

Analysis of the Protagonist's New Female Image from a Psychological Perspective

-- Taking Sister Carrie as an example

Aohui Li

College of Education and Sports Science, Yangtze University, Jingzhou 434000, China

Abstract: Under the collision between tradition and modernity, the problem of female image has always been concerned and discussed. Taking *Sister Carrie*, the first novel by Theodore Dreiser, a famous American writer in the 20th century, as an example, this paper will analyze the new female image of Carrie from depravity to sublimation from the psychological point of view, based on the three levels of Freud's personality structure and Maslow's needs.

Keywords: Depravity; Desire; Greed.

1. Novel Introduction

1.1. Creative Background

At the beginning of the 20th century, liberal capitalism developed rapidly in America, and the center of American society moved from rural areas to cities. Due to the great efficiency of mechanized production, the surplus rural labor force had to enter the city to work and support their families. The development of science, technology and economy has made people more selective about the way of working, and people want to work in cities more, which makes people less dependent on nature. The city has undoubtedly become the center of modern life and the place that young people dream of. With the rapid development of American capitalism and economic prosperity, abundant material supply stimulates consumption, but also encourages people's desire and worship for money. Consumption ideology has gradually replaced the ideology based on production. This consumption ideology emphasizes spending and material things, which weakens traditional moral standards such as thrift, economy and self-control[1].

1.2. American Social Environment

After the end of the Civil War, the United States declared the victory of advanced capitalism in the north against backward slavery in the south to a certain extent. At this time, the United States was already a country that started the second industrial revolution and urbanized, and how did the United States successfully complete these turning points during this period? This is another way to prove the change of American society. In this era of industrialization, people have long forgotten the era of oppression, the era of war and strife, and only concerned about the rapid development of enterprises. In the fierce competition environment, entrepreneurs are gradually looking for partners to enhance their own strength and seek the growth of their strength, so that industries are increasingly concentrated and monopoly enterprises are gradually formed, and the United States has become a typical trust imperialist country. However, with the acceleration of industrial process, the economic center of the United States has gradually shifted from rural areas to cities, and agriculture is also experiencing a scientific and technological revolution,

which has provided conditions for a large number of rural people to flock to cities and provided a large number of cheap labor for factories in cities. When businessmen want to get the maximum benefit, they strengthen the exploitation of working people. At that time, the society was a society with a wide gap between the rich and the poor, a society in which people pursued money enthusiastically, and a society with sharp contradictions and conflicts[4].

1.3. Introduction to The Author

The birth of a literary work is often closely related to the author's own experience. Dreiser was born in a German immigrant family, and his father was a mediocre Catholic who treated his children rudely. Therefore, when Dreiser was eight years old, his mother took him and his brothers and sisters out of his hometown and wandered to another town, which inevitably created his miserable childhood. Later, he came to live in Chicago as an adult, and when he was a cashier, he tasted the bitterness of the world and accumulated a lot of material for his later creation. In 1889, with the support of a kind person, Dreiser entered Indiana University to study, which provided him with language accumulation for his later literary creation. After graduation, he started his career as a journalist by working in a newspaper. During this period, Dreiser saw the helplessness and misery of the bottom people's lives, while the rich bourgeois were partying and seeing the darkness and heaviness of society. As a result, his ideals were attacked. The gap between ideal and reality reminds him of expressing his inner feelings through language. Everything Dreiser experienced was the source of his creative materials. He borrowed his novel *Sister Carrie* to describe a series of social problems in the United States at the turning point, and revealed the great differences between the two classes in American society[1].

1.4. Article Writing Style

Dreiser pays great attention to details. Because his works discuss social status and people's pursuit of material desires, realistic style and description of details strongly contrast the theme. On the other hand, it makes his works (especially *Sister Carrie*) difficult for some people to read. It is worth noting that Dreiser is not famous for his style, but for the reality of his works, the development and changes of his

characters and his views on American life make him famous. The artistic features of Dreiser's works: broad social picture, rich and tortuous plot, in-depth and meticulous psychological description, contrast of different scenes and unique language are all reflected in his works[3].

1.5. Main Contents of The Article

Sister Carrie mainly tells the story of Carrie from the countryside. She envied the material life of the metropolis and came to Chicago to make a living. But the harsh social reality shattered her fantasy and brought her unemployment and illness. When she was desperate, she became the mistress of Drouet, a salesman, and later became the mistress of Hurstwood, a hotel manager because of her greater desire. After eloping with Hurstwood, she became a smash hit actress in New York by chance, squeezed into the upper class and realized her fantasy[4]. However, the society did not bring her great satisfaction. She felt empty and could not find the meaning of real life. Finally, in loneliness and desolation, she sat in a rocking chair, dreaming of unattainable happiness. As soon as the novel came out, it caused an uproar, because he was not punished for Carrie's moral decay but finally succeeded. People have a heated discussion about Carrie's personality and behavior, especially her desire. The following will be a brief analysis from Freud's concept of personality structure development[5].

2. Psychological Analysis of Carrie's Desires and Needs

Psychologist Freud believed that a complete personality structure consists of three parts, namely, ID, Ego and Superego. According to Freud's point of view, only when the ID, Ego and Superego achieve a harmonious balance can personality develop healthily. If it inclines, it will lead to mental breakdown or degeneration. If Anna's Ego is true, then the ID is an extreme desire for sexual desire and emotional desire, while the Superego is constantly suppressing her inner sexual desire and emotional desire in order to follow morality. The ID and Superego have been grabbing powerful dominance, thus forming a tense situation.

ID is a subconscious thought, and it is the most primitive desire of human beings to satisfy instinctive impulses, such as hunger, anger and sexual desire. In Freud's words, the ID is the source of all people's enthusiasm, instinct and habits. As the foundation of personality structure, ID is innate, and Ego and Superego are developed on its basis. The ID has a strong primitive impulse power, with the characteristics of unconsciousness, irrationality, non-socialization and disorder, and follows the hedonic principle, that is, the pursuit of food or sexual satisfaction and other biological needs. Just as Anna's lust was released after she fell in love with Volynski, her subconscious desire for love and sensuality was even stronger. Freud believed that "the elements of dreams are symbols of the hidden meaning of dreams" and "most of the symbols in dreams are symbols of sex", so Anna's dreams have physical desires.

The Ego is gradually differentiated from the id, between the id and the Superego, and plays a regulatory role between them. Different from the hedonic principle of the ID, it follows the realistic principle and meets the requirements of the ID in a reasonable way. Ego enables human beings to balance their own thoughts with those of the real external world, and to adjust themselves and their environment. In short, Ego is the

existence and awakening of self-consciousness.

The Superego is at the highest level in the personality structure and belongs to the moral part of the personality structure. Superego is a moral self, which is internalized by social norms, ethics and values, and is the result of socialization. The Superego follows moral principles, which can restrain the impulse of the id, monitor the Ego and pursue the realm of perfection. People with Superego personality gain psychological moral satisfaction at the expense of their own happiness. When the self's behavior and thoughts conform to the moral law, it will feel proud and happy, and when the self succumbs to temptation, it will feel ashamed and embarrassed.

Freud believes that the ID, Ego and Superego interact and are interrelated. I ignore the reality and only ask to satisfy my desires and seek happiness; The Superego imposes more restrictions on people's desires and behaviors according to moral principles, while the Ego moves between the id and the Superego. It implements the desire of the id under realistic conditions and obeys the mandatory rules of the Superego. It must not only find things that meet the needs of the id, but also consider that the things it seeks cannot violate the values of the Superego. Therefore, in the three aspects of personality, the Ego plays a difficult role. On the one hand, it tries to satisfy the Ego's pursuit of happiness; On the other hand, we must make the behavior meet the requirements of Superego. Therefore, the self-power must be strong enough to coordinate the conflicts and contradictions between them, otherwise, the personality structure will be in an unbalanced state, leading to the formation of an imperfect personality[7].

3. Anna's New Female Image

3.1. Growing up in Self-denial

Carrie left her hometown of Columbia City alone for her sister's home in Chicago, eager to find a job to make a living. When she came to the big city for the first time, Carrie felt that everything was novel and attracted by a new life. The novel begins: her natural posture has not been developed yet, and she can't pose ... But she already knows how to look after herself, is sensitive to the passionate fun of life, and longs for material enjoyment. But when everything around her gradually changes, Carrie begins to think and find the value of her existence. When Hurstwood's income was slightly reduced, Carrie couldn't help thinking about the meaning of life. She didn't want to continue living in a boring cycle. Later, Carrie got to know Amy because of the Vance couple. She felt her shallowness for the first time and realized that wealth is not everything, but that she should pursue a better life through reading and learning[6].

Carrie, as a rural girl, was vain and wanted to "squeeze" into the city and the upper class, and gradually realized the pain and emptiness brought by the spiritual poverty behind material abundance, which showed the American women's brand-new thinking about the meaning and pursuit of life at that time. Sister Carrie lies in her courage to measure life by her own standards, to deny herself and to reflect on herself. Carrie's thinking track reflects the regional cultural differences between the United States and Britain, but more importantly, she has made further progress in the spiritual growth of female consciousness.

3.2. Pursuing Personality Independence

In Dreiser's works, Carrie, who has experienced two

feelings, expresses her attitude towards love with a classic monologue: "No matter whether the woman you fancy is smart or vain, beautiful, clumsy, rich or poor, she has only one thing to really give you or not-her heart. She may sell you her beauty, cleverness and talent; But her love is priceless." Here, women's subjectivity and independence in love and marriage are greatly enhanced. When women look at themselves, they no longer take their relationship with men as the yardstick, but regard themselves as individuals with completely independent personality and independent behavior ability, and independently construct their own love views and values. At the same time, with Carrie's material self-sufficiency, her view of love is more independent. When a woman finds that a man's love is very obvious, her opinion of this man will decrease. She thinks that there is only one person in the world who should be complimented, and that is herself. From then on, the days when a man's insignificant words made Carrie dizzy ended forever. Carrie, who used to be so vain, now "explicit flattery has lost its effect on her."

3.3. Really Grow into an Independent Woman

With the change of social environment, thousands of "new women" emerged at the end of the 19th century. Many women began to earn their own living through labor, and they fought for greater independence and even equal rights with men in various ways. More and more women have the ability to receive education, engage in work and maintain their lives on their own. Women's self-awakening has gradually become one piece from the isolated and sporadic state more than half a century ago, and women's liberation as isolated individuals has gradually developed into women's recognition of their own group identification.

In Dreiser's description, Carrie left her hometown and came to a big city to realize her dream. When she first came to Chicago, her job search was often frustrated, and she found her first job-working as a female worker in a shoe factory with unremitting efforts. But after day-to-day mechanical labor, she doesn't want to be content with fate and spend her life like other women workers. When Carrie's life with the unemployed Hurstwood in new york was exhausted, she decided to look for a new job on her own. Carrie has been constantly growing in thinking and learning in the face of repeated blows. Through self-struggle and her own talent for drama, Carrie got a job in the troupe and left the decadent

Hurstwood. She thinks that she can get what she needs legally. Like other self-reliant women of her time, she has devoted herself to the busy life of the city. In the end, Carrie achieved success in her career, relying on economic independence to gain personality independence, and really grew up as an independent woman[8].

4. Conclusion

Under the collision of tradition and modernity, the issue of female image is always concerned and discussed. Carrie, an eighteen year old girl who leaves her family, has two fates: either to get better with the help of good people, or to quickly fall into the bad habits of the big city and fall into decline. In such an environment, it is impossible for it to be neither good nor bad. But we cannot give up psychological fulfillment and happiness just for the sake of material possessions. Therefore, establishing a correct outlook on life is of paramount importance.

References

- [1] Wang Zhaojun (2024). The True Writing of Human Nature: A Review of "Sister Carrie" and Theodore Dreiser Behind It. *New Chu Culture* (14), 40-42.
- [2] Song Wei (2023). The literary historical value of Theodore Dreiser and Sister Carrie. *Writer's World* (32), 59-61.
- [3] Zhao Dongxu (2016). Dreiser's Realistic Writing in Sister Carrie. *Journal of Jilin University of Chemical Technology* (04), 36-38.
- [4] Chen Guangxing (2015). Dreiser's "Sister Carrie": Ethical Reflections on the Consumer Age. *Huazhong Academic* (02), 82-92.
- [5] Zhao Tao (2014). The literary themes and characteristics of Dreiser's Sister Carrie. *Journal of Chifeng University (Chinese Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* (04), 177-178.
- [6] Lin Lin (2013). A Brief Analysis of Sister Carrie's Pursuit of Happiness. *Intelligence* (27), 214.
- [7] Sudan (2013). Environment, Desire, and Mental Dilemma: An Analysis of Dreiser's Sister Carrie. *Mangzhong* (03), 83-84.
- [8] Wang Rong (2009). The New Female Image in Dreiser's Works: A Personality Analysis of Sister Carrie. *Journal of North China University (Social Sciences Edition)* (03), 36-39.