Sister Carrie, Theodore Dreiser's Sociological Tragedy

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Description
Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900) broke new literary ground in a number of ways. Its graphic documentary style, urban setting, and concern with economic and sociological issues set it apart from popular fiction of the period. In his characteristically detailed and awkwardly methodical style, Dreiser crafted characters and situations that dramatize the forces of economic necessity, social censure, and urban anonymity. Set in turn-of-the-century Chicago and New York, the novel explores the life of Carrie Meeber, a poor rural woman whose naivete and poverty make her an ideal target for the dangers of urban life. Dreiser depicts the dilemma created by Carrie's desire to succeed and find security in a morally and financially compromised society that lures her with its glitter.

David E.E. Sloane's study proposes that Dreiser's sociological tragedy uses the details of the cityscape and the lives of its urban characters to build a drama in which none of the characters are able to achieve real happiness. Sloane demonstrates how Dreiser used themes already of concern to his readers but managed them in ways that challenged the moral and sexual assumptions of the day. Sloane's thesis is that the novel addresses economic inequality by showing that even in the poor and inarticulate like Carrie Meeber there are physical and spiritual drives that need expression but that are repressed by social mores. The study offers a detailed examination of how Dreiser's stylistic and structural choices are perfectly suited to his material, and shows how the novel forged the way for other socially conscious works in the twentieth-century.

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Theodore Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 27, 1871. Dreiser's father, John Paul, fled to America from Germany to avoid the draft. Although the elder Dreiser had mastered weaving in Germany, he found that employers in his new country did not appreciate his skill. He tried to earn a living in Terre. Slightly encouraged by this success and the urging of a friend, Dreiser penned *Sister Carrie.* Based on his sisters' lives, the novel became Dreiser's best-known work. Critics today credit Dreiser with being the first writer to portray nineteenth-century American life in a realistic way. Dreiser died in Los Angeles, California, in 1945. Note on Theodore Dreiser, *The World of Theodore Dreiser* and *Sister Carrie,* Inspired by *Sister Carrie,* and *Comments & Questions.* Copyright © 2005 by Barnes & Noble, Inc. All rights reserved. Since its publication in 1900, *Sister Carrie,* Theodore Dreiser's first novel, has incited two kinds of controversy: moral and artistic. When Dreiser submitted his book to the respectable publishing firm of Doubleday, Page and Co., it was initially met with enthusiasm. Serving as a reader, the novelist Frank Norris strongly recommended that the book be acquired. *Sister Carrie* is the fictional complement to Thorstein Veblen's sociological classic *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and the American cousin of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary.* There is a clear-cut autobiographical basis to these attitudes. *Sister Carrie.* Theodore Dreiser. ! Home. Literature Notes. Carrie is met at the station by her sister Minnie Hanson. The two girls travel to the flat where Minnie lives with her husband Sven and their baby. The couple plan to have Carrie live with them while she works in the city. It is thought that Carrie will pay for her room and board in order to help the Hansons reduce expenses. Carrie is thrilled by the prospect of finding work in Chicago. She imagines herself part of the great swirl of activity in the city. Her hopes are somewhat dampened when she finally obtains a job in a shoe factory at four and a half dollars a week. Carrie realizes that she