



DREISER EMPHASIZES THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT, INSTINCT,
AND CHANCE OVER HUMAN LIVES.

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Annotation. *The complex relationship between fame, fortune, and personal fulfillment in Theodore Dreiser's novel Sister Carrie is examined in this article. Carrie Meeber, the main character, sets out on a journey that transports her from rural poverty to urban prosperity, where she acquires material wealth and public recognition. The novel's critical view of the American Dream is highlighted by Carrie's emotional discontent despite her apparent successes. Dreiser presents a realistic portrayal of society in which social and economic factors impact individual choices. This analysis highlights how Sister Carrie reflects the worries of the early 20th century about consumerism, modern life, and the false notion of happiness.*

Keywords: *Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser, materialism, the American Dream, loneliness, naturalism, urban living, celebrity, individualism..*

Dreiser uses Carrie's persona to highlight the hollowness of the American Dream, which conflates material prosperity with contentment. Carrie's material accomplishments—such as elegant clothing, an opulent apartment, and public recognition—fail to meet her more fundamental emotional needs. Her distance from true human connection increases with her gains. Dreiser's criticism of the American notion that hard work and ambition will bring happiness is evident in this contradiction. As Carrie advances in society, her loneliness grows. Because people around her only see her as a symbol of success rather than as a person with emotional needs, her rising fame isolates her. Sister Carrie thus turns into a potent critique of consumerism and how it affects people's souls. Dreiser, a prominent figure in American literary naturalism, highlights the impact of chance, instinct, and environment on human lives. Instead of intentionally planning her ascent, Carrie does it. [2]

The opposite of the "career predator" artistic personality model depicted in the image of Carrie is another fictional character. This is Jenny in Dreiser's novel "Jenny Gerhardt". Unlike Carrie, she is a person who does not strive for success in society. Jenny lives for the happiness and well-being of those around her. Although she, like Carrie, formally commits immoral acts and agrees to the role of a protected woman, the author changes this personality model in order to make the reader evaluate the heroine's actions differently.

He devoted his first two novels to creating an artistic model of the female personality. Dreiser no longer returns to female characters on such a scale and does not make them the main characters of his works. However, he relies on the already established artistic model -





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“career heroes” - to create male characters.[3] Jenny and Carrie are perhaps the only characters in Dreiser’s work who are the main characters of the author’s exploration of female characters. Most of them are interesting, first of all, as a way to draw the reader’s attention to certain psychological characteristics of male characters.

While separated by more than two decades, Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) both present powerful critiques of the American Dream. In both novels, the protagonists pursue success, wealth, and social mobility in the hopes of achieving personal happiness. However, their paths and outcomes reflect different facets of American society. Carrie Meeber rises from poverty to fame in a largely passive yet socially adaptive way. Her trajectory is shaped by circumstance, relationships, and social forces—hallmarks of Dreiser’s naturalism. By contrast, Jay Gatsby actively constructs a glamorous identity and builds his fortune with obsessive determination, driven by a romantic ideal: to win back Daisy Buchanan. Despite their external successes, both characters experience profound inner emptiness. Carrie achieves fame but remains emotionally disconnected and alone, while Gatsby hosts dazzling parties but dies isolated, misunderstood, and disillusioned. The two novels suggest that wealth and status cannot guarantee emotional fulfillment or authentic human connection.

Moreover, while *Sister Carrie* reflects the influence of economic determinism and social Darwinism, *The Great Gatsby* explores the moral decay and superficiality of the Jazz Age. Yet, both authors challenge the notion that the American Dream—defined by individual success and material gain—leads to happiness. Instead, they expose it as an illusion that often ends in loneliness or tragedy. Through *Carrie* and *Gatsby*, Dreiser and Fitzgerald offer timeless portraits of ambition and disillusionment, reminding readers that happiness is not found in material success, but in deeper personal and emotional fulfillment.[4] Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* both explore the inner lives of women seeking meaning beyond traditional societal roles. Carrie Meeber and Edna Pontellier challenge expectations placed on women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but their journeys differ in tone and outcome. Carrie pursues material success and fame as a path to happiness, navigating a male-dominated society through adaptation and ambition. Her rise reflects the influence of external forces—urban life, economics, and relationships—typical of naturalist fiction. In contrast, Edna seeks personal and artistic freedom within a confined domestic world. Her rebellion is more internal and spiritual, culminating in tragic self-destruction when societal constraints become unbearable. While Carrie survives and even thrives materially, she remains emotionally unfulfilled. Edna, unable to reconcile her desires with reality, chooses death over conformity. Both characters illuminate the limited options available to women and question whether true personal happiness is possible in a restrictive society.[5] They suffer from loneliness and guilt. These heroes can be formally classified as “career heroes”, but they are also unsuccessful careerists. They are weak and weak-willed, and therefore almost inevitably doomed to perish in a world resembling a forest, where only the strongest survive.





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Exploring the essence of the creative human psyche, Dreiser draws attention to the problem of the contradiction between the creator and society. Like Claudio Carrey, Eugene Vila strives for prosperity and success. Eugene needs wealth, not in the simple sense of owning. Financial well-being opens the way to open creativity and beauty.[6] However, the hero is forced to recognize the need to subordinate the artist's creative thought and talent to social requirements and moral standards. Eugene succumbs to temptation and "sells" his divorce for material well-being. The novel "Genius" also develops the theme of family relationships.[7] Dreiser was one of the first to describe in his works the emerging crisis of marital insufficiency, when the family ceases to be a traditional value, although it is formally preserved in society. Eugene, endowed with a creative spirit, perceives this process more clearly than others. The novel explores the theme of marriage as a "battle of the sexes," a kind of slavery. Eugene's moral postulates depend on his desires and feelings: everything that is natural is moral. However, he does not recognize the right of a woman to such an opinion and is disappointed when he learns that one of his many mistresses has similar views.[8]

The conflict between material success and emotional fulfillment is powerfully and enduringly explored in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. The American Dream's alluring appeal is demonstrated by Carrie Meeber's ascent from poverty to fame, but its profound limitations are revealed by her eventual loneliness. Dreiser depicts a world through the lens of naturalism in which outside factors like social expectations, financial hardship, and urban alienation shape—and frequently impede—personal happiness.[9] The book pushes the reader to reconsider conventional wisdom regarding freedom, happiness, and success.

In Carrie's life, fame and wealth bring her comfort and admiration, but they don't bring her true love, companionship, or tranquility. Her emotional emptiness in the face of material prosperity is a moving indictment of the ideals of contemporary society.[10] In the end, *Sister Carrie* makes the argument that financial or social success does not ensure personal happiness.

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