

The difficulty of defining (based on sister Carrie by dreiser)

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I think it is very difficult to define the exact character of Dreiser's Sister Carrie, and his original intention. I would say, as many eyes, so many opinions, so no wonder there are different approaches and interpretations towards the novel which is influenced not just by the readers reading or personal experience, but also by their particular philosophy of life as well as knowledge about the historical background.

Sister Carrie can be read as a novel of desire, seduction, or the critique of capitalism and consumerism. It's definitely not the plot or characters which are dominant elements of it. The taste and the literary value of Dreiser's novel is shaped and created by its setting and the author's tone. Chicago and New York have almost as organic and important a role in the novel as the characters. They do not just form the simple environment for the novel, but they influence its character and have a very strong impression. Chicago's character is kind of more positive, it is a city of promise, luck, rise (Carrie). We can say that in Chicago, Hurstwood means something. New York's character is different. It's a city of lies, fall, impersonal isolation of a walled city where surviving is much more difficult than in Chicago. In New York, Hurstwood means nothing.

The setting creates different expectations to people.

During the reading of Sister Carrie, I was interested in searching and revealing the different kinds of desire.

Generally we can say that Dreiser deals with the desire of wealth, social status, material things which are represented by money. Within this

generalization, we can find and identify many other faces and forms of lust and longing. Carrie, as an ambitious and strong woman embodies the social values of the consumer culture. All she longs for is a material wealth, which represents power. She can be seen as a symbol of money. But Carrie lives in a world of prices. Her labor costs \$4. 50; board \$4 a week; car fare \$. 60; cheap lunch \$. 10; etc. She imitates everything perfectly and that's why she is becoming what people want her to become. Her desires come from other people's desires. It is exactly Drouet, who introduces her to the world of wealth, to materialism. He gives her money, flat even name when she enters the world of theater. She plays her role according to Drouet's desires once acts as his mistress or wife. She plays a kind of role for him and by imitating whatever the drummer desires in women, she becomes merely a reflection of masculine desire. It seems to me that she is never allowed to express any desire of her own except for her desire for consumption (admiring and buying clothes). I think in her relationship with other people, she feels bigger pleasure from being desired than for feeling desire of her own.

The question is whether Dreiser's attitude towards women is negative or positive? Are his women just objects or active characters? Or does Dreiser reinforce the conventional belief that the essence of a woman is just a performance of a role? I think we can also talk about a kind of prostitution as for the female characters, namely Carrie and Julia. Carrie sells herself for \$20, and she is paid far more for her body than she is for her labor. Julia also demands money which makes her marriage also as a form of prostitution. Is

sex in this world, consumption society, a womans most marketable product?
Do these women have or even can they have their own faces?

Hurstwoods desire is to possess, to possess a quiet and peaceful life with exciting episodes. He views marriage as a contract that gives him a right to control both women without questions. He thinks he has the absolute power to make decisions. Does Dreiser want to stress that power is a natural and singular masculine right?

Dreisers attitude towards his characters is pretty confusing. He tries to manipulate his readers and throughout the novel, he makes comments judgements on the characters and their actions. Definitely, he feels more sympathy towards his male characters. His opinion on women is not pleasant, he is putting them to a position of creatures who are naturally imitative, who love performance, clothing, so not ones who could follow their own decisions.

The authors voice makes the tone of the novel which is very important and dominant in Dreisers Sister Carrie. This is also a typical trait of naturalism, where the author is taking back his control over the characters and their actions.

I think, Sister Carrie represents a naturalistic type of novel. The characters and their actions are determined, and they do not have much free will. Many actions take place by accident, by chance which is not of course spiritual fate but still forms different kinds of determinism. Carries fate is determined by

her gender, by her environment - cities where she lives - and people, who she is surrounded by.

Although Carrie does not leave a very sweet taste in the readers mouth, I like her. I am not saying that her reactions would represent a woman with high moral qualities, but as for the society, it was not her choice. I think, it was the only way to live and survive.

I like Dreisers images of seasons, weather, theater, newspaper. I like his comments, observations, and language.

It was really a very enjoyable and exciting reading.