. Murnau had an obsession with film since his childhood. He studied philology at the University of Berlin, plus art history, and literature at the University of Heidelberg. In WWI, Murnau served as a company commander. He joined the Imperial German Flying Corps and flew missions. After the end of WWI, he established his film studio with Conrad Veidt. His noteworthy films are *Der Januskopf* (1920), an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), an adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; *The Last Laugh* (1924); *Faust* (1926); *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927); *City Girl* (1930), the primary inspiration for Terrence Malick's film *Days of Heaven* (1978); and *Tabu* (1931). Murnau died in a car accident in 1931.

Film: *City Girl* is a 1930 American silent film directed by F.W. Murnau. The story is based on the play, *The Mud Turtle*, by Elliot Lester. *The Mud Turtle* was a Broadway play that opened in August 1925 and had 52 performances in total. The story is about a young man called Lem Tustine going to Chicago to sell his father's wheat crop, his meeting a waitress called Kate, and the events that follow their marriage. The film stars Charles Farrell and Mary Duncan. The film was initially shot as a silent feature, but later sound elements were added to it. It was released in 1930. *City Girl* is credited as being the primary inspiration for the 1978 film *Days of Heaven*.

Historical background: *City Girl* is one of the last films of F.W. Murnau. Even though Murnau is known for his employment of German expressionism in his films, which uses distortions in the art design to reflect the inner states of the actors; *City Girl* is a realistic film. It was shot in Athena and Pendleton, Oregon. Film historians think that a farm was constructed for the shooting of the film. The film's original title was *Our Daily Bread*.

SYNOPSIS

Lem Tustine goes to Chicago to sell his father's wheat crop. The father is concerned about whether it was right to send Lem to Chicago. Meanwhile, in a restaurant, Lem meets Kate, a waitress who no longer wants to live in the fast-paced city, but in the quiet countryside. Lem sells the crop for far less than what his father wanted him to. Lem visits the restaurant for a second time. He and Kate fall in love and decide to marry. They go back to the farm. The father is very angry that Lem has sold the crops for far less than the price he wanted. The father also thinks that Kate is simply after Lem's money and behaves rudely toward her. Lem, however, cannot stand up to his father which further damages his marriage with Kate. Later, a group of farm workers comes to help with the wheat harvest. Mac, one of the farmhands, tries to woo Kate away. The father thinks that Mac's behavior toward Kate is a further indication of Kate's bad character. They soon learn that a hail storm is reaching where they live. Lem's father tries to harvest the field at night to not be affected by the storm. Mac calls a strike to not work in the harvest. He plans to leave the farm with the workers and Kate. Kate tells him that she will come with Mac. However, she leaves a farewell letter to Lem and decides to leave. Lem finally takes action, fights Mac, and confronts his father about Kate. The father understands his wrongdoings. Lem searches for Kate, talks to her and they reconcile. They return to the farm. The farmhands decide to help with the harvest and they leave Mac alone. The father asks for forgiveness from Kate as the film comes to an end.

CHARACTERS

Lem Tustine: A young man who travels to Chicago to sell his father's wheat crop

Kate: A waitress in a restaurant who dreams of living in the countryside and who falls in love with Lem

The father: A serious and angry man solely concerned with the profits he can get from his wheat crop

The mother: A calm and submissive woman who is affectionate toward Kate

Marie: Lem's sister

Mac: One of the farm hands who tries to woo Kate away

Girl on the train: The girl who travels on the same train as Lem

Farmhands: A group of workers who come to help the father with harvesting wheat

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

KATE (*Open*)

Kate is a waitress at a big restaurant who is rather tired of the pressure and fast pace of the city and wishes to live in the countryside away from the crowds and overstimulation. When she meets Lem at the restaurant, they start to get along fairly quickly and soon fall in love. Kate agrees to go live in the farmhouse with Lem. She has no doubts or hesitation about leaving city life. However, life in the countryside also comes with its disadvantages as Kate is met with hostility by Lem's father.

Adventurous Kate is an adventurous person who easily adapts to the lifestyle of the countryside. In the city, she feels like a bird trapped in a cage, thus moving to a farmhouse is a dream of hers. Lem makes her dream come true as he proposes to her and invites her to live with him in the countryside. Her adventurous nature is apparent as she accepts his proposal without any second thoughts.

Loyal Lem cannot stand up to his father to protect Kate. Kate and Lem argue because of Lem's lack of courage, but Kate always remains loyal. Even when Mac, one of the farmhands, tries to woo Kate away, she is adamant about her feelings toward and devotion to Lem. Mac asks Kate to leave Lem and come with him. Kate decides to leave because of the physical abuse she has endured from Lem's father and Lem's staying silent about this behavior. Nevertheless, she does not go with Mac but leaves on her own. Only when Lem finally berates his father about this hostile behavior and talks with Kate does she change her mind about leaving. One constant throughout the story is thus Kate's loyalty toward Lem.

Self-confident Kate is self-confident. She stands up to Lem's father even though Lem himself cannot do so. Even though she does not have a family to protect her, she stands up for herself. Kate also courageously discusses with Lem his father's unacceptable behavior toward her. Moreover, even though Mac strongly insists that Kate come with him and leave Lem, she is not influenced by him and makes her own decisions throughout the story.

LEM (*Agreeable*)

Lem Tustine is the son of a farmer who works in the wheat business. He is a rather naive person. This naiveté is observable in the first train scene where a young woman shows interest in Lem, however, he seems completely oblivious to her. Moreover, even though he is a young adult, he is still under the influence of his family, in particular his father who dictates what he is supposed to do regarding the sale of the wheat.

Soft-hearted Lem is a soft-hearted person which is in stark contrast to the angry nature of his father. Thus, he is more like his mother who is also calm and submissive. His soft-hearted nature is one of the reasons that he cannot stand up to his father for Kate. However, he realizes later on how his behavior badly affects Kate and their marriage. He finally finds the courage to address the mistreatment of his father and save his marriage with Kate. His being able to criticize his father shows us the viewers how a person of a soft-hearted and naive nature can nevertheless act courageously in situations that call for courageous actions.

Absent-minded Lem is rather absent-minded, as he often forgets things or does not pay attention to his surroundings. His absentmindedness is seen in the very first scene of the movie where the ticket officer asks for his ticket, but he cannot find it for quite a while. Moreover, his father's note specifically admonishes him to not lose his money. However, as his father predicts, he sells the wheat for far less than the bottom line that his father wanted, because he spends more time enjoying himself in the restaurant and talking to Kate rather than focusing on business. This shows the viewers not only that Lem is absent-minded, but also that he does not have the mindset of a businessman, and his values are different from those of his father. His marriage with Kate is much more important to him than the wheat he sold and the profit he gained

MOTHER (Agreeable)

The wife of the father or the mother is a rather calm, stable, and silent woman. The viewers can infer that she has suffered because of her husband's angry behavior through the years. However, she has resilience and is focused on her work.

Submissive When his father behaves in a hostile manner toward Kate and physically abuses her, Lem at first wishes to talk to the father. However, the mother stands in front of the door and does not want Lem to be in trouble with his father. The viewers understand that she does not want her son to be on bad terms with his father. This also shows her rather submissive nature in contrast with the more courageous nature of Kate who stands up to the father, even on her own.

MAC (Disagreeable)

Mac is one of the farmhands who come to help the father with harvesting the wheat crops. When Mac sees the conflicts in the marriage of Lem and Kate, and how Lem cannot stand up to his father for Kate; he sees this situation as an opportunity to try to woo Kate away.

Opportunistic He is not afraid to destroy a marriage, and use situations to his advantage. He calls a strike to sabotage the harvest to gain Kate's affection. Thus, he does not take into account the effort that people put into farming the crops. Likewise, he does not think it wrong to destroy the marriage of a newlywed couple. He even threatens Kate that if she does not come with him, he will say to the father and others that she put him up to ruining the wheat. His opportunistic behavior, however, does not make him win as Kate does not come with him in the end, and after the dispute between the father and Lem is settled, other farmhands leave Mac alone.

FATHER (Emotional)

The father is a farmer who is solely interested in the profit he can make from his wheat crops. He meticulously calculates his gains and profits. He admonishes Lem not to lose his money. One of the reasons he is so interested in the money he makes might be because he comes from a background of poverty and scarcity. He is also rude in his behavior toward Kate and his son. He is quick to come to conclusions about what kind of a person Kate is. Only at the end of the film does he understand the gravity of his prejudices and mistakes, and thus apologizes to Kate.

Serious The father is of a serious nature. One of the examples of his seriousness comes to the forefront as he sees a child playing with the grains. He gets angry and says that every grain is important for his business, and thus cannot be played with. He lacks a sense of humor and is solely focused on his work and the harvest goes successfully.

Angry Angry nature of the father is visible throughout the film in his facial expressions. He becomes very angry when he learns that Lem sold the wheat for far less than the bottom line that he wanted Lem to. Because he is so angry about his monetary losses, he cannot see how happy Lem is to have married Kate. He is equally mad at Kate because he thinks Kate is after Lem's money. His overall angry and hostile attitude creates conflicts and causes ruptures in Lem and Kate's marriage.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Patriarchy)

Patriarchy Patriarchy, dominance, and privilege that are primarily held by men are threads that can be observed throughout the film. The dominance that the father exercises over his son and his family causes conflicts and damages the marriage of Kate and Lem. Everyone in the family is subordinate to the father who cannot be confronted. Even when the father hits Kate, Lem cannot do anything about this physical abuse, because the father is the master of the house who expects to be obeyed all the time. The mother is another character who has accepted the angry and dominant nature of the father as she intervenes when Lem tries to talk to his father about Kate. The reason she intervenes seems to be so as not to cause any conflict or make the father angry. But the mother staying silent means that she has already accepted the unjust patriarchy and the consequences that come from it. Kate, as the girl from the city, does not accept this patriarchy and stands up to Lem's father. When, however, she sees that Lem is not making any effort to protect her, she decides to leave. This shows the viewers once again that she does not yield to the patriarchy, but decides to leave this hierarchical family order altogether. At the end of the film, we see how the father becomes sincerely sorry for what he put Kate and Lem through. The father finally apologizes to Kate which can be interpreted as the fall of patriarchy and the beginning of a more equal family order where each member respects the other. So, it can be said that even though patriarchy is a major theme of the film. It is not a concept that is applauded or commended but rather criticized.

RELATIONSHIP (Marriage)

Marriage Marriage and the responsibilities that marriage entails are one of the major themes of the film. Lem and Kate start their marriage with the hopes of a bright future. However, the prejudices and behavior of the father shadow their happiness. Lem learns that he needs to protect his wife against the cruel treatment she faces. Kate learns that not everything works smoothly in the countryside just as it is also the case in the city. As Kate says, "it takes more than a license and wedding ring" for a marriage to prevail. The two main characters learn how it takes reciprocal respect in addition to love for this enterprise, that is marriage, to go on.

PSYCHOLOGY (Sadness)

Sadness When Kate first decides to marry Lem and move to the countryside, she is utterly happy. However, she becomes subject to the harsh treatment of Lem's father against which Lem cannot do anything. Therefore, her happiness gives way to a sense of despair and sadness. She tries her best in trying to stand up to the father's cruel behavior. However, seeing how the whole family yields to the dominance of the father, she has no choice but to leave the place. Thus, what started as a happy adventure turns into a dispiriting and disheartening marriage. The sadness that Kate experiences also is due to Lem's irresponsible and fearful behavior. He cannot find in himself enough courage to stand up to his father. He lets Kate suffer in silence which only makes Kate's disappointment and hopelessness worse. Only when Lem reads the farewell note of Kate does he realize what he put her through and decides to take action. When Lem finds in himself the courage to criticize and berate his father, the unjust hierarchy and the cruel treatment of the father are addressed. So, sadness and despair transform themselves into hope for a better future. Lem's growth into a better and more courageous person heals the sadness and disappointment of Kate which shows us the viewers that people's mental and psychological states are dependent upon the people they rely on and that with courage and positive action, one can transform negative states into more positive ones.

FLAWS (Greed)

Greed The father's greed is visible in many instances of the film. He does not let Marie play with the grains of wheat, because every grain is there to be sold for a profit. He does not congratulate Lem and Kate for their marriage, because he is upset that Lem could not sell the wheat crops for the price he wanted. His greed terrifies and subjugates the whole family. His harsh behavior toward Kate causes Mac to call for a strike to sabotage his harvest. His greed even causes him to shoot Lem believing him to be

one of the farmhands. We can thus see how greed as a flaw damages oneself and the people one is surrounded by. When the father apologizes to Kate and thereby steps away from the greed that has so dominated him, the story takes a turn for the better.

QUEST (Explore)

Explore Kate is an adventurous person who is not happy with the hustle and bustle culture of the city. She does not hesitate to embark upon an adventure when Lem proposes to her and wishes her to come with him to the countryside. One of the reasons why she wishes to leave city life is because she feels trapped in the city like a bird in a cage. Her transition to the lifestyle of the countryside becomes a sort of adventure for her. She explores what responsibilities, advantages, and disadvantages a life in the countryside entails. Moreover, she gets to learn more about Lem's character and the family dynamics. As much as the film is a tale of personal growth for Lem, it is also a tale of exploration for Kate. Her self-confidence helps her through the obstacles she faces, in particular, she is courageous enough to stand up to the harsh treatment from Lem's father. She also dares to make the difficult decision to leave Lem. Through all these events, she not only explores life in the countryside but also her own strength to face hardships and unfortunate circumstances.

SCENES

A train ride to Chicago The film begins with a train scene with the main character, Lem Tustine. The train is going to Chicago. The ticket man comes to check the tickets, however, Lem has trouble finding where he put his ticket. He seems to be an absent-minded man. Sitting in the opposite row is a woman who seems bored by the long train ride, observes Lem, and puts on makeup. The woman seems to be interested in talking to Lem. Soon someone from the staff announces that it is lunchtime. She tries to strike up a conversation with Lem, however, she is disappointed to find out that Lem is not as interested in talking to her as she is in him. As Lem is eating his sandwich, the woman leaves angrily for the dining car.



Family's wheat business In the next scene, we see Lem's mother and father. Lem's mother makes bread while Lem's father calculates the profit for the bushels of wheat. He has doubts about whether he did the right thing by sending Lem to Chicago alone. Lem's father gets very angry when sees a child playing with the wheat. In his words: "I raise wheat to sell, not to play with! Every grain counts!" The child starts crying, however, the father is adamant in his belief that every grain is important and should be protected. Later, the family sits at the dining table, prays, and starts eating



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Romance The scene changes to a restaurant where a waitress named Kate is serving a customer at a restaurant. Kate is exhausted because of her work. As she rests for a minute, she looks at a picture of sheep grazing in the countryside. Next, she and another waitress notice Lem sitting at the table praying. They find this behavior entertaining. Kate takes his order. After bringing his food, she starts talking to him about what he is doing in the big city to which Lem replies that he is there to sell their wheat crop. After Lem finishes his meal, he neatly piles up the dishes which surprises while mildly irritating. Lem tells her that this makes his mother's work easier at home. Kate says to him that living on a farm must be wonderful. Before Lem leaves, he lets Kate know that he is very glad to have met her. Kate says she is glad likewise at which her coworkers laugh in an amused way.

Lem visits the restaurant once again and Kate is very happy to see his return. He gives her the flower that he is wearing as an accessory. Lem looks worried as he waits for his meal. He keeps calculating the profit from the wheat that he sold that day. As he didn't get the price that his father wanted he is worried that his father will be angry. Later, one of the dining men tells Kate that she would be nice company and asks her what she does with her evenings. Considering the inquisitive man to be too obtrusive, Lem makes him go away and protects Kate. Afterward, he tells her that he is going home on the one o'clock train. He asks her whether she likes living in the city. She answers that one place is as good as another. Kate bids farewell to Lem. She is devastated as he leaves.



Marriage At the train station, Lem decides to wait for a minute before he boards the train. Meanwhile, he plays a game called "your weight and your fortune". He gets a card that says "if you marry the one you are thinking of all will be well". Lem decides to wait and not board the train. Kate leaves the job to look for him at the station. She cannot find him there only to come back to the entrance of the restaurant and see him looking for her there just as she was looking for him. They go to a bar together. Lem shows her the card he got from his fortune play and suggests that they marry right away which Kate accepts. Lem sends his family a telegram that he married a sweet girl and is bringing her home. Although the mother is slightly happy to learn the news, the father has hesitations as he thinks that good girls do not marry so quickly and easily.

Arrival at the Farm Kate and Lem arrive at the farm. Kate talks about how wonderful it must be to have a home and a family. They run as freely as children through the wheat fields. At home, Kate meets Lem's mother who is very happy to see her. Lem's little sister Marie brings Kate a bouquet made out of grains. Everyone is happy until the father comes in and scolds the little girl and tells her not to play with wheat again. The father asks Lem how much he got by selling wheat and learns that he sold the wheat for a dollar and fifteen cents a bushel, far under the price he wanted. The father is very angry, he tells Lem to get to work as the harvesters are coming in the morning.



Father argues with Kate The father asks Kate in private what she expected to get out of marrying Lem. Even though Kate insists that she married Lem because she loves him, the father doesn't believe her and wants her to go back to Chicago where she came from. Kate shouts that she will never give Lem up and she will make a man out of him. The father says only he is the master and hits her. When Lem finds out about this incident, he is about to strike his father, but when his mother intervenes, he realizes that he cannot go against his father. Kate sobs uncontrollably while the mother tries to console her.

Harvest Other farm workers gossip about Kate and Lem's marriage. Kate is seen as a servant of the house. The workers and the father harvest the wheat with the help of horses. They pause from harvesting for lunch, where Kate serves them. The men make fun of her and Lem. Kate sends lunch to Lem, but he does not want to eat anything.

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The hail storm In the evening, Lem talks to Kate that no one can come between them and tells her that he loves her. He wants them to forget about this quarrel and be happy. Kate, however, does not want to make up. Lem is made fun of by the other workers. Later, the father reads in a newspaper that a hail storm has swept through Central Canada and that all wheat crops are ruined. He says to workers that a hailstorm is coming and that they will have to work all night to save the crops.

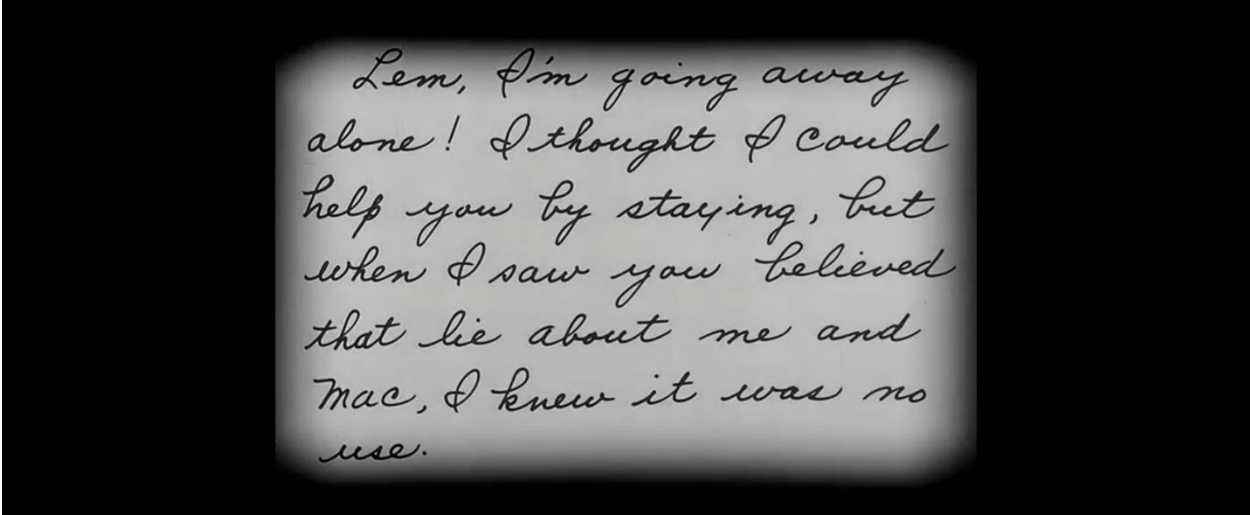
Father argues with Kate again As they work, one of the workers comes to Kate saying that he cut his hand on the machine. As she takes care of the wound, the man tells her that she must be crazy to be in a situation like that. He tells her to abandon everything and come away with him after harvesting. At that moment, the old man sees them and tells Kate that he always knew that she was not a good woman. Then Kate and he start arguing. The father says he will tell Lem what kind of woman he is married to. Kate starts crying. The worker man says that he knows how to get even with him. Kate shouts that she used to think that the men were decent in the country and that the country was clean, but now she realizes that men are all alike, "cheap sports who talk big when they want something". The worker man talks with the other workers. They all decide to quit working.



Lem argues with Kate Lem comes to tell Kate that his father caught her and Mac planning to run away together. Kate doesn't respond. She tells her later that he must learn that any man can catch a wife, but it takes more than a license and wedding ring to keep her. She is heartbroken and disappointed that Lem never believes her, does not protect her and that he cannot strike against his father. Lem tells her that their marriage was a mistake.



Kate leaves The father catches the workers trying to leave. Even though he threatens to shoot anyone who leaves the farm, the men laugh and prepare to go. Mac enters Kate's room and tells her that he has settled her score with the old man and that they are leaving the wheat to rot in the fields. The man demands that Kate come with him too. Otherwise, he will say that she put him up to ruining the wheat. Kate decides to go as well, but she doesn't go with Mac and leaves alone. She also leaves a letter for Lem explaining that she only loved him. After reading the letter, Lem gets into a fight with Mac as the horses are riding them away from the farm.



Lem, I'm going away alone! I thought I could help you by staying, but when I saw you believed that lie about me and Mac, I knew it was no use.

Father and son Lem's father shoots Lem believing him to be one of the workers. The father is devastated thinking that he shot his son. However, Lem is unharmed, and they hug each other. The father tries to tell his son that he was not meaning to shoot him. Lem, in response, tells that there are some things worse than shooting such as the father's abusive treatment of Kate and himself. Lem decides to find Kate and take her away to a place where they can live their lives. The father finally says he is sorry and that he will beg Kate to stay, but Lem is decisive that he will find Kate by himself. The father says to the workers that he will not try to stop them and that they can go whenever they want to. The boys tell him that they will not leave until their wheat is in.



Kate forgives Lem finds Kate and asks to give her a lift. When they stop, Lem tells her that he went crazy when he read her letter. Kate forgives him in the end and they go back to the farm. The father is waiting at the farm. He also asks for forgiveness from Kate. Kate forgives the father too. They hug and the father rides them to the farm.

