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<http://www.supportscience.uz/index.php/ojp/about>**SOCIAL STATUS AND THE PURSUIT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN “AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY”****Bakhora Ergasheva**

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy, American Dream, social status, class mobility, literary naturalism, Clyde Griffiths, Roberta Alden, close reading, law and literature.

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Abstract: The article examines how Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) represents social status as the operative mechanism behind the failure of the American Dream. Criticism has read the novel either as a demonstration of naturalist determinism or as a moral indictment of materialism, and both readings tend to treat class as a background condition rather than as a working system with its own signs, thresholds and sanctions. Using a close reading of the complete 1925 text together with recent scholarship on Dreiser's style, social vision, legal imagination and gender politics, the study analyses status through four categories: status as a legible surface of dress, money and speech; institutions that admit the aspirant to proximity while withholding belonging; rules that convert private desire into legal jeopardy; and the trial as a public ritual in which class is finally confirmed. The tragedy is called American because the Dream distributes aspiration universally while distributing opportunity by class, and because the novel locates responsibility in that distribution rather than in the individual alone.

“AMERIKA FOJIASI” ROMANIDA IJTIMOVIY MAQOM VA AMERIKA ORZUSI SARI INTILISH**Bakhora Ergasheva**

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit soʻzlar: Teodor Drayzer, “Amerika fojiasi”, Amerika orzusi, ijtimoiy maqom, sinfiy mobillik, adabiy naturalizm, Klayd Griffiths, Roberta Olden, diqqat bilan oʻqish (close reading), huquq va adabiyot.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Teodor Drayzerning “Amerika fojiasi” (1925) romanida ijtimoiy maqom “Amerika orzusi”ning puchga chiqishi ortidagi asosiy harakatlantiruvchi mexanizm sifatida qanday tasvirlangani tahlil qilinadi. Adabiy tanqidchilik asarni yo naturalistik determinizm namunasi, yo materializmga qoʻyilgan axloqiy ayblov deya talqin qilgan. Har ikki yondashuv ham sinfni oʻziga xos belgilari, chegaralari va jazo choralariga ega boʻlgan amaldagi tizim emas, balki shunchaki fon sifatida koʻrib chiqishga moyildir. Tadqiqotda asarning 1925-yilgi toʻliq matni sinchiklab oʻrganilib, Drayzerning uslubi, ijtimoiy qarashlari, huquqiy tafakkuri va gender siyosatiga oid soʻnggi ilmiy ishlar bilan birgalikda maqom tushunchasi toʻrt jihatdan tahlil qilinadi: libos, pul va nutq orqali namoyon boʻladigan tashqi koʻrinish sifatidagi maqom; intiluvchan qahramonni oʻz safiga yaqinlashtirsa-da, unga toʻlaqonli aʼzolikni ravo koʻrmaydigan ijtimoiy institutlar; shaxsiy xohish-istaklarni huquqiy jazo xavfiga aylantiruvchi qoidalar hamda sinfiy mansublik uzil-kesil tasdiqlanadigan ommaviy marosim sifatidagi sud jarayoni. Fojining “Amerikacha” deb atalishiga sabab, “Orzu” barchaga birdek intilish ulashsa-da, imkoniyatlarni tabaqalar boʻyicha taqsimlaydi va asarda masʼuliyat faqat shaxsning oʻziga emas, ana shu taqsimotga yuklatiladi.

СОЦИАЛЬНЫЙ СТАТУС И СТРЕМЛЕНИЕ К АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ МЕЧТЕ В РОМАНЕ “АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ТРАГЕДИЯ”

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Теодор Драйзер, “Американская трагедия”, американская мечта, социальный статус, классовая мобильность, литературный натурализм, Клайд Гриффитс, Роберта Олден, пристальное чтение, право и литература.

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается, как в романе Теодора Драйзера “Американская трагедия” (1925) социальный статус представлен как механизм, лежащий в основе краха американской мечты. Критики интерпретируют роман либо как

демонстрацию натуралистического детерминизма, либо как моральное обличение материализма, и обе интерпретации склонны рассматривать класс как фоновое условие, а не как работающую систему со своими собственными знаками, порогами и санкциями. Используя внимательное прочтение всего текста 1925 года, а также новейшие исследования стиля Драйзера, его социального видения, правового воображения и гендерной политики, исследование анализирует статус в четырех категориях: статус как читаемая поверхность одежды, денег и речи; институты, которые допускают стремящегося к близости, но лишают принадлежности; правила, которые превращают частное желание в юридическую опасность; и суд как публичный ритуал, в котором окончательно подтверждается классовая принадлежность. Трагедия называется американской, потому что мечта распределяет стремления повсеместно, а возможности — по классам, и потому что роман возлагает ответственность на это распределение, а не только на отдельного человека.

Introduction. *An American Tragedy*, published in 1925, follows a poor young man named Clyde Griffiths from a family of street missionaries in Kansas City to the death house of a New York state prison. Between those two points the novel narrates a career of aspiration: a hotel job that reveals wealth to him, a factory job that places him near it, a love affair that promises it, a pregnancy that threatens it, a drowning that may or may not be a murder, and a trial that ends in execution. Reference works have long summarised the book as a compassionate account of Clyde's life joined to a searing indictment of materialism and of the American dream of success [12]. That summary is accurate but incomplete, because it names the target of the indictment without describing the machinery through which the indictment is made.

The American Dream, in its ordinary formulation, is the proposition that the United States is a country in which upward mobility, freedom and equality are available to people of every class who work hard and possess the will to succeed [12]. The novel does not refute this proposition by argument. It refutes it by dramatising the conditions under which a person actually encounters it: the signs by which status is recognised, the institutions that regulate access to it, the rules that

punish the wrong kind of intimacy, and the courtroom in which the whole arrangement is finally endorsed. Status, in other words, is not the setting of the story. It is the story's operating system.

Recent scholarship has moved in directions that make such a reading possible. Work on Dreiser's conception of the social argues that society in his fiction is not a backdrop against which individuals succeed or fail but a conditioning environment carrying much of the novel's explanatory force, and that his fiction dramatises the difficulty of defining the social rather than delivering a finished sociological model [5]. Work on his style argues that the features long dismissed as awkwardness or excessive detail form a deliberate documentary strategy, integrating legal, journalistic, moral and inner discourse so that determinism is expressed at the linguistic, structural and symbolic levels at once [3], while work on the novel's geography shows that even the choice of Kansas City is historically loaded rather than generic [4]. Work on capital punishment situates the closing books within a live debate of the early 1920s about the death penalty [6], and legal commentary on the real case of Chester Gillette, tried in New York in 1906, shows how closely the plot follows a documented prosecution of a poor young man with a wealthy uncle [7]. Consumer-culture studies read Clyde's longing for clothes, cars and houses as a demand for the identity those goods signify [8], and gender-focused readings argue that the Dream here is unequal not only by class but by sex, since female ambition is bounded by economic dependence and social judgement in ways male ambition is not [9], [10].

Literature review and research methodology. Three lines of criticism inform the analysis. The first is the naturalist line, which explains character through environment. Its recent formulation is important for the present argument because it resists fatalism: Dreiser's language of equation and balance, borrowed from Herbert Spencer, is described as a retrospective rationalisation that smooths over the actual complexity of the novels, and the individual in his fiction is not cancelled by society but necessarily defined in social terms [5]. This licenses a reading in which Clyde is neither a free agent nor a puppet, but a person whose available choices have been shaped in advance.

The second line is formal and stylistic. If the novel's documentary surface — its inventories of rooms, wages, garments and procedures — is a strategy rather than a stylistic failure, then those inventories are evidence, and the recurrence of mirrored events and repeated objects is part of the argument the novel makes [3]. The third line is contextual: the historical scholarship on the novel's settings and its legal frame, including postwar Kansas City [4], the Gillette prosecution [7], and the capital-punishment controversy in which Dreiser was intervening [6]. Consumer-culture and gender criticism supply the remaining components: the semiotics of goods [8] and the asymmetry of risk between Clyde, Roberta and Sondra [9], [10].

The study is a qualitative, interpretive close reading; it is not a quantitative or corpus study, and no counts, measurements or statistical procedures are used. The primary material is the complete two-volume 1925 text of *An American Tragedy* [1], [2], consulted in full so that passages could be verified in context rather than quoted from anthologies. The procedure had four stages. First, the text was read for passages in which status is explicitly registered — through dress, money, address, family occupation or naming. Second, those passages were grouped into four analytic categories developed inductively and refined against the secondary literature: status as a legible surface; institutions as thresholds; rules as traps; and law as ritual. Third, each category was tested for counter-evidence, that is, for passages granting Clyde genuine agency, so that the reading would not rest on confirming passages alone. Fourth, the interpretation was placed against the recent literature, with divergences stated in the discussion.

Two limitations follow. The analysis concerns one novel, so its conclusions describe a literary representation rather than historical social mobility in the 1920s; where the novel converges with documented legal history, that convergence is attributed to the secondary sources rather than inferred from the fiction [6], [7]. Second, the reading uses the English text only and does not examine translations, adaptations or reception.

Results and discussion. Status as a legible surface. The novel establishes very early that Clyde perceives class before he understands it. The Griffiths family conducts mission work in a nearby street, distributing tracts and collecting voluntary gifts, and the boy's humiliation is not doctrinal but visual: he is seen in public in the wrong role [1]. What follows is a passage that sets the terms of the entire book. It is painful to him to think that his clothes are not right, that he is not as handsome or as interesting as he might be, and he concludes: "What a wretched thing it was to be born poor and not to have any one to do anything for you and not to be able to do so very much for yourself!" [1]. Three features of this sentence organise the plot. Poverty is experienced as a personal deficiency rather than as a social position; the remedy is imagined as patronage, someone to do something for you; and the mirror, not the wage, is the instrument of measurement. Clyde is thus equipped with an accurate reading of the sign-system of status and with no instrument for changing his place in it.

Money in the novel is described in the same semiotic register. As a drug-store assistant Clyde could eventually earn twelve dollars a week, and the text notes that this sum was no solvent for the yearnings already gnawing at him [1]; the phrasing measures the wage against desire rather than against subsistence. At the Green-Davidson hotel the register changes entirely: guests tip for the smallest service, and these, taken together, averaged from four to six dollars a day, which Clyde recognises as most amazing pay [1]. The evening on which he keeps five dollars and a half for a few hours of fascinating work strikes him as "fantastic, Aladdinish" [1]. The comparison is precise:

the hotel is not a workplace where labour is exchanged for wages, it is a site of magical acquisition, and money arrives there as a reward for proximity to the rich rather than for production. This is the lesson consumer-culture criticism identifies when it reads Clyde's pursuit of goods as a demand for the identity those goods confer [8]. The novel's documentary detail is doing analytic work here rather than merely furnishing the scene [3].

Institutions as thresholds. Each stage of Clyde's career places him inside an institution that grants him a view of wealth while defining him as external to it. The Green-Davidson, presented as the finest hotel in Kansas City, excites him at the mere mention of employment there [1]; it is a school of manners in which he learns the appearance of the class he will never enter through it. The pattern repeats with greater precision in Lycurgus. His uncle Samuel Griffiths owns a factory manufacturing collars and shirts and employing several hundred people [1], and the decision about the nephew is that he may be inducted at the very bottom of the business: the basement of the plant, where fabrics are shrunk, the place assigned to beginners [1]. Later he is promoted to the stamping room, a separate chamber at the west end of the stitching floor receiving vast daily quantities of unstitched collars [1]. Kinship secures him entry and the class system fixes his level; the promotion moves him within the building without moving him within society.

The Griffiths household enforces the same logic socially. The family occupies one of the best and most tastefully constructed residences in Lycurgus and is esteemed among the few best families of the region, conservative, respectable and successful [1]. Against this, the poor cousin receives the minimum civility respectability requires: Bella extends a finger or two before turning back to her friends, and the introduction of Miss Finchley and Miss Cranston is performed in the stiffest and most formal manner while the two young women study him directly [1]. Nothing is refused and nothing is granted. The scene is the novel's compact model of status as a threshold: admission to the room is not admission to the class. Sondra's world is then made concrete in property and leisure — the family will give up its place at Greenwood Lake and build a new bungalow at Twelfth Lake, right down at the water's edge [1] — and Clyde's ambition acquires a definite object, formulated in free indirect style as the prospect that he would be the equal, if not the superior, of Gilbert Griffiths himself [2]. The Dream here is not a metaphor; it is an address on a lake.

Rules that convert desire into jeopardy. The decisive result of the analysis concerns the rules that operate between the two worlds. The Griffiths Company forbids fraternisation across rank: no superior officer or head of any department is permitted to have anything to do with any girl working under him, a regulation the prosecution will later cite in court as explaining much [2], and which Roberta paraphrases to herself in her own defence, adding that it is different with them and that she will resign soon [2]. The rule is presented as ordinary industrial discipline, yet its narrative

function is to make the relationship secret from the moment it begins. Secrecy then becomes the condition under which every subsequent decision is taken, including the journey to the lake. The company rule does not cause the death; it removes in advance every setting in which the pregnancy could have been disclosed and handled.

Roberta's position shows how unevenly the Dream is distributed. Clyde himself, in a moment of clarity, registers that this is not her fault, that she had so little to look forward to — nothing but her work or a commonplace marriage [2]. The alternatives named are exhaustive, and neither is mobility. When the pregnancy comes, the novel supplies no institution to which she can appeal: not the factory, which forbids the relationship; not the law, which does not recognise her claim; not medicine, which is available only clandestinely; and not her family, whose poverty the text renders as grimness rather than shelter [2]. Marriage to Clyde would repair her respectability and destroy his prospects, so their interests become directly opposed without either of them intending it. This asymmetry is what gender-focused criticism isolates when it argues that the Dream here is unequal for women across classes and that even Sondra's privilege does not amount to autonomy [9], [10]. Put sharply: Clyde risks his ambition, Roberta risks her existence, and the novel makes that difference structural rather than personal.

The reading must be tested against counter-evidence, since the text is careful not to absolve Clyde. He conceals, delays, lies, and takes Roberta to the water while entertaining a purpose he cannot fully avow [2]. The passage in which he fears that the world from which he sprang might extend its gloomy, poverty-stricken arms and envelop him once more, just as the poverty of his family had enveloped and almost strangled him from the first [2], is at once an explanation and an indictment: a motive formed by class and a man consenting to it. The position adopted here is therefore not that Clyde is innocent, but that his guilt is not separable from the arrangements that produced it — the conclusion toward which the recent account of Dreiser's social realm also points [5].

The trial as class ritual. The final movement of the novel converts social status into legal outcome, and does so with the documentary apparatus that criticism now reads as deliberate design [3]. The prosecution builds its case partly on the company rule [2]; the defence protests that a boy trapped by circumstances should not be railroaded to the electric chair merely to achieve a victory for the Republican party in November [2]. That protest states the mechanism plainly: the district attorney's political calendar, not the evidentiary question, governs the tempo of the case. Around the courthouse the novel describes a sense of holiday, with farmers arriving in Fords and Buicks while an electric chair stands as the shadowy mental background to it all [2]. Justice is staged as public entertainment, and the defendant's poverty makes him available for the staging.

The verdict and sentence are recorded in flat institutional language. The foreman announces: “We have. We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree” [2]. The court then pronounces that Clyde Griffiths, for the murder in the first degree of one Roberta Alden, is hereby sentenced to the punishment of death [2]. He is removed to Auburn, the western penitentiary of the State of New York, to the death house or Murderers’ Row, which the narrator calls as gloomy and torturesome an inferno as one could imagine any human compelled to endure [2]. The absence of rhetoric here is itself the argument: the state speaks in the same procedural voice with which the factory issued its rule. Scholarship on the legal frame confirms how deliberate this is: Dreiser was writing into an active national debate about capital punishment in the 1920s, in which Clarence Darrow had publicly argued the question in New York in 1924 shortly after defending the wealthy defendants Leopold and Loeb, whose families could buy the finest defence available [6]. Legal commentary on the 1906 Gillette trial, whose defendant was likewise a poor young man with a rich uncle and a pregnant working-class sweetheart, notes that the prosecution framed his choice as one between doing right by the young woman and retaining his connection to a more affluent class [7]. The fictional verdict thus reproduces a documented pattern in which the class of the accused conditions the outcome.

Taken together, the four results describe a single mechanism rather than four themes. The Dream is transmitted through signs, which are cheap and universally legible: anyone can learn what wealth looks like, and Clyde learns it thoroughly before he is twenty. Access, by contrast, travels through institutions, which are selective, and through kinship, which is not distributable. The gap between these two channels generates the tragedy: desire is educated to a level that opportunity cannot meet, and the surplus is converted into secrecy, then deception, then a death. This is why the novel needs no villain and offers none.

The reading modifies the standard naturalist account in one respect. If determinism is understood as the pressure of environment on a character who becomes an effect of forces, the novel appears fatalistic and Clyde’s culpability becomes hard to state. If instead the novel is read as tracing institutional causation — a rule here, a threshold there, a political incentive in the courthouse — then determinism appears as a set of identifiable arrangements, each of which could in principle have been otherwise. That is closer to recent Dreiser scholarship, which describes his fiction as holding individual and social perspectives together [5], and consistent with the stylistic argument that documentary excess and recurring symbolic objects are the formal means by which this causation is made visible [3]: the reader is given the specifications of the machine, not merely its output.

The gender dimension deserves emphasis, because it shows that the Dream is not simply unavailable to the poor but differently priced for different people. Clyde’s pursuit of Sondra is

socially legible as ambition, a respectable motive in a young man; Roberta's attachment to Clyde is legible as ruin, a punishable condition in a young woman. Both want a life better than the one they were assigned, but only one of them can be destroyed by wanting it. Criticism focused on the novel's female characters reaches the same conclusion by another route, noting that female ambition is bounded by economic dependence, patriarchal authority and social expectation, and that wealth does not purchase autonomy for Sondra either [9], [10]. This replaces the over-simple picture in which the poor lose and the rich win with a stratification determined by class and gender at once.

The contextual scholarship supplies a final qualification. The novel is not a transcript of American conditions, and its historical specificity is more crafted than it appears: the choice of Kansas City carries commemorative weight in the postwar years, so that Dreiser's near-silence about the Great War in a city then central to its memorial culture reads as planned irony rather than inattention [4], while the legal sections are shaped by a controversy he meant to influence [6] and by a case whose ambiguity was publicly notorious [7]. Recognising this protects the argument from a documentary fallacy: the novel's claim is that the arrangement it describes is characteristically American, and the evidence lies in that arrangement's coherence, not in the fiction's accuracy as a record. Read in this way, thematic accounts of the corrupted Dream [11], [13] become the starting point of analysis rather than its conclusion, and the consumer-culture reading of Clyde's appetite for goods [8] becomes one component of the mechanism rather than the whole diagnosis.

Conclusion. An American Tragedy represents social status as a working system with four parts, and the pursuit of the American Dream as the process by which a person is admitted to the first part and excluded from the rest. Status is first a legible surface, learned through clothes, tips, addresses and the humiliation of being seen in the wrong role; it is then a series of institutional thresholds — the Green-Davidson, the basement and the stamping room of the collar factory, the drawing-room of the best families, the bungalow at Twelfth Lake — which grant proximity while withholding membership; it is then a set of rules, above all the prohibition on fraternisation across rank and the absence of any lawful exit from Roberta Alden's pregnancy, that convert private desire into legal jeopardy at a far higher price for a working woman than for an ambitious man; and it is finally a public ritual, the trial, in which an electoral calendar and a poor defendant produce a verdict confirming the order the novel has described. Clyde is neither exonerated nor made exceptional by this account: he consents to his own destruction, but the terms of that consent were set before he could read them. The adjective in the title is therefore load-bearing. The tragedy is American because the Dream broadcasts aspiration to everyone while rationing opportunity by class and gender, and because responsibility belongs to that arrangement rather than to the young

man it consumed. Two extensions follow: a comparative reading alongside *Sister Carrie*, where the same stratification produces survival rather than execution, and a study of the novel in translation, where the vocabulary of class does not transfer intact.

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