

The Image of Social Life in Theodore Dreiser's Novels Such As "Jennie Gerhardt", "Sister Carrie", "American Tragedy"

Baqoyeva Muhabbat Qayumovna,
Dsc, Professor of BukhSU.

Aminjonova Muattar Odiljon qizi,
2nd Year Master Student of BukhSU.
m.o.aminjonova@buxdu.uz

Abstract:

This article talks about the works of the famous American writer Theodore Dreiser, the theme of social life in them, mutual problems between the characters and the society, and psychoanalytical analysis of the characters and events of the work.

Keywords: social life, artistic idea, social class, moral corruption, bourgeois America, Caroline Member, Jennie Gerhardt, Clyde Griffiths.

Introduction

It is known that the famous American writer Theodore Dreiser is remembered as the favorite writer of many people. His works are distinguished by their closeness to real life and attract readers with this aspect. If the writer has an artistic attitude to his work and brings the heroes to life in it, he will occupy a place in the hearts of book lovers. Theodore Dreiser is one of such writers.

When we read the works of Theodore Dreiser, we witness that social life and population classes in the society are presented in a truthful way. Examples of his works on this topic include "Jennie Gerhardt", "Sister Carrie", "American Tragedy".

It is no exaggeration to say that Theodore Dreiser's "Sister Carrie" is one of the best and most famous works of world literature. This work is the first major work of the writer. However, this work is heavily surrounded and criticized by critics, who are accused of being immoral and low-level. Theodore Dreiser openly opposed bourgeois America with this novel. Because in the eyes of the critics, the artistic idea in the novel was covered with immorality and it was completely contrary to American values.

As the writer finished and published his novel "Jennie Gerhardt", it was the second time he spoke out against bourgeois America. That is, his novel "Sister Carrie" was met with reactionary criticism long ago. Nevertheless, Dreiser continued to follow the same criticized path. At first glance, the novels "Sister Carrie" and "Jennie Gerhardt" are very close to each



other, their ideas seem to be the same works. However, the feelings and experiences of the heroes of the work are completely different. For example, it is very important for Carrie to achieve the life she dreams of, no matter what, she is ready to achieve her dream even though she is used to the shortcomings of society. But Jennie is a completely different world. Jennie wants a good life too, but she doesn't lose her identity on this way, she doesn't sink into the abyss of society, she doesn't pollute her pure heart.

If we pay attention, it is not difficult to notice that in both novels of the writer special emphasis is placed on the issue of social life. It can be immediately noticed that the way of life in the novels is different for all people, social strata, the division into lower or upper classes is in the first place. We can understand from the reality that Theodore Dreiser wants to convey to us in the works of his that the people of the era described by the writer go beyond the stratum in which they were born and raised, it is like a catastrophe, its scope cannot be avoided, whoever seems to be out of bounds, that's it, he will ruin his life, he will be hated by others. As a proof of these thoughts, the writer tells the bitter life of girls named Jennie and Carrie. Eighteen-year-old Carrie, like most Americans of that time, wants to make her dreams come true, live a good life, and achieve financial success. She always compares happiness with material success and hopes to find her place in everything. Of course, she dreams that she can endure all the difficulties in order to achieve her dream. However, as Carrie gets closer to success, she loses her identity and spiritual qualities. Carrie is shaped as a person who can achieve a comfortable life, but she cannot achieve happiness. We can conclude from the work that earning money does not necessarily mean finding happiness. Carrie wants to achieve a good life with her work, but it was difficult to achieve this in the society where she lives. After that, as a result of moral degradation, Carrie achieves prestige and state, but does not find happiness.

"The city has its cunning wiles, no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. There are large forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights is often as effective as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye" [3; 6]. These very sentences give a glimpse of the waves of social life in the period described by the writer.

Unlike Carrie, the protagonist of Theodore Dreiser's second novel, Jennie was able to protect herself from social vices, greed, careerism, and selfishness. Despite the fact that her life consists only of poverty, she retains her pure qualities. Jennie is a wonderful character who treats everyone in the play equally, feels sorry for their hearts, and is far from evil. In the novel, there are beautiful sentences describing Jennie: *"There are natures born to the inheritance of flesh that come without understanding, and that go again without seeming to have wondered why. Life, as long as they endure it, is a true wonderland, a thing of infinite beauty, which they could but wander into it wonderingly, would be heaven enough. Opening their eyes, they see a comfortable and perfect world" [4; 13].* However, the fact that social life motivates people with a beautiful nature like Jennie does not leave the reader's attention: *"Caged in the world of the material, however, such a nature is almost invariably an anomaly. That other world of flash into which has been woven pride and greed looks askance at the idealist, the dreamer. If one says it is sweet to look at the clouds, the answer is a warning against idleness. If one seeks*



to give ear to the winds, it shall be well with his soul, but they will seize upon his possessions... The hands of the actual are forever reaching toward such as these- forever seizing greedily upon them. It is of such that the bond servants are made. In the world of reality, Jennie was such a spirit" [4; 13].

The writer's novel "American Tragedy" is also a cause of wide debates and discussions among readers. In this novel, we can learn about the theme of the rich and the poor, the hero from a low class who strives for high luxury, and in search of a good life, he even enters the path of the abyss. The hero of the work, Clyde Griffiths, dreams of getting out of his poverty-stricken life, achieving immense luxury, and living like a high-class person. When he worked as a hotel maid, he often observed people who had no problem with their property, and he tried to be like them. The low attitude of the upper class towards the poor in society, the fact that they hardly establish contact with them, and do not consider them as equals, turn most people into a bottomless robot ready to do anything to achieve wealth, prestige, wealth can also put. Clyde also makes an unforgivable mistake for fleeting luxury, he becomes the murderer of an innocent girl in order not to lose the high position he should occupy in society, and not to ruin the upcoming fake shiny future.

In all three novels of the writer, we witness the lives of heroes who are unhappy because of society's luxury, which is expensive. The writer tries to show us that such narrow-minded ideas in the society occupied the minds of many people in those times. Perhaps this form of social life has existed for centuries, has been absorbed into the blood of humanity, and is still surrounding us. Even today, the same views as those of that time, hatred for wealth, division into different social strata, may not have come to an end. The closeness of the theme in the novels also prompts us to come to the conclusion that the writer was dissatisfied with the social life of that time.

Now we turn to another question that interests us. Why does Theodore Dreiser in both "Jennie Gerhardt" and "Sister Carrie" refer to the similar fate of working-class girls in capitalist America? In order to find an answer to this question, we decided to analyze the life of Theodore Dreiser and his works through psychoanalysis.

"Sister Carrie" is the product of Theodore Dreiser's own life. Dreiser's childhood was very difficult, poverty and financial difficulties brought great problems to the family. Dreiser was the eleventh of twelve children in the family, but some of them died, leaving ten children alive in the family. Due to the early death of the writer's parents, the children in the family faced various difficulties. This information clearly shows that the fate of the characters in Dreiser's works, who lived in extreme need, is connected with the writer's personal life. Neediness forced Dreiser to work hard, to constantly look for work, to leave his place of residence. These events in her life were reflected in the fate of Caroline Meeber in the novel "Sister Carrie". From this we can conclude that the events of moving away from home due to neediness in Carrie's life are related to the experiences of the writer. Jennie and Carrie, the characters of the novels "Jennie Gerhardt" and "Sister Carrie", are actually the characters of Theodore Dreiser's sisters' lives in the work. The writer's sisters Mary and Sylvia served as prototypes for the heroes of the work. Mary violates the moral norms of the society and becomes pregnant by a



famous politician, but her lover leaves her in order not to lose his position. Five years later, the same fate happened to Sylvia. Dreiser was very young when these events took place, and it affected him deeply. If we pay attention, we notice that Mary's fate is revealed in the image of Jennie Gerhardt. Jennie is a very simple, ordinary girl from a poor family. Neediness makes her collide with hard blows of life. She always cares about her family members, even once she sacrifices herself for her brother Sebastian. That is, one day Bass is imprisoned for stealing coal. Jennie is forced to go to Senator Brender for help. She becomes pregnant by Senator Brender and violates the rules of bourgeois morality. But it is inappropriate for us to think that Jennie is morally corrupt. In the novel, the writer describes Jennie as a spiritually pure, innocently beautiful girl who wants good for everyone. Only because of the moral base of the society, her life ends tragically and Jennie becomes a victim of the bourgeois society.

In short, Theodore Dreiser condemns the social life of that time and the moral weakness of the bourgeois society in all three novels. He tried to show that the wrong way of life leads nature to its trap and to the destruction of pure-hearted, spiritual, strong moral people. In fact, despite the threats of many critics, the writer who managed to show the real life in a clear way received special respect and interest among the readers, and his works are widely popular among the people.

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