

Feminism in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*

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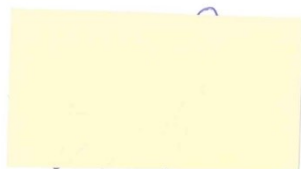
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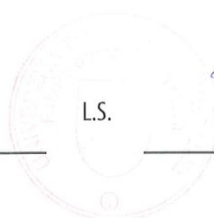
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje prvky feminizmu v novele *Sestřička Carrie* od amerického autora Theodora Dreisera. Práce je rozdělena na čtyři části. První část práce čtenáře seznamuje se společensko-historickým pozadím Ameriky, kde se zaměřuje na dobu zvanou Pozlacený věk, která je datována na přelomu 20. století. Následující části se zabývají životem samotného autora a také historií vývoje feminizmu, a to zejména v americké společnosti. Poslední část této práce je zaměřena na samotnou analýzu novely. Práce si klade za cíl zjistit, zdali hlavní protagonistka vykazuje prvky feminizmu, či nikoliv.

Klíčová slova: feminizmus, Theodore Dreiser, *Sestřička Carrie*, Pozlacený věk, Amerika, pohlaví, společenské třídy, společnost, identita

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses features of feminism in the novel *Sister Carrie* by American writer Theodore Dreiser. The first part of this thesis is focused on the historical background at the turn of the 20th century called the Gilded Age. The following two parts examine the life of Theodore Dreiser and the evolvement of the feminism, predominantly in American society. The last part should suggest in which ways could be the protagonist considered a feminist. The aim of this thesis is to examine whether or not the protagonist of the novel shows any features of feminism.

Keywords: feminism, Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, Gilded Age, America, gender, social class, society, identity

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

It is the year 1900, United States, and Theodore Dreiser publishes his first historical novel, *Sister Carrie*, by the Doubleday Company. Not only is *Sister Carrie* Dreiser's first social novel, but also his first novel with the highlights of feminism, a movement causing much controversy in society ever since. Meanwhile, the United States is undergoing the expansion of industry and massive population growth, the feminist movement is in its first stage called the First Wave, fighting for one of the basic human rights, the right to vote. The subject of discussion and the main goal of the thesis is to analyze the novel, *Sister Carrie*, from the perspective of feminism. At the beginning of the novel, Dreiser shows the conventional perception of a woman in 19th century America and makes Carrie, the protagonist of the novel, a kept woman, mistress of two lovers. „When a girl leaves home at eighteen she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and become better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and she becomes worse“.¹ Does Carrie by her liberalization from the male's world become worse or does she find fulfilment after achieving her dream by realizing herself in the American show business as a choir singer? How does the poor, uneducated, countryside girl finds herself in a higher social class than her past lovers and in what way could Carrie be considered a feminist? These are the main questions this thesis tries to answer.

This thesis is divided into four chapters and each chapter is focused on a different topic. The first chapter of the thesis is concerned with the history of the United States in the late 19th century, called the Gilded Age. The late 19th century America is remembered for its economical and industrial expansion, migration and also for inventions such as the telephone and the automobile.

The next chapters deal with the life of Theodore Dreiser and his work, following the history of feminism and the evolution of the movement, predominantly focused on the United States, providing an insight into the women's fight for basic rights and equality. The possibility to study, vote, to have a career or to own a property is nowadays for many women considered conventional. However, these possibilities were not present always and activists in the feminist movement had to fight a lot to subsequently gain these privileges that should have always been considered a standard for every human being. The last chapter analyzes the novel *Sister Carrie* from the perspective of feminism, as mentioned

¹ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 1.

above. The conclusion will be drawn from the analysis based on the last chapter of the thesis.

1 THE GILDED AGE

After the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era follows the Gilded Age. However, historians do not agree on a specific date for the Gilded Age. The beginning of the Gilded Age is considered to be around 1870s. According to some sources, the symbolic end of the Gilded age is signified by the sinking of the Titanic on April 14, 1912.² The name for this historical period originates from the novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, by Mark Twain. In this novel, Mark Twain mocks the society and mainly the corruption, suggesting that even though the era looks extravagant, deep inside it is different. The “gilded” is not gold, but rather it has a sense of “sheen”, covering the bad underneath.³

By the end of the 19th century, America had transformed into an economic powerhouse. During the Gilded Age and the industrial expansion, the population of the United States rapidly grew. The migration had two streams. The first stream involves American citizens who moved from agricultural villages into industrial towns, and the second stream involves immigrants from abroad, mainly from Europe. Most of immigrants, who arrived to America in the 1870s and 1880s, and also lower classed people headed to the West. The West soon turned into a multicultural society and a symbol of opportunity to become rich. Also, the egalitarian West became a place of “rugged individualism.”⁴ It was believed that anyone who works hard could be successful and rich, and therefore, one of the reasons for migration to America was to escape poverty, find a work and become rich. Fulfilment of the American Dream was, back then, mainly based on materialism.⁵ Between 1865 and 1901, the population rapidly grew from 35, 701, 000 to 77, 584, 000 people. People also moved into industrial cities such as New York, Chicago and Boston, to work in factories and heavy industry, textile production, iron-making or carpentry.⁶

The Gilded Age is an era of great inventions such as the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell, elevator by Elisha G. Otis or a light bulb by Thomas Alva Edison.⁷ Also, expanded transcontinental railroads became tendons of the whole country. These and many

² Josef Lucke, Scripps Howard News Service, “April 14, 1912: A Night Remembered,” Chicago Tribune, April 14, 1992. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1992-04-14-9202030412-story.html>.

³ Cashman, Sean Dennis, *America in the Gilded Age: from the death of Lincoln to the rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 2-4.

⁴ Rundbell, Walter. "Concepts of the "Frontier" and the "West"." *Arizona and the West* 1, no. 1 (1959): 13-41. Accessed April 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/40166911.

⁵ Brinkley, Alan, *The Unfinished Nation: A Brief Interactive History of the American People*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 278-279.

⁶ Cashman, Sean Dennis, *America in the Gilded Age: from the death of Lincoln to the rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 30.

⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

other great inventions had contributed to business efficiency and, it allowed businessmen and large corporate companies to sell their goods all over the country.⁸ The liberal tactic of laissez-faire politics that left the economy operate itself without government interactions lead to corruption and gave rise to monopolies run by ‘robber barons’. Robber barons, such as J. P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, were considered the richest men in the late 19th century America. For instance, John D. Rockefeller dominated the American oil refining business, which was, in fact, easy to monopolise, because this industry did not exist before the year 1861. By the mid-1870s, John D. Rockefeller has held almost 93 % of the oil industry market in America. In 1890, as a tool against the monopolies came in force the Sherman Antitrust Act. Although there is much negativity linked to robber barons, some of them, like Andrew Carnegie, might be considered as a self-made man, due to his humble Scottish origins. Also, some of the robber barons dedicated part of their money to philanthropy, and they have invested into a realisation of new public buildings, such as Andrew Carnegie into the New York Public Library, or John D. Rockefeller into charities.⁹

1.1 Social Darwinism and Survival of the Fittest

The Social Darwinism had derived from Charles Darwin’s theory *The Origin of the Species* from 1859. The theory of Social Darwinism emerged in the late 19th century and opponent for this theory was English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Theory of Social Darwinism applied “the laws of evolution and the natural selection” on the society and the business sphere. In other words, only the strongest in the marketplace will survive. It was believed that successful people had earned their success and people who failed were too lazy or careless to be among the successful ones. Moreover, Spencer claimed that this selection was beneficial for the society.¹⁰

1.2 The Final Frontier and the Manifest Destiny

American history is also a history of “colonisation of the Great West”, where the “existence of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement

⁸ Morgan, H., Wayne, *The Gilded Age*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 1-15.

⁹ Brands, H. W. Lecture on How the Rich Got Rich: Gilded Age America. *YouTube.com* [online]. [cit. 2020-04-16]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7d766W6GTE>.

¹⁰ Brinkley, Alan, *The Unfinished Nation: A Brief Interactive History of the American People*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 276-277.

westward, explain American development.”¹¹ Frederick Jackson Turner was an American historian who had introduced an idea of the final frontier in 1893. This idea was presented in his *Frontier Thesis* at the American Historical Association at the World’s Fair in Chicago, which was held as 400th anniversary of Columbus discovery of America.¹² In the thesis, Turner claimed that civilising the West has always been in the nature of the American culture, and it also contributed to the individualism and the rise of democracy. West was a symbol of a “virgin land” and opportunities for free land, supported by the philosophy of Manifest Destiny, the belief that it is destined for American people, by God, to expand over the continent of America, mainly westwards, in order to spread democracy and capitalism.

Though the conquering of the West was one of the defining characteristics of the American nation, due to the expansion of the railroads, migration and industrialisation, at the end of the 19th century the West was already conquered. The frontier was gone, which, according to Turner, was the end of the first period of American history. There was a need of a new frontier and America had to set a new focus of conquering other parts of the world because their land was not empty and open anymore. It was essential to follow the New Manifest Destiny and to discover and explore in order to keep the defining frontier part of the American culture.¹³

1.3 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Notwithstanding the glamour of wealthy tycoons and the great technical progress, the Gilded Age was also about poor working and living conditions, sweatshops and assembly lines, low wages, child’s labour, long working hours and worker’s strikes against all these issues.¹⁴

One of the events that symbolise the tragic situation of workers in the Gilded Age is the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was, in many aspects, very similar to other sweatshops all around the industrial cities of Gilded Age America because of the working conditions. Workers usually worked long hours for extremely low wages. Some of the factories would even lock the door to prevent workers

¹¹ Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Significance of Final Frontier in American History*. (New York: H. Holt, 1921), 1.

¹² Rundbell, Walter. "Concepts of the "Frontier" and the "West"." *Arizona and the West* 1, no. 1 (1959): 13-41. Accessed April 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/40166911.

¹³ Brinkley, Alan, *The Unfinished Nation: A Brief Interactive History of the American People*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 261, 316.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 279-280.

from stealing. The Triangle factory employed 500 employees, mostly young immigrants and black women, and also children. Workers were aware of the poor conditions, therefore it led to strikes. In 1909, 400 employees walked out of the Triangle Factory for a strike, supported by The Women's Trade Union League, an association of white middle-class women. Despite all the strikes during the Gilded Age, the situation of poor working conditions for workers in the sweatshops had remained without change. On March 25, 1911, the factory caught on fire in the ninth floor of the building. Out of 500 employees, 146 died in flames. The employees neither could escape through the locked exit door, nor they could be saved by the firemen because the ladder was too short to reach the windows of the ninth floor. Some of the victims chose to jump to escape from the fire; some of them chose to burn alive. The majority of the accident victims were European immigrant women; some of them were 14 years of age. People demanded justice and the owners of the factory, Harris and Black, were sued. The tragedy, however, gave rise to the formation of worker's unions.¹⁵ The following Progressive Era came as a response to the Gilded Age, and it re-established the order in society in many ways, for example, in the creation of labour laws.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kheel Center, Cornell University. *The 1911 Triangle Factory Fire*, accessed April 13, 2020, <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/index.html>.

¹⁶ Brinkley, Alan, *The Unfinished Nation: A Brief Interactive History of the American People*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 280.

2 THEODORE DREISER

Theodore Dreiser was born on August 27, 1871, in Terre Haute, Indiana. His father, Johann Dreiser, emigrated from Germany in 1844 to avoid compulsory military service. Firstly he worked in wool mills in New England and then he moved to the Midwest where a majority of German-speaking people had settled. During his search for work, he met a young girl, Sarah Mary Schänäb, the daughter of a wealthy farmer. However, there were religious differences among them. Johann was a Roman Catholic, whereas Sarah was a member of a small religious sect called Mennonites, which prohibited its members to marry anybody of the catholic religion. These tensions forced the couple to run away, and in 1851 they got married in secret. They moved to Indiana and Johann became a successful proprietor of a wool mill in Sullivan, Indiana. Unfortunately in 1869, the mill had burned down and the financial situation of the family had changed. Moreover, during the reconstruction of the mill Johann was injured. There was also a decrease in the wool industry due to the early national economic crisis of the 1870s, which was another aspect that contributed to the overall poverty and long-lasting unemployment. The Dreiser family never recuperated from the economic downfall.¹⁷

Dreiser's childhood was full of poverty and unemployment of the members of his family that were constantly in a search for a job. He grew up in a family of 9 children, of which 6 of them were older his than age.¹⁸ The constant search for a job made them relocate quite often. For a while, they lived in Chicago as well. Theodore Dreiser himself was charmed by Chicago, and the city left a positive impression on him. Despite all the positive aspects, life in Chicago was challenging and that made the family relocate again to the near town called Warsaw. Theodore started to attend a public school and soon he realized his admiration for literature, however, he did not finish high school, and as a sixteen-year-old, he moved back to Chicago to search for work. In Chicago, he met his former teacher, Miss Mildred Fielding, who paid the university fees at Indiana University in Bloomington for one year, so Theodore got a chance to go back to his studies once again.¹⁹

¹⁷ Dreiser, Theodore, *Dawn – An Autobiography of Early Youth* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1998), 4-10.

¹⁸ Wallcut, Charles Child, *Seven novelists in the American naturalist tradition: the introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 95.

¹⁹ Dreiser, Theodore, *Dawn – An Autobiography of Early Youth* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1998), 368.

After his studies, he started to work as a reporter for the *Chicago Globe Newspaper*. During his journalistic career, he wrote for various newspapers in Chicago, St. Louis and Pittsburgh. He wrote reviews, feature stories and he also worked as an investigative journalist. In 1895 he moved to New York where he shortly worked for a production company Howley, Haviland & Co., that published songs of his brother Paul Dreiser. Theodore became an editor for a women's magazine of popular music and literature called *Every Month* which was released by Howley, Haviland & Co.,²⁰ Such women magazines were, by the late nineteenth century, targeted marginally on families of lower income and mainly on the middle class consumers.²¹

By the year 1897, he started to write for magazines such as *Munsey's Metropolitan*, *Harvey's Daily* and for magazine *Success* where he had a chance to interview rich tycoons like Andrew Carnegie, Philip Armour or Thomas Edison. During his stay in New York, he meets Sara Osbourne White and in 1898 they got married.²²

With the encouragement of his wife Sara and his friend Arthur Henry, he started to write his first social novel, *Sister Carrie*, which was inspired by the story of his sister Emma, who had an affair with a married man. The novel also depicts his opinions and perception of Victorian society in America.²³ In the novel, Dreiser relates the story of a girl from a small town who moves to Chicago and she is carried away by its glamour. She slowly realizes that the only way up the social ladder is her desire for success that she is driven by. The novel was rejected and criticized since its publishing. However, it was not criticized by the public but by the publisher himself, Frank Doubleday, who rejected to publish the novel due to its inappropriate content and the lack of punishment of the female protagonist in the end. The theme of *Sister Carrie*, used in the novel, was in Victorian America considered rather immoral. The novel was published in 1900 but it was not promoted, therefore it was not well known and rather negative comments could be heard about the novel.²⁴

The second novel Theodore Dreiser wrote, *Jennie Gerhardt*, has a different theme but the inspiration once again partly rises from his family, especially from his sisters Sylvia and Mame. According to Gerber, the parents of Jennie, Mr. and Mrs. Gerhardt are

²⁰ Moers, Ellen, *Two Dreisers* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1970), 32.

²¹ Fox, Richard Wrightman, and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds. *Cultures of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*. (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 44.

²² Dreiser, Theodore, *Newspaper Days* (New York: H. Liveright, 2000), 489.

²³ Alexander Charlotte A, *Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie* (New York: Monarch Press, 1965), 8.

²⁴ Loving, Jerome, *Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 140-158.

based on Dreiser's parents and some storylines are parallel to what happened in real life in Dreiser's family.²⁵ The story is about Jennie that comes from a family of German immigrants. As a young girl, she has an affair with Senator Bernan from whom she is pregnant. Unfortunately, Senator Bernan dies before he can marry Jennie. Later on in the story, she moves with her family to Cleveland where she meets Lester Kane to whom she is attracted, too. Due to social class differences, it is impossible for them to get married, however, Lester Kane provides Jennie with a comfortable home near him. At the very end, Jennie takes care of him when he gets ill and she stays with him until he dies. The novel was published in 1911 and received a better acceptance by the public.²⁶

After divorce from his wife Sara in 1912, he travelled to Europe and afterwards, he wrote a book *A Traveler at Forty*, published in 1913, describing his experiences from the journey. Although he was appreciated by significant critics of that time, such as H. L. Mencken, for the use of realism in his writings, his novels were quite often censored. Before publishing the novel *A Traveler at Forty* it was about forty chapters shorter than the original writing Dreiser handed to the publishing company and some parts were even omitted during the print of the novel.²⁷

2.1 Theodore Dreiser's Career

Theodore Dreiser published over his life about twenty-seven books. Apart from novels like the already mentioned *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, he is also an author of the famous novel *The American Tragedy*. The theme of the novel is man murdering his pregnant lover so he could marry a wealthier woman, and the desire for wealthier life and materialism overwhelmed his morality. The story follows a life of the protagonist Clyde Griffith and it ends with his death. Clyde's story is inspired by the real murder case of Chester Gilette and Grace Brown that happened in 1906. Among other famous works of Dreiser is the "Trilogy of Desire" that consists of the novels *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and *The Stoic* (1947). The "Trilogy of Desire" is written from the perspective of a businessman, Frank Algernon Cowperwood. Dreiser depicts a life story of a tycoon in the nineteenth century, bribes, frauds, paid elections, controlled media corruption and many other unfair techniques used by robber barons whom Dreiser had a chance to meet

²⁵ Gerber, Philip L, *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 21.

²⁶ Gerber, Philip L, *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 36-41.

²⁷ Loving, Jerome, *Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 254.

and interview during his journalistic career.²⁸ Although Dreiser is mostly remembered for his novels, he also wrote many short stories, such as *Free and Other Stories* in 1918 and *Chains: Lesser Novels and Stories* in 1927, and two volumes of poetry *Moods, Cadenced and Disclaimed*, published in 1927, and *Moods, Philosophical and Emotional* from 1935. Dreiser also wrote two autobiographies - *Dawn* published in 1931 and *Newspaper Days* in 1922. He is also an author of social criticism, *Tragic America*, which is about research on the social problems in America and also consists of arguments against the state institutions and corporations that he blamed for the social and economic situation of that time. This volume was released in 1932. Another book of social criticism was released eight years later, in 1941, *America is Worth Saving*, which is also a volume focused on the American government and its engagements in World War II., whilst the country has other issues to solve.²⁹

In spite of his successful career, Theodore Dreiser suffered from depression and he tried to commit suicide. Luckily he was saved by his brother Paul Dreiser and afterwards treated in a sanatorium. After his recovery, he started working as an editor for several women's magazines. In 1938 Dreiser and his partner, Helen Richardson, moved from New York to Los Angeles and they stayed there until Dreiser's death in 1945. Some of his works were published posthumously, such as the novels *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic* in 1947.³⁰

2.2 Naturalism

Naturalism is a literary movement that comes from Europe. The first to describe the movement was the French novelist Émil Zola, in *Le Roman Experimental* in 1880. This literary movement is introduced to America by novelist Frank Norris, who used scientific methods and by his works gave to the public readers the impression that the universe is controlled by the laws of mechanic causations. Norris also followed Zola's style of a character's slow destruction throughout the story, as for example in his novel *McTeague*. In contrast to the preceding literary movement of realism that is more concerned with plot and moralizing, naturalism is more concerned with characters and observing. Characters are mostly lower-class people with little or no education that are in some part of the novel

²⁸ Lehan, Richard Daniel, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 97.

²⁹ Lehan, Richard Daniel, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 202-204.

³⁰ Gerber, Philip L, *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 22.

exposed to external forces that they cannot control. With the influence of the Darwinian Theory of Evolution, human nature is characterized in the novels rather as animalistic, and characters are exposed to challenging situations, for example, a shipwreck in Stephen Crane's *The Open Boat*. The short story starts with four people in a lifeboat who spent two days trying to sail to the shore. Apart from the hopeless situation the short story also includes naturalistic depiction of death as well as anger, denial of God's existence and indifference of the nature that is neither hostile, nor helpful. The personality of characters vanish, the situation evokes the primal instincts and the inner beast within them. The predominant theme in naturalistic novels is determinism that is presented by the lack of a character's free will and control over their fate by external forces. Due to determinism, the characters in the novels are hopeless and the plot is pessimistic.³¹

Wallcut's description of naturalism is that "it comes where the conditions, the circumstances, the forces that limit the hero's freedom of choice grow in strength and complexity to the point where they take control. When the story becomes more complex it is because the problems and the circumstances become more complex, so that the hero has to consider great many more elements as he decides what path he will choose."³² External circumstances limit the character's freedom of decision. The more complex the story is, the less control over the external forces the character has.³³

As for Theodore Dreiser, whether is he or is not a naturalist author is a debate discussed by many, nevertheless, he is also referred to as the "Father of American Naturalism".³⁴ His inspiration for writing lies not only in his family but also in his journalistic career and observations of life in Chicago as well as in New York. Throughout his travelling, he had met many types such as Drouet. The character of Sister Carrie is based on experiences of his sisters and, according to Loving, the character of George Hurstwood and his tragical fate might be partially based on the life failure of Dreiser's father.³⁵ Besides chemical and scientific naturalistic insinuations in Dreiser's works, he also referred to more classical and widely used sources, such as water, magic and animalism.³⁶

³¹ Bloom, Harold, *American Naturalism* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 6-7, 93.

³² Wallcut, Charles Child, *Seven novelists in the American naturalist tradition: the introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 5.

³³ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁴ Loving, Jerome, *Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 140.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 146.

³⁶ Gogol, Miriam, *Theodore Dreiser—Beyond Naturalism* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 7-13.

3 HISTORY OF FEMINISM

Change in politics and society had an immense influence on the overall perception of women. The gradual shift from feudal to capitalistic society was in the second half of 18th century, mainly due to the Industrial Revolution and gradual expanse of economics. In contrast to the capitalistic society, feudal society was oriented more on different social classes than on gender differentiation. Considering the lower class, men and women had similar economical status. Both were participating in the same kind of work, for example on the fields, and the work was done usually in smaller, gender-mixed groups. As a result, strong differences may be seen mainly among social classes, not gender per se.³⁷ The gender gap had been created with the onset of the rise of capitalism, and 19th-century women were seen as mothers and housewives rather than workers in the public sphere and they were dependent on the money earned by husband. Moreover, from economic dependence rose also a social dependence and for women marriage became a necessity.³⁸

The oppression is significant in religion, too, and women had been a symbol of evil ever since. In the Bible it was Eve who sinned and tempted Adam to eat the forbidden apple. As a result of her disobedience, she caused the expulsion from God's Garden of Eden and the fall of the human race. A step against this view of women took an English writer, Jane Anger, in her work *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women*, from 1589, and she stated that Eve was in many aspects superior to Adam. As one of her examples she used God's creation, because in contrast to Adam, who was made out of "dross and filthy clay", Eve was made out of Adam's rib and according to this, Anger insisted that Eve might be therefore purer than Adam.³⁹

The word feminism comes from French and it firstly appeared in the 1890s. Along with the word "feminism" appeared also synonym term "womanism", used mostly by black women when they wanted to refer to white women. With these terms, especially in connection with the first wave of feminism, appeared the coined term "suffragettes", which referred to women whose mission was not only an accomplishment of the right to vote but also the support of abolitionism, a radical movement against slavery.⁴⁰ Feminism has always been a broad term and there was never a strict definition that would define the term perfectly. *The Collins Dictionary of Sociology* explains feminism as an "ideology which

³⁷ Bryson, Valerie, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*. (New York: Paragon House, 1992), pg. 7.

³⁸ Havelková, Hana, *Abc feminizmu: První a druhá vlna feminizmu*. (In Valdřová, Jana. *Abc feminizmu*. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004), pg. 171.

³⁹ Walters, Margaret, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pg. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

stands in dialectical opposition to all misogynous ideologies and practices”.⁴¹ A broader definition is provided by *The Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, where feminism is described as an organized social movement aiming to gain equality among sexes by enlarging women’s rights. In 1890 term “feminist” was used for anybody who was supporting women’s education, better professions and the right to vote.⁴²

Focusing on the United States, the anti-slavery movement was the first one where women were the main initiators, which led to the formation of a women movement purely focused on the accomplishment of the right to vote. However, O’Neill suggests that feminism can be understood not as an uprising born from slavery, but rather as a slow reaction to longterm oppression that co-occurred with the concept of a nuclear family, that is, according to the *Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, a family consisting only of a father, mother and children.⁴³

Marriage had sometimes a function of an escape. Smith-Rosenberg observes the poor working conditions for women and states that due to these unhealthy and depressing conditions, the opportunity to get married was perceived as an escape and a form of a strategy for survival. Marriage brought an obstacle to get into the workplace again. Moreover, Smith-Rosenberg observes this phenomenon in literature as well and as an example she uses the novel *Sister Carrie*: “Theodore Dreiser had described Sister Carrie’s horror when brought face to face with the barren drabness which both her married sister and the unmarried ‘girls’ in the sweatshop experienced.”⁴⁴

By 1860 emancipation of women in United States had started to evolve in two directions. Firstly, in a private way as teachers, students and as members of a small women associations they gradually started to reach for better opportunities outside the domestic sphere. Secondly, in a public way, and even though the sphere of influence was rather small, women organizations still supported abolitionism and their influence systematically grew. From the historical point of view, also the Civil War was helping women where thousands of them worked as nurses. Although men were in charge in most of the relief agencies, such as the Union’s Sanitary Commission, Civil War still allowed women to

⁴¹ Jary, David and Julia Jary, *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*. (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1995), pg. 229.

⁴² Marshall, Gordon, *The Concise Dictionary of Sociology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pg. 178.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 174

⁴⁴ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian Society America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13.

participate and use their skills not only in nursing but for very few also as spies or soldiers.⁴⁵

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution are all assuring freedom for black slaves. After the Civil War, feminists were desiring both, freedom for black slaves as well as women's right to vote.⁴⁶

Also, there was a concept of The True Woman. This True Woman was virtuous and she was mainly defined by four characteristics - purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity. In contrast, characteristics of the True Man were focused more on success and on moving up on the social ladder. The True Man was aggressive, competitive and rational which was useful in making a business. The roles of men and women in the 19th century were divided. A man was supposed to make a fortune and be in the public sphere, whereas a woman was supposed to manage the household in the private sphere.⁴⁷ Throughout history, women were often placed in the role of a comforter for a men. It was expected from women to turn home into a peaceful and cheerful place, so men would not have to search for a good time elsewhere.

Gradually, feminism had created two rival streams, one radical that formed the National Woman Suffrage Association in New York and the second one, more conservative, was the American Woman Suffrage Association, formed in Boston.⁴⁸

3.1 Three Waves of Feminism in 19th and 20th century

Women's fight for equal rights can be historically divided into three waves. The First Wave started at the turn of 19th and 20th century and the first independent women organizations, such as National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the General Federation of Women's Club appeared. These organizations allowed many women to express themselves and mainly to fight for their right to vote.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ O'Neill, William L, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pg. 12-13.

⁴⁶ McElroy, Wendy, "The Roots of Individualist Feminism in 19th century America". Excerpted from *Freedom, Feminism and the State*. (California: The Independent Institute, 1991), pg. 1-8.

⁴⁷ Welter, Barbara, *The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860: American Quarterly*, Volume 18, Issue 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), pg. 151-174. John Hopkins University Press, 1966.

⁴⁸ O'Neill, William L, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pg. 17-18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 18-19.

3.1.1 The First Wave of Feminism

The inspiration and courage to fight for equal rights were in parallel with the anti-slavery movement. In 1840 Elizabeth Cady Stanton attended the World Anti-Slavery Conference in London, where women were forbidden to talk in the debates.⁵⁰ Later on, in 1848, together with Lucretia Mott, Martha C. Wright and Mary Ann McClintock, she had organized the Seneca Falls Convention where *The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*, written by Stanton, was presented. To illustrate the issues women were dealing with it was decided to rewrite the Preamble of *The Declaration of Independence* from 1776.⁵¹ The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was established in 1890. The goal of NAWSA was to extend the Constitution of adding the Nineteenth Amendment, giving a woman the official right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment successfully passed the Congress in 1919 and, after the 72 years of fight for this matter, it came in force into 1920. Since this achievement, the tension among feminists was higher and women, in general, had ambitions to go further in their fight for equality.⁵² During World War I. women were able to work in many spheres and therefore it did not matter of course anymore to consider them as less capable or less intelligent than men. The achievement of the right to vote was, however, the main characteristics of the First Wave.

3.1.2 The Second Wave of Feminism

The Second Wave feminism, sometimes called the Women's Liberation Movement, is dated from 1969 and gave rise to many independent streams and movement of feminism worldwide. Women started to attend universities and graduated in many academic fields, such as law, science or medicine. Furthermore, women were acknowledged for their academic work that had a significant impact on sociology.⁵³ The era of the Second Wave feminism was focused more on themes such as patriarchal society, which was highly criticized by feminist activists, gender roles and inequality among sexes trying to improve the overall position of women in society.⁵⁴ Women mostly focused their attention on

⁵⁰ Walters, Margaret, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) ,pg. 46.

⁵¹ Dubois, Ellen Carol, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pg. 22.

⁵² Marshall, Gordon, *The Concise Dictionary of Sociology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pg. 179.

⁵³ Havelková, Hana, *Abc feminizmu: První a druhá vlna feminizmu*. In Valdřová, Jana. *Abc feminizmu*, (Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004), pg. 175.

⁵⁴ Marshall, Gordon, *The Concise Dictionary of Sociology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pg 179, 565.

sexual and family rights and they started to concentrate also on feminist movements worldwide.⁵⁵ The situation for women had changed after World War II., not only due to the expansion of economics but most importantly, men were capable of going back to work after war. On the grounds of these factors, the ideology of women as housewives was present again.⁵⁶ Moreover, it was common to list jobs according to gender and jobs listed for woman were only ‘secretary’ or ‘clerk’. Even though women were allowed to study at a university, it was still expected from them to get married, stay home and take care of the children as soon as possible without any attempt to have a future career. This is shown in one of the major works written in this era, *The Feminine Mystique*, by one of the leading figures in the feminist movement, Betty Friedan. Due to its topic the book gained popularity among many women. During 1960s arose the movement of Hippies, the movement as well supported the individuality of people and mainly women, creation of more job options for women, apart the ones already offered, and also that women should have the full right to freely decide about her bodies.⁵⁷ Along with this, the topic of rape and abortion started to be discussed. In 1975 was published a book, *Against Our Will*, by Susan Browmiller. In this book the topic of rape is presented as a violent sexual act by men on women and as a form of necessary dominant behaviour. As this was one of the first books to describe this matter, a year later, in 1976, Nebraska, came into force the law which made rape illegal.⁵⁸

3.1.3 The Third Wave of Feminism

The Third Wave feminism happens in the time from the mid-1990s. The prominent issues are political, social and economic inequality. Women overall try to move out from home and stand equal to men, not against them.⁵⁹ Also, the term ‘feminist’ started to be misused by society and it started to symbolize extremism and male hatred. The Third Wave is, overall, more focused on the individual, rather than on society as a whole and activists fight for equality among all people, claiming that people should focus on finding their own identity. This free era gave rise to many independent streams, such as

⁵⁵ Walters, Margaret, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pg.137-139.

⁵⁶ Havelková, Hana, *Abc feminizmu: První a druhá vlna feminizmu*. In Valdřová, Jana, *Abc feminizmu*. (Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004), pg. 171.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 177.

⁵⁸ Browmiller, Susan, Documentary on Woman’s Liberation Movement in the U. S. *Youtube.com* [online], [cit. 2020-03-12], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOsLjbpHV8M>.

⁵⁹ Walters, Margaret, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pg.138.

postmodern feminism, that was concerned with the idea of gender, claiming people are not born with gender and the main importance is how people present their gender by their public appearance to society. Queer theory, derived from the postmodern feminism, was, above that, interested in the question of what makes woman a woman and man a man, attributing to this questions a political importance. Another stream is multiracial feminism, dealing with the perception of a woman of different skin types and prejudice regarding the skin colour. The previous fights of the First and the Second movement gave women of the Third Wave a chance to focus on different issues. Women were aware of themselves and they fought against discrimination and the gender stereotype in society and they support the equality and individuality of the person.⁶⁰

A prominent American sociologist and feminist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, states that equality among sexes was a necessity. Gilman alleged that every woman, from an economical and moral point of view, desired to work the same as men and that women should work to sustain their sanity. Gilman claimed that “science, art, government, education, industry,--- the home is the cradle of them all, and their grave if they stay in it. Only as we live, think, work and feel outside of the home, do we become humanly developed, civilized, socialized.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Sokolová, Věra, *Současné trendy feministického myšlení*. (In Valdřová, Jana. *Abc feminismu*. Brno: Nesehnutí, 2004), pg. 206-212.

⁶¹ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, *Women and Economics: A Study of Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), pg. 110.

4 FEMINISM IN THE NOVEL *SISTER CARRIE*

The story of *Sister Carrie* begins in August 1889, when she leaves her home in the countryside, Wisconsin, and travels to Chicago to stay with her sister Minnie. In the train to Chicago, she meets her future lover, Charles Drouet. The story ends after eight years, in 1897, New York, when Carrie's second lover, George Hurstwood, commits suicide after Carrie leaves him.⁶² According to Lehan, "it is a story of longing and desire, weakness and strength, success and defeat, struggle and ambition."⁶³

The book starts on a train journey. Sister Carrie, as family members refer to her, is eighteen years old, when she is sent to Chicago. From her description by the narrator, the reader has a vision of Sister Carrie being dreamy, naïve and a passive character. Moreover, within the first pages, the narrator implies how her fate might evolve during the story, by saying that every girl has a choice. First choice means the city can corrupt her, the second one means she will be saved by someone and spared from the city's corruption, as the following excerpt shows. The reader, therefore, gets an unconscious feeling the city is harmful or dangerous.

When a girl leaves home at eighteen she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and become better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and she becomes worse.⁶⁴

4.1 Escape to the upper class

The answer to the first question of how does a poor and uneducated girl get to the upper-class world is in her ability of observation. In contrast to Colombia City in Wisconsin, Chicago is a cosmopolitan city full of beautiful things and glamour and Carrie wants to be part of it from the beginning. In the train to Chicago, she meets a handsomely dressed man, Charles Drouet, and her vision of Chicago being a better place is even stronger.

[Carrie] possessed of a mind rudimentary in its power of observation and analysis.⁶⁵

⁶² Alexander, Charlotte A, *Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie* (New York: Monarch Press, 1965), 61.

⁶³ Lehan, Richard Daniel, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 56.

⁶⁴ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 1.

⁶⁵ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 2.

When she learns how her sister Minnie and her husband Hanson live, she does not like it, and she does not feel like home there because it is not how she had envisioned it to be. She even does not want Drouet to visit her because the house is not beautiful enough, and she feels ashamed. Carrie and Minnie are contradictory characters. Minnie is a foil to Carrie, and she represents the traditional True Woman who is pragmatical and lives in poverty. She takes care of the household, husband, child and shows no interest in the world outside her home. Carrie, on the other hand, represents rebellion, dreams and idealisation of the future. She represents the New Woman who desires a better life and who allows herself to think that the world can offer more than a lower class dull house and stereotype.

Also, Carrie never reveals a desire to become a wife and mother. Minnie's life was, for Carrie, very dull and dissuasive. She sees Minnie waking up early in the morning to prepare breakfast for her husband, take care of the baby and tidy the house, whereas Minnie's husband Hanson reads newspapers. This vision of Minnie gave Carrie another reason to leave the life that would be waiting for her if she would not decide to live as a kept woman. Overall, Carrie does not like Minnie's lack of freedom, as the passage below shows:

When they were alone, the two sisters began a somewhat freer conversation, Carrie interrupting it to hum a little, as they worked in the dishes. "I should like to walk up and see Halstead Street, if it isn't too far," said Carrie, after a time. "Why don't we go to the theatre tonight?" "Oh, I don't think Sven would want to go tonight," returned Minnie. "He has to get up so early." "He wouldn't mind—he'd enjoy it," said Carrie. "No, he doesn't go very often," returned Minnie. "Well, I'd like to go," rejoined Carrie. "Let's you and me go." Minnie pondered a while, not upon whether she could or would go—for that point was already negatively settled with her—but upon some means of diverting the thoughts of her sister to some other topic. "We'll go some other time," she said at last, finding no ready means for escape.⁶⁶

The second reason why Carrie wants to escape the life she is offered is the constant desire for material things. Even though she was raised in a family of flour mill workers and she knew hard work, she did not want to be part of the working class, and she wanted to have a more comfortable life. Moreover, as soon as Carrie finds a job in a shoe factory, she cannot help herself to look down on her co-workers. Carrie never considers herself to be part of them even though they are kind to her and they try to help her during the work process.

⁶⁶ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), 30.

Also, she realises the pay for her work is not equal to the dull, hard work she has to do. On the other hand, she does not realise that she is not qualified enough to gain a higher-paid job, and she finds her situation disappointing.

As Carrie listened to this and much more of similar familiar badinage among the men and girls, she instinctively withdrew into herself. She was not used to this type, and felt that there was something hard and low about it all. She feared that the young boys about would address such remarks to her—boys who, beside Drouet, seemed uncouth and ridiculous.⁶⁷

The third reason for her entrance to the higher class world was her realisation that if she is going to stay in her sister's house and continue to pay a high rent, she will never be able to look like rich girls she sees on the streets. The girls among whom she desperately wants to belong. Carrie wants to spend money, and she wants to wear beautiful clothes, but this would never be a reality if she stays with her sister Minnie and her husband in their house.

Throughout the story, Carrie quickly realises that in Chicago, money and commodities are things of importance. From men who come across her life she learns that physical looks and attractiveness of a woman are powerful things to have and to use.⁶⁸ She does realise that if she wants to have all the beautiful clothes, she has to find a more lucrative source of income. Her attitude towards money is presented after her first lover, Drouet, takes her to an expensive dinner and afterwards gives her a 20 dollar note to buy some clothes:

A flame of envy lightened in her heart. She realised in her dim way how much the city held – Wealth, fashion, ease – every adornment for women, and she longed for dress and beauty with a whole and fulsome heart.⁶⁹

4.2 Liberalisation from the Male's World

After Carrie lost her job, she had a choice - either to go back home, or leave her sister's house and start to live as a mistress of a married man. She would have to live as a kept woman dependent on her lover, even though Drouet seems generous to her. Carrie's unwillingness for returning home and her lust for materialism overweighs her morality in

⁶⁷ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 39.

⁶⁸ Wallcut, Charles Child, *Seven novelists in the American naturalist tradition: the introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 99.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

the end, and she leaves her sister's house, leaving just a note with an explanation to her. Moving in with her lover Drouet is her first step into the upper class and the world where she desired to belong. Unfortunately, Carrie is stuck in a constant search for happiness and therefore, when she gets something she desire, she wants more. Frohock suggests that "the girl who keeps her eyes open doesn't necessarily come to a bad end because she goes to bed with other woman's husband."⁷⁰

However, Theodore Dreiser made Sister Carrie much less willing to be a 'kept woman'.⁷¹ How does Carrie get rid of her lovers and why? The narrator suggests her motivation that remains the same throughout the book, the endless desire for more.

The relationship between Carrie and Drouet is not based on love. Carrie knows she does not love Drouet and Drouet; on the other hand, views Carrie rather as a possession kept in his 'gilded cage',⁷² than an equal partner. In this relationship, Carrie gain the material things she desperately crave, and she indeed feels more powerful when she possess them, but, on the other hand, she has always felt like she could do much greater things. Not only Drouet's coldness towards her but also her desire to do greater things in life lead to the fact that she does not feel satisfied. Luckily, she finds better and more emotionally involved admirer, named George Hurstwood. It is not hard for Carrie to leave Drouet for her second lover, Hurstwood. In her pilgrimage to happiness, Carrie always wanted to move forward from places where she did not feel good enough. Hurstwood represents a higher social class, and Carrie finds him as a better match for her, instead of Drouet.

In spite of Hurstwoods 'greatness', as soon as she sees him getting old and not willing to find work, Carrie will abandon him as well. She intuitively, due to her ability of observation and analysis, realises that there is no hope for Hurstwood and his decline is inevitable, as he is unable to find a job and get back to higher class again. Carrie starts to despise him for his inability because now the roles between them have changed. Carrie now has to financially support them both, which is very uncomfortable for her. Naturally, Carrie always puts herself and her desires on the top of her priorities, and she is not willing to change it. It does not mean she is cruel but rather determined not to drop down and coalesce with the lower class again. She never wants to go back, and if she stays with

⁷⁰ Wallcut, Charles Child, *Seven novelists in the American naturalist tradition: the introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 93.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Epstein, Joseph, "'Sister Carrie' at 101." *The Hudson Review* 54, no. 1 (2001): 15-33. Accessed April 9, 2020. doi:10.2307/3852806.

Hurstwood, she would fall with him. Carrie does not want to fall back. Instead, she wants to fall upward. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator described her as a “half-equipped little knight”⁷³, but over time she grew in her persona, realising her increasing capabilities.

In the first relationship, Carrie lacks emotions and love, and therefore she leaves Drouet for more an emotionally oriented and, mainly, much richer man. Moreover, she is also aware of the fact that Drouet perceives her rather as a possession than a partner.

[Drouet] was simply letting things drift because he preferred the free round of his present state of any legal trammellings. In contrast, Hurstwood appeared strong and sincere. He had no easy manner of putting her off. He sympathised with her and showed her what her true value was. He needed her, while Drouet did not care.⁷⁴

In her second relationship, she realises Hurstwood’s weakness and his inability to support them both. She does not want to be taken down by his weak spirit and frees herself to go up the social ladder as she has always wished to do so.

Carrie’s abandoning of Hurstwood is understandable for another reason. She is a working woman in a patriarchal society where working opportunities are made primarily for men, not for women. By the end of the 19th century, women were still expected to stay at home. Hurstwood is a former manager of a saloon, and Carrie expects she is going to have a better life with him, as he is richer than Drouet, but this is not the case. Not only that Hurstwood is not successful in finding another job but he expects Carrie to support him. Carrie is a lady in a patriarchal world where women do not even have a right to vote, and yet she is expected to financially support her partner, who is not her husband. Moreover, her low wage is not enough for both of them, and she realizes that if she is going to continue to give money to Hurstwood, she will not be able to buy things for herself. Her gentle way of setting herself free from the relationship implies she is still a sensitive character:

“Dear George,” he read, crunching the money in one hand. “I am going away. I’m not coming back anymore. It’s no use trying to keep up the flat. I can’t do it. I wouldn’t mind helping you if I could, but I can’t support us both and pay the rent. I need what little I make to pay for my clothes. I’m leaving twenty dollars. It’s all I have just now. You can do whatever you like with the furniture. I won’t want it. Carrie.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 439.

4.3 The New 'Freedom'

Thirdly, after the analysis of her 'liberalisation' from the male's world, it is important to analyse whether this brings her coveted happiness and satisfaction. Carrie gains happiness every time, but only temporary happiness because as soon as she reaches her goal, she strives to get something more. Once she takes a step out of the lower class world and surrounds herself by beautiful things in a new home with Drouet, she feels like she could do greater things. Later on, in the story, she takes up the role of theatre actress. Then she again moves forward to run away with a better, richer and more sophisticated man from Chicago to New York. There she surrounds herself with new acquaintances, and in the end, she leaves her second lover, and she also stars on Broadway and lives with her friend, Lola Osborne.

Although it seems Carrie is getting everything she wants, there is always a punishment. Lemaster proposes that Carrie's happiness is unreachable and she states that "[Carrie] has experience with exchanging sex for money, clothes and security – she recognises how woman sell themselves in a capitalist economy, the thing that lured Carrie on in her desire for beauty turns out to be ephemeral, and therefore she remains unhappy at the end – she fails to find happiness."⁷⁶ Carrie will never have anyone with whom she could share her happiness and success, and at the end of the novel, she is, indeed, surrounded by her belongings, but no matter how full the room might be, it will never fill up her soul enough so she would not feel empty as a shell.

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 such happiness as you may never feel.⁷⁷

4.4 Sister Carrie as a Feminist Character

As a literary character, Carrie was never allowed by the narrator to express her deepest feelings and to find the connection to herself. In comparison with a novel of a

⁷⁶ Lemaster, Tracy, "Feminist Thing Theory in 'Sister Carrie'". *Studies in American Naturalism* 4, no. 1 (2009): 41-55.

⁷⁷ Dreiser, Theodore, *Sister Carrie*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 487.

similar theme, *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, the narrator feels disdain for Madame Bovary. The narrator in *Sister Carrie* stays neutral. He does not criticise, nor admire her.⁷⁸

All three previous questions above lead to the crucial one, is Carrie a feminist? Considering the historical era of the Gilded Age and the overall position of women in nineteenth-century America, Carrie's behaviour is outstanding. Victorian society of the nineteenth century describes a middle class white American woman as pure, pious, domestic and submissive. The competing model for femininity was introduced in a form of the New Woman around the 1880s. These women were usually economically independent, and they had a career. They also chose to align themselves with a same-sex member, rather than be involved in a conventional marriage with a man. This phenomenon can also be applied to the character of Carrie, as she follows this pattern as well when she leaves Hurstwood and moves in with her friend, Lola Osbourne. However, the typical New Woman was more politically active and better educated. In this case, Carrie might be considered as a transitional figure between the role of a traditional Victorian model of a True Woman to the concept of the New Woman.⁷⁹

At the end of the novel, the reader learns that even though Carrie got everything she wanted, the happy ending is absent. Instead, she can be considered as a tragic character. Carrie undergoes an exceptional way towards her success, but the success of hers is not truly fulfilling. Moreover, the goal of early feminists of the 19th century was, apart from gaining the right to vote, the self-reliance and independence. Women wanted to be taken seriously and they wanted to speak up, to educate themselves and to enhance their inner spirit. Women wanted to be a subject to their own lives. With Carrie, due to her emptiness, this part of feminism is never fulfilled. Even though her social position in a patriarchal society is admirable for a woman, her character does not show a key feature of feminism. In fact, Carrie could be considered more an American Eve or a 'fallen woman.' According to Pizer, even though Carrie is a 'fallen woman' she does not suffer from the typical punishment that usually follows such characters, like for example Hester Prynne, the protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter*.⁸⁰ Moreover, Pizer also observes that: "Carrie, as Eve, 'falls' not because she is weak or because her human tempters, Drouet and Hurstwood, are

⁷⁸ Epstein, Joseph, "'Sister Carrie' at 101." *The Hudson Review* 54, no. 1 (2001): 15-33. Accessed April 9, 2020. doi:10.2307/3852806.

⁷⁹ Welter, Barbara, *The Cult of the True Womanhood: 1820-1860: American Quarterly*, Volume 18, Issue 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), pg. 151-174. John Hopkins University Press, 1966.

⁸⁰ Pizer, Donald, *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 38.

evil, but because the apple is beyond resistance in its attraction. And life, though it is filled with terror and mystery as well as wonder, is not evil.”⁸¹

All in all, Carrie’s storyline shows an outstanding way towards success. Warren states that “like Indians and blacks in nineteenth-century America, women as a group were excluded from participation in the American Dream.” In *Sister Carrie* Dreiser, apart from other novelists such as Mark Twain or Herman Melville, does not disregard the female as a person. Instead, he allows a woman to reach the American Dream and be successful in the patriarchal society.⁸² If the historical background is taken into account, Carrie’s way up could be considered as a feminist feature. However, the main feminist feature remains unfulfilled. With some exceptions, such as her intentional choice of life as a ‘kept woman’ over the life as a married woman, Carrie is mostly a passive character throughout the novel. Carrie is not entirely independent. Instead, her dependency had changed. It is true she is not dependent on men anymore. However, she is dependent on money, good reputation and overall respect she gains as an actress. Her hollowness and the fact that she is not a subject to her own life, therefore, does not match with feminist attempts and desires for independence.

⁸¹ Ibid, 53.

⁸² Warren, Joyce, *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 16-17.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyse the feminist features of Carrie, the protagonist of the novel *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser. In the first chapter, the thesis provides the reader with the historical background of America in the late 19th century, called the Gilded Age. The second chapter is focused on the life of Theodore Dreiser as well as his inspiration for this novel. *Sister Carrie* is based on the life of Dreiser's sister Emma. Just like Carrie in the novel, Emma became entangled with a married gentleman named Hopkins who, like Hurstwood, had stolen money from his employer and run away with his lover. Also, the name of the novel itself could be considered as proof of using his personal life as an inspiration for his work. Moreover, Dreiser seems to treat the protagonist with sympathy. This might be a reason for the absence of the punishment for Carrie as a 'fallen woman'. The third chapter is about the historical evolvement of the feminist movement, predominantly focused on America. The last chapter of the thesis is the analysis of the novel *Sister Carrie* from the feminist perspective.

In the last chapter, the thesis explains that even though Carrie shows unusual behaviour for a woman of the late 19th century, some of the feminist features remain unfulfilled. Even though she shares some of the characteristics such as unwillingness to be caught in the usual family life that consisted of being a good housewife, she lacks the essential feminist feature which feminists of the 19th century praised the most— independence. Feminism in *Sister Carrie* is projected in Carrie's determined way up, in her rebellion against the social conventions of the late 19th century, in her courage to leave men in her life and live on her own, which is for a woman in Gilded Age America unusual and hard. Carrie represents a New Woman, and she is one of the early feminist characters showing that even women without the right to vote can be successful and can achieve the American Dream in a patriarchal world. For Carrie, the accomplishment of her American Dream is in the form of material wealth. However, the naturalistic setting of the novel shows her hollowness and most importantly highlights the fact that she will never be happy, suggesting that material things are not equal to happiness. For Carrie, happiness is the unreachable terminal because she always projects her happiness into things she does not currently possess and, therefore, she is caught in a perpetual search without the near end. The fact that she always dreams about happiness in her rocking chair only supports the lack of progress.

In spite of Carrie's determination, feminism in the novel is incomplete and in some parts passive as the protagonist herself. Feminists of the 19th century aimed to reach individuality, and they wanted to rely on themselves. However, Carrie misses her inner self, and because she is hollow, she cannot rely on herself like a typical feminist. She wants to be independent, but she is not successful because her dependency on men had changed to dependency on money and fame. She aims for superficial things, which corresponds with the superficial material American Dream of the late 19th century.

In conclusion, the thesis suggests that Carrie might be considered as a feminist, but incomplete and passive, as her character is indeed throughout the whole novel. Carrie is an American Eve, a fallen woman who ends up having it all without visible punishment. Nevertheless, the punishment is there, although it is not that striking. She is a tragic character because she never finds anything fulfilling in her life. She is empty as a shell, still longing for her happiness that always lies in an unreachable place, dreaming about it while sitting in a rocking chair, moving on a place without progress, looking blindly into the distance.

Therefore, the terminal of Carrie's way towards happiness is absent and empty, as well as herself, and, perhaps this emptiness of herself might be equal to a usual punishment a 'fallen woman' would get.

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