



## The Imagery and Symbolism Analysis of the Novel “Sister Carrie” by Theodore Dreiser

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**Abstract:** In this article Theodore Dreiser has discussed the consequences of the life of the main character of novel “Sister Carrie”, paying attention on the social reasons for Carrie’s fall, on her spiritual condition in the life struggle against the backdrops of social phenomena. During the research process, it was discovered that one of the novel’s important elements is the realization that Carrie will never be satisfied with what she has; she will constantly yearn for more. Carolina Meeber, unable to wait for one, is already reaching for another, unable to be satisfied with what she already has. Carrie’s life discontent with stems from the fact, that she never truly enters “high society”. She never had that woman happiness and true love.

**Keywords:** Sister Carrie, Chicago, symbolism, imagery, wealth, society, character, spiritual condition, tragedy.

*Date of Submission: 26-12-2022*

*Date of Acceptance: 31-01-2023*

**Introduction:** “Sister Carrie”, considered Dreiser’s first novel, was written in 1899 by suggestion his friend Arthur Henry, he frequently tried to stop writing of this novel, but by the force of his friend he continued. Actually he wrote this novel according his sisters life was living in Chicago, 6<sup>th</sup> kid in the family. Several times Dreiser changed the name of the novel “Sister Carrie” to “The Flesh”, “The Spirit”. This novel was published in 1900, he had difficulties on publishing his novel, Doubleday & McClure Company accepted the manuscript. His novel has been criticized several times, as Dreiser has often been criticized for his writing style.

In 1930 Arnold Bennett said, "Dreiser simply does not know how to write, never did know, never wanted to know." Other critics called his style "vulgar", "uneven", "clumsy", "awkward", and "careless". His plotlines were also decried as unimaginative, critics citing his lack of education and claiming that he lacked intellectualism.

“Sister Carrie” was written in naturalism, describing the main hero of teenage age 18, is pure and beautiful face by nature, timid, innocent girl and naive girl, wants to try new, better life in a big city.

Carrie is a sentimental character, not a passionate one, had no interest in reading, was born in a working-class family, always dreaming to be wealthy. In the melodrama of the novel, Carrie begins as the heroine of a popular romance, the naive, dreamy-eyed, ambitious but virtuous youngest sister; she emerges as a sort of nun, a "sister of the poor," dedicated to charity, lonely and celibate.

This is a story about a girl Carrie, whose real name is Caroline Meeber. She arrives to the big city Chicago, to try her luck and become an actress, but the new place is hostile to her from very beginning. Trying to fix her affairs, she has to become a mistress of a travelling salesman, Drouet. She faced a lot of troubles and trials lie ahead of her on the way to her dream.

In order to improve her life for the better, chasing happiness and wealth, she dedicated herself to several men, being a mistress for a short term.

By the main teenager hero of the novel, Dreiser tried to depict the urban life, the American life after the W. W. I and the feminism as well.

Dreiser especially skillfully, masterfully demonstrates the responsibility of American society for the waste of this talent, and in the fact that Carrie could not become "the spokesman for all human aspirations", Dreiser sees the tragedy of her fate, her human defeat.

In the novel, Dreiser seeks to thoroughly reveal the look of the heroine and notices both. Charming qualities - sharpness, beauty, youths' dreams and always dreamed of becoming famous actress - Selfishness, desire for financial gain, concern for appearance. Dreiser attentively and skillfully follows this method. American reality distorts Carrie's character throughout the story, revealing her height. Carrie, the central image, has been painstakingly painted. The novel's exposition is her portrait. Caroline Meeber, known at home as Sister Kerry, was born into a working-class household. As Dreiser writes - "Egoism was a facet of her nature," and while it was not exceptionally obvious, it might nonetheless be regarded the main component of her character."

Sister Carrie was an excellent example of an American woman of average wealth, as she was good with unpretentious prettiness of adolescence, her figure promised to take on graceful shapes in the future, and her eyes shined with natural sharpness.

Desperate for her job, Carrie becomes Drouet mistress and provides her with a secure life. She thinks, "Now I'm at a higher level." A monologue revealing her state of mind: "She looked in the mirror and saw another Carrie. There were more beautiful people than before. She looked into the soul, a mirror of ideas from her and others) and she saw Carrie worse than before. Carrie thought alone for myself, I come to the conclusion: "They didn't even try to fight back, they immediately admit that you were defeated," she says with pain in her heart.

Dreiser writes the following due to Carries defeat, "The voice of need answered for her", mentioning the social reasons of Carrie's fall.

Carrie was defeated because she could not find a

job, because her sister, the wife of a Chicago slaughterhouse worker, could not help her, and

even because she was afraid of working in a factory, which, as Carrie was convinced, could not bring her material well-being and happiness. And now Carrie is on the payroll of Drouet.

"Carrie wasn't really in love with Drouet", says Dreiser, highlighting the material reasons that led her to get close to Drouet.

Later Hurstwood appeared in her life. Hurstwood invited to marry him and took her to New York.

This time again Carrie did not for the love, but just to change her life for better as she thought she could become a wife of a rich man. The marriage was not successful and ended with the death of Hurstwood, who became homeless, loser. At the beginning life together with Drouet was happily, therefore the problems has started from financial sides.

Carrie is the best performer of the novel. She climbed quite high up the social ladder currently. But here, too, her rise was also her fall. To save money on the outfits she needs as actress Carrie leaves Hurstwood, who lost all attraction to her when he could not support her.

Carrie achieves comparative material security only at the high cost of losing the best human qualities.

Revealing the process of Carrie's corruption by bourgeois America, Dreiser seeks to convey the complexity of the dialectic of the soul of this outstanding personality...

It is no coincidence that when talking about Carrie's life in "high" society, Dreiser constantly confronts her with pictures of poverty, makes her remember her wanderings in search of work in Chicago. Carrie travels to New York to a restaurant and, looking at the prices on the menu, she briefly remembers her first dinner at the restaurant with Drouet. "But even in this brief moment," writes Dreiser, "she managed to see another Carrie - poor, hungry, lost everything

courage for whom Chicago was a cold, unapproachable world where she wandered in search of work. With great artistic tact, the writer uses this technique to set off the social techniques of the fall of Carrie, to convey the tragic atmosphere of the life of people in America of corporations and monopolies.

An important problem of art for the novel is solved primarily by the image of Carrie.

She was never able to fulfill her dream of becoming a real actress, wasting her talent in the struggle to get out of poverty, in pursuit of dollars, for comfort, for the external brilliance of success.

Carrie had a natural artistic talent, she had "a pledge of brilliant dramatic talent". One of the characters in the novel, Ems, remarks on Carrie's amazing expression. Addressing her, he says: *"And sometimes nature embodies all feelings in a human face. He makes the face express all human aspirations. That's what happened to you."*

**Analysis:** The novel "Sister Carrie" was not broadly acknowledged and got numerous critics, but this novel isn't awful as this novel has got positive audits as well. In any case, these critics are not completely true, Dreiser's composing isn't totally awful which his phrasing was not totally subjective. Subsequently, the books Sister analyzed to symbolism, imagery devices.

The terms **image** and **imagery** have numerous intentions and meanings". He clarifies that the term imagery "covers the use of dialect to represent objects, activities, sentiments, considerations, thoughts, states of intellect and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. Moreover, Different images are communicated by the use of figurative dialect. Figurative dialect is used in metaphors or in similes.

The word **symbol** implies an object, which stands for something else, symbol for justice. Symbols are used to "express an emotion or an abstract idea.

Theodore Dreiser makes use of many images and symbols in his novel. In the following, the images and symbols **water** and **sea**, **animals**, **fairy-tales**, **physics**, and **theatre** will be evaluated.

*"The largest and most obvious group of images in Sister Carrie is that clustering around the sea".* The image is first used when Carrie rushes into a "great sea of life" and when she feels *"alone, a lone figure in a tossing thoughtless sea"* in the new, big city Chicago. At the end of the second chapter, Dreiser makes use of another sea image when he describes the difference between the poor and the rich people living in Chicago as "gulf". One of the most important words in this context is the word "drift" which is used several times by Dreiser, for example, when Carrie thinks about returning home to her family: "Carrie saw the drift". When Hurstwood and Carrie talk about her unsettled feelings, Dreiser also uses the image of water: *"The little shop girl was getting into deep water. She was letting her few supports float away from her"*. Right at the beginning of chapter 30, the city of New York is described as an "ocean" which *"was already full of whales"* and in which a "small fish" like Hurstwood cannot survive. The word "tide" is also important in this context, for

example, when Carrie's helplessness is explained: *"She felt the flow of the tide of effort and interest – felt her own helplessness without quite realizing the wisp on the tide that she was"*.

For Dreiser, in his early novel, the sea symbolized the cutting edge life within the city. In his first novel, he uses this image to demonstrate the life within the big cities Chicago and New York, which is mostly very turbulent. Life may be a sea and one must be a really great swimmer to survive.

Besides the sea and the water, Dreiser also utilizes animals to write metaphorically. In *Sister Carrie*, wild animals, as well as domestic animals, act as symbols.

In chapter 10, the winter approaches. It is explained that everybody, "dogs and all men" feel the change of nature: *"The sparrow upon the wire, the cat in the doorway, the dray horse tugging his weary load, feel the long, keen breaths of winter"*. Dreiser compares the timid animals, fearing the winter, with Carrie. She stays with Drouet, even if they are not married, because she fears to be alone in the cold world. When Hurstwood becomes interested in Carrie, he does not mind that his beloved is already spoken for Drouet. In this context, Dreiser compares Hurstwood with a spider:

*"He never for a moment concealed the fact of her attraction for himself. He troubled himself not at all about Drouet's priority. He was merely floating those gossamer threads of thought which, like the spider's, he hoped would lay hold somewhere. He did not know, he could not guess, what the result would be"*.

The author compares human life to the exhausting life of animals that have to struggle and to assert themselves to survive:

*"Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is no not yet wholly guided by reason. On the tiger no responsibility rests. We see him aligned by nature with the forces of life – he is born into their keeping and without thought, he is protected. We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to free will, his free will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. He is becoming too wise to hearken always to instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them. As a beast, the forces of life aligned him with them; as a man, he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces. In this intermediate stage he wavers."*

Finally, it can be said that Dreiser works with the animal symbol like with the water and sea symbol: he wants to show how hard life can be. *"Life is a sea; life is a jungle"*.

Carrie symbolizes the collective values of the burgeoning American consumer culture. To her, money represents power; one might easily judge her and include her in the money-hunters' category of people; those that would be happy to be trapped on a desert island if only she had a large amount of money.

We can see Carrie is a pretty young girl whom Dreiser uses to express his own longings for wealth and affection. The glitter and excitement of the city has come to symbolize the possibility for the realization of the American Dream. Dreiser himself had been born in poverty.

**Conclusion:** Sister Carrie went against social and moral norms of the time, as Dreiser presented his characters without judging them. Dreiser fought against censorship of *Sister Carrie*, brought about because Carrie engaged in affairs and other "illicit sexual relationships" without suffering any consequences. This flouted prevailing norms, that a character who practiced such sinful behavior must be punished in it. After World War I, the American people and some authors were concerned about the impact of war on society. Literature was needed to express the events that happened and are happening in the American society. American writers turned to the direction called modernism,

which was a new trend at that time. Nineteenth-century realism, naturalism, and depiction of American life are prominent in post-World War I modernism. There are many similarities and commonalities between these two directions. Realism tries to find a cure for the wounds left by the war, to find a solution to the problems, along with a clear and brutal description of the American society after the First World War.

At the end of the novel, she never knew the happiness of creative work. Despite the appearance of fortune, Carrie came no closer to a happy end than Hurstwood.

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