

DREISER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

OF THE INTERNATIONAL DREISER SOCIETY

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DREISER AT ALA

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Session #1 THEODORE DREISER: WOMEN ON DREISER
Chair: Irene Gammel, McMaster University

"Gender and Fictional Form: Fathers and Sons in Dreiser's Early Novels,"
Miriam Gogol, University of Hartford

"'Housekeeping Ain't No Joke': Domestic Labor in *Jennie Gerhardt*,"
Nancy Warner Barrineau, Pembroke State University

"*The Financier's* 'Subtle' World: Dreiser, Veblen, and the Immaterial World of Business,"
Clare Eby, University of Connecticut at Hartford

Session #2 THEODORE DREISER: NEW VOICES IN DREISER CRITICISM
Chair: Caren J. Town, Georgia Southern University

"The Dialectic of Irony: Structural and Thematic Considerations in *An American Tragedy*,"
Roark Mulligan, University of Oregon

"*Jennie Gerhardt*: A Daughteronomy of Desire," Kathy Frederickson, Quinsigamond Community College

"Secrets of Fraternity: Men and Friendship in *Sister Carrie*," Scott Zaluda, Queens College, CUNY

"*Jennie Gerhardt*: Gender, Identity, and Power," Margaret Vasey, Kent State University

Both sessions are organized by Lawrence Hussman, Wright State University
International Dreiser Society Vice President

News about the annual business meeting and party is forthcoming to Society members.

“Together with Dreiser”

Clara Jaeger

The following article appeared in *Women's Club*, an international magazine published in what was the U.S.S.R., in the Fall of 1991. *DSN* reprints it with the permission of the author, who is now living in England. *Philadelphia Rebel: The Education of a Bourgeoise* was published by Grosvenor Books in 1988.

I met Theodore Dreiser in 1931. I am from a Quaker family in Philadelphia in the United States. I lived a comfortable bourgeois life, unaware of the harsh struggles so many of my countrymen had to experience in order to survive. One day I found a book by Theodore Dreiser, “An American Tragedy”, which described in vivid detail the struggle of a young man from a poor background to find his way and ended up in the electric chair, convicted of murder.

This book shook me to the roots, and as I finished it I shed many tears. I was 21 years old. I then sat down and wrote a long letter to Dreiser, pouring out my heart to him.

To my amazement and delighted surprise, he wrote back to me and said he would like to meet me. The result was that I became his secretary and worked for him over a period of four years.

It was in 1927, on the tenth anniversary of the Soviet Revolution, that Dreiser spent 77 days there, exploring what he considered a great experiment which might usher in more justice for the masses of underprivileged people of the world. From that time on he supported the Soviet Union in all his future writings, as well as in public speaking and lending his name to many left-wing humanitarian causes.

When I first met him he spoke endlessly about his visit to Russia, not always uncritical, but always hoping that the concept could be used to ease the suffering in the world.

He knew much of suffering.

He was one of ten children in a poor family living in Indiana in the mid-west of

America. His father was a Catholic but unable to hold down any regular work. It was his mother, therefore, who had to toil to keep a roof over their heads and to find the money to somehow feed the large family. She took in washing and did menial jobs of many kinds.

Theodore was a sensitive, dreamy boy, tall and ungainly as he grew into his teens. He loved his mother deeply and wept for the burden she had to carry. The situation of a feckless, church-going Catholic father and an overburdened, warm-hearted mother who did not go to church turned him against the church. He describes this vividly in some of his autobiographical writings.

Dreiser had very little regular schooling, although his creative gifts came to the attention of one of his teachers, a lady who took on to encourage him.

Dreiser's personality, like that of so many artists, was full of contradictions. He had his dreamy, poetical, tender side where he would sit in his rocking chair musing on the wonders and the mysteries of all the universe and creation. This was very deep in him, and it was this seeking after life's meaning that drew us together. We spent hours discussing it all, along with the great artists, writers and thinkers of the world—the Greeks, the great Russian writers especially Dostoevski, who was very high on his list of great writers.

Then there was another side of his personality: because of his struggles with poverty and what he had seen of the ruthless methods of men he called “The Robber Barons” of the United States—Rockefeller, Morgan, Vanderbilt, Astor, Yerkes, he carried quite a chip on his shoulder. It made him suspicious of people's motives. He found it hard to trust people, with the result that he often would get into quite heated arguments, even with so-called working men like waiters and taxi drivers, if he felt they were charging too much.

When I started to work for him in the autumn of 1931 it was three years after his trip to Russia. He had just celebrated his 60th birthday and was a very famous man.

Though highly critical of the powerful American tycoons, Dreiser had already written two books about the life of one of them, Charles

Yerkes, the street railway magnate. The first two books were "The Financier" and "The Titan." He was now about to start on the third and final volume, showing Yerkes at the height of his career, when he was asked to take charge of building the London underground railway. This book was to be called "The Stoic," and this was the book he asked me to help him with, mostly with dictation and typing, but also to do some editing.

Dreiser's writing style was extremely thorough, and usually over-loaded with superfluous words, so it was helpful for him to have a little streamlining done. Nevertheless, his thoroughness and his strong convictions gave marvelous strength to his writing. He had done careful research on all his material.

I found it interesting to work with Dreiser on this third volume of Yerkes' life, whom he called "Cowperwood" in the novel, and to live along with Dreiser in his attempt to describe a man in his older age or twilight years, with success, wealth and power in his hands, yet reaching his final phase in life, aware of the transitory, fleeting atmosphere of old age and the time when all things must end.

This wistfulness was focused especially in the love Cowperwood had at the time for a much younger girl, having left his second wife to be with his mistress whom he installed in luxury in a London house.

Dreiser had told me a great deal about his own life as I got to know him, about his own marriage and the wife he had left, and I knew from reading some of his autobiographical writing that there had been, and were, many women in his life. The shy, awkward youth had quickly grown into a man of the world, an artist who found sexual love a necessity in his life, and a force he found overwhelming in its power and intensity and which he regarded with awe when under its thrall.

We worked very hard on "The Stoic," and at the end of the day Dreiser would take me out to dinner and show me around New York City, a city he loved. In 1931-32 America was going through a very dark period, called the depression, after the Wall Street crash. The city was full of

unemployed men, with no work and no place to go. Often when we walked home at night we would see these men stretched out on park benches, with no protection against the cold except some old newspapers. It was this side of capitalism that stirred Dreiser's anger, and made him reach out to a system of government that would prevent such tragedies.

Then in 1932 Franklin Roosevelt became President of the United States, and with great vision and courage, he tackled the situation. Dreiser often wrote to Roosevelt and gave him his support.

During the 1930's other writers began to make their names as they took on to describe the darker, more tragic side of American life, a kind of writing which Dreiser had pioneered. I was very fortunate to be able to meet some of the famous and well-known artists of the day whom Dreiser knew. High on the list I would put Sergei Eisenstein. Dreiser took me to meet him at dinner one night when he was passing through New York on his way from Mexico where he had been making his film "Thunder Over Mexico." Dreiser had hoped Eisenstein would have directed the film to be made on "An American Tragedy," but the Hollywood producers turned him down. Eisenstein would have made the film into the great social commentary that the novel provides. Instead it turned into a sex and murder story.

Dreiser and Eisenstein got on famously. It was a thrill for me to see them together, these two great artists, large in their outlook. Eisenstein's cameraman, Tisse, was also at the dinner.

Another great artist I met with Dreiser was Diego Rivera, a Mexican painter.

Half way through writing "The Stoic," Dreiser came to a block and was unable to go on with the book. My own job with him came to an end, and although I did some temporary work for him, I moved out of New York and returned to live with my family.

I ran into Dreiser two years later on the streets of New York. We were so delighted to see each other again.

Shortly after that he left New York and spent his final years in Hollywood. He died in 1945, aged seventy-four.

In the last two years I have had the privilege of meeting quite a few people from Russia and I am always glad to hear from them that they have read Dreiser's books and that he is still highly regarded as an artist by the Russian people.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

Fulfillment & Other Tales of Women & Men
Ed. T.D. Nostwich. Black Sparrow Press, 1992.
\$25. hardcover, \$15. paperback.

The stories in *Fulfillment & Other Tales* have long either been unavailable or were never published in book form. Several were suppressed at the time they were written because of Dreiser's frank treatment of the sensual relationship that exists between women and men.

Jennie Gerhardt. Ed. James L.W. West III.
University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992. \$39.95
cloth; \$19.95 paper.

The new *Jennie Gerhardt* restores some 16,000 words cut by editor Ripley Hitchcock and his assistants and reinstates Dreiser's frank commentary on religion, social mores, sex, and marriage. The result is a novel which balances the voices of Lester and Jennie, who was silenced by the first edition text.

Douglas Stenerson, "Some Impressions of the Buddha: Dreiser and Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 22 (Winter 1991): 387-405.

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Dreiser's Ambiguous Nature: Pastoral in *Sister Carrie* Theodore Cary

When he was a sophomore in high school, Theodore Cary wrote the first version of this essay in response to Lawrence Hussman's *Dreiser and His Fiction*. Currently he is a student of English and Classics at Wright State University.

There is no reading of Dreiser's first novel which satisfactorily accounts for its pastoral undertones. The implications of the unmistakable allusions are rarely discussed and, if mentioned, are either condemned as inappropriate or warped so as to conform with conventional interpretations. To fully understand *Sister Carrie*, however, it is necessary to investigate the novel's pastoral elements, for the nature of Carrie's ultimate desire is revealed through pastoral suggestion, and the direction of Dreiser's characters' ambitions suggests their fates. While most critics recognize the relationship between the characters in *Sister Carrie* and their consuming desires, criticism does not come any closer to determining the object of Carrie's vague yearnings than she comes, rocking back and forth in her favorite chair to the tinkling of shepherd's bells.

The pastoral allusions in *Sister Carrie's* last paragraph have been disregarded by critics for several reasons. Some, like Louis Auchincloss, simply find the mawkish prose distasteful. A more valid objection arises from the fact that, until recently, there always remained some doubts as to the passage's authorship, since Dreiser's wife modified the text for publication. The new University of Pennsylvania Press's edition of the novel, however, restores Dreiser's original work, and in the first critical book to use this new edition as a source, Lawrence Hussman's *Dreiser and His Fiction*, the most legitimate complaint is voiced. Hussman maintains that the pastoral form of ambiguity is not appropriate in an urban novel. Only one critic, John McAleer, realizes the importance of the pastoral motif and the timelessness and sweeping scope of Dreiser's message, but his theory that Carrie's greatest desire

is a pastoral alliance with nature, while defended by citations of even the most obscure pastoral references, does not address Hussman's justifiable grievance.

To make sense of the ambiguities in *Sister Carrie*, it is necessary to remember that nature in the pastoral implies not only nature in McAleer's agrarian sense, but the nature of things in general. William Empson, in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and *Some Versions of Pastoral*, best describes the functions of this versatile form. According to his theory, the pastoral is not the trite convention which McAleer reads into Dreiser, but a subcategory of one of several "types" of ambiguities employed by a writer simply as a means of "putting the complex into the simple." Specifically, the pastoral belongs to Empson's third classification of ambiguity, in which "two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously" (*Ambiguity* v).

It is important to note that ambiguity in the pastoral is always agonistic, a characteristic which can be traced back to the form's origins. Pastoral conventions serve as vehicles for the vicarious communication of the author's ideas through a familiar medium. Their intermediary role is much like that of the chorus in ancient Greek drama, which distances the spectator from the individual characters through its third-party deliberations on their situation; no longer entangled in the transient complication, the audience, from its more removed vantage point, is able to single out a universal theme. Similarly, when a dramatic situation is exposed as unnatural and contrived, it becomes apparent that its characters' predicaments, far from being circumstantial, are devised by a third party for a purpose, and so must contain some message for the spectator. Puns, double plots, and the characterization of the familiar pastoral shepherd are all techniques that must be recognized as techniques to be effective. Their application always contains some suggestion of artistry, for in the pastoral, meaningfulness, if not meaning, is always obvious: unnatural situations are bait to the reader and fodder for the critics.

Empson identifies another technique associated with the pastoral and used extensively

by Dreiser: character inversion. The pastoral shepherd—who, refined in speech and manner, is clearly an artificial, ambiguous creation and a spokesperson for his author—is the classical example of this conveyance of complex ideas through the simple character. Dreiser's method of inversion is more subtle, but a close reading of *Sister Carrie* reveals that he is very deliberate in his selection of his characters' career choices, which are reflections of their souls and intimations of their fate.

Inversions of character professions in this manner are actually examples of Empson's fourth type of ambiguity, which "occurs when two or more meanings. . . do not agree among themselves, but combine to make clear a more complicated state of mind in the author"; they differ from inversions in the pastoral because "the stress of the situation absorbs them, and they are felt to be natural under the circumstances" (*Ambiguity* 133). However, because in the instance of *Sister Carrie* Dreiser's use of the pastoral form is more sophisticated than this application of the fourth type of ambiguity, it is helpful to discuss these two ambiguities out of order.

As the people Carrie meets in the novel become more complex, so do their relationships with their professions. Shallow Drouet, the "masher," is most concerned with his appearance, and especially its appeal to women. The reciprocal relationship between the salesman and his profession is easily determined: Drouet sells clothing, his clothing sells him. Hurstwood, however, is a complex character, impressed by more than appearances. Although initially interested in Carrie sexually, a desire of a different nature inspires him to abandon his wife and comfortable job to elope with the budding actress, and the correlation between his controversial motivation and his work as a bartender is intricate.

It is well known that Dreiser was influenced by the psychological theories of his contemporary Elmer Gates. Not coincidentally, the effects of the alcohol swilled in Hurstwood's saloon are similar to the effects of Gates' hypothetical brain chemical katasites, a "poison" bred by "evil emotion" which, like "a false image,

concept, or idea. . . prevents normal and sane judgments" and "successful adaptation to environment." The chemical "therefore tends to destroy or limit the life of the organism in which it is embodied" (cited by Lehan 67). The sickness which drives Hurstwood to steal ten thousand dollars from Fitzgerald and Moy, and which leads to his suicide, is accompanied by these symptoms, suggesting the existence of the parallel between his fate and his bartending. Before he kills himself, however, he is also a scab strike-breaker, living off the hardships of others; appropriately, he eventually becomes a street beggar after Carrie's developing concept of virtue ceases to include his welfare, a true scab and parasite who depends on society's meager charity.

Commentators often expend more effort contrasting Carrie's antiphonal ascent to fame with Hurstwood's Aristotelian plunge from wealth and position into a watery pauper's grave than they do examining the role of the protagonist throughout the rest of the novel. Because Dreiser's contemporaries were shocked by Carrie's undeserved escalation, they turned their attention to Hurstwood, as both the familiar naturalistic hero and the author's persona. Hurstwood is recognized as more complex than Dreiser's heroine, seen as the author's sister, mainly because his motivation for abducting Carrie has never been satisfactorily explained. Yet Carrie experiences each of the longings which drive the other characters in the novel, including Hurstwood, in the order in which she encounters them.

The first desire is thus the most banal of them all, the "Lure of the Flesh," which overcomes her for an instant on the train with Drouet before his modish attire reminds her of her own threadbare clothing and subordinate status, arousing in her the desire which most readers associate with her character—the desire for social promotion. From her symbolic beginnings as a worker on an assembly line whose task it is to tack heels to men's shoes, she is driven by this desire to climb the social ladder, along which men are merely rungs to her. But there is a turning point in the novel at which all of the character's drives, whether sexual or materialistic, are replaced by an

attraction to something greater—something which first reveals itself during Carrie's debut as an actress.

Drouet and Hurstwood immediately detect Carrie's metamorphosis from Carrie Meeber to Carrie Madenda; something within them appreciates this new woman's potential, and she acquires unfamiliar appeal—she possesses a talent, a nascent virtue, which makes her worthy of their devotion. The irresponsible Drouet resolves to legitimize their relationship by marrying Carrie as promised, but her formerly conscientious older lover, overcome by desire for the new Carrie, spirits her off to Montreal, and then to New York, where once again she assumes a new name—actually the fourth she has held in the novel thus far.

Carrie's polynymity underscores the fact that she is not a realistic character, but an ingenious medium for inversion. What differentiates her from the other characters is that they are all type-cast—Drouet as a masher, Hurstwood as a wealthy and influential man about town, etc.—whereas she is a malleable changeling. ~~Carrie's distinguishing characteristic is her ability to mimic others, to internalize their values, so it is not surprising that she excels as an actress.~~

The one man Carrie is unable to imitate or understand, though she religiously follows all of his advice, is Ames. The fundamental incompatibility which interferes with communication between their two characters is related to *Sister Carrie's* central theme, yet only Hussman accords the inventor the attention he deserves as the author's spokesman. It is Hussman's theory that Ames simultaneously embodies several people who were respected by Dreiser. Ames' generosity, for instance, is inspired by Dreiser's mother, and the inventor's sentimental appreciation of music is typical of Dreiser as well as his brother Paul, the song-writer. Hussman notes that the character's most outstanding model is not a family member, however, but Thomas Edison, the inventor of the electric light which Ames has modified. Ames, lecturing Carrie, is thus not only expressing the philosophy of his author, but those of Edison and

Balzac and others as interpreted by him. Hussman claims this type of inversion is unsuccessful because expression of so many disparate views through one agent further contributes to the elusive nature of Dreiser's design (31-32), but, in fact, Ames serves to further its delineation.

Critics complain that Dreiser never brings the inventor's hollow character to life. His actions, unlike those of the other characters, are not directed by any oppressive invisible force, so at first he seems disturbingly out of place in a naturalistic novel. This impression, however, is unjustified; Dreiser's method is not. The reader's initial response to Ames is, in fact, proof of his creator's success.

The mechanism of cause and effect, while not always obvious in real life, is well-defined in a naturalistic work. The actual process of ascribing these valuations to surface phenomena remains outside the scope of naturalism, since all such judgments have already been made for the reader. The thoughts of an inventor, therefore, like all creative forces, are necessarily sublime. Ames, who is capable of elevating himself so far above the naturalistic world through imagination that he can see how it works, diagnoses its problems, and devises means of improving its operation. He can pass judgment. Like the light bulb he improved upon, he is a source of independent illumination; in a naturalistic novel, such a luminary can only cast a shadow.

Thus, Ames' critics are correct: he is not a three-dimensional character; in Carrie's world, he is an apparition, a projection from a higher plane materializing at its intersection with the naturalistic dimension. He is a creature from an ephemeral realm of relativity beyond Naturalism's dimension of causality. From his unique vantage point, he can make out the boundaries which delimit his naturalistic cage; he can see the links in that chain of cause which fetters the other characters.

Carrie is the only character in the novel who senses she is caged. She sees Ames slipping through the bars and clanks her empty cup against them to get his attention. Fortunately for her, Ames cannot completely pass through to freedom; although intellectually and spiritually independent,

he is like any man in that his animal side is still subject to natural law: his initial interest in Carrie, just like Drouet's and Hurstwood's, is sexual. As with Carrie's former lovers, however, it is not long before Ames recognizes something in her worthy of a different kind of admiration. Drouet and Hurstwood worshipped her for this quality; Ames is moved to charity.

Ames tries to instill in Carrie the inventiveness crucial to his profession and to her fulfillment, but his disciple's real life, in spite of his efforts, is destined to remain as much of an act as her stage life, for as long as she remains an imitator she cannot hope to comprehend the sentience of any individual whose part she attempts to assume. She comes to Chicago in the first place under the influence of a vague desire to become independent, but she is defeating herself by unquestioningly embracing all of Ames's principles, as she has erred in the past by adopting the rest of society's standards. Dreiser's "most serious inadequacy," Mathiessen claims, "in presenting his heroine is not. . . that Carrie is too unconventional, . . . but that she is not unconventional enough" (cited by Lundquist 33). The inadequacy, however, is Carrie's, not Dreiser's, and it is integral to her character.

Carrie, whose ambitions are "high," not "strong," differs from others because she recognizes the existence of virtue, realizing that altruistic creativity survives in a few, but not understanding it. When she is aware of poverty, she is at first moved to charity because she empathizes with—because she recognizes her former self in—the poor, but still, as Hussman writes, she is "more sympathetic in inverse ratio to the proximity of the object of her sympathy" (35). She does remind her friend Lola that people should not be selfish while others suffer, but if it were not for ideals stolen from Ames she never would have objected on these grounds. Her own plight must be an object of her compassion before she can transfer the feeling to another in a similar predicament, yet—as Dreiser points out—she is not selfish, because she has no sense of self, and borrows all of her ideas from others in hopes that they will establish in her the independence she senses at their source.

Carrie first recognizes in Ames, much as Drouet and Hurstwood recognized in her, the incomprehensible quality deserving admiration when, during the dinner with the Vances, he criticizes her social and literary preferences during casual conversation, encouraging her to tackle worthier literature to augment her epistemological development, attempting to convey to her receptive mind Balzac's theory of struggle, Edison's philosophy of success, and Dreiser's conception of virtue. Edison, who disdained completed inventions because they were no longer intellectually stimulating, told Dreiser that "he always took pains to ensure that the things he made benefitted society" (Hussman 31).

Ames echoes Edison when he refers to Balzac to define the application of creativity towards the alleviation of struggle as virtue. He counsels Carrie to assume more serious roles so that she can achieve, "do something," before, like Hurstwood, she is dead or too old to understand. As an actress, to be virtuous and contribute, to be generous like Ames or Edison or Dreiser's mother, Carrie could use her talent at expressing "the world's longing" to portray both man's struggle with conflicting desires and society's need for independent thinkers, the individuals whose creativity emerges unscathed from this contest, if only her grasp of the theory was greater than that of her audience, society as a whole.

"Literature is a social process, and also an attempt to reconcile the conflicts of the individual in whom those of society will be mirrored," writes Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (19). Carrie's obsession with the material and her class-consciousness—the same deficiencies Dreiser, who would become a Communist sympathizer, believed were sabotaging American society—are symptomatic of her hopeless condition and that of American culture; even the name of her home town, Columbia, is synonymous with that of her country. Dreiser attempts to prevent his readers from succumbing to this sort of self-deception by warning them of the illusiveness of the American dream.

"Virtue," to Dreiser, "is a matter of appearances," maintains John McAleer (78), and

Eliseo Vivas writes that Dreiser feels that "life has no intrinsic meaning" (237). The content of Dreiser's first novel suggests that this characterization is inaccurate. "Despite his awareness of the unrewarding nature of virtue, . . . [he] had never been able to dismiss from his thinking the assumption that his training had imbued in him that absolute good existed, could be determined, and could be established apart from evil" (Elias 80). His concern with creative contribution is demonstrated by his distress at the initial delay in the publication of his first novel.

Sister Carrie, like its author, is ambiguous about the possibility of virtue. Professor Hussman's reading of the novel is more advanced than those of his colleagues because he is the first commentator to persuasively argue that ambiguity in *Sister Carrie* is integral, instead of imposing on the text a generic interpretation or dismissing its confusing elements as evidence of Dreiser's inexperience as a novelist. Far from oversimplifying, Hussman maintains that Dreiser's message is controversial because it reflects its author's at times almost schizophrenic personality. While convincing and original, this theory raises more questions than it resolves by explicitly citing ambiguities which other criticism never addresses.

The application of the pastoral form in *Sister Carrie* is confusing because it results in a type of ambiguity which, although blatant, does not meet Empson's definition of a pastoral ambiguity: even after cursory investigation, it seems absurd. Empson, in describing possible reader responses to the third type of ambiguity, sums up by implication the critics' reaction to the pastoral in *Sister Carrie*: "Often what on a first reading seems faulty or irrelevant is put in [because the poet feels]. . . it throws light on matters of another sort, because it illustrates life; . . . that is not to say it is not generally faulty, because unnecessary" (*Ambiguity* 121). This basic reading of the pastoral in *Sister Carrie*, however, is unjustified; while the form itself may be an example of the sort of ambiguity Empson is talking about, the variety of ambiguity resulting from the isolated application of the pastoral in an apparently inappropriate context is revealed to be irreconcilable with the third type if one takes into

account that, in the third type of ambiguity, meaningfulness is always explicit. Criticism consistently demonstrates that, in fact, the ambiguity in *Sister Carrie* impresses the unwary reader as disturbingly meaningless.

The pastoral form is used by Dreiser as a type of ambiguity which exists within another type, a unique instance of multi-level meaning which can best be described as a nested ambiguity. A nested ambiguity is relative to an instance of incongruity which is sensible on a surface level, and its relationship with that decoy ambiguity is recursive. In the last paragraph of *Sister Carrie*, the surface ambiguity is clearly intentional, but the reader who seeks its sublime meaning is always confronted by a second, nested ambiguity, which is the inconsistency of the first ambiguity in relation to the text. "Why," asks the reader of *Sister Carrie*, "does this pastoral ambiguity exist in an urban novel?"

The first explanation conceived which accounts for this inconsistency is almost always that it reflects something wrong with its author: either he is inexperienced or he is uneducated or he is schizophrenic. In reality, what looks like a weak link is evidence of the stable, cleverly disguised substructure of *Sister Carrie*. The genius of Dreiser's design is that by the last paragraph of his novel, the reader is faced with the same dilemma as the heroine, who, rocking in her chair, is going nowhere fast: neither Carrie nor the reader can figure out what it is that prevents her from attaining fulfillment. Unfortunately, many readers give up after concluding with Carrie that the methods used by the author of the circumstances are beyond comprehension—whether that author is a naturalistic force or Dreiser.

Dreiser's fabrication of this specialized, maieutic ambiguity is evidence of his fertile imagination. Such creativity is a quality which his first novel's protagonist, in her quest for independence, sorely lacks, and one which Dreiser believed his stagnating American culture, once known for its independence, had lost. He hopes, through *Sister Carrie*, to encourage its development in the reader.

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