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**Romance and Tragedy in THEODORE DREISER 'S *SISTER*  
*CARRIE* and WILLA CATHER' S *A LOST LADY*: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY.**

**Presented by:**

- Sofiane HEDDAR
- Amira LAOUARI

**Supervised by: Dr. Fatima BENSIDHOUM**

**Board of Examiners:**

- |               |                        |                        |            |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| ❖ Chair:      | Dr.GADA. S,            | Department of English, | M.M.U.T.O. |
| ❖ Supervisor: | Dr. Fatima BENSIDHOUM, | Department of English, | M.M.U.T.O. |
| ❖ Examiner:   | Mr.HADDADOU.M.         | Department of English, | M.M.U.T.O. |

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## **Dedications**

*To the cherished memory of my Father*

*To my mother and friends*

**Sofiane**

*To my parents and all my family, my friends and my chiefs*

**Amira**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a comparative study between Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). (1923), to achieve our work, we have widened the scope of our investigation within a theoretical frame. For this matter, we have relied on some concepts of Northrop Frye's theory of Romance and Tragedy as exposed in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) particularly the transition from the mythos of Summer (romance) to Winter (tragedy). The first chapter examines characterization by highlighting both similarities and contrasts between the two protagonists through Northrop Frye's concepts of innocent youth, the romantic heroine and their departure. It also shows how both novels illustrate the protagonist journey from an idealised world to isolation. The second chapter focuses on plot by analyzing the rise and the fall of each protagonist and tracing their progression from rise to decline. The third chapter deals with setting, revealing how space functions in each novel by applying Frye's concept the Green World. The study concludes that both Dreiser's and Cather's novels align with the essential characteristics of romance and tragedy.

**Keywords:** Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, Romance, Tragedy, Departure, journey, Illusion, Rise, Decline, Society,

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## I. Introduction

The late nineteenth century witnessed a period of profound change and transformation across various fields in America, notably in literature which saw the rise of realism and naturalism as dominant movements. As Mark Twain noted in *The Art of Authorship* —The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter; it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning, (1890,p.87). Highlighting the precision and truthfulness that realism demanded. It is often said that literature is a mirror of life, writers in this period faithfully captured the complexities of society ,harshness of life and human nature. It was marked by the emergence of diverse literary genres in which the novel became the dominant form for expressing social concerns. Literature became a powerful vehicle for social and political commentary, addressing major issues such as politics, class, gender, and the far-reaching impact of industrialization.

American authors such as Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Stephen Crane, explored the shifting moral and cultural landscapes of their time, challenging traditional values and exposing the tension between individual desires and societal expectations.

Romance and tragedy, as genres, saw significant improvement by the end of the 19th century. Many writers who were associated with early American romance continued to contribute to the late American romance. Among these authors, Theodore Dreiser and Willa Cather stand out as key figures. Willa Cather (1873–1947) grew up in Nebraska and later moved to New York City. Her novels dealt with nostalgia, exile, and the portrayal of American life, as well as the struggles of women in society. Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) was a prominent American novelist and journalist, known for his naturalistic and realistic portrayals of American life. His

works explored themes of materialism, spiritual doubt, and the struggles of individuals in a rapidly industrializing society. His novels demonstrate Dreiser's commitment to exploring the complexities of American society and the human experience, often drawing on his own life for inspiration. Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* (1900) explores elements of both tragedy and romance. Cather was a realist and modernist author who drew inspiration from her childhood experiences in the American West. Her novel *A Lost Lady*, published in 1923, explored themes of romance and tragedy in American life.

The selection of both novels is based on their continued appeal to readers today. Both *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser and *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather remain relevant to modern readers because they explore timeless human struggles particularly the search for meaning, identity, and emotional fulfillment in a rapidly changing world. In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser describes his heroine as —amid the tinsel and shine, she dreams of something more, (1900,p.461) a line that speaks directly about the modern condition, today, individuals are surrounded by wealth, media, and consumer culture, yet many still feel an inner emptiness, longing for happiness beyond material success.

Similarly, Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* addresses the emotional cost of change. She writes, —The world was growing harder, and she was growing older, (1923,p.34). This expresses a feeling of loss and disillusionment that resonates with people today who feel alienated because of technological advancement, cultural shifts, or the erosion of personal values. These two quotes reflect how both novels, though set in different historical periods, capture the enduring tension between appearance and inner truth, progress and personal cost. In this way, Dreiser and Cather offer narratives that are not just historically significant, but emotionally and socially relevant in the 21st century.

## 1- Review of the Literature

Both *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser and *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather are two novels that have been widely studied and critiqued. Theodore Dreiser's "*Sister Carrie*" has been widely acclaimed by literary critics since its publication in 1900. The novel is celebrated for its realistic portrayal of urban life and its exploration of themes such as ambition, desire, and the pursuit of success. When first published in 1900, *Sister Carrie* was met with very few favorable reviews. Most critics were "violently adverse and insulting", labeling the novel as immoral and vulgar. One of the earliest critics to recognize the novel's significance was H.L. Mencken, *Second Series*. Alfred A. Knopf, who praised Dreiser's ability to capture the essence of American society and declared:

Dreiser has seized with remarkable courage upon a distinctive type of American experience, and he has set forth with admirable directness and simplicity, the tragedy of its blind groping after personal happiness. ( 1920, p. 198)

Alfred Kazin (1942) another influential critic, hailed "*Sister Carrie*" as a masterpiece of naturalism. He lauded Dreiser's ability to depict the struggles of ordinary people with compassion and insight, and he recognized the novel's enduring relevance to contemporary readers and he asserts that: "Dreiser's unflinching portrayal of the human condition in '*Sister Carrie*' resonates with readers, offering a powerful commentary on the pursuit of dreams and the harsh realities of life." ( 1942,p. 297).

Richard Lingeman (1990), in *The Uneasy Chair: A Biography of Theodore Dreiser*, praised *Sister Carrie* for its pioneering exploration of feminist themes. He highlighted Carrie Meeber as a groundbreaking character who defies societal expectations and asserts her independence in a male-dominated world, stating: "Carrie Meeber's transformation from a naïve young woman to a self-assured individual challenges traditional notions of femininity and

underscores Dreiser's keen insight into the human psyche "(1900,p.175).

Similarly to Theodore Dreiser's "*Sister Carrie*" Willa Cather's "*A Lost Lady* (1923 has been widely acclaimed by literary critics since its publication in 1923 *A Lost Lady* (1923) by Willa Cather has been examined from various perspectives.

Maxwell Geismar in *The Last Provincials*, (1947) argued that the novel presents an idealized and romanticized portrayal of the pioneer era. He claimed that Cather's nostalgic vision of the past is more evident in *A Lost Lady* than a true depiction of the changing values and landscape of America. He stated:

*A Lost Lady* reflects a curious 'sunset of the pioneer', a prismatic sunset, an almost mythical pioneer. Admirable as the story is with reference to its human relationships and emotional values, and remarkable for its creation of an atmosphere, it is still a kind of touching fairy tale of the more beneficent robber barons, or their second or third cousins. It is a reflection not of a society but of a point of view that, increasingly narrow, selective, and fanciful, is actually retreating further and further from society.(1947,p.183)

Another critic, Donald Heiny, estimated that the primary focus of the novel *A Lost lady* is the collapse of the societal structure, as the protagonist Mrs Marian Forrester's ambitions are destroyed by the unexpected death of her husband. In his book *Recent American literature*(1958), he argued:

The novel traces the decline of the heroine, which parallels the decline of the town after its future as a railroad center is blighted. The key incident in her life is her brief romance with the dashing bachelor Frank Ellinger. When Ellinger later marries, Mrs. Forrester turns her attention to the care of her now ailing husband; and when he dies she has an affair with the coarse and pushing business-man Ivy Peters. (1958,p.197)

Other critics praised Cather for the perfection of her writings. Lionel Trilling, in *After The Genteel Tradition* (1937) saw that The novel *A Lost lady* is a central work in Cather's career. Because it handles the fundamental issue of moral decline and cultural transformation in post-

frontier America .He wrote :

A *Lost Lady*, Miss Cather's most explicit treatment of the passing of the old order, is the central work of her career. Far from being the delicate minor book it is often called, it is probably her most muscular story, for it derives its power from the grandeur of its theme. Miss Cather shares the American belief in the tonic moral quality of the pioneer's life; with the passing of the frontier she conceives that a great source of fortitude has been lost .(1937,p.55)

## **2- Issues and Working Hypothesis**

From the review of the literature, it appears that both novels have received significant critical attention. There is clear agreement in literary studies that *A Lost Lady* and *Sister Carrie* are narratives of romance ,desire and tragedy both culminating in tragic endings (the downfall of the main characters). It is intriguing that no previous comparative study has been conducted to highlight the similarities and differences between *A Lost Lady* and *Sister Carrie*, despite the evident parallels between the two novels. We worked on these two literary works because both explore how romantic ideals clash with the real life which lead them to the defeat and downfall.Their themes of love ,desire ;ambition ,and their journey made them ideal to compare them.

Consequently, the goal of this research is to explore the similarities and differences between the two works. Our aim in this dissertation is to analyze the concepts of romance and tragedy in both novels, focusing on how the two authors depict these concepts in their works. To complete this research, we will apply some key concepts of romance and tragedy to demonstrate the relevance of our topic, we shall rely on Northrop Frye's theories of romance (mythos of summer) and tragedy (mythos of winter), as outlined in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*. The selection of these theories is particularly relevant because their components align with the goals of our study in analyzing both novels.

### **3- Methodological Outline**

This dissertation is written following the IMRAD method. The work starts with an introduction where the problematic is identified. It is followed by a brief overview of the literature conducted on the two novels. The second section will be devoted to Method and Materials. In the Methods section, we will apply Northrop Frye's concepts of romance and tragedy as outlined in *Anatomy of Criticism*. The materials section will cover biographies of the authors and summaries of their novels. The discussion section consists of three main chapters: the first chapter will address characterization, the second chapter the study of the Plot and the third chapter will focus on the Study of setting in both novels *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather and *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser, relying on Frye's mythos theory as a framework. In the results section, we will highlight our findings, and finally, the conclusion will summarize our research.

## **II. Methods and Materials**

### **1- Methods**

In this research, we will rely on Northrop Frye's theory of Romance and Tragedy which is presented in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). The present study highlights Romance and Tragedy as the main concepts to be examined.

#### **a- Romance and the Mythos of Summer**

According to Frye, Romance represents an idealized world where the protagonist embarks on a quest, often overcoming great challenges to achieve a transcendent goal. It is an archetypal journey of adventure, discovery, and triumph. Romance typically culminates in a victory that restores order and balance, often resolving in the fulfillment of desires, such as the hero's union with a lover, or the hero's triumphant Return to society.

Frye aligns Romance with the Mythos of Summer, a time of growth, vitality, and fulfillment, symbolizing the human quest for identity, purpose, and self-realization. He describes the Romance archetype in *Anatomy of Criticism* as: "The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and the essential element of this quest is the adventure that takes the hero through peril and trial to a moment of triumph" (1957, p. 186).

Frye outlines six distinct phases of romance. These phases focus on the hero's journey, the challenges faced, and the resolution. First Phase is The Myth of the Hero's Birth and Early Adventures. This phase involves the mysterious or miraculous birth of the hero. The hero's early adventures typically include childhood trials or initiations that set the stage for future exploits. Second Phase is The Innocent Youth of the Hero, the hero grows up in a rural or pastoral setting, embodying innocence and purity. Third Phase is The Quest or Adventure, The hero embarks on

a significant quest or series of adventures. This phase includes the journey, encounters with enemies, and overcoming obstacles. Frye notes, "The quest is the hero's journey toward a goal, which often involves a perilous journey and preliminary minor adventures" (1957, p. 187).

Fourth Phase is The Heightened Conflict where the hero faces the greatest challenges or a climactic confrontation with the antagonist. This phase often includes a decline into a dark or dangerous place, a symbolic death. Fifth Phase is The Hero's Triumph and Recognition The hero overcomes the final obstacles, defeats the antagonist, or solves the central conflict. There is often a recognition of the hero's true identity or rightful place in society. Sixth Phase is The Restoration; it concludes with the hero's ascension, marriage, or establishment of a new order. This phase symbolizes the restoration of harmony and the establishment of an ideal state. Frye states, "The hero achieves a triumph that is not merely personal but restores order and harmony to his society" (1957, p. 192).

### **b- Tragedy and the Mythos of Winter**

In contrast to the idealistic world of Romance, Tragedy is aligned with the Mythos of Winter, a time of death, decline, and disintegration. Tragedy represents the fall or isolation of the hero, from a position of power to a catastrophic downfall. The tragic hero is typically a figure who encounters overwhelming forces whether internal flaws, external social pressures, or fate itself that leads to their inevitable defeat.

Frye defines Tragedy as the process by which a hero falls from a higher position to a lower one, often resulting in alienation, suffering, and death. He writes:

The tragedy is the mythos of winter, a tale of catastrophe in which the central character is isolated from his society... the final point of tragedy is death, the opposite of birth, which marks the low point of the cycle" (Frye, 1957, p. 192).

Frye associates winter with tragedy because winter symbolizes the end of life's cycle, reflecting death, decay, and the loss of vitality. In literature, tragedy focuses on the fall or defeat of the hero, often emphasizing human suffering, and the limits of human power.

Winter represents the darkest point in the cycle of life and seasons the time when the hero confronts forces beyond their control. This ties directly to the idea of irony and tragedy that often ends with failure —The tragic hero moves from the illusion of freedom to the reality of necessity. (Frye, 1957, p. 208)

### **c- key Elements of the Mythos of Winter: Tragedy**

#### **1- The Fall of the Hero:**

In tragedy, the hero often begins in a high position but experiences a downfall due to internal or external forces. This can be caused by a flaw in character (hamartia), fate, or societal forces, leading to an irreversible defeat or death.

#### **2- Human Suffering:**

The focus on suffering is central to tragedy. The hero's struggle often results in suffering and a recognition of their own limitations. This aligns with the bleakness of winter.

#### **3- Inevitable Defeat:**

In tragedies, the hero is often powerless against greater forces whether they are fate, the gods, or societal pressures. This defeat reflects the darkness and coldness of winter, where hope fades, and death is unavoidable.

#### **4- Catharsis:**

One of the primary functions of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to evoke pity and fear in the audience, resulting in catharsis and purging of these emotions. The tragic experience allows

the audience to reflect on the human condition, life's limitations, and the inevitability of suffering and death.

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### **5- The Hero's Awareness (Anagnorisis):**

In many tragedies, there is a moment of recognition or awareness (anagnorisis) where the hero understands their fate, flaw, or the forces arrayed against them. This often happens too late to change the outcome, emphasizing the irony and powerlessness of the hero.

### **d- Phases of the Mythos of Winter**

Frye outlines different phases of the tragic myth, showing how stories move from idealized worlds (like romance) to darker and more realistic portrayals of human existence. These phases are progressively more disillusioned and dark:

#### **1- The Hero's Downfall:**

A noble character faces challenges that lead to their inevitable fall.

#### **2- The Death Struggle:**

The hero's defeat becomes apparent, and they must confront their tragic destiny.

#### **3- The Isolation of the Hero:**

The hero is increasingly isolated from the world, symbolizing their alienation or estrangement from society.

#### **4- Death or Defeat:**

The hero's story ends in literal or symbolic death, signifying the completion of their fall and the overarching themes of loss, failure, or futility.

#### **5- Irony and Satire:**

Frye notes that as the tragic myth moves deeper into the Mythos of Winter captures the essence of tragedy by focusing on the decay, defeat, and limitations that human beings .it portrays also alienation, disillusionment, inevitable failure and the darker side of human experience, where the hero cannot escape the consequences of their actions or the indifferent universe they inhabit It reflects the dark, and cold aspects of life, where heroes often face insurmountable obstacles, their fall or suffering serving as a mirror for the audience's reflection on human nature and fate.

For Frye, the difference between Romance and Tragedy is not just thematic but also structural. Romance follows a rising arc from disorder to order, from separation to union, from trial to triumph while Tragedy follows a descending arc, from success to failure, from order to disorder, from community to isolation.

In Romance, the hero's quest leads to renewal . The narrative typically involves overcoming obstacles to reach an idealized goal, such as love, honor, or divine favor. In Tragedy, the hero's fall is inevitable, brought about by a combination of internal flaws and external pressures, leading to alienation and often death. Frye's theory suggests that these two mythoi Romance and Tragedy are opposite poles of the human experience. While Romance reflects the possibility of overcoming adversity and achieving fulfillment, Tragedy underscores the fragility of life and the inevitability of suffering and loss.

Frye's theory helps to explain why many literary works incorporate both romantic and tragic elements, showing the complexity of human experience. For instance, even in romantic stories, there are often moments of near-defeat or loss, while in tragic stories, there are moments of hope before the final downfall. Frye sees this relation between the two mythoi as central to understanding the structure of many literary genres. He writes: "Romance and tragedy reflect two contrasting but equally essential aspects of human existence: the struggle for identity and purpose in a hostile world, and the inevitable confrontation with forces that transcend human effort" (1957, p. 213).

In Northrop Frye's theory, Romance and Tragedy are not merely genres, but profound archetypal structures that reflect the cyclical nature of life itself. Romance, associated with the Mythos of Summer, symbolizes growth, triumph, and fulfillment, while Tragedy, aligned with the Mythos of Winter, represents decline, isolation, and death. Together, these mythoi offer a framework for understanding human beings, where life's aspirations are set against the inevitability of mortality.

## **2- Materials**

### **a- Theodore Dreiser Biography**

Theodore Dreiser was an American novelist and journalist known for his naturalist and realist works. He was born on August 27, 1871, in Terre Haute, Indiana, to John Paul Dreiser, a German immigrant, and Sarah Maria (née Schanab), a Czech Mennonite from Dayton, Ohio. He was the ninth of ten surviving children. The author's childhood was marked by poverty and frequent moves between small Indiana towns and Chicago. His father was often unemployed and subscribed to a strict Roman Catholicism, while his mother was gentle and compassionate. Dreiser attended parochial and public schools, but his formal education was limited. He attended

Indiana University for a year (1889-1890) without graduating. He began his career as a newspaper reporter in Chicago in 1892 and worked his way to the East Coast. He wrote for several newspapers, including the Chicago Globe and the Pittsburgh Dispatch, and contributed to various magazines.

Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in 1900. Although initially suppressed due to its erotic and moral frankness, it received critical acclaim in Britain and later in America. In his novels, Dreiser often explored the social problems arising from rapid industrialization in America. His works featured characters who succeeded despite a lack of a firm moral code and literary situations that resembled studies of nature rather than tales of choice and agency.

Some of Dreiser's notable novels include *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), *An American Tragedy* (1925), and *The Bulwark* (1946).

### **b- Summary of the Novel *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser**

In August 1889, Caroline Meeber boards a train at her family home in Columbia City and travels to Chicago to live with her older sister, Minnie, and Minnie's husband. During the long train ride, she meets a handsome young traveling salesman named Charles Drouet. Shy, she perceives him as the epitome of wealth and influence. When the train arrives in Chicago, she and Drouet make plans to meet again the following week so that he can show her the sights of the city. Carrie soon finds a job running a machine in a shoe factory and gives most of her meager salary to the Hansons for room and board. One day, after an illness costs her job, she encounters Drouet again. He persuades her to leave her dull, constricted life and move in with him. As time passes, Carrie realizes that Drouet is not nearly the ideal figure she had first imagined. He is egotistical and insensitive, but he is also kind and generous, so she accepts her situation

graciously. Drouet takes it upon himself to "educate" the untutored girl in the ways of society, teaching her to dress and behave according to fashion.

One evening, the young couple is visited by George Hurstwood, a friend of Drouet's and the manager of a "way-up, truly swell saloon." He is mature and attractive, and he finds Carrie naive and pretty. The two are struck by an instantaneous fascination for each other and begin to see each other frequently. Eventually, Drouet discovers that Carrie and Hurstwood have been seeing a great deal of each other, prompting him to move out of the flat to frighten her. Hurstwood's wife, meanwhile, a shrewd and selfish woman, accuses him of having an affair and initiates divorce proceedings against him.

One night, when Hurstwood stays late in his office to finish some paperwork, he discovers that the safe has been left unlocked, containing over ten thousand dollars. As he debates whether to take the money, the door of the safe slams shut while he holds the entire amount in his hands. Frightened, he decides to flee. He rushes to Carrie's flat, tells her that Drouet has been injured and wishes to see her, and whisks her away with him on a train to Canada.

Carrie is repelled by Hurstwood now, having learned from Drouet that he is married. Hurstwood argues that he has left his wife to be with Carrie. She believes him and agrees to remain with him if he will marry her. In Canada, Hurstwood is tracked down by a private detective and returns most of the stolen money on the promise that his employers will not prosecute him.

The couple marries in a hasty ceremony, although the marriage is not valid. They continue on to New York, where they find a comfortable apartment. Hurstwood is forced to invest the little money he has retained in a second-rate saloon, and he and Carrie settle into a

routine existence in New York, never going out or meeting anyone. Hurstwood's business venture fails, and he finds himself unable to secure employment. Conditions become so difficult that Carrie decides to find work. Eventually, she secures a part as a chorus girl in a Broadway opera. Her fortunes rise steadily, and after a few years, Carrie gains fame and fortune as a stage comedienne. Hurstwood, however, continues to decline until he becomes a Bowery tramp and ultimately commits suicide.

At the time of Hurstwood's suicide, Carrie has gained all that she had hoped for: wealth, finery, and prestige. Nevertheless, she remains unsatisfied, always pondering the vagaries of fortune that make her desire something new and indefinable. It is clear that she will never attain the happiness she dreams of.

### **c- Willa Cather's Biography**

Willa Cather was an American author who was born on December 7, 1873 in Virginia and she died on April 24, 1947 in New York . Her father who was called Charles Cather ,was an Irish man of Virginia and her mother who was called Marry Virginia Cather .

Willa Cather faced difficulties at her early age to go to study in Virginia .When she was nine years old ,she and her family moved from Virginia to Webster country . She graduated from high school at the age of sixteen and she graduated from the university of Nebraska at the age of twenty two . She was a journalist and editor and a teacher before devoting herself to writing novels .Her notable writings include : *O Pioneers!* ( 1913),*My Antonia* ( 1918) , *The Professor's house and death comes for the Archbishop* (1927) , *A Lost Lady* (1923) ,*My Mortal Enemy* (1926), *Sapphira and Slave Girl* (1940) .

Throughout her career , Willa Cather received various honors and awards , including the

Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1923 for her book *One of Ours* . In 1925 , The American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded her the Gold Medal for fiction .

#### **d- Summary of the Novel A Lost Lady by Willa Cather**

A Lost Lady is a novel set in America which is written by Willa Cather,. The novel was published in 1923 and narrates the life of a couple living in the western town of SweetWater. The story is told by a young boy named Niel Herbert, who focuses on Marian Forrester, the wife of Daniel Forrester. Her husband is older than her, but she loves him. Marian Forrester is described by Niel Herbert as an elegant, beautiful, and gracious woman. Throughout the story, Marian, a wealthy married woman, is pursued by a variety of suitors. Niel, who is younger than her, falls in love with her as a boy because of her charm and grace. Captain Forrester and his wife have a lovely home in SweetWater, where they host parties, inviting businessmen and families, including Niel and his uncle, Judge Pommeroy. One day, The Forrester family organizes a party, and Niel and his uncle attend. Niel discovers that Mrs. Forrester has a lover, Frank Ellinger, a businessman. Captain Forrester receives a telegram informing him that a bank in which he is heavily invested has declared bankruptcy. He calls his lawyer, Judge Pommeroy, and leaves home to find a solution. During his absence, Mrs. Forrester engages in an affair with Frank Ellinger, which Niel accidentally witnesses. This incident changes Niel's perception of her. When Captain Forrester returns home, he informs his wife about his financial decline. After returning, Captain Forrester suffers a stroke but survives. Niel decides to leave SweetWater to study architecture. Following the financial decline of the Forresters, their lives change and deteriorate. Niel returns to the town and decides to visit the Forrester family, only to find that Mr. Forrester has aged, with signs of sadness on his face, while Mrs. Forrester remains a beautiful young woman who seems to enjoy her life. Captain Forrester suffers another stroke and

experiences a decline in health, but this time Mrs. Forrester is unable to care for her husband because she is unaccustomed to such difficult situations. Niel decides to take a year off from his studies to help the Forrester family, even as he begins to change his perception of Mrs. Forrester. After suffering two strokes, Mr. Forrester dies. Marian becomes isolated from society after her husband's death, and the townspeople gossip about her for inviting and organizing parties with young men. Niel Herbert is angered by her actions, feeling she has lost her moral values. When Niel decides to return to school, he goes to say goodbye to Marian but catches her flirting with Ivy Peters, who bought her land and forced her from her home. Niel leaves without saying goodbye. After a few years, Niel meets an old friend from SweetWater, who informs him that Mrs. Forrester has died after moving to California and marrying an Englishman.

### III. Results

This part of our dissertation is concerned with the major findings and results we have reached and we come to after studying and deeply explored in Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Lady* this comparative study highlighted how Dreiser and Cather represented the modern woman's struggle within American changing , both characters followed morally ambiguous journeys and are motivated by personal desire, our analysis focused on three central elements: characterization, plot and setting .

In the first chapter, Both works portrayed the protagonists challenging traditional social norms, illustrating how their personal development is deeply influenced and shaped by environmental, social, and economic conditions. Carrie and Marian each undergo a departure from innocence, marked by encounters with male characters who acted as helpers ,While Carrie's ambition took her upward socially despite moral compromises, Marian's charm and social prestige could not protect her from decline Male figures such as Drouet and Hurstwood for Carrie, and Captain Forrester and Ivy Peters for Marian, revealed how patriarchal structures in both novels restricted and enabled women's agency. This analysis also showed how environmental, social, and economic conditions shaped protagonists identities and relationships .

The second chapter investigated the plot mirroring the evolution of the heroines, highlighting key moments that marked turning points in their development and transformation, such as decisions, encounters, and losses, reflecting Frye's mythos of romance and tragedy and Carrie's story moved from naive aspiration to ironic survival, while Marian's journey is tragic, ending in moral and social collapse. These plots revealed not only individual choices but also the influence of broader cultural and economic forces.

The third chapter examined the setting, revealing how space and environment functioned symbolically and psychologically in the heroines' journeys. It examined how urban and rural spaces, houses, and social milieus reflected the heroines' desires, illusions, and eventual disillusionment, contributing to their journeys relying on The "Green World", the central concept in Frye's theory of romance. It represented the magical space contrasting with a corrupted world. A space where the hero or heroine experienced transformation, trials, or self-discovery but yielded the return to society and tragic fate.

Overall, this comparative study demonstrated that while both Dreiser and Cather portrayed women struggling for agency and fulfilment, their narratives diverged in rise and decline. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* offers a critique of urban modernity, while Cather's *A Lost Lady* criticised a lost ideal through Marian's fall. Both works revealed the women's desires in a changing America, illustrating the transition from romantic idealism to harsh disillusionment that defined the early twentieth-century.

## IV. Discussion

### Chapter one: The Study of characterization

In this chapter, we will examine Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* to analyze the aspects of romance and tragedy. Both Dreiser and Cather vividly explore these themes through their protagonists, Carrie Meeber and Marian Forrester, each highlighting the transition from idealistic beginnings to disillusioned realities. Our analysis will draw upon Northrop Frye's theory of literary mythoi: Summer (Romance) and Winter (Tragedy) as outlined in his work *Anatomy of Criticism*.

In addition to the protagonists, this chapter will also consider other key characters: Hurstwood, Drouet, Ivy Peters, Captain Forrester, and Niel Herbert to highlight their influence in both protagonists' journey and contribution to their transformation.

In *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady*, both protagonists embark on journeys marked by desire, ambition, and longing for a better life, even though their origins and social backgrounds differ. The traits evident in Carrie's character are also found in Marian, which create important points of comparison. Each woman is driven by a quest for fulfillment and transformation, motivated by desire but limited by social norms. Both protagonists in both novels exemplify the romantic pattern outlined by Northrop Frye in "The Mythos of Summer," where both characters are motivated by an idealized vision of life. Frye also emphasized the heroine's early innocence, often depicted through rural or pastoral upbringing that symbolizes purity. This is evident in both Carrie and Marian, where the heroine is initially portrayed as innocent and romantic.

Theodore Dreiser introduces Caroline Meeber in a way that portrays her as a

hopeful romantic protagonist. She begins her journey as an innocent character of life's complexities and harsh realities. The narrator describes her initial departure as follows:

When Caroline Meeber boarded the afternoon train for Chicago, she was as far from being anything the city was known for as was possible. Her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small paper box lunch, and a yellow leather snap purse. (1900, p. 28).

In this opening passage from *Sister Carrie*, Caroline Meeber is shown to be innocent, naive young woman who is exposing herself to the immense, strange world of Chicago. The banality of her cheap and accessories highlights her lower-class roots and lack of preparedness for city life. She embodies the figure of the innocent youth. This symbolic departure marks the beginning of the quest for fulfillment and self realization, a quest for identity and self discovery. Frye describes the romance myth as a shift from innocence toward experience, and Carrie's journey reflects this structure.

Similarly, Cather introduces Marian as a legendary figure who embodies the romantic ideal of feminine beauty and grace. Niel Herbert recalls how Marian first appeared in the old Forrester mansion, crowned in a white dress and radiating with "youth and promise" (1923, p. 170). Her arrival into the small town of Sweet Water marks her "birth" in the community. She is referred to as a lady of romance. Marian is portrayed as an idealized figure from the beginning as Cather depicts:

She was always spoken of as 'Mrs. Forrester,' not as Marian, or Mrs. Captain Forrester. She was indeed the gracious lady of the house, the favorite of the town, the woman who gave Sweet Water its distinction. (1923, p. 02)

Like the —Innocent Youth, she is perceived through the lens of idealism. Frye's romantic heroine often appears first as an idealized figure Marian fits this perfectly. She is presented as a symbol of beauty and honor.

Unlike Carrie, Marian belongs to a higher social class admired by the town of SweetWater for her beauty and grace, she is already what Carrie aspires and dreams to become .

Both women become more and more shaped by their desire leaving behind the purity of their origins and their innocence, longing not only for beauty but also for freedom ,self-discovery and status.

Carrie's desires at the beginning revolve around a desire to escape from her lower-class origins and a desire for upward mobility. When Carrie arrives in Chicago, she desires to escape her town. She desires a life of comfort, admiration, and security that can be accomplished by beauty and the right connections, as the narrator notes:

She was perfectly certain that there was happiness. If she could but stroll up on a broad walk, cross that rich entrance-way, which to her was of the beauty of a jewel, and sweep in grace and luxury to possession and command—oh! how quickly would sadness flee; how, in an instant, would the heartache end. (1900,p.127)

In this passage Carrie envisions herself surrounded by wealth and power, as she represents in her fantasies that she strolls up a broad walk and enters a rich entrance-way. In Carrie's vision, happiness is dependent on external circumstances, wealth and status, and the objects of success. The broad walk and the rich entrance way symbolize her understanding of luxury and success as gates to forms of satisfaction.

Carrie is thinking that once being rich , she would be happy, her sadness would disappear and vanish and life would be filled with happiness and enjoyment. This reflects Carrie's initial misunderstanding of happiness, in that she believes it is by having things and living in comfort, and it is not an exploration of internal peace or personal growth.

While Carrie's initial focus is on wealth and social status, her desires soon deepen into a longing for love and emotional security. Theodore Dreiser evokes Carrie's desire for love and emotional safety through a monologue she delivers while on stage in *Sister Carrie*. The speech highlights not only her emotions but also creates a moment that stirs the audience's emotions, collapsing the distinctions between her acting and reality. She states:

Remember, she concluded, tenderly, "love is all a woman has to give," and she laid a strange, sweet accent on the all, "but it is the only thing which God permits us to carry beyond the grave. (1900,p.190).

This powerful performance reveals Carrie's belief in the purity of love. She still has a very naïve understanding of desire. According to Frye, romantic characters pursue idealized goals. Carrie's seeking for upward mobility through beauty and wealth marks her as a typical figure of romance.

Just as Carrie who was influenced by her desire for mobility and fulfillment, Marian is also shaped by her desire. Marian longed for preserving her image and status, to preserve the honor and the grace of the world she presented at the beginning her first portrayal as the admired woman representing grace beauty as Cather describes :

Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; of her eyes, lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little mocking! (1923, p. 38).

It portrays Marian as a figure of illusion and grace. She seems more intelligent and alive than others, like a movie star or royalty, gathering others to her. Marian becomes a figure of romantic idealism, the kind of heroine that *Northrop Frye* might place in the Mythos of Summer (Romance): radiant, enchanting, and elevated above ordinary life.

By time, Marian's desires changed for freedom and fulfillment that exists outside of her identity as a loyal wife. Marian illustrates the longing for the world as it exists beyond the role of wife as epitomized by her grace and charm, However as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Marian has desires that are much larger than those confined to her marriage to Captain

Forrester, and she expresses a desire for —life on any terms‖(1923,p.90) which represents a need for independence, autonomy, and a voice beyond the limited sphere of her defined societal role. Cather asserted:

It was what he most held against Mrs. Forrester; that she was not willing to immolate herself, like the widow of all these great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged; that she preferred life on any terms. (p.90).

This quote highlights Marian's unwillingness to accept the constraints of widowhood to which society expects her to abide. More surprisingly, it demonstrates her decision to find life and autonomy standing outside of her marriage. Her Yearning for "life on any terms" is representative of her struggle for agency and autonomy. This captures Marian's refusal to be trapped by the past or sacrifice herself for ideals.—on any terms,‖ beyond the traditional expectations. It's a powerful expression of her inner rebellion. In this context Adhikari In her research *Subversion of Female Stereotype in Willa Cather's A Lost Lady* believes that :

Marian's character challenges the idealized feminine stereotype by exposing her inner conflicts and dissatisfaction with domestic confinement, positioning her as a symbol of female autonomy and rebellion (2011, p. 45).

According to Adhikari ,Marian is admired for her grace and beauty, but her patriarchal restrictions on her independence are demonstrated by her marriage to Captain Forrester. There is a deep conflict between her inner desire for independence, self-determination and the way she presents herself in public as the gracious wife (her exterior image). Marian symbolizes the conflict experienced by many women who aspired to autonomy within a restrictive social order, her actions highlight her challenge to the traditional feminine ideal.

Similarly, Sharon R. Barba in her dissertation *Willa Cather: A Feminist Study* addresses this detachment from traditional ties by arguing : "Marian Forrester embodies a woman caught between traditional roles and emerging modern freedoms, illustrating the tensions inherent in the New Woman's quest for identity " (1973, p. 112), this analysis reveals Marian as a figure of new

woman and portrays the shift from traditional norms to the modern woman. Northrop Frye's theory in *Anatomy of criticism* defines romance as "mythos of summer" which represents an idealized world .

The protagonist embarks on a quest, often overcoming great challenges to achieve their goals and ultimate fulfillment, the hero is marked by slow beginnings, journey or departure full of challenges and trial which end with triumph, in *Sister Carrie* Theodore Dreiser portrayed this young naive woman from working class as a protagonist her journey full of many aspects and patterns of mythos of summer from her beginnings and becoming a famous actress challenging social conditions, gender roles, and desires. Her symbolic growth, however, remains emotionally empty. The same romantic ideal, though differently treated, appears also in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*.

Dreiser fits Frye's conception of the romantic hero's "departure" Carrie leaves her small-town life behind in search for better life when she boards a train from Columbia City to Chicago this represents her modest beginnings as a hero embarking into the unknown. According to Frye, this kind of start represents a possible change and symbolic rebirth. Chicago becomes Carrie's "green world," a place of danger and opportunity where her material, emotional, and artistic desires start to appear. Carrie is driven by a strong desire for beauty and financial satisfaction. She visualizes success and happiness as she looks at elegant clothing and luxurious decor.. Dreiser writes, —She was perfectly certain that there was happiness (1900,p. 127), Carrie sees Chicago as a promised land which marks her idealization. This idealization is shown in her relationships with the male characters, Drouet and Hustwood, believing that these relationships will bring her the happiness she seeks and an exceptional importance of love.

Carrie agency, however, is still limited. Frye notes that the "passive phase" of early romance is characterized by the hero or heroine being acted upon rather than acting. As the novel progresses the transformation of Carrie fits what Frye calls the final phase of the romance quest: recognition, authority, and the promise of fulfillment. Her theatrical success marks her symbolic triumph she "was no longer ordered but requested". (1900, p. 415)

Marian does fit Frye's romance myth in some ways; she was idealized by others, especially Niel, much like the romantic heroine who embodies beauty, mystery, and nobility. She inspires him, and he considers her as "lady of the castle." She embodies the values of dignity, sophistication, and tradition. She lives in the symbolic world Sweet Water and the Forrester estate are examples of a symbolic world of honor and beauty that evokes the "high summer" of Frye's mythology, a world that was once heroic, and beautiful.

In *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather Marian Forester is an idealized figure particularly in Niel's eyes, Marian is a symbol of nobility, elegance. Niel formed an idealized vision and romantic notions about Mrs. Forrester. It was narrated: —For the next few years Niel saw very little of Mrs. Forrester. She was an excitement that came and went with summer (1923, p. 31). This statement describes Niel's fleeting infatuation with Mrs. Forrester in his youth. It also highlights Niel's attachment to Mrs. Forrester and his conception of her as an unattainable seasonal pleasure. This depiction matches the literary portrayal of romance in the modern novel, through which love and adoration are related to the theme of unattainability and illusion.

Both novels represent a complex portrait of the romantic heroine, one that is influenced by the needs of modernity, desire, and change. The protagonists are associated with ideals, charm, and the prospect of fulfillment in the —Mythos of Romance. But as their paths develop

and fall into the tragedy — Mythos of Winter II, their identity and ideals collapse.

Frye explains why many literary works incorporate both romantic and tragic elements, showing the complexity of human experience. For instance, even in romantic stories, there are often moments of near-defeat or loss, while in tragic stories, there are moments of hope before the final downfall. Frye sees this relationship between the two mythoi as central to understanding the structure of many literary genres. He writes:

Romance and tragedy reflect two contrasting but equally essential aspects of human existence: the struggle for identity and purpose in a hostile world, and the inevitable confrontation with forces that transcend human effort. (Frye, 1957, p. 213).

Romance and Tragedy represent two different parts of what it means to be human, romance which symbolizes the hopeful part, the adventure full of difficulties that end often with triumph and success and achieving goals while tragedy represents the inevitable defeat, the loss, isolation and death. Both romance and tragedy reflect the two complex sides of humanity, one of hope and dream, success and fulfillment and one of harsh complexities of real life.

Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* provides a strong example of the balance between Romance and Tragedy. As Carrie moves upward in society, the novel shifts from the idealism of the Romance to disillusionment aligned with Frye's Winter phase of tragedy. Carrie becomes a person who ultimately loses traditional moral values because she was driven by her desire for success, ambition, and social status in a rapidly modernizing, materialistic society. Dreiser captures this ambiguity when he writes: "Self-interest with her was high but not strong. It was nevertheless her guiding characteristic." (1900, p. 29).

This statement captures an important feature in Carrie's character. She has become passive into her own self-preservation and promotion. Carrie's moral sense is ambiguous not

because she is selfish, but for the simple reason that she does not have any coherent moral-ethical or emotional basis. Carrie's decisions to leave Drouet, to become a part of Hurstwood's downfall, and the like illustrates that her thinking isn't driven by villainy, but rather by emotional disengagement, confusion, and an obedient and habitual ambition.

While Carrie seems innocent, her desire for romance leads to tragic consequences for others, especially Hurstwood. Her focus on her own dreams blinds her from the harm she causes for others, without realizing it, her choices have real effects, even though she doesn't understand them or mean to cause pain. *Sister Carrie* ends with a sad reminder that material success feels empty when it lacks real human connection. Dreiser writes:

Know, then, that for you is neither surfeit nor content. In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream of such happiness as you may never feel. (1900, p.462).

Despite her financial success, Carrie reflects on the emptiness of her accomplishments while sitting by herself in her rocking chair which conveys the tragic pointlessness of her romantic pursuits. She has fulfilled her dreams but discovered them to be meaningless. Carrie remains emotionally isolated, experiencing loneliness and dissatisfaction despite her achievements. This isolation, also reflected in her various identities (Drouet's mistress, Hurstwood's common-law wife, stage performer "Carrie Madenda"), led her to lose touch with her original self. Each transformation, while bringing her closer to her romantic ideal, distances her from authentic existence. The tragic irony is that in pursuing self-realization, she achieves self-alienation. Her relentless pursuit of success and material wealth, while initially driven by genuine desire, ultimately leads to a hollow existence. Every accomplishment only reveals new desires: owning expensive clothing makes one want better apartments; being successful in amateur theater makes one hungry for professional recognition; and becoming famous makes one

desire for more profound artistic expression. The tragic impossibility of fulfilling romantic aspirations is suggested by this never-ending cycle.

Geber in his critical study of *Sister Carrie* describes the novel as "a story of longing and desire, weakness and strength, success and defeat "(1964,p. 45) it captures the emotional and thematic complexity of the novel Geber asserts that Carrie's journey is a series of contrasting experiences . Her seeking for beauty, confort, and upward mobility reveals the powerful influence of desire while her dependence on men reveals her weakness,at the same time her success and resilience accompanied by emotional emptiness suggests that each triumph Carries a corresponding defeat . Her initial desire represents a romantic vision of personal transformation, in line with Frye's mythos of Summer.

Yet as she gains strength and independence, she also confronts moral ambiguity and emotional isolation. Her rise to fame is successful, but empty , reflecting the descent of the heroine into Frye's Winter.

Despite their coming from different backgrounds Marian Forrester and Carrie Meeber both represent the modern heroine's journey from romanticized beginnings to sad realities (tragedy). Carrie's path progresses from hopeful dreams to an empty celebrity, where success is devoid of value and moral clarity. Marian also began as a beautiful woman and became a romantic memory. Marian Forrester represents the move from an idealized past to a present that is filled with disillusionment.

She is first presented as a charming and graceful figure, a fantasized woman seen through the perspective of Niel Herbert's young ardor and she signifies the genteel tradition of the American frontier elegance and honor. However After her husband's death, Marian became left

without guidance, as Niel observes and declares —But without him, she was like a ship without ballast, blown hither and thither by each wind. (1923,p.81) The metaphor captures how her identity and meaning were intimately tied to her role as a wife. By losing her husband she also loses her status, her identity, even herself.

Regardless of the rapidly advancing displacement around her, Marian is compelled to take action in order to survive. She interacts with men like Ivy Peters, who symbolizes the emerging materialism and opportunism that contradict the importance of honor and ideals. In marrying Ivy, Marian not only breaks with ideals but also loses her identity, and embraces social decay.

Cather shows how an old cultural ideal falls apart. Marian's decline turns the romantic heroine into a figure of modern Tragedy. In Frye's terms, this shift from Romance to Tragedy means moving into a world that has lost its ideals and is marked by isolation and alienation.

In both *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady*. The female heroine ends tragically in isolation even though they have achieved triumph, Carrie remains alone in her rocking chair, and is twisted into isolation from her ideas of beauty and possibility. As Frye points out, the moment the external indicators of —success separate from internal meaning, "there is no achievement to discover." There is a parallel leap from fullness to disillusionment.

Marian Forrester, once the idealized figure of romantic imagination for Niel Herbert. She is transformed from enchantment and grace, to isolation and death. Marian's story also ends in survival at the cost of the ideals she once represented. Ivy Peters marks the symbolic death of the romantic world she represented. This new world is colder, and more cynical than she originally represented.

Both Willa Cather, and Theodore Dreiser, tell the story of the modern tragic heroine who

were idealized but they remain alone, isolated. Carrie Meeber and Marian Forrester from the perspective of Northrop Frye's concepts of romance and tragedy, both women represent heroines whose quests are shaped by illusions and lead into disillusion.

The women embark on quests to escape their respective social locations Carrie, to become a material success and achieve independence, and Marian, to escape her actual social identity while preserving her romanticized past. But, through Frye's lens, we see the transformation of their quests, they are instead limited by their gendered societal limitations.

### **1- Supporting Characters in the Heroines' Journeys**

The men surrounding both protagonists are agents of both assistance and obstruction, in accordance with Frye's ideas of helpers and blocking figures depicted in the romantic quest.

Both *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser and *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather depict female protagonists whose development is shaped by romantic aspirations and disillusionment. Central to their maturation are male characters Drouet and Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*, and Captain Forrester Niel Herbert and Ivy Peters in *A Lost Lady* who initially act as benefactors by offering access to a more promising world.

Yet over time, these same figures become barriers to fulfillment, symbolizing the collapse of the romantic ideal. According to Northrop Frye's theory, such transitions reflect the movement from the mythos of Summer (romance), characterized by growth and possibility, to the mythos of Winter (tragedy and irony), marked by decline, loss, and the breakdown of ideals , Frye explains that romance is shaped by a dialectical structure in which characters are arranged around the central conflict and says :

The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on the conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the other characters tend to be distributed around this conflict. Thus we have characters who assist the hero, his friends, servants, and wise old men, and characters who oppose him, the villain and his followers.(1957, p. 187 )

This analysis explores how these characters function within Frye's cyclical framework, revealing the deeper symbolic structure beneath each protagonist's journey.

In *Sister Carrie* , Drouet initially appears as a charming and supportive figure in Carrie's life; his flashy appearance and easy confidence initially attract Carrie. He will also give her a way to escape from poverty. This willingness to help Carrie demonstrates romantic generosity providing not only material security but also emotional reassurance.

Drouet's praise and encouragement of Carrie's talents, opened doors for new opportunities , such as her first acting role, and inspired her ambitions. His influence marked the start of her awakening and self-definition. Dreiser in the novel claims:

Together they went. In the store they found that shine and rustle of new things which immediately laid hold of Carrie's heart. Under the influence of a good dinner and Drouet's radiating presence, the scheme proposed seemed feasible.(1900,p.90).

This passage reveals how Drouet's 'attention and generosity gives Carrie confidence and a feeling desirable , allowing her to see possibilities beyond her simple and modest life. Drouet's supportive gestures are not just gifts of material objects, Drouet appreciates her potential and exploits her ambition. Dreiser adds:

She conceived a true estimate of Drouet. To her, and indeed to all the world, he was a nice, good-hearted man. There was nothing evil in the fellow. He gave her the money out of a good heart out of a realisation of her want. (1900,p.71)

However Drouet's character is also limited. He failed to provide an emotional connection with Carrie. When Carrie begins to realize her own value and desires, it becomes apparent in her growing feelings of dissatisfaction with Drouet's character and the relationship. Drouet cannot

share in supporting Carrie's ambitions, and she realizes his love is conditioned. Dreiser shows this limitation and dependency in this passage :

She saw what Drouet liked; in a vague way she saw where he was weak. It lessens a woman's opinion of a man when she learns that his admiration is so pointedly and generously distributed. She sees but one object of supreme compliment in this world, and that is herself. (1900,p.116).

Carrie's increasing dissatisfaction, along with her recognition of Drouet's inability to support her, pushes her to seek for deeper connections and opportunities that align with her developing identity .

Hurstwood is a more complicated character than Drouet. From the beginning, he presents himself more suitable to Carrie due to his wealth. He impresses her with .His sophistication, making her comfortable, while Drouet's unsophistication makes Carrie uncomfortable, his manipulative tendencies and eventual moral decline reveal a darker side to his character .

Dreiser depicts Hurstwood as a romantic figure, a self-made man who has achieved social grace and worldly knowledge through his own efforts, a master of his social environment, someone who —knew the theatrical managers, the newspaper men, the actors, the politicians (1900,p. 89). His position reveals someone who has transcended his origins through force of personality and social skill.

His affair with Carrie demonstrates the romantic notion of love as a force that transcends conventional social boundaries — his waning desire —rekindled by her —bloom and unsophistication which is the charm of youth (1900,p.75) Her presence allows him the opportunity to feel young again.

Despite being married and established, he pursues Carrie with the intensity of a romantic hero, believing that love justifies abandoning social obligations. His courtship of Carrie through

carriage rides and restaurant visits represents the romantic ideal of love. Hurstwood and Carrie's attraction toward one another is intensified by their mutual dissatisfaction in their current relationships, Hurstwood with his wife and Carrie with Drouet.

The important difference is that Hurstwood is aware of Carrie's unhappiness with Drouet and uses it to his advantage. However Hurstwood's character and action, such as abducting Carrie under the guise of protecting her expressed desires, exemplify how he, at certain points, can harm and restrict Carrie's autonomy and growth. Dreiser adds :

She arose and tried to push out into the aisle—anywhere. She knew she had to do something. Hurstwood laid a gentle hand on her. 'Sit still, Carrie,' he said. 'Sit still. It won't do you any good to get up here. Listen to me and I'll tell you what I'll do. Wait a moment.' (1900, p.261).

This passage reveals how Hurstwood's actions that seem concerned are completely determined and selfish. By extracting Carrie from her known world, he voids her independence and growth, thereby becoming a burden himself through his own degradation and limiting her way to be herself.

In *Sister Carrie*, Hurstwood's decline profoundly impacts Carrie's realization that her pursuit of happiness through him is futile. Initially, Hurstwood offers Carrie stability and sophistication, but his inability to maintain his own stability leads to a downward spiral that entangles Carrie in a web of dependency.

As Hurstwood's fortunes wane, Carrie observes his apathy and lack of effort to improve their situation, leading her to reassess their relationship. A poignant moment capturing Carrie's disillusionment occurs when she reflects on Hurstwood's transformation:

These miserable details ate the heart out of Carrie. They blackened her days and grieved her soul. Oh, how this man had changed! All day and all day, here he sat, reading his papers. The world seemed to have no attraction. (1923, p.333).

Like Hurstwood, Captain Forrester in *A Lost Lady* belongs to a dying world. He is a respected man whose world is slowly breaking down. He is noble and represents the romantic ideals of the past. He is a successful railroad man, loving Marian in a way that makes her feel safe and protected. He belongs to a world of traditional values, which Marian clings to as she deals with significant change. As he recounts his journey, he said:

Because," he roused himself from his abstraction and looked about at the company, "because a thing that is dreamed of in the way I mean, is already an accomplished fact. All our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteader's and the prospector's and the contractor's. We dreamed of the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed of my place on the SweetWater." (1923,p.29).

Captain Forrester embodies the pioneering spirit, whose personal desires are closely related to the larger development of the American West. His character is opposed to the modern characters emerging in the novel, which highlights the shift from a world of dreams and principles to a world of pragmatism and change.

As Captain Forrester's story goes on, he becomes more and more a symbol for decline. The obsession with wealth and power, combined with his actual physical decline, symbolizes the decline of the romantic ideals Forrester once represented. Marian realizes her connection to Forrester is flawed as his stability is a delusion and his inability to adapt to the world around them is frightening. Marian Forrester, observing her husband's transformation, expresses her discomfort with his passive acceptance of aging: —How can anybody like to see time visibly devoured? (1923,p.58)

While Captain Forrester provides a semblance of security, he also limits Marian's growth. His inability to engage with the evolving societal dynamics leaves Marian feeling trapped in a fading world. As she witnesses his decline, she grapples with her own identity and desires,

ultimately leading to her disillusionment with the life he represents .

Both men, Hurstwood and Captain Forester begin their stories as successful and admired members of society, but they fall in different ways , Hurstwood through moral and financial collapse, whereas Forrester declines physically, along with the loss of ideals he exemplifies.

Forrester remains a respectable man, unlike Hurstwood who becomes more selfish and manipulative especially towards Carrie. Both decline over time, but Hurstwood's end is dishonorable, while Forrester's decline is tragically noble.

On the other hand, Drouet is a charming opportunist, a careless and self-centered man who has more in common with Ivy Peters, Marian's later partner; both representatives of the modern generation, which lacks honor.

Unlike Captain Forrester's, Niel's admiration for Marian derives from the lens of youthful idealism. Since childhood, he has imagined her as a representation of beauty, grace, and the lost romance of the American frontier. As he grows older, he is constantly forced to confront reality .

Niel is portrayed as a young boy from a middle-class background, raised by his uncle Judge Pommeroy. he is very different from the wealth and emotional complexity of Madame Forrester and her world ,He has been enchanted by Marian since he was a boy, wrongly believing she truly matched the ideal he imagined, which fulfilled his childhood dreams and romantic ideas. Niel's infatuation is shown in this passage:—She had always the power of suggesting things much lovelier than herself, as the perfume of a single flower may call up the whole sweetness of spring. (1923,p.91).

Neil recognizes that Marian's attractiveness is not just her physical beauty, but is embodied in the ideas and feelings she represents. Although he struggles with her imperfections and contradictions, he recognizes the depth of appreciation she has given him for beauty and grace. In adulthood, he struggles with the fact that the dreams of his youth do not resemble the increasingly complex, imperfect life of Marian he is watching emerge.

Niel goes through a significant evolution from naive idealism to informed comprehension. He is initially drawn to Marian Forrester's beauty and elegance. Niel envisions her as a romantic and moral ideal.

However, as Niel becomes aware of her infidelity and the gradual dissolution of her marriage to Captain Forrester, he is compelled to reckon with the complexities of adult relationships, as well as the disheartening realities of human action. This internal struggle deeply unsettles Niel because Marian no longer embodies the nobility he previously associated with her.

Her loss of nobility not only reformulates his ideal of her, but signifies larger movements in society that challenge the values Niel has cherished. Niel's departure from Sweet Water ultimately reflects his painful, yet necessary transition from innocence to experience, or, the displacement of a youthful fantasy into adult wisdom. his recognition expresses his own personal loss of faith but also the notions discredited and forgotten by society. Niel's journey shows the loss of innocence and facing reality. This is captured in the line:—It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back "(1923,p.89)It also symbolizes the end of the ideals and values that were once represented by characters such as Captain Forrester. Ivy Peters is characterized in *A Lost Lady* as a vicious and ambitious being, and he is called —Poison Ivy(1923,p.10) because he acted cruelly . contrast to Captain Forrester in some regards a man of honor and dignity.

Ivy Peters, with his bold ambition, manipulative ways, and money-centered worldview, emerges as a person who rises from poverty to a successful lawyer, culminating in his control over the Forrester estate and marriage to Marian, signifies the triumph of materialism over traditional values. This shift is poignantly captured when Niel reflects: "Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything." (1923,p.56)

Ivy Peters' conflict with Niel Herbert epitomizes and crystallizes the broader cultural strife created during the transition from romantic idealism to cold, pragmatic modernism as captured in Ivy's transformation of the cherished marshland, a metaphor for the ravishment of beauty and rooted values as the march of industry continued on.

Characters in both novel move from a romantic world of promise, aspiration, and idealism to falling into moral failure, decline, or disillusionment. which align with Northrop Frye's theory particularly the transition from romance to tragedy Frye thinks that, characters often follow a symbolic cycle that begins with aspiration and ends in fall or disillusionment. This theory helps to illuminate the narrative structure in both *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady*, where characters shift from a romantic world of promise into tragic decline. He states: —The tragic hero moves from the illusion of freedom to the reality of necessity. (1957, p. 208)

According to Frye, Drouet serves at first as a romantic figure, he looks like "a charming guide figure" who assures personal growth and upward mobility at the beginning of the story. He gives Carrie an opportunity to escape her poverty and exposes her to a world of wealth and luxury introduces her to a new world through his influence. Carrie's desire and ambition become awakened he gave her an opportunity to self-discover and independence yet his inability

to support Carrie's deeper ambition marks the beginning of his fall and the transition from romance to tragedy where this illusion collapses he becomes an obstacle rather than a support for her.

Unlike Drouet, whose romantic potential declines quickly, Hurstwood represents a deeper and more tragic fall. He was first well respected and has a social status but experiences a gradual fall leading to his isolation, ruin, and suicide. He gave Carrie growth and freedom. His transformation from a successful manager to an unemployed, hopeless man reflects Frye's tragic mythos of Winter, in which the hero is isolated from society and loses the ability to take meaningful action.

While Hurstwood's fall is marked by shame and loss of dignity, Captain Forrester experienced a different kind of tragic fall at the beginning of the novel. Captain Forrester in *A Lost Lady* represents the mythos of summer; he was a powerful, honorable man who built a world of dreams. His name is associated with ideals like justice, power, and beauty. As he becomes physically unable to maintain control, he experiences a tragic fall and shifts to the mythos of winter. However, despite his decline, he retains nobility. Unlike Hurstwood, he still maintains dignity and authority that makes his decline tragic.

Niel Herbert is more in line with Northrop Frye's Second Phase of Romance, which is focused on the "Innocent Youth," in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*, he is depicted as a young man who was raised in a pastoral or rural environment and represents ideals of purity, hope, and romantic aspiration. Growing up in the tiny frontier town of Sweetwater, Niel is a perceptive and bright young man who at first sees Marian Forrester as a model of moral grace, beauty, and sophistication, a sort of romantic ideal. He views her admiration through an idealistic and

innocent lens.

Niel's romantic idealism is gradually destroyed. because he expects Marian and the Forresters to be something they're not. As he matures, he sees a romantic world shift into a modern tragedy, and his final departure from Sweet Water signifies the decline of idealism.

Neil aligns with Frye's concept of the innocence and youth he captures the shift Frye describes, from summer to winter, which marks the end of the romance and the beginning of the tragedy . On another hand ,Ivy Peters is introduced as a modern figure of power, devoid of nobility or imagination. His control over the Forrester estate and Marian herself portrays the tragic ending .He symbolizes the victory of Winter, and captures the death of the romantic dream, the decline of ideals.

In conclusion, Both protagonists Carrie Meeber and Marian Forrester reveal the complex shift from romance to tragedy. They both begin as innocent and romantic figures shaped by dreams of beauty, love, and social norms . Surrounded by men who support them and expose them to the moral compromises and social decay beneath their aspirations. These relationships reveal how personal desire and societal pressures transform the promise of romance into inevitable tragedy, reflecting the modern loss of innocence and the decline of ideals.

## Chapter two: The Study of the Plot

In this chapter we will deal with the study of the plot through Northrop Frye's theory of Romance and Tragedy and how the sequence of events reflect Fry's Mythos of summer and Mythos of winter .

According to Fry literary plots are considered as cyclical movements that mirror phases of human experiences from rise (romance) to decline (tragedy).

The romantic plot often begins with aspiration and ends in fulfillment or self-realization, The essential element of plot in romance is adventure. (1957, p. 186) while the tragic plot moves toward decline and the collapse of ideals.

In *Sister Carrie*, the protagonist rises from poverty to fame, yet her journey reveals the tragic irony of unfulfilled desire. Likewise, in *A Lost Lady*, Marian Forrester's world begins as a romantic ideal but gradually deteriorates, revealing the collapse of old values. Both narratives shift from Frye's mythos of Summer to the mythos of Winter, where ideals give way to isolation, irony, and disillusionment. —Tragedy exhibits a hero who becomes isolated and falls from a high position to despair. (1957, p. 207) .

Carrie Meeber, a young woman who travels from a small town to Chicago in pursuit of a better future . She begins in poverty and at the whim of societal dictates, becoming a successful actress but at the loss of her moral self and personal relationships. The novel also deals with ambition, desire, and harsh reality concerning life in the city, ultimately tracing a tragic path where Carrie does fulfill her dreams but remains unhappy and isolated

Carrie the naive girl of eighteen left her rural home and family to unknown vast city in search of fulfillment and opportunity "She was eighteen years age, bright, timid, and full of the illusions " (1900,p.28). Her departure whispers a new world to Chicago (a promised land) green world symbolizing her birth .This departure marks her entrance into a new world, a transition from the ordinary to the potentially extraordinary, echoing the romantic structure of a transformative journey.

Upon her arrival, her sister Minnie and her husband Sven Hanson took charge of Carrie but this hospitality was cold Minnie treated her as a more burden than as a welcomed guest ,Carrie was expected to contribute financially to the household when she lost her job due to illness and fatigue Dreiser wrote :

When she got up after three days, it was taken for granted that her position was lost. The winter was near at hand, she had no clothes, and now she was out of work (1900,p.64)

Dreiser highlighted how unsafe working-class jobs were, especially for women. Missing a few days due to illness leads to immediate dismissal, with no second chances or job security. the word "winter" symbolizes not only a literal cold but also hardships and emotional emptiness in addition to fear telling them thy truth because she knew they would not support ,their home lacked of warmth and emotional connection making Carrie feels unwanted Dreiser claims "Minnie was no companion for her sister" (1900,p.57) this reflect Carrie's isolation , this rejection appears when she leaves hanson home to live with Drouet there is no attempt to rescue or understand her .

She struggles to adapt to the harsh realities of urban life. Her early days in Chicago Were marked by rejection, illness, and near starvation which function as romantic trials, through which she gained resilience and awakened her potential .

Carrie's departure from her rural home to Chicago symbolizes the beginning of a classic romantic quest, fitting the Northrop Frye phase, the departure phase in the mythos of Summer.

Unlike Carrie, Marian's departure is symbolic rather than physical. In Frye's mythos of romance, departure marks the moment a character begins their journey, often into a new world or a transformative experience. For Marian, this departure happens not through leaving a place as Carrie leaves Chicago, but through her gradual emotional and moral detachment from the ideal world she once symbolized.

Her arrival into the small town of Sweet Water marks her —birth. Her idealized charm is emphasized in the story. She is referred to as a —lady of romance, her presence appears to have a great influence. Marian deeply connected to the nostalgic grandeur of the frontier aristocracy alongside her husband, Captain Daniel Forrester. Even though the world around them is changing, Marian maintains a calm, pastoral quality, as though she and her husband are still at the center of a stable and harmonious world as Neil observes: "She was the symbol of something, (1923, p.115) a figure who represents —a vanished age, a time when manners and ideals had a certain formality and grace (1923, p.111). Cather creates a romantic setting in which Marian serves as queen of a disappearing era.

However, this beautiful image, over time, shifts from romance to tragedy when seeking for freedom and self-realization.

Carrie's journey marks a transition. When she meets Charles Drouet, a charming salesman who functions as a helper, he rescues her from poverty, offering her material comfort and access to a new world, world of fashion, theater, and wealth, which becomes later her initiation into a sophisticated urban identity. Dreiser writes: "He gave her the money out of a good heart out of a

realisation of her want. ". (1900,p71) Drouet buys her clothes that shift her identity from poor country girl to an attractive urban woman ,these clothes give her the confidence to navigate new spaces, from restaurants to theaters, and to envision a self beyond her initial conditions.

Once she was settled with Mr. Drouet, living in his apartment and accepting his financial aids, She meets George Hurstwood another helper figure who offers her a taste of elite society and more complex emotional experiences .Her emotions were depicted as Dreiser claims: —Hurstwood’s glance was as effective as the spoken words of a lover, and more. They called for no immediate decision, and could not be answered. (1900,p. 131). This passage for instance, marks the beginning of Carrie’s infatuation with Mr hurstwood , His ability to secure her shown in the following passage in the train to New York positions him as a facilitator of her continued rise and growth "He paid for two tickets " (1900,p.293) This line shows Hurstwood taking charge of the logistics of their departure. He acts like a guide or protector, Dreiser adds :

On Sunday evening Carrie dined with him at a place he had selected in East Adams Street, and thereafter they took a cab to what was then a pleasant evening resort out on Cottage Grove Avenue near 3Qth Street." (1900p.146)

This quote reveals how Hurstwood influences Carrie's personality and exposes her to urban experience. Offering her freedom from rural limits offers her Fine dinners, elegant surroundings He takes her to places of refinement and pleasure and gives her access to prestigious life .

Men act like helpers, they open the doors to Carrie to new social realms, they act like aid to Carrie in her journey.

Like Carrie, Marian’s quest is shaped by her encounters with helper figure captain Forrester, a successful railroad man, who offers her safety and protection . He represents a world of traditional values. Captain Forrester is not only a husband but also a symbolic protector, she

idealizes. His presence grounds her identity and positions her as a romantic heroine graceful, idealized, and linked to a larger mythic past .

Just as Carrie whose life was marked by loneliness and rejection Marian also faces different struggles. Her struggle centers on economic decline and the rise of modernity, symbolized by Ivy Peters, who courted her for prestige and inheritance. where Marian is forced to decide between giving into the pressures of reality and the fading romantic ideals she once represented. Marian's allies are her enduring social prestige and her capacity to captivate everyone around her, particularly young Niel Herbert, who views her as the model of beauty and sophistication , even though the romance "helper" is less evident. But the challenge is obvious: Marian needs to confront the deterioration of her world and figure out how to live. As Cather writes, —She was not willing to grow old. She had a passion for life, and it was stronger than her dignity (1923,p.91). This moment reveals the emotional and moral cost of Marian's struggle between her desire for vitality and her need to preserve the image of grace.

Carrie's growth culminates when she becomes a successful stage actress which symbolized her fulfillment and triumph ,Her achievement signifies more than material success it represents the completion of a romantic journey toward self-realization on stage Carrie no longer relied on mal She commands her own audience, income, and image .

As Carrie achieved triumph, Marian also might have achieved a clear triumph by securing her fortune or marrying for love. Instead, she is seen holding on to hope amid uncertainty. When Captain Forrester died unexpectedly, Marian's victory lies in her composure: she continues to entertain and charm the people of Sweet Water, insisting that —everything is all right (1923,p.99) Her achievement is the preservation of her dignity. She is still regarded as the —queen of the

community, suggesting that the true success in her story is not material wealth, but her moral strength and grace.

Carrie Meeber's journey also embodies tragedy. In addition to her unrelenting quest for wealth and prestige, she also exhibits unethical behavior, especially when interacting with Drouet and Hurstwood. She becomes the mistress of Drouet, then Hurstwood symbolizing her growing detachment from traditional values. When Hurstwood steals money and takes Carrie to New York that marks his decline and her transformation into a solitary, ambitious woman. His fall marks a turning point in Carrie's journey. While he declines into social and personal ruin, Carrie rises in material success, Hurstwood's decline into poverty and obscurity reveals the darker consequences of Carrie's rise, he becomes a ghost of her past, obsessively watching her from a distance. Carrie, meanwhile, has emotionally outgrown him; her indifference symbolizes Frye's Phase, the disillusionment that follows triumph.

Mr. Hurstwood considered Carrie to be an idealized woman with no match to her purity and innocence. However, this illusion is shattered for both Carrie and Mr. Hurstwood when she left him alone throughout the end of the novel, facing unemployment, homelessness, the police and ultimately starvation and suicide. The following passage shows his remorse and his feelings after his illusion of love and romance was shattered:

Hurstwood made the best of a bad lot by keeping on his clothes and pushing away the dirty covering from his head, but at last he dozed in sheer weariness. The covering became more and more comfortable, its character was forgotten, and he pulled it about his neck and slept. In the morning he was aroused out of a pleasant dream by several men stirring about in the cold, cheerless room. He had been back in Chicago in fancy, in his own comfortable home. Jessica had been arranging to go somewhere, and he had been talking with her about it. This was so clear in his mind, that he was startled now by the contrast of this room. He raised his head, and the cold, bitter reality jarred him into wakefulness. (1900,p. 461)

This passage demonstrates Mr. Hurstwood's remorse for leaving his wife behind to

pursue the delusion of happiness with Carrie. It also proves that romance is a fleeting pleasure that, once its glow wears off, can only leave regret in its wake. Mr. Hurstwood experienced this regret through his longing to his old life with his wife and the family that was portrayed to him in the form of a dream. More importantly, it also shows the grave effect of romantic notions on influencing one's life decisions. This concept was clearly depicted through the turning point in Mr. Hurstwood who turned from a rich restaurant owner into a street beggar with no food or shelter. Carrie's ambitious youth gives way to existential loneliness. this profound sense of loneliness is captured in the novel as Dreiser claims :

Amid the tinsel and shine of her state walked Carrie, unhappy. As when Drouet took her, she had thought : " Now I am lifted into that which is best " ; as when Hurstwood seemingly offered her the better way: " Now am I happy." But since the world goes its way past all who will not partake of its folly, she now found herself alone.(1900,p.p.461)

The false sense of contentment Carrie attached to each of her social successes is highlighted in this passage. Hurstwood and Drouet both seemed like steps in the direction of a better life, but every interaction only made her feel more disillusioned. This is a representation of the disillusionment that characterizes the tragic and ironic stages of the modernist narrative

Carrie stays calm even as she realizes her fame will not last. Her acceptance, surrounded by the coldness of New York streets and her loneliness which creates a modern tragic ending.. Frye notes that in contemporary literature," the fall may not be physical but symbolic," and Carrie's final solitude perfectly illustrates this descent into winter's mythos (1957,p. 30).

Marian's romantic idealism begins to collapse when she accepts financial assistance from Ivy Peters which is a betrayal of her previous values. Marian's achievement is shown to be fragile by this agreement; although her dignity appears to be unaffected, the world she lives in is already starting to fall apart.

She starts to realize that her romantic ideal cannot last. Her second helper, Ivy Peters, is driven more by determined social ambition than by love, but her support is tainted by self-interest, and her marriage with him leads her to decline.

She loses her reputation in addition to the money that was used to support her. People who once admired her now regard her marriage to Ivy with disillusionment. What was once a source of romantic admiration for her ( status ) becomes the site of social rejection. Niel's adoration for Marian shows a more romantic view of relationships in *A Lost Lady*. It creates a contrast between his youthful and harsh reality. As Niel thinks back years later:

Long, long afterward, when Niel did not know whether Mrs. Forrester was living or dead, if her image flashed into his mind, it came with a brightness of dark eyes, her pale triangular cheeks with long earrings, and her many-colored laugh. When he was dull, dull and tired of everything, he used to think that if he could hear that long-lost lady laugh again he could be gay.(1923,p.38)

This memory reveals how Marian stays in Neil's mind as a symbol of a vanished ideal. He remembers her as an ideal he can never reach. The Romance here is mixed with loss and nostalgia. Cather concludes Marian's story with two parallel images: she ends up living alone and isolated like Carrie in a low-cost boarding house, and Niel Herbert describes how she was later found dead, with her body found on the train tracks with "ice in her veins" (1923,p.103). The last picture is both literal and symbolic: Marian's passing emphasizes how completely her Romantic world has fallen apart. With "no past and no future,"(1923,p.103) she is completely Isolated .

In both *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady*, the romantic quest initially marked by the pursuit of self-discovery, social mobility, and glamour turn a profound transformation as the narratives shift toward decline and disillusionment.

Carrie begins her journey as a naive young women —bright, timid, and full of the

illusionsl (1900,p.28) leaving her home in search of fulfillment her early struggle with illness poverty and rejection function as a romantic trials through which she gain her resilience following Fry's theory "the essential element of plot romance is adventure " the helper figure "Douet and Hurstwood "function as guide offering her material comfort and access to elite society as she become successful this triumph weakened by emotional emptiness .

Hurstwood's decline into poverty then to suicide parallels with carrie's rise reflecting a tragic irony which is portrayed in Fry's description of modern tragedy "the fall may not be physical but symbolic"(1957,p.30) carrie's loneliness captures the disillusionemnt that follows romantic aspiration .Thus, Dreiser's novel not only mirrors Frye's structural movement from romance to tragedy but also critiques the hollow pursuit of success in a modern, urbanized world.

Marian, likewise begins her journey as a figure of romantic idealism, her fall marked not by material failure but by moral compromise and loss of idealism following Captain Forrester's decline. Her tragic irony lies in her transformation from a revered romantic heroine into a forgotten and morally ambiguous figure This descent illustrates a more trajectory: from Romance to Tragedy to Irony, reflecting the erosion of identity and values that mirrors Northrop Frye's literary phases not just the fall of the individual, but the disintegration of collective ideals romance, honor, love, ambition in a world governed by materialism and alienation.

*A Lost Lady* and *Sister Carrie* both demonstrate how tragedy and romance interact, as Fry explains. Marian's story captures the tragedies of life and the passing of time, while Carrie's journey is an illustration of tragic ambition and the costs of social expectations. Each book offers a profound study on the human condition through its own narrative and character transformation, showing how relationships can bring about both aspiration and despair.

### **Chapter three: the study of Setting**

In this chapter we will analyze how settings in *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady* function not as passive background but as active structural elements that shape and reflect the emotional and thematic journeys of the protagonists, relying on Northrop Frye's theory of romance and tragedy ,we will explore how these symbolic spaces change from idealized settings (mythos of summer ) representing hope ,desire and possibility into a cold spaces marked by isolation and decline (mythos of winter )

Northrop Frye frames this transition under the name of Green world initially imagined as a realm of renewal which remains fragile and temporary, we examine how the transition from romance to tragedy is not only experienced by the characters but also reflected by the space they occupy demonstrating the transformation of these spaces from aspiration to despair.

Settings in both Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Cather's *A Lost Lady* function as dynamic elements that physically manifest the transition from Frye's mythos of Summer (Romance) to mythos of Winter (Tragedy/Irony). Rather than serving as mere backdrops, the settings in these novels actively participate in the symbolic movement from idealism to disillusionment.—The romantic world is a world of escape and idealization... The setting is often a pastoral or idyllic world which stands in contrast to the corrupt society."

However this shift is mirrored in the protagonist's moral and emotional decline"Tragic heroes are often isolated from their societies and thrown into a wasteland, dungeon, or bleak, ironic setting that underscores their alienation." This tragic movement is reflected in Carrie's final isolation in her rocking chair and in the drained marshes and decaying household of Sweet Water settings that have transformed into symbolic wastelands. Thus, both novels fit with Frye theory ,

using setting not just as context but as a structural embodiment of the shift from fulfillment to emptiness.

Fry frames this transition under the concept of The Green World a symbolic transition from romance to tragedy .As Frye himself suggests, the Green World is tied to the mythos of Summer season of growth and idealism but this season inevitably yields to the mythos of Winter, symbolizing disillusionment and decline "the green world, a forest or landscape of dream, where the problems and injustices of the normal world are magically resolved, before the characters return to the society they left.¶.

The concept of the Green World, as an idealized space of transformation and renewal (rebirth), is often critically reevaluated through the lens of inevitable transition and loss. While the Green World functions as a temporary refuge where characters experience hope and growth, it is considered like a fragile space, unable to stand the harsh realities of social change and human complexity .

Ralph Cohen notes that the green world often ignores or suppresses social realities and conflicts that shape human experiences, he believes that the green world tends to "idealize pastoral or romantic spaces at the expense of acknowledging social and historical contradictions". (Cohen, 1994, p. 58). so this idealization can create an illusion that fails to resolve the tensions between personal desire and societal contradictions.

In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser presents Chicago as a place of romantic potential, where the city actively engages in seduction and change. He writes:

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.(p.37)

Dreiser compares the city's lights and vibrancy to a seductive woman, describing it as a seductive force. He claims that, like a seductive lover, Chicago itself entices people, particularly newcomers like Carrie, with its emotional appeal and sense of promise. The "gleam of a thousand lights" represents the delusion of success and opportunity, highlighting how the city can entice people to pursue goals that might not always come true. This personification of the city is consistent with Northrop Frye's concept of the setting in romance as an enchanted world, a place that draws the hero or heroine into an unfamiliar landscape where identity and fortune can be reinvented. suggesting that the urban environment itself functions as a Green World, a space where desires are awakened and illusions flourish. According to Frye, the Green World is a symbolic realm "where the problems and injustices of the normal world are magically resolved" (Frye, 1957, p. 182).

This illusion of transformation amplified by the department store which are depicted as magical spaces that awaken Carrie's desires and fantasies.as dreiser detailed it :

The dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirt and petticoats, the laces, ribbons, hair-combs, purses, all touched her with individual desire, and she felt keenly the fact that not any of these things were in the range of her purchase.(46)

This detailed imagery creates a world of beauty and luxury for Carrie, the stores become a symbol of aspiration .These commercialized spaces represent what Frye identifies as settings of romantic fulfillment where dreams appear attainable.

The theaters also provide Carrie with a space of imagined elevation and transcendence where Carrie performs serves as transformative spaces where she can reinvent herself and transcend her humble origins. She adopts new identities and enters into the realm of fantasy,

glamour, and admiration on stage, which enable her to experience a sense of empowerment and agency absent in her everyday life. Dreiser demonstrates :

She longed to be renowned like others" the theater is the space in which Carrie can satisfy her desire for fame and change from a struggling, everyday girl to a well-known actress. (p.407)

Yet, as Frye's mythos suggests, the season of Romance is always shadowed by the inevitable descent into disillusionment argues that " the green world, a forest or landscape of dream, where the problems and injustices of the normal world are magically resolved, before the characters return to the society they left. Carrie's journey shows, such a magic is temporary often giving way to disillusionment and loss.

This magic begins to erode as the novel shifts to New York, the big city where people can easily lose their dreams. In contrast to Chicago's romantic charm, the city's anonymity and coldness underscore the harsh realities of urban life, compelling Carrie to face the empty feeling of material success and loneliness. Dreiser reveals :—"The world was a gray place to her. New York is not full of warmth or hope New York is not cold just in temperature but also in emotions it becomes a silent and colorless world and lifeless

The final image in her rocking chair represents an ironic inversion of achievement:—"In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel. (p.462) ,this final image contrasts the reality of loneliness and disappointment with the ideals of success and happiness. Once imagined as a place of relaxation and contentment, Carrie's rocking chair turns into a metaphor for irony, she has attained fame but not personal fulfillment, yearning for an unattainable happiness.

Like Carrie's Chicago, which Dreiser presents as a seductive Green World a space of illusion and success, Sweet Water and the Forrester estate are first romanticized as pastoral ideals full of beauty, stability, and charm in Cather's *A Lost Lady* these places serve as a green world. However, the New Sweet Water's marked by the drained marshes and decaying estate reflects a similar descent into disillusionment and decline, like the urban setting in *Sister Carrie* which leads to alienation and loss that aligned with Frye's transition from the mythos of Summer to the mythos of Winter the magic setting that once were idealised gives way to a dark reality of change and deterioration.

Cather writes, presenting the Forrester location as a preserved pastoral ideal. "The Forrester place, as everyone called it, was not at all remarkable;... into Sweet Water by rail, and the last thing one saw on departing."(p.5)

This description supports the notion that the estate is a sanctuary by highlighting its importance and the sense of security it provides. Frye's idea of the romantic pastoral, where human values coexist with nature, is consistent with this cultivated natural setting. The marsh, with its delicate wild roses and ephemeral beauty, reinforces this symbolic pastoral it represents an untamed but harmonious natural space Cather writes:

Under the bluffs that overhung the marsh he came upon thickets of wild roses, with flaming buds, just beginning to open. Where they had opened, their petals were stained with that burning rose-colour which is always gone by noon, -- a dye made of sunlight and morning and moisture, so intense that it cannot possibly last... must fade, like ecstasy.(p.45)

This depicts the beauty of the marsh and highlighting it as a refuge where nature thrives undisturbed, yet this harmony disrupted by Ivy Peters whose drainage of the marsh symbolizing the transition to exploitation expressing Ivy's own dislike toward idleness and beauty, even if he is unable to identify it. It also highlights his ambition to rule and dominate both people and

land.Cather depict:

By draining the marsh Ivy had obliterated a few acres of something he hated, though he could not name it, and had asserted his power over the people who had loved those unproductive meadows for their idleness and silvery beauty.(p.55)

This decline is also visible in The Forrester house, its deterioration reflects the eroding values of the American West. The house, which is initially portrayed as a place of elegance and hospitality, progressively deteriorates, mirroring the decline of its occupants and larger cultural shifts.as it is revealed by Cather:

But now that the Captain was helpless, everything changed. She could hold off the curiosity no longer. The townswomen bought soups and custards for the invalid. When they came to sit out the night with him, she turned the house over to them. She was worn out; so exhausted that she was dull to what went on about her. The Mrs. Beasleys and Molly Tuckers had their chance at last. They went in and out of Mrs. Forrester's kitchen as familiarly as they did out of one another's.(p.73)

Cather's depiction of Sweet Water itself completes the movement toward Frye's Winter ,the transformation from a hopeful frontier town to a symbol of materialistic decline. The town's slow decline, which was initially depicted with high hopes, reflects the decline of the pioneering spirit and the emergence of materialistic values, best capturing the novel's main themes of loss and change.Cather writes:—Its future no longer looked bright."(p17)

Both novels' settings actively contribute to the narrative transition from Romance to Tragedy/Irony.

Both authors employ setting to follow what Frye call the unavoidable progression from Summer's idealism to Winter's disillusionment; this pattern reflects both authors' naturalistic interpretations of human experiences In Sister Carrie, Dreiser introduces Chicago as a place of romantic potential, where the city actively engages in seduction and transformation Dreiser compares the city's lights and vibrancy to a seductive woman, describing it as a seductive force.

Like a lover representing the illusion of success and opportunity, highlighting how the city helps people to achieve their goals aligns with Frye's concept of the setting in romance as an enchanted world a green world "where the problems and injustices of the normal world are magically resolved, ", a space where desires awaken and illusions flourish .

This illusion of transformation is amplified by department stores, depicted as magical spaces awakening Carrie's desires. creating a world of beauty and luxury where dreams are attainable that fits with Frye's identification of settings as romantic fulfillment, in addition to these commercialized spaces theaters also provides Carrie with a space of rebirth where she can reinvent herself and satisfy her desire becoming well known actress

Yet, as Frye's mythos suggests, the season of Romance is always shadowed by the inevitable descent into disillusionment. Frye argues that "the green world, a forest or landscape of dream, where the problems and injustices of the normal world are magically resolved, before the characters return to the society they left." Frye notes, the green world is always temporary, a space of illusion before the inevitable return to harsher reality .

Carrie's journey shows this decline when moving to New York an anonymous and colder Carrie move marks this shift , the city underscores the harsh realities of urban life, compelling Carrie to confront the emptiness of material success and loneliness her of isolation contrasts with the earlier idealized world full of happiness and wealth.

Similarly, Cather's *A Lost Lady* romanticizes Sweet Water and the Forrester estate as pastoral ideals, a Green World filled with beauty, stability, and charm, offering Marian Forrester the appearance of security and social prestige. However, like Dreiser's urban setting, the New Sweet Water shows the transformation into alienation and decline, mirroring Frye's shift from the

mythos of Summer to Winter. The drained marshes and deteriorating estate symbolize this decline.

In both *Sister Carrie* and *A Lost Lady*, setting serves as a dynamic and symbolic structure that portrays the protagonists' transformations and journeys. Guided by Northrop Frye's theory, the progression from the mythos of Summer marked by idealism, desire, and the illusion of possibility toward the mythos of Winter characterized by isolation, disillusionment, and decline. The setting functions as a mirror reflecting characters' transformation by the space they occupy.

The Green World, as Frye portrayed it, functions temporarily as a realm of renewal and escape, but it is fragile, collapsing under the reality, social forces.

Chicago and Sweet Water, despite their contrasting urban and pastoral natures, emerge as idealized spaces where transformation and self-reinvention seem to be attainable. Yet, New York's cold and the drained marshes of Sweet Water reflect a fall from grace, to isolation and loss of social and emotional emptiness.

Thus, the setting in these novels is not a passive backdrop but an active force mirroring the protagonist's quests. Frye's mythos offers a lens through which to understand how romantic aspirations are confronted by the realities of change and human nature. The decline of these idealized spaces highlights the tragic destiny of the protagonists, revealing how the space is tied to the psychological and moral dimensions of the protagonists.

## V. Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation is to examine and compare Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923). Drawing on Northrop Frye's theory of literary mythoi, We have focused in our analysis on the affinities and divergences between the two novels, highlighting how each author portrays the experiences and struggles of the protagonist

The work is opened by a general introduction where in the review of literature Then we have tried to give a brief account for the theory deployed, short biographies of both authors Finally, by making reference to the chosen theories of Northrop Fry it is fair to say that Dreisser and Cather both accomplished an excellent task of portraying romance and tragedy in their novels.

Northrop's theory and conceptualization of romance and tragedy in Modern American literature aligns with how these elements are portrayed. But each writer displayed a distinct writing style that reflects how they understood these concepts. Cather emphasizes the study of human nature and desire more in *A Lost Lady*. She also praises traditional American culture and mourns the moral decay of Modern American society. However, Dreisser places more emphasis in his writing on the challenges of Modern metropolitan cities than criticizing characters' moral judgments and behaviors.

Our analysis is grounded in a close reading of character, plot, and setting in both novels. Despite differences in literary style, historical context, and authorial approach, both works reveal strikingly similar concerns about modern American society, especially in relation to gender, materialism, and social change.

In the first chapter, through our study of characterization , we observed how both Dreiser

and Cather depict their central female characters Carrie Meeber and Marian Forrester as complex figures shaped by their social environments. While Carrie rises through a world driven by ambition and chance, Marian is gradually diminished by the loss of social order and stability around her. In both cases, each reflecting the inner lives and trajectories of the protagonists. These differences underline the two authors' contrasting views on personal agency and decline. We have introduced also the role of man as helper and opponent.

In the second chapter, we focused on the study of the plot. Particular attention was given to the way Frye's theory of romance and tragedy illuminates the symbolic and narrative patterns in each story and how events progress fitting the theory of romance and tragedy. We explored how both authors introduce plots to reflect the protagonists' quests as well as the disillusionment of their encounter. The chapter highlights the shifting and turning point from rise to decline.

The third chapter examines the role of the setting as more than a mere backdrop. How the settings serve as agents of opportunities and illusion reflecting the protagonists shifting from romance to tragedy from rise to decline. Through Frye's concept of the Green World we interpreted these spaces as realms of transformation where the characters escape reality. The decline of these settings parallels with the protagonists' emotional and moral journeys, reinforcing each novel's critique of modernity and the cost of progress.

Both novels suggest that both Dreiser and Cather, in their distinct ways, critique the values of a rapidly modernizing America. Both novels offer a nuanced critique of American progress, revealing its costs alongside its promises. By placing individual lives at the center of larger societal shifts, Dreiser and Cather allow us to reflect on what is gained and what is lost in

the pursuit of modernity.

To conclude, our present research offers a comparative analysis of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923), focusing on characterization, plot, and setting through the lens of Northrop Frye's literary theory. We encourage future researchers to delve deeper into topics such as : the contrast between Urban and Pastoral Spaces in American Literature And how these environments reflect and shape the identities of female protagonists. another topic involving the tension between tradition and modernity, by comparing the two narratives in the light of other theories.

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