

# The concept of home in the ambassadors and sister carrie



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Ambassadorship is a field which utilizes the skills of diplomacy and promotes understanding among nations and peoples. Embedded in ambassadorship is tact with regard to human relations which involves mediation and problem-resolution techniques. Collaborative politics is indispensable to functioning well in the capacity to represent not only of another entity, but also to forward specific goals and objectives. In order to have an impact, an ambassador has to groom proficient communication and observation skills, while possessing a competence to easily assimilate or adapt in another climate and culture. Being an effective ambassador also means retaining one's loyalty to the homeland, although occupying a difference space. In Henry James' "Ambassadors" (1903), the protagonist, Lewis Strether is an American chosen to act as Mrs. Newsome's proxy in some family business. For some reason, Chadwick loses the will to return to America and to his mother, Mrs. Newsome. He has to use his powers of persuasion to urge the American-born Chadwick Newsome vacationing in Europe to return home. The concept of home is key in *The Ambassadors* and *Sister Carrie* since each character espouses a different view on home. Home can either be one's place of nativity, a fixed abode, or a place of rest and comfort. Because of the process of maturity, love of travel, and the desire to settle with one's own family, people chose to migrate and eventually live in a new place than formerly.

Usually, home is a place in which one's feels at ease and happy. This view of home becomes more and more popular among characters who migrate and settle in a new area. Strether himself, the appointed American ambassador to Europe affirms that he "feels more and more at home" (James 34).

Happiness shared is also an integral component of what makes a home atmosphere. Chadwick was unhappy at his original home in America. As Strather observes Chadwick, he sees a man transformed by personal fulfillment and happiness, even happier than he. Soon, The Ambassador is desirous of partaking in the happiness of the American emigre. The American Dream is also a promised land of toil and hardship, yet hold out the hope of an improved lifestyle. The United States is the land of freedom and opportunity where all are in the pursuit of happiness. All Americans are the predecessors of immigrants, boasting a proud nation of ancestors which built a nation through their daring to explore another land. As an American, Chadwick exports the heritage of Americanness to Europe-the quest for happiness and love of adventure. Strether discovers soon that America is not the only land founded on the pursuit of happiness since in Europe, Chadwick pursues and finds happiness in culture and in the woman, Madame Marie de Vionnet. The irony is that Americans rediscover happiness in another land, even The Ambassador, Strether. While in Paris, Strather and Ms. Gosfrey who are Americans, feel at home. James describes vividly that “ the circle in which they stood together was warm with life, and every question between them would live as nowhere else (James 2008). Home evokes images of a world of domestic bliss and even a utopia. Furbished with many comforts and amenities, homes can either be fashionably luxurious or spare - nevertheless the true essence of a home lies not with the fixtures or appearance but in the people who live with one another. Equally, Theodore Dreiser in his book, *Sister Carrie*, attests that “ a lovely home atmosphere is one of the flowers of the world, than which there is nothing more tender, nothing more delicate” (Dreiser 1998). Carrie, the protagonist is in quest of a home since she cannot

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fine true happiness in the rural area where she was born. Here, Carrie begins to realize the treasure of that place called home.

Home is a place for family. The eternal difference between a house and a home is family. What gives a home identity is the people who live therein. It would be impossible for Chadwick to merely change his location to establish a new home, the people in Chadwick's life had to change as well. Chadwick does not feel appreciated at his home in America where his mother attempts to control his life. His new home in Europe bears striking contrast to his home in America for he rears up a new family consisting of Madame Marie de Vionnet and her daughter. As the man of the house and apart from his American family, he feels independent and experiences a higher level of personal contentment. Within the family is the key ingredient - love.

Madame Marie de Vionnet confesses that both she and her daughter, "love him (Chadwick) here. He's charming" (James 2008). The trio is bound by a tie of love which unites them as family and members of a home. Conversely, in America, Chadwick has no living record of motherly affection nor feels genuine love-only restraint. Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* observes that in Hedgewood "there was in him no feeling of affection which could bind him to his wife and children" (Dreiser 1998). Home life for his character has become destitute to the point that he seeks fulfillment elsewhere. Family is non-existent so although he possesses a luxurious house, it is not a home. Also, Carrie tells her friend that she could not get along with her family since they "always want me to do what they want" (Dreiser 1998). When a home begins to assume the character of a prison in which members are bound, they would seek to find comfort elsewhere, like Chadwick does.

Ms. Gosfrey preserves her identity as American and asserts that as an American she “ bears on (her) back the huge load of our national consciousness or in other words ...our nation itself” (James 2008). Here, Ms. Gosfrey verbalizes her opinion that being American does not necessarily root one forever to one’s homeland. She sees herself as an ambassador and representative, although not on home soil. Like millions before her, she visits Europe and becomes enthralled, choosing to stay for a while. At the same time, like Europe, America stands as a place which welcomes visitors or immigrants, opening to them the possibility of naturalization so that they can be registered citizens. America is the melting pot of diverse cultures. People of foreign lands arrive and make new homes in America primarily to attain a better standard of living for themselves and their families. The national consciousness to which Ms. Gosfrey alludes is diversity, freedom and equality. These nationalistic philosophies concept form the base of her statement. America becomes the mother country to which every one of her children pays due allegiance. Offering citizens land, bread and protection, American functions as a haven for the masses seeking comfort. America is defined as a home for the afflicted and a fortress for those fleeing misery, religio-political upheavals or personal adversity.

Home is a place of pleasure where one can live out the ideal, Carpe Diem or Seize the day. The theme of truly living is one of the foundations of The Ambassador. Being able to live a full and unhindered life is the goal of Chadwick, Jim and Strether. Jim declares that he “ wants to come right out here and live here myself. And (he) wants to live while ... here too (James 2008). Home lacks essence if one cannot be self-actualized as an individual.

This disparity opens the gap between taking advantage of lands of opportunity or remaining discontented in substandard circumstances. Lands that offer better opportunity gradually become home. Sister Carrie paints a female character dissatisfied with the offerings of the country. She is anxious to seize the day and take control of her own life and nothing says independence and pleasure more like the urban area. (Carrie) was perfectly certain that here was happiness. The author shows the reader Carrie in a well-decked and furnished home where Carrie is confident that she will finally realize her dream of being happy.

Home is a familiar place. Because home represents a familiar sphere or known world, one can confidently deduce that there lies an unknown world, filled with novelties. America and Europe share links with one another, yet stand apart as separate entities. The inhabitants of each space occupy different worlds and share different worldviews. The novel derives its title, *The Ambassador*, because the home assumes not only physical space but also brings in its train unwelcome situations with which the characters are desirous of escaping. Chadwick longs to have a different experience because of his the blandness of familiarity at home in America, his longing to explore the new and unknown and also his discomfort in his own native home in America. On the other hand, James characterizes Madame Marie de Vionnet, Chadwick's girlfriend, as a woman who "was not a wandering alien...but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate" (James 2008). Since he becomes familiar with her, with her becomes his new home in Paris, France. In the same vein, Strather becomes familiar and exposed himself to enough European culture to appreciate the strange and accept it as his own. In *Sister*

Carrie, Carrie has to leave the familiar environment of home to launch out and make a living for herself. She ruptures “ the threads which bound her so lightly to girlhood and home (as they) were irretrievably broken (Dreiser 1998). Leaving her birthplace is a big but necessary decision to grow, mature and experience life to a fuller degree in the city, rather than in the countryside.

In conclusion, one perceives varied concepts on home, each concept giving clarification concerning the purpose of a home. In *The Ambassador*, each person’s home is formed by the background, views, choices, experience and individuality. As one progresses through time, the home changes dimensions for circumstances never remain constant. The home contains surroundings, shelters people, inspires opinions, and accommodates vital institutions such as the family. Hence, the home continues to play important roles in shaping the life and worlds of characters.

#### Works Cited:

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