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## Theodore Dreiser's First Novel (to the 115<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of "Sister Carrie's" Publishing)

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to Theodore Dreiser's skill as a writer of a novel. His first book "Sister Carrie" characterized his writer's manner in which the author was unhurried deliberate and thorough master. In his first novel Th. Dreiser shows himself as a deep psychologist and stylist. "Sister Carrie" is a landmark in the history of American literature as well as in the history of world realistic literature of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

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### 1. Introduction

"Sister Carrie", the first Th. Dreiser's novel, is an autobiographical book. The action of the novel takes place in Chicago and in New-York, cities, that Dreiser knew and was fond of Caroline Meeber, the main heroine of the novel. She, like Theodore Dreiser, when he was 16, goes to Chicago to look for better future. Caroline's walking through the city, her fear and shyness are like those T. Dreiser felt during his first meeting with the city. The writer put his sister Amma's fate in the basis of this novel. She ran to Canada with a married cashier of a restaurant. In our investigation we will make an attempt to confirm the influence of social realities of the time when Th. Dreiser lived and worked on the formation of his heroes' characters and their reflection in the fate of poor and rich people who became remarkable personages of Th. Dreiser outstanding novels.

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## 2. Analysis of social realities in the first Th. Dreiser's Novel "Sister Carrie"

### 2.1. "Sister Carrie" as a social novel

"Sister Carrie" is a social novel. We see there a contrast between the rich and the poor. Dreiser stresses the tragedy of a little man fortune. The writer describes Carrie carefully. First of all he marks natural, biological virtue of Carrie's nature — her egoism, selfishness.

At the beginning of the book Carrie's selfishness is harmless, inoffensive. She, like every young girl, wants to be well-dressed, she is ashamed of her poverty; she envies the beautiful life and wants to live as a rich girl.

Dreiser writes about Carrie: "Self-interest with her was high, but not strong. It was, nevertheless, her guiding characteristic. Warm with the fancies of youth, pretty with the insipid prettiness of the formative period, possessed of a figure promising eventual shapeliness and an eye alight with certain native intelligence, she was a fair example of the middle American class — two generations removed from the emigrant. Books were beyond her interest - knowledge a sealed book. In the intuitive graces she was still crude. She could scarcely toss her head gracefully. Her hands were almost ineffectual. The feet, though small, were set flatly. And yet she was interested in her charms, quick to understand the keener pleasures of life, ambitious to gain in material things" (Dreiser, 1900).

At first Carrie is an unpractised, inexperienced girl. She goes through the period of suffering. She works at a shoe factory and understands that working there she must forget all dreams of the beautiful life. At first Dreiser shows that the life is cruelty to Carrie, and then he shows Carrie's cruelty to another person, for example, to Hurstwood. The writer is sure that a way up is the way to the moral degradation. This theme is not new in the history of the world literature. It was described by Stendal ("Red and Black"), by Balzac ("The Lost Illusions"). Dreiser brought an American element in the solution of this problem: pursuit for business. Carrie becomes Drouet's mistress and then she becomes Hurstwood's mistress without any feelings.

The novel is ended when Carrie has become a successful actress of a variety show. She leaves Hurstwood, who commits suicide. She changes her attitude of art. But "amid the tinsel and shine of her state walked Carrie, unhappy. As when Drouet took her, she had thought: "Now am I lifted into that which is best", as when Hurstwood seemingly offered her the better way: "Now am I happy". But since the world goes its way past all who will not partake of its folly, she now found herself alone" (Dreiser, 1900).

### 2.2. "Sister Carrie" as a Landmark in the History of American Literature

Novel "Sister Carrie" is a landmark in the history of American literature: it revealed the truth about the capitalist America by depicting faithfully the life of the common people, a life of hard toil, misery and privation. In this novel Dreiser traces the path of a factory girl, who is exclusively concerned with the material aspects of life, and the struggle for material well-being makes her unscrupulous, selfish and callous. The novel is ended by the scene: Carrie is sitting by the window in her rocking-chair, and the author exclaims wistfully: "In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (Dreiser, 1900).

It is a very melancholy, sad novel, which does not solve the contradictions, confronting a man. A reader understands that Carrie's life has gone for nothing, that the surrounding society has killed a personality man in her soul, that the sense, the meaning of life is not richness. That is why the meaning of the novel is its social sharpness. That is why this novel was under a ban, was prohibited, interdicted for a long time in America, that is why some critic tried to disparage, to belittle its quality, merit (Davies, 2000).

But there were critics who consider that in "Sister Carrie" the main features of Dreiser's method have been exposed, have been revealed (Loving, 2005). There are the realistic principles in this novel. They are not only in the social motivations of heroes deeds; but in the imagination of many sections, wide sections of the society; they are in the showing of city's landscape, in realistic details and so on. The remarkable example of the realistic landscape is the imagination of a snow-storm in New-York: "Already, at four o'clock, the sombre hue of night was thickening the air. A heavy snow was falling — a fine picking, whipping snow, borne forward by a swift wind in long, thin lines. The streets were bedded with it six inches of cold, soft carpet, churned to a dirty brown by the crush of teams and the feet of men. Along Broadway men picked their way in ulsters and umbrellas. Along the Bowery, men

slouched through it with collars and hats pulled over their ears. In the former thoroughfare business men and travellers were making for comfortable hotels. In the latter, crowds on cold errands shifted past dingy stores, in the deep recesses of which lights were already gleaming. There were early lights in the cable cars, whose usual clatter was reduced by the mantle about the wheels. The whole city was muffled by this fast-thickening mantle” (Dreiser, 1900).

The contradiction between richness and poverty is reproduced here brilliantly. There are two New-Yorks before the reader’s eyes: Broadway – City of the rich men, and Bowery – workers’ city. This description consists of the oppositions: comfortable hotels and dingy dirty stores; ulsters and umbrellas of the rich men and hats pulled over the poor people’s ears.

Dreiser uses realistic details to stress the same thought. Showing Fleishman’s bakery, the writer says: “For nearly a quarter of a century, Fleischman, the baker, had given a loaf of bread to any who would come for it to the side door of his restaurant at the corner of Broadway and Tenth Street, at midnight. Every night during twenty years about three hundred men had formed a line and at the appointed time marched past the doorway, picked their loaf from a great box placed just outside, and vanished again into the night” (Dreiser, 1900). Only one sentence Dreiser uses to describe terrible position of poor people. Among them, he writes, there were two who had missed scarcely a night in fifteen years.

### 2.3. “*Sister Carrie*” as a Novel-Biography

The composition of this novel is characteristic of his writer’s manner. “*Sister Carrie*” is a novel-biography. There is only one main plot line: the whole action is concentrated on the main heroine Carrie Meeber, who is passing a way from a modest factory worker to a successful actress of a variety show.

In his writer’s manner Dreiser is unhurried, deliberate, detailed and thorough master. When he writes of a restaurant, or about factory where Carrie begins to work, when he writes about tram workers strike, Dreiser describes the surrounding and characters analytically comprehensively, thoroughly. It increases the weight of Dreiser’s style, but it does not tire, weary, fatigue a reader. On the contrary, just the other way about it adds epic range to the description.

Dreiser’s style is not monotonous, as some critics try to convince us. Yet in his first novel Dreiser shows himself as a deep psychologist. Let’s remember a scene, when Hurstwood steals money: “He looked fearfully around. Not a soul was present. Not a sound. Someone was shuffling by on the sidewalk. He took the box and the money and put it back in the safe. Then he partly closed the door again... When Hurstwood put the money back, his nature again resumed its ease and daring. No one had observed him. He was quite alone. No one could tell what he wished to do. He could work this thing out for himself... He took out the drawer again and lifted the bills. They were so smooth, so compact, so portable. How little they made, after all. He decided he would take them. Yes, he would. He would put them in his pocket” (Dreiser, 1900).

The author traces all inner movements of Hurstwood’s soul, all his doubts, all his hesitation, the struggle between the voice of honour and the voice of seduction and the victory is of the last one.

### 3. Conclusion

So the publication of Dreiser’s first novel “*Sister Carrie*” showed that a new, very interesting, complicated and contradictory writer had appeared (Sushkova, 2012). Having made the analysis of social realities described in this novel we can show that this contradictoriness is based on the following statements:

1. On the one hand, the writer takes and proclaims the biological conception of life. The life, he considers, to be struggle, the struggle between a strong man and a weak man, and therefore the main conflict of his first novel and many others is the conflict between a strong personality and the society. On the other hand, in Dreiser’s first novel we see the social approach to the description of acts, his aspiration for social analysis.
2. On the one hand, the writer is sympathetic with poor people. This democratism goes back, undoubtedly, to the hard years of his own childhood. Misery, poverty was his first life studies, his first life learning. That is why the contrast of poverty and wealth is so sharp in his novels. On the other hand, we discover the cult, the worship of

strong personality, personality cult is present in his novels. He is fond of the strong personality disregarding the aims the personality strives for. For example, you will discover that Dreiser's sympathy is with Carrie but not Hurstwood, because Carrie is the personality and Hurstwood is a weak man.

3. On the one hand, Dreiser admits the role, the importance of human reason, human mind. As a rule, his heroes are clever men. But, on the other hand, Dreiser is prone, to emphasis an other power, the authority of fatal forces over a man. It may be the authority of society, its rules, it may be the power of temperament.

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