Sister Carrie in Consumer Society as Seen from Deception Within Non-verbal and Verbal Framework and the Fulfillment of Desires

SISTER CARRIE DANS LA SOCIÉTÉ DE CONSOMMATION VUE SOUS L'ANGLE DE LA TROMPERIE DANS LE CADRE NON-VERBAL ET VERBAL ET DE LA SATISFACTION DE DÉSIRS

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Abstract: This essay attempts to analyze the theme of deception which is presented by two forms, one is silence, the other is lie, which are known as the deception within the non-verbal and verbal framework respectively. Widely employed in Sister Carrie, the theme of deception reveals the conflicts between feminine and masculine power through the utterances. In addition, the materialization in the relationship between man and woman especially Carrier and her two lovers is presented in the consumer society. And the protagonists in the novel are tragic products of the inability to communicate with each other and the victims of their desires and consumer society.
Key words: Silence, lie, consumer society, desire

Résumé: Le présent article tente d'analyser le thème de tromperie qui est présenté sous deux formes dont l'une est le silence et l'autre est le mensonge, qui sont considérés comme la tromperie dans le cadre non-verbal et verbal. Amplement employé dans *Sister Carrie*, le thème de tromperie révèle les conflits entre les puissances féminine et masculine à travers les paroles. De plus, la matérialisation de la relation homme-femme, notamment entre Carrie et ses deux amants, est présentée dans la société de consommation. Et les protagonistes du roman sont les produits tragiques de l'incommunication entre eux et les victimes de leurs désirs et de la société de consommation.
Mots-Clés: silence, mensonge, société de consommation, désir

1. INTRODUCTION

The range of Theodore Dreiser's work is diverse: he wrote poems, essays, sketches and short stories, but is most famous for his novels. Influenced by his early career as a journalist, he wrote stories about actual events and his work described American life at the beginning of twentieth century. His understanding of and feeling for American life were acute. Dreiser wrote, "The extent of all reality is the realm of the author's pen, and a true picture of life, honestly and reverentially set down, is both moral and artistic whether it offends the conventions or not."[2] Dreiser aims to include all aspects of social reality in his novels. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain, France, the United States, and Germany became the most developed countries in terms of industrialization. As a result of industrialization and urbanization, cities turned into metropolises and society gradually changed into a "consumer society."[3] At the same time people attained more purchasing power to possess what they desired among the dazzling display of commodities. In order to tempt people to buy, admen usually exaggerated the advantages of their goods through deceptive acts. The dramatic development of the industrialized society inflamed people's endless desires for more things

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[2] *Booklover's Magazine* 1 (February 1903). Quoted in Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed., Introduction to Se*lected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser: Life and Art in the American 1890s.* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1985), 35
[3] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), 18.
* Received 6 August 2007; accepted 5 October 2007

besides commodities, such as money, social status and affection. Desire enslaves people and forces people to act deceptively in their social lives in order to gratify their desires.

I will explore the theme of deception in the relationship between men and women in one of Dreiser's novels, *Sister Carrie* (1900). I will argue that the theme of deception is presented in two forms in *Sister Carrie*, which is the deception within non-verbal and verbal framework, to be exact, lies and silence. This thesis will concentrate on these two forms of deception and the motives underlying such deception. In *Sister Carrie*, the protagonists employ deception in the process of pursuing success and happiness and fulfilling their respective desires in the industrialized society.

Significantly, two forms of deception are portrayed incisively and vividly in Augustin Daly's well-known play *Under the Gaslight*[4] in which Carrie plays her first starring role as Laura early in the novel. It is this theatrical experience that leads to her subsequent successes on the stage. Carrie Meeber's stage debut in *Sister Carrie* provides a model for the theme of deception that recurs throughout Dreiser's fiction. The theatrical performance of Carrie Meeber makes the audiences believe that what is played on the stage is real. Backstage, Carrie and her two admirers, Drouet and Hurstwood, succeed in playing other roles to hide their true feelings for each other. This shift from the unreal stage to real social life forms a constant pattern of deception within the novel. Drouet, the Chicago drummer who acts as a friend to Carrie in the first chapter, is responsible for the beginning of Carrie's theatrical career, which begins with a lie. Anxious to hide his illegal affair with Carrie from people around them, Drouet invents a new identity for Carrie by lying to the director about her name. Drouet tells him her name is Carrie Madenda, a false name intended to disguise the true nature of his relationship with Carrie. Dreiser offers further lies which take place on the evening of the performance. For instance, Hurstwood explains his wife's absence with a lie, "She couldn't come tonight. She's not well" (*SC* 179). After the performance, Hurstwood and Carrie participate in a conversation that is intended to keep their intimate relationship from Drouet.

Silence, the second form of deception, is an unarticulated lie which hides one's true feeling. Dreiser's characters are often inarticulate; much of their conversation occurs on a non-verbal level. Both the verbal and the non-verbal can be used deceptively. In Drouet's presence, Carrie and Hurstwood pretend that they are only nodding acquaintances; they avoid any verbal or visual reference to their intimate relationship and, as a result, their silent affair fools Drouet.

While Carrie, the actress, loses sight of her own individual identity and of the real world, her power also serves to deceive her two lovers who associate their real conditions with the fictional actions and dialogues of "Laura." When the performance of the play goes to the scene in which "Laura" gives her lines on the significance of love, Drouet connects the scene with his relationship to Carrie and "resolve[s] that he would be to Carrie what he had never been before. He would marry her, by George!" (*SC* 192). Likewise, Hurstwood selectively uses this part of her performance to express his longing for her.

> The two men were in a most harrowed state of affection. They scarcely heard the few remaining words with which the scene concluded. They only saw their idol, moving about with appealing grace, continuing a power which to them was a revelation.…Hurstwood resolved a thousand things—Drouet as well (*SC* 192-193).

The effect of Carrie's performance is nearly the same in both men: each thinks that Carrie speaks directly to him and, thus, both fool themselves into regarding their relationship with Carrie as reality.

The motivation for deception is diverse in Dreiser's novels. In general, deception depends on the desire for a certain object, attribute, or condition which is lacking in the deceiver's life. Dreiser's characters frequently reveal an intense desire for control. The disasters and good fortunes in the world cannot be predicted and an individual cannot have control over them. So being helpless and powerless makes the individual totally depend on fate and immediate circumstances. In order to reduce the effect of this lack of power, individuals turn to deceptive acts which help them to create the illusion of power. By assuring Quincel that he knows an actress and by telling Carrie he has given her a stage name, Drouet, for instance, exerts power over these two characters in varying circumstances. Drouet appears to have knowledge to enable him to take control of the situation from a superior standpoint. Dreiser's characters turn to deception not only because of their desire for power but also to gain affection or praise; to bring about personal or social advancement; or to protect the deceived party from the discovery of the truth.

As we will see, the pattern of deception in Dreiser's novels represents the characters' relying on false acts, especially under the influence of society. Dreiser also shows the similarity between the theatrical production and the deceptive "performance." Reality is constantly confused with illusion in theatrical performance. Deception not only influences the character's view of truth and falsehood but also makes it impossible for characters to distinguish between truth and falsehood. The theme of deception will be placed within the context of American literary realism in this thesis. Although Dreiser was "unswerving in his determination to write the unpopular truth as he saw it,"

[4] See Augustin Daly, "Under the Gaslight," *Hiss the villain, Six English and American Melodramas*, ed. Michael Booth (New York, Benjamin Blom, 1964), 271-341.

his "truth" includes liberal doses of falsehood or deception.[5] And, in all cases, his deceivers live empty, unhappy, unfulfilled lives. The only constant element we can expect in life, Dreiser states, is change and confusion in the face of modern American's "kaleidoscopic glitter" (*JG* 570).

2. DECEPTION WITHIN THE NON-VERBAL FRAMEWORK

Business boomed after the American Civil War. In 1860, most Americans lived on farms or in small villages, but by 1919 half of the population was concentrated in about twelve cities. People flooded into big cities to find employment opportunities and pursue their dreams of success and happiness. With his portraits of fictional characters such as Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie, Dreiser tries to depict real life in American society in that period. Carrie leaves her hometown in Wisconsin, and tries to find her place in Chicago. She is "alone, away from home, rushing into a great sea of life and endeavor… a lone figure in a tossing, thoughtless sea" (SC 10-12). During her struggle to survive in the modern urban world and not be drowned in this "society-sea," 6 she depends upon different men to achieve success and happiness, first Drouet, then Hurstwood. Deception characterizes their relationships with each other and the fulfillment of their respective expectations of life. The five forms of deception I outlined in the introduction will be studied in Sister Carrie. This part will explore the ways in which deception functions in Dreiser's Sister Carrie and how deception and desire characterize American society and are mirrored in the relationship between the two main characters in the novel.

Generally speaking, deception within the non-verbal framework occurs when one character wants to hold back information or feelings from other character. Dreiser calls people's attention to the non-verbal mode of communication in the following passage from *Sister Carrie*:

> People in general attach too much importance to words. They are under the illusion that talking effects great results. As a matter of fact, words are, as a result, the shallowest portion of all the argument. They but dimly represent the great surging feelings and desires which lie behind. When the distraction of the tongue is removed, the heart listens. (*SC* 118)

He criticizes the illusions people have about the spoken words and claims that there are many implied meanings under them. Silence occurs between spouses, lovers, or parents and children when one party is afraid of making his or her feeling known to the others or is unwilling to uncover the facts. Silent deception in such relationships suggests Dreiser's lack of faith in the matrimonial bond and the family unit. Few of his characters marry and those who do meet with hardships and unhappiness. In addition, relationships which are not bound by a marriage license, such as Carrie's relationship with Drouet and Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*, Jennie's with Brander and Lester in *Jennie Gerhardt*, Clyde's with Roberta and Sondra in *An American Tragedy*, fail in the end. Parent-child relationships prove no better. Carrie Meeber leaves her family at the age of eighteen. She is "bright, timid and full of the illusions of ignorance and youth" (*SC* 3). The ties between her and her family are broken after her boarding the afternoon train for Chicago. We receive little information about Carrie's family aside from a description of Carrie's short stay with her sister Minnie. All the main characters in *Sister Carrie* are without family. Drouet has no family; Carrie breaks with her family—first when she leaves Wisconsin and then when she moves away from her sister—and Hurstwood breaks from his wife and children, whom he merely tolerates "by force of habit [and] by force of conventional opinion" (*SC* 87).

In *Sister Carrie*, the protagonist's relationship with Hurstwood develops silently, thus deceiving Drouet. Hurstwood's glance is "as effective as the spoken words of a lover, and more," while Carrie cannot "speak… without feeling a sense of difficulty" (*SC* 117-118). Dreiser places Carrie in an emotionally vulnerable state and also a state of unfulfilled longing when Hurstwood enters the story. Philip Fisher states that the non-linear movement of the rocking chair in which Carrie sits symbolizes frustration with her static position in society,[7] while her associated thoughtful mood suggests unhappiness and also desire for change in her social life: "She longed and longed and longed… she was sad… and yet uncertain, wishing, fancying…it seemed as if… her state was one of loneliness and forsakenness…" (*SC* 116). When Carrie sees that Hurstwood can offer her more, she quickly tires of Drouet and moves to Hurstwood who can satisfy her desire for material things. Gradually, the way in which Carrie and Hurstwood come into contact with each other changes from non-verbal feelings and messages to an exchange of glances and the expression in their eyes. With the acceptance of their relationship, they rely more and more on silence to conceal their affair from Drouet, and ultimately to deceive him.

Their hidden love affair exemplifies first the collapse of verbal communication, and secondly the failure of relationships both within and outside marriage. Carrie finds herself attracted to Hurstwood through "secret current feelings" (*SC* 118), through a non-verbal

[5] Swanberg, 182.
[6] William L. Phillips, "The Imagery of Theodore Dreiser," *PMLA* 68 (1963), 572.
[7] Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 155.

language that passes between them during their meetings. Various objects or auras relating to Hurstwood's person—his "rich Scotch plaid" vest (*SC* 94), his shiny silk cravat, his soft leather shoes, his glance, and his "atmosphere which suffused her being" (*SC* 117)—begin to "talk" to her, "yet there were no words" (*SC* 118). Carrie's relationship with Hurstwood develops on a non-verbal level, not on a verbal level. When Carrie and Hurstwood take advantage of Drouet's absence to express their feelings for each other, their conversation ironically focuses on a request for silence:

"We are good friends, aren't we?" [Hurstwood] said…

"Yes," she answered.

"Not a word, then, until I see you again." (*SC* 120)

At the first opportunity for them to express their feelings openly, Carrie hesitates while Hurstwood suggests silence. Moreover, the verbal exchange brings about opposite responses from the two: Carrie is affected by "a feeling of trouble and shame" (*SC* 120), while Hurstwood departs whistling happily. Their different status in life causes this opposite effect. Carrie feels indebted to Drouet for raising her standard of living, although she has the advantage over him in terms of cleverness and depth of feeling. She is mentally superior to Drouet. Hurstwood has lost interest in his wife and tries to escape from her demands so as to bask in the "bloom and youth" Carrie displays (*SC* 123). Foolishly, he neglects to consider the social, emotional and legal consequences of disrupting his marriage. Hurstwood incorrectly assumes he has everything to gain and nothing to lose through an affair with Carrie, whereas Carrie is uncertain whether a relationship with Hurstwood will compensate for the loss of Drouet or not. Neither Drouet nor Carrie is constrained by a legal contract that binds Hurstwood to his wife. Hurstwood has been married to his wife for at least twenty years while Drouet and Carrie have only known each other for a short time. Hurstwood shows less respect for his "permanent" marriage than Carrie does for her love affair with Drouet. Through Hurstwood's behavior, Dreiser suggests that the desire to break a commitment increases over time because individuals grow tired of each other. Moreover, the degree of permanence in a commitment heightens the individual's desire to defy its constraining authority.

At the conclusion of her performance as Laura, Carrie's motives for silence come together with Hurstwood's. Erving Goffman explains in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that often "the definition of the situation projected by a particular participant is an integral part of a projection that is fostered and sustained by the intimate co-operation of more than one participant."[8] Deception, therefore, can and often is created by more than one player. Hurstwood nearly explodes from the need to suppress his feelings for Carrie: "He cursed the luck that could keep him smiling, bowing, shamming, when he wanted to tell her that he loved her… [but] his hopes were futile" (*SC* 193). Likewise, Carrie expresses her feelings by squeezing Hurstwood's hand in a gentle, impulsive manner before Drouet enters their coach. Drouet becomes the center of their silence because both characters desire an intimate relationship that undermines Drouet's position in their lives.

Carrie and Hurstwood are highly sensitive to Drouet's situation. If they had not been aware of their betrayal of Drouet, Carrie and Hurstwood would not have chosen to conduct a hidden relationship. Both characters show compassion for Drouet, yet both desire to break their relationship with him. If Carrie had not been attracted to Hurstwood while still feeling ties to Drouet, she would not feel the need to deceive. Her conflicting desires reflect her contradictory feelings for Drouet and show that individuals can feel committed to more than one person at the same time.

After the performance of *Under the Gaslight*, both guilty parties continue the silent, deceiving sham with their respective "loved ones." Conversation between Hurstwood and his wife is impeded, mostly because each character is selfishly lost in his or her own thoughts as to how he or she can manipulate the other. But Hurstwood is not so much interested in manipulating his wife as she is in manipulating him because he is having an intimate relationship with Carrie without his wife's knowledge. Again, Dreiser shows us contradictory desires: Hurstwood wants both the pleasures of an extra-marital love affair and the social conveniences of a marriage. Carrie is in a similar position. On the one hand, she enjoys the comfort and predictability of her relationship with Drouet, and on the other, she desires a more exciting affair with Hurstwood. Ironically, Carrie distorts the conversation that night by displacing her blame onto Drouet, the man she has been deceiving. Paying no attention to her own deceptive silence, she inwardly accuses Drouet of deceiving her by holding back the important information about Hurstwood's marital status: "[Drouet] was at fault…. Why did he bring Hurstwood out… a married man, and never say a word to her?…. There he stood now, guilty of this miserable breach of confidence…" (*SC* 226). Moreover, Hurstwood himself is guilty in her eyes for having remained silent about his marriage, and deceiving her into thinking that he could and would marry her. Like Carrie, however, Hurstwood declares himself free from all blame, claiming "I couldn't help it… I wanted you too much" (*SC* 277).

Hurstwood's silence regarding his wife is only the first example of how he intentionally omits information in order to deceive Carrie. He neglects to tell Carrie about the stolen money. Goffman explains that most people cannot escape the need for silence in their ordinary affairs:

[8] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 77.

> … there is hardly a legitimate everyday vocation or relationship whose performers do not engage in concealed practices…. Thus, in well-adjusted marriages, we expect that each partner may keep from the other secrets having to do with financial matters, past experiences, current flirtations, indulgences in "bad" or expensive habits, personal aspirations and worries, actions of children, true opinions held about relatives or mutual friends, etc….[9]

Although Hurstwood's relationship with Carrie can hardly be classified as "well-adjusted," both he and Carrie yield to secrets or "silence" for the various reasons that Goffman mentions: their behavior provides an appropriate but sad example of the spouses' failure to communicate. Hurstwood finds himself in a bind between truth and falsehood. If he tells Carrie about the theft, he displays his weakness to her and risks losing her admiration. As it is, Hurstwood is unable to free himself from increasingly serious financial problems; he grows "gloomy and taciturn" (*SC* 342) and maintains "bluff about money and investment" (*SC* 346). Lacking money, social status and, most importantly, the ability to hope, Hurstwood loses the power that originally fascinated Carrie. Hurstwood and Carrie are tragic products of the inability to communicate with each other.

3. DECEPTION WITHIN THE VERBAL FRAMEWORK

Dreiser's characters not only employ silence to express themselves, they also depend on the spoken word to deceive others through the continuing use of lies. For Dreiser, human beings are mere chemical organisms, "lone figure[s]" adrift "in a tossing, thoughtless sea" (*SC* 12), powerless in the face of fate. Because they cannot control their world and cannot predict or prepare for future events, his characters continually seek other ways of feeling powerful. Lying reflects the individual's frustration with living in a naturalistic world. Liars avoid their powerlessness by inventing power. When Hurstwood pretends that Drouet has been hurt, he uses lies to gain control over Carrie's actions and to convince her to run away with him. While made angry by his boldness, Carrie is nonetheless fascinated by the "daring and power" of his lie (*SC* 278). Deception creates a false situation or a pseudo-reality in which the creator (the deceiver) manipulates, regulates or monitors future actions.

Drouet demonstrates, through his lies, that men conquer, protect and own women. This gender distinction explains a pattern of defensive and offensive lies in Dreiser's novels. Generally, the female character tells defensive lies to protect herself or her loved ones from shame, anxiety or loss of self-esteem. The male character tells offensive lies to offer or to gain sexual gratification, to restore youthful energy or to gain social advancement from society. This view is supported by the psychologist Carol Gilligan's view that "women… define themselves in a context of human relationship… [and] judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" for others, whereas men define themselves through separation and an abstract ideal of perfection.[10]

In *Sister Carrie*, Hurstwood also exemplifies the male tendency to move away from established relationships through his verbal deception. His lies arise from the need to regain his youth through an association with Carrie. To fulfill this need, he must first leave his wife and, secondly, transgress the limits of his friendship with Drouet. He takes Carrie away from Drouet by telling a lie:

"Drouet is hurt," said Hurstwood quickly. "He wants to see you. Come quickly."

Carrie was so bewildered that she swallowed the whole story. (*SC* 272)

Hurstwood uses a lie to create a false condition under which Carrie agrees to run away with him. Hurstwood establishes himself as an authority upon whom Carrie relies. Carrie's dependence on him during the train ride to Montreal makes him feel more powerful. Hurstwood makes up Drouet's accident in an effort to return to his lost youth and to offer protection to a helpless young woman whose helplessness he finds attractive. Dreiser attributes Carrie's charm to "the ancient attraction of the stale to the fresh" (*SC* 105), which is further strengthened through the contrasting portraits of Hurstwood's wife and mistress: Carrie's youth contrasts with Mrs. Hurstwood's age, her obedience and dependence with Mrs. Hurstwood's potential to "become refractory" (*SC* 112). When Hurstwood observes Carrie's performance as Laura, he momentarily forgets his wife's existence, for Carrie restores in him a lost "atmosphere of youth and pleasure" (*SC* 217). Furthermore, Carrie's radiance, a natural product of her youth, gives out power that Hurstwood feels he lacks: "he was almost swept away by the strength and feeling she exhibited" (*SC* 185). Dreiser later suggests that "a man of Hurstwood's age and temperament is not subject to the illusions and burning desires of youth, but neither has he the strength of hope which gushes as a fountain in the heart of youth" (*SC* 306). In Carrie, therefore, youth allows her to hope and hope generates power. Both she and Hurstwood desire the power that the other exhibits. In a scene which occurs before her stage debut, Carrie suddenly feels "as if she were invincible when Hurstwood helped her" (*SC* 95); yet, on stage, Carrie represents power for Hurstwood. Ironically, a physical union between these two characters does not combine

[9] Goffman, 64.

[10] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 17.

but diffuses their power. Dreiser suggests that individuals search for a source of power but fail to realize that power is entirely relative and dependent on one's current status or desire in life.

Carrie's economic and emotional destitution before she begins her career as an actress places her in a helpless, drifting situation requiring aid from outside. Following Drouet's actions, Hurstwood comes to her rescue, believing that she needs him. The attentiveness of the audience, its approval of her acting and its dependence on her stage appearance help to remove this helplessness. The character of Laura, however, returns Carrie to the role of a helpless heroine who asks a helping hand from her audience.

> Carrie had the air of one who was weary and in need of protection, and, under the fascinating make-believe of the moment, [Hurstwood] rose in feeling until he was ready in spirit to go to her and ease her out of her misery…. (*SC* 190)

Lies emerge when a character denies the accusation that he has concealed a lover. Hurstwood's wife suspects that her husband is unfaithful. Hurstwood quickly denies her correct suspicion:

"It's a lie," he said, driven to a corner and knowing no other excuse.

> "Lie, eh," she said fiercely but with returning reserve. "You may call it a lie if you want to, but I know."
>
> "It's a lie, I tell you," he said in a low sharp voice. (*SC* 221)

Hurstwood shows clearly the fight-or-fright principle in these passages. Having no place to hide, he puts up a fight, using lies as his weapons to protect himself from his wife's suspicion.

4. CONCLUSION

Dreiser's characters mislead by deceiving through silent and verbal forms of communication. The dominance of the physical world in *Sister Carrie* suggests Carrie's intense desire to make the ideals of wealth, glamour, and power come true. Philip Fisher points out that "city magnifies and gives a concrete expression to… Carrie['s]… small, future-oriented self with its plans and expectations extending out into reality like trolley tracks and strings of gas lamps." [11] The visual experiences ignite Carrie's hope for fulfillment; yet, despite her travels and supposed success in New York, at the conclusion of the novel, Carrie is no closer to realizing her ideals. Part of the reason for her failure to fulfill her ideal lies in the ability of the city to deceive her by exhibiting the outward products of success and happiness which Carrie later realizes are empty.

In the Renaissance, and as Goffman argues in the twentieth century, the individual was interested in how to present his or her intentions and desires. There are three motivating factors in Dreiser's characters: the quest for power, the formation of an identity with regard to oneself and one's community, and the gap between the individual and the "other" who is superior to him or her. The central theme in the lives of Dreiser's characters revolves around power. While Elizabethans experienced power through the centralized authority of the Queen and her protégés, Dreiser's characters view power as more abstract and inexplicable. His protagonists struggle with an indescribable force. And it is this force that dictates their actions and causes them to strive for empty ideals. Carrie embodies the quest for power. Her attraction to the stage reveals her intense desire for power. In her mind, if only she is as well-dressed as the actresses, "she, too, could compel acknowledgement of power" (*SC* 158). Secondly, role-playing shows the individual's need to form an identity with respect to herself and her community. Finally, role-playing makes clear the gap between the individual and the "other". During the Renaissance, new scientific thought repositioned the individual in the natural world. In twentieth-century America, the growth of urbanism and capitalism repositions the individual within the social world. For Dreiser, modern class society emphasizes the differences between the rich and the poor. The "metropolitan center" of Chicago widens and deepens the "gulf between poverty and success" for Carrie (*SC* 17). Jennie's affair with the Senator and with Lester attempts to bridge the gulf but proves, in their ultimate separation, that the gulf is all-powerful. All Dreiser's protagonists come from humble origins and strive to cross the gulf to the opposite side; yet, none are completely successful. Even when the "walled city" opens its "splendid gates" to Carrie (*SC* 449), she fails to find happiness and peace of soul.

Hurstwood's failure and death present the ultimate product of self-delusion. In New York City, he becomes obsessed with his lost wealth and glamour and his recent poverty and insignificance. He frequently spends his days dreaming in hotel lobbies and his nights brooding over reality in his gloomy apartment. His failure begins in the hotel lobbies where he day-dreams and creates a make-believe world. Gradually, his imagined worlds develop into hallucinatory interruptions over which he has little control. After Carrie leaves him, he goes into these escapist worlds by talking to imaginary people from past scenes. From mental drifting, to hallucinations, to talking to himself, Hurstwood allows himself to be overwhelmed and defeated by the outside world.

Both Hurstwood and Carrie do not benefit by performing deceptive acts. Carrie climbs to the higher social status at the end of the novel. She rises from rags to riches and fulfills her desire for material things and social status, but, in fact, she does not feel happy and

[11] Fisher, 129.

contented. Hurstwood fulfils his desire for power over Carrie in Chicago, which foreshadows his decline in New York and he commits suicide in the end. Both Hurstwood and Carrie are victims of their desires and consumer society. Dreiser establishes a pattern of deception in *Sister Carrie* that reappears in his later novels.

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