

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA



FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LETTERS

N°:.....

DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

Anti-Consumerism in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfilment of
the Requirements for Master Degree in Civilization and Literature**

Candidates:

Mrs. Imane SETTA

Mrs. Asma BOUKARI

	University of M'sila	Chairperson
Dr. Houria MIHOUBI	University of M'sila	Supervisor
	University of M'sila	Examiner

2020

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA



FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LETTERS

N°:.....

DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

Anti-Consumerism in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfilment of
the Requirements for Master Degree in Civilization and Literature**

Candidates:

Mrs. Imane SETTA

Mrs. Asma BOUKARI

	University of M'sila	Chairperson
Dr. Houria MIHOUBI	University of M'sila	Supervisor
	University of M'sila	Examiner

DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the thesis entiteled, “Anti-Consumerism in Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie”. Is our own work and that all the sources we have quoted have been acknowleged by means of references.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, we are profoundly grateful to almighty Allah for his mercy and guidance.

Second, we would gratefully acknowledge our sincere gratitude to our supervisor Dr. Houria MIHOUBI for her guidance and patience.

Lastly, we offer our regards to each and every one who has stood by us in any respect during the previous years.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents for their love and support throughout my life and for giving me the strength to reach and chase my dreams. I hope I will never stop making them feel proud of me.

To my husband and my son who deserve my wholehearted love. And finally I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my friend Asma Boukari.

Dedication

I dedicate this humble dissertation first and foremost to my dear parents, especially my beloved mother. And of course all my brothers and sisters for their unconditional love and continued financial and moral support in order to achieve my goal and to reach this level.

I also extend my thanks and appreciation to my colleague and my sister Imane Setta, for her great efforts in our dissertation.

Abstract

This paper examines the notion of what capitalism and consumer culture have meant to individuals throughout the history of the development of American society. As to fully understand the reasons of the creation of this notion. This study takes a closer look what is consumerism ideology and its results and how this ideology did affect people from different classes. Furthermore the study makes evident that the development of the American society and the American economy will force people to reevaluate the old values in order to survive in the competitive society. Eventually this study places a particular focus on the consumer culture in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. The novel selected is thus studied thematically. Literature can not be detached from historical and social setting; it has been. And will continue to be, a register of political and historical turmoil. That is why, the first chapter highlights the socio-historical issues and realities that surrounded and affected the writing of the novel and examines the ideologies widespread in America that time. While the second chapter, it examines how the writer as anti-capitalist attacked consumerism demonstrating its negative effects on individuals lives. Our objective here is to map how Theodore Dreiser criticizes the consumer society and people's willingness to do anything in order to succeed even if their actions were against moral values.

Keywords: Capitalism, Consumerism, *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	I
Dedication.....	II
Abstract.....	IV
Table of Content.....	V
General Introduction.....	01

CHAPTER ONE: THEORITICAL FRAME WORK AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

Introduction

1. Marxist Theory.....	05
2. Socio-historical Background of the Novel	
2.1. The Rise of Capitalism in America.....	09
2.2. Consumerism as a Result of Capitalism.....	13
2.3. Naturalism as Litrary Movement.....	17
3. Theodore Dreiser and his Novel.....	20

Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO: ANTI-CONSUMERISM IN DREISER'S *SISTER CARRIE*.

Introduction

1. The Way Dreiser as Anti-capitalist did attack Consumerism.....	26
2. The Distruction Caused to Individuals by Consumerism.....	30
3. The Tragic Ending of Characters Caused by Consumerism.....	35

Conclusion

General Conclusion.....	38
Work Cited.....	40

General Introduction

“The end of consumerism and accumulation is the beginning of the joy of living”

(Vandana Shiva).

Literature reflects life, as coloured by the artist's imagination. But it is also true that the literature of a country is directly influenced by the life and society of the period. There is always interplay of the personal and impersonal factors in the making of literature. It has been rightly said that literature is the result of an interplay of the man, the moment, and the milieu.

There are many forces that act in combination to transform the literary standards and tastes. These forces could be economic, socio-cultural, political, philosophic and scientific.

In the early nineteenth century, the economy had been primarily agricultural but in the late nineteenth century Americans experienced energetic and corporate and powerful capitalism which produced immense wealth and inequality. The rural people and overseas immigrants made massive movement into factories and cities. Individuals and society were divided in that private profit came before public welfare and it generated the new individual constituted by possessions. Due to the development of science and technology, material prosperity pervaded the cities. The urbanization resulted in capitalism and consumerism.

Moreover, there are two main features that characterize capitalism, the most important feature is the materialistic attitude, it values the acquisition of material goods. The culture which highlights consumerism is referred to as a consumer culture. In the consumer culture, people equate personal happiness with acquiring material possessions and consumption. In addition, the characters regard consumerism as a social signal which permits them to identify with like-minded people.

Another feature of capitalist society is class struggle. Industrial economy results in the concentration of wealth and severe class distinction. They are measured in terms of

comparative economic importance; its result has become the relativity of poverty and wealth and causes people to feel happiness or misery.

Dreiser's plan concerning his novel *Sister Carrie* was to portray America during the time of its urbanization, with its fast transformation as Americans adapted into the new society and depicting the oppressive ideologies and social inequality in a capitalist and consumerist society and the negative effects of consumerism on individuals and their behavior and values.

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is also best known as a representative naturalist novel in literature. General views on naturalist novel give it a pessimistic impression in which human being are determined by heredity and environment and they seem to have no free will and no moral in their fate. In the novel, although the characters may be helpless in their fate in an amoral world, Dreiser never makes them stop seeking a valuable life.

Furthermore, Dreiser considers the people living within the capitalist order in which the characters show a fascination with consumer objects "self-fulfillment resides not in the act of making things, but in the act of buying things" (Brown 86). It is not the production of goods, but their gathering and showing which produce the feel of success.

Therefore, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is among the novels that can be analysed through Marxist literary theories. So this dissertation reveals Marxist critique of commodification and consumerism in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in which the main characters are from three different classes of American socio-economic life. The characters oppress and commodify each other to their own convenience. They exploit and victimize each other to climb the social ladder while they lead the poor ones to misery and hardship. Such kinds of commodification, class distinction, and oppressive ideologies as consumerism are the results of capitalism. So through Marxist reading of *Sister Carrie*, one can see the negative effects of consumerism on individuals and their behavior and values.

Besides this, the oppressive ideologies of the capitalist society affect the characters badly and lead them to a brutal competition in materialism and tragic ending. The ruling class 'constructed' the ideologies which only serve their interests and through these false ideologies, they make the lower class believe that the upper class must be more privileged and have this right to commodify and use the lower class, however; they like while the lower class must be completely obedient and at the service of them. Thus, the relationship between the base and superstructure in the capitalist society is perceivable in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

Many researchers have shown interest in this topic, and in Theodore Dreiser's literary corpus for their investigation. Critics have praised Theodore Dreiser's profound deflection of the issue of consumerism.

Aiming at providing an understandable coherent work, it is important to identify the questions that this study is attempting to answer. The main question that will give birth to this thesis is: how did Dreiser attack consumerism? . This study will equally deal with the following sub-questions: What are the negative effects of consumerism on individuals? How does the Marxist view capitalism and consumerism? What is the author's aim from demonstrating the negative effects of capitalism and consumerism?.

The aim of this research is to prove that *Sister Carrie* can be analysed from a Marxist standpoint, hence, demonstrating Marxist critique of commodification and consumerism in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, tracing them mainly in the lives and characters of Carrie, Hurstwood, and Drouet around whom most of the story revolves. Moreover, this study will identify the impact of such false ideologies on individuals' personalities.

The work will be structured into two chapters. The first chapter will take the socio-historical context while the second one will be devoted to the practical side of the study in which the novel will be analysed.

CHAPTER ONE:

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The literary text is considerably interrelated with its context. It mirrors and bears the ideologies and the sociocultural codes particular to the time period of its production, and one of its prominent theme is definitely the critique of society.

Many nineteenth and twentieth authors observed the deterioration of the American society and its departure from the values. One of these authors is Theodore Dreiser, American novelist known for his best novel *Sister Carrie*. The novel *Sister Carrie* reflects the period in which was written, the era of emerging of capitalism and consumerism. This era corresponded perfectly with the American literary Naturalism.

The first chapter of this dissertation deals with the socio-historical of the period in which the novel was written. It is divided into three parts. The first part deals with Marxism and the second part deals with the socio-historical context, capitalism, consumerism, and naturalism while the last part presents the author and his work.

1. Marxist Theory

The Industrial Revolution took place in England in 1750 and it spread up gradually all over Europe till the end of 18th century. The emergence of Industrial Revolution is an epoch-making event in the history of human society. This Revolution changed the overall face and structure of society at the global level. The social, political, economic and religious scenario of the world than was overthrown totally by the Revolution. It no more remained as it was before 1750 but got drastically changed. Even the cultural and philosophical attitudes of the world started to change during this period due to industrialization. In a nutshell, the Industrial Revolution spared no field unchanged. (Gronow 1)

With the emergence of Industrial Revolution, a new system of production came into existence in the society and that was capitalism. The capitalistic system gave rise to two classes - owners' class and workers' class. The capitalists were men of wealth, power and

property and they started to exploit the workers. They committed injustice upon the workers' class as a result of which the atmosphere of unrest and displeasure got aroused in the workers' class. A large number of philosophers and thinkers got united against the injustice and exploitation done by the capitalists during this period. Among these philosophers and thinkers, the German philosopher, Karl Marx. (Gronow 1)

Karl Marx, in full Karl Heinrich Marx, (born May 5, 1818, Trier, Rhine province, Prussia , Germany, died March 14, 1883, London, England), revolutionary, sociologist, historian, and economist. He published (with Friedrich Engels) *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (1848), commonly known as *The Communist Manifesto*, the most celebrated pamphlet in the history of the socialist movement. He also was the author of the movement's most important book, *Das Kapital*. These writings and others by Marx and Ka Engels form the basis of the body of thought and belief known as Marxism. (Gronow 2)

Furthermore, Karl Marx, was a leading figure, is the pioneer of modern communist philosophy. He is a philosopher and thinker who led the struggle against injustice. He gave a new turn to the conflict between capitalists and workers. Along with Friedrich Engels, he supported all movements for the ammelioration of workers' condition and for their democratic rights. He thoroughly devoted himself to the welfare and upliftment of this class. Through his writings, Marx has expressed his thoughts on the sorrow and misery of the exploited class in a simple but very effective manner. In a sense, it is but a revolutionary ideology of Marx which has carved out a special niche for him as an epoch-making reformer and philosopher of the modern world. (Gronow 1)

Marxism is a social, political, and economic philosophy named after Karl Marx, which examines the effect of capitalism on labor, productivity, and economic development and argues for a worker revolution to overturn capitalism in favor of communism. Marxism posits

that the struggle between social classes, specifically between the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, and the proletariat, or workers, defines economic relations in a capitalist economy and will inevitably lead to revolutionary communism. (Cheppelow par.1)

Besides his philosophy, Marx believed that labour, value and materialism are the basic things and further maintained that labour of the worker should be honoured with its due returns. He also remarked that the progress of society is possible with the help of workers' labour only. Therefore, the workers must get a just share of their labour in the form of wages for maintaining their expenses on food, shelter, clothing, education for children etc. which will bring happiness to the worker and his family. It is for the sake of giving comfort to him and to his family the worker puts his labour in the system of production. However, as a matter of fact, the worker is not benefitted from his labour. Instead of it, the capitalist gets the real profit of the workers' labour. Thus, the capitalists' class exploits the workers' class. And here starts the economic inequality in the society. Such an economic inequality gives rise to class conflict. In order to abolish this inequality, the society anticipates revolution. We can put an end to this conflict and to such an atmosphere of revolution by establishing an ideal society which is based on communism. (Gronow 2)

In short, Marx believed that social change could be made possible through the conflict between the exploiters' class and the exploited class. For their freedom and liberty, the workers' class should launch a revolution. He further believed that economic factor plays an important role in the society because the relations of production give rise to the thoughts and ideology in the society. He also tried to convince that labour is a very important concept in human society. All these thoughts of Marx are based on facts. They are evolved out of the contemporary actual social situation. By observing this situation carefully, Marx propagated his thoughts and ideas for putting an end to the misery and sorrow of the workers' class by

taking them out of the difficulties like bad working and living conditions, low wages, their alienation from labour etc. (Gronow 2)

The basic principles of Marxism are as follows: first, the concept of 'Surplus Value' According to Marx, in the capitalistic system of production, the working class gets exploited. With the help of his theory of surplus value, Marx points out how this exploitation of the working class takes place. In a sense, Marx's theory of surplus value is but a theory of labour value involved in a commodity. Marx says that there are four elements of production and these are - land, labour, capital and organization. Out of these four elements of production, the element of labour is the sole creator of the value of a commodity. The other three elements are not the creator of the value of a commodity. They reproduce only what is put in them. In the process of production or manufacturing of a commodity, labour is employed from the beginning. For example, in producing the raw material labour is employed. Labour is employed in processing the raw material. It is employed in the sources of energy like coal, oil, gas etc. It is also used in constructing the machinery and building. According to Marx, the value, of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labour employed in producing the commodity in a given state of society, under certain average conditions of social production and average skills of the labour employed. (Gronow 13)

The second principle is the concept of class struggle: In the Communist Manifesto Marx says, "*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.*" (Marx and Engels: 1952, 419). The concept of class struggle or class war is very important in Marx's Theory Marx says that in the history of human society, there has been war or struggle between two classes from the very beginning. Every society includes two classes having hatred or antagonism against each other. For example, the landowner exploits the landless; the factory owners exploit the workers. (Gronow 14)

In addition to, the law of concentration of capital in the hands of the few principle: which is the concentration of capital in the hands of the few. In this regard Marx argues that the wealth of the community gets concentrated in the hands of people like industrialists or capitalists. These capitalists or industrialists are the owners of the means of production: With the help of the means of production, they-exploit workers by paying them low wages and no share of profits. As a result, they amass a huge wealth. With the help of this wealth they create another wealth. Thus, day by day they get richer and richer whereas the workers, who don't have anything in their hands, get poorer and poorer. (Gronow 16)

Besides to that, there is the dictatorship of the Proletariat principle: The dictatorship of the proletariat is one of the basic aspects of Marxism. Marx, in his theory, speaks of the dictatorship of the proletariat also. "*The proletariat*". The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines as "*lowest class of community*" or the "*wage earners esp. those without capital and dependent on daily labour for subsistence.*" (Con. Oxford : 1982, 823). Thus, the proletariat means landless and propertyless masses who are being exploited mercilessly, will overthrow the capitalists and establish a dictatorship, which will live for some time only. (Gronow 16)

2.1. The Rise of Capitalism in America

Capitalism is defined as an economic system in which a country's trade, industry, and profits are controlled by private companies, instead of by the people whose time and labor powers those companies. The United States and many other nations around the world are capitalist countries, but capitalism is not the only economic system available; throughout history, other countries have embraced other systems, like socialism or communism, so it's important to explore what capitalism actually is. (Kelly par.1)

In a capitalist economy, capital assets such as factories, mines, and railroads can be privately owned and controlled, labor is purchased for money wages, capital gains accrue to

private owners, and prices allocate capital and labor between competing uses (see “Supply and Demand” in the June 2010 *F&D*). (Jahan, Mahmud par. 2)

It is noticeable that the need and greed to possess materialistic goods and the aspiration of becoming successful was also present among the Puritans. Max Weber, the author of *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, observes the productivity of the new settlers and concludes that the most affluent and prolific society was that living in the New England region where most of the Protestant colonies lie. However, their productivity had always been based on an ascetic labor. The doctrine of predestination has led them to achieve both moral and ecclesiastical purity as well as self-induced calculable performance. The Protestants viewed all work as a spiritual calling that ought to be meticulously executed. Frederick Tolles, a leading historian of colonial Pennsylvania, argues that within this doctrine the acquisition of prosperity and richness through God’s will symbolizes their salvation: “If one kept one’s inner eye to the Lord and labored diligently in one’s calling, one could expect that God would show His favor by adding His blessing in the form of material prosperity” (Jillson, 19). This claim cannot be corroborated because the circumstances of 8 that age had forced them to further develop their trade and expand their marketplace. Early Puritans and Quakers made joint decisions about the kind of plantations they would own and sell, while believing that religion would give form and direction to politics and economics. Quakers were more inclined to urban trade rather than making settlements, but once they achieved commercial success they established impressive towns and communities. (Hlaban 7)

After the Protestant’s dominance over the colonial market came a group of English noblemen who saw having a settlement in America as an opportunity of financial success. These men wanted a quick fortune mainly in the gold industry and plantations. They settled in Virginia, which later on became the main center of the North American population with continuous income of immigrants. The Englishmen invested in hundreds of acres of

plantations for these adventurers, far away from any other colonists, and established private business in order to make a personal profit. Thus, a first form of Capitalism arose. (Hlaban 8)

The American Creed fully developed in the 18th century when the state was being formed in a document called the Declaration of Independence and it involved equality, liberty, populism, individualism, and laissez faire. The belief of self-exploration led the Protestants into commercial activity which later on transformed into the search for economic individualism. These may be the first signs of Capitalism in the New World which led to excessive consumption and competitive consumerism with the Industrial Revolution. As a result, this ideologie had changed the American standard and its principles and values. (Hlaban 3)

Indeed, Capitalists are typically wealthy people who have a large amount of capital (money or other financial assets invested in business, and who benefit from the system of capitalism by making increased profits and thereby adding to their wealth. A capitalist nation is dominated by the free market, which is an economic system in which both prices and production are dictated by corporations and private companies in competition with one another, and places a heavy focus on private property, economic growth, freedom of choice, and limited government intervention. Generally, those to the right of the political spectrum tend to be pro-capitalist; those on the left veer toward anti-capitalism. (Kelly par. 4)

The kind of impact that capitalism has on someone life depends on whether he or she is a worker or a boss. For someone who owns a company and employs other workers, capitalism may make sense. The more profits your company brings in, the more resources you have to share with your workers, which theoretically improves everyone's standard of living. It's all based on the principle of supply and demand, and in capitalism, consumption is king. The problem is that many capitalist bosses aren't great at sharing the wealth, which is why one of

the major critiques of capitalism is that it is a huge driver of inequality, both social and economic. (Kelly par. 5)

Moreover, Capitalism takes the position that “greed is good,” which its supporters say is positive thing greed drives profits and profits drive innovation and product development, which means there are more choices available for those who can afford them. Its opponents say that capitalism is, by nature, exploitative, and leads to a brutally divided society that tramples the working classes in favor of fattening the rich’s wallets. (Kelly par.5)

Furthermore, Capitalism has several pillars among them: private property, which allows people to own tangible assets such as land and houses and intangible assets such as stocks and bonds. Self-interest, through which people act in pursuit of their own good, without regard for sociopolitical pressure. Nonetheless, these uncoordinated individuals end up benefiting society as if, in the words of Smith’s 1776 *Wealth of Nations*, they were guided by an invisible hand and Competition, through firms’ freedom to enter and exit markets, maximizes social welfare, that is, the joint welfare of both producers and consumers. (Jahan and Mahmud par. 2)

Besides to, market mechanism pillar that determines prices in a decentralized manner through interactions between buyers and sellers prices, in return, allocate resources, which naturally seek the highest reward, not only for goods and services but for wages as well. Freedom to choose with respect to consumption, production, and investment dissatisfied customers can buy different products, investors can pursue more lucrative ventures, and workers can leave their jobs for better pay. (Jahan and Mahmud par. 2)

In addition to, limited role of government pillar, to protect the rights of private citizens and maintain an orderly environment that facilitates proper functioning of markets. The extent to which these pillars operate distinguishes various forms of capitalism. In free markets, also called *laissez-faire* economies, markets operate with little or no regulation. In *mixed*

economies, so called because of the blend of markets and government, markets play a dominant role, but are regulated to a greater extent by government to correct market failures, such as pollution and traffic congestion; promote social welfare; and for other reasons, such as defense and public safety. Mixed capitalist economies predominate today. (Jahan and Mahmud par. 2)

2.2. Consumerism as a Result of Capitalism

Consumerism is the belief that personal wellbeing and happiness depends to a very large extent on the level of personal consumption, particularly on the purchase of material goods. The idea is not simply that wellbeing depends upon a standard of living above some threshold, but that at the center of happiness is consumption and material possessions. (Norton 1)

A consumerist society is one in which people devote a great deal of time, energy, resources and thought to “consuming”. The general view of life in a consumerist society is consumption is good, and more consumption is even better. The United States is an example of a hyper-consumerist society. People are constantly bombarded with advertisements urging them to buy things. Such advertisements promote not simply specific products, but also a vision of “the good life” and what it takes to be happy. Shopping is experienced by many people as an exciting recreational activity. People go deeply into debt in order to buy things beyond basic necessities: a larger house, a giant television, a fancy car. These are all the hallmarks of a society within which consumption is at the center of life. (Norton 2)

Consumerism challenges four important premises of the marketing concept: It is assumed that consumers know their needs, business really cares about those needs and knows exactly how to find about them, business does provide useful information that precisely matches product to needs, and It is presumed that product and services really fulfill customer expectations as well as business promises. (Chand par. 1)

There is not necessarily anything morally wrong in buying and selling things, nor even in promoting them (in an honest way and to a certain extent). But the extreme form of consumerism that now dominates the Western world has a number of unpleasant and even potentially dangerous characteristics. First of all it is intrusive: This is as good a reason as any to dislike it! Advertising, selling and product placement is simply an annoying imposition on one's peace and personal space. Advertising is everywhere, and spoils many experiences and pleasant views. It is like having a stranger following you and shouting at you for several hours a day. (Life Squared 17). The second bad characteristic, it is manipulative: Both advertising and consumerism itself try to manipulate us into adopting a particular view of how we should live rather than letting us decide for ourselves. One might argue that advertisements are simply there to make people aware of the products available to them and serve no purpose other than this. But this is not always the case. Many advertisements and other communications in our consumer society go way beyond this function and attempt to manipulate people into making particular decisions. So Modern advertising is not just about telling people that a product exists – i.e. responding to an existing want or need someone may have. It is now about creating wants and needs that we might not have had before seeing the advertisement. In other words, it creates false desires and needs in us by manipulating us. The advertiser's ultimate purpose in creating these needs is always to make people want their product.

While the third characteristic is that it does not meet our needs: Some people may believe that consumerism meets all their desires in life. But for an increasing number of people it does not. It creates impossible aspirations – quite simply, the principles it is based on make it a logical impossibility that it will make us happy. If the idea of consumerism is to continually create new needs in people and make them consume more, this will result in us constantly chasing after a carrot on a stick. Although we might reach it sometimes (e.g. by buying a

particular product), a new ‘carrot’ (i.e. need) will then appear. A lack of fulfilment is therefore built into the whole idea of consumerism. This is not surprising – if the system is not aimed at meeting human needs and interests, but at generating profit, then it will only be a matter of extreme luck that it ends up doing the former. (Life Squared 19)

The second point follows on from this: consumerism cannot provide many of the things that are important to us. This view is supported by recent studies in the relatively new discipline of ‘human well-being’ which is gaining increasing interest from politicians and others. It can broadly be described as the study of what makes human beings happy and fulfilled, and the desire to base political and social systems on promoting these things.

And finally, it affects our worldviews and characters. Consumerism is a significant influence on our perspectives on the world. For example, if we are spending much of our time and energy seeking the next product or activity to consume then we have less time and enthusiasm to learn about the world or broaden our horizons. (Life Squared 25)

Also, consumerism plays a role in moulding our characters perhaps in ways we would rather it did not. For example, if the whole aim of consumerism is to get us to acquire more, then it might well lead to excessive self interest in the people affected by it. If it includes the pursuit of interests other than human (or value-driven) ones then it seems likely that those following this path will have less time for, or interest in, other people. (Life Squared 25)

The effects of consumerism on us are what one might expect from a culture that promotes consumption. We slip into a cycle of wanting more things whether it is the new iPod, another holiday abroad or simply a particular type of food and the pursuit of these things takes up our time, energy, stress and money (sometimes money we do not have – one reason for the spiralling debt of Britons today). We also constantly compare ourselves with other people (both real and fictitious), wanting to be like them or in their position. This leads us into a state of constant dissatisfaction – we are never happy with what we have and are always on edge.

And this is just what the logic of consumerism wants, as it makes us more active consumers on a continuous basis. So, consumerism not only affects our behaviour (We spend more time on consumerist activities) but also our thinking (our aspirations, attitudes and worldviews).

Other effects are perhaps less immediately obvious but equally important. For instance, consumerism can affect our worldviews and confuse us especially when we start feeling that our lives are not providing us with what we need to be happy. From the Western perspective, we might have all the elements that constitute a good quality of life job, car, house and other material possessions. But we might nevertheless feel somehow dissatisfied and empty, feeling that the pursuit of more possessions and the pressure of having to earn more money or sink into further debt to pay for this lifestyle is bringing more costs than benefits to our lives. (Life Squared 16)

This situation can be extremely difficult to escape from, as there are very few dissenting voices on consumerism in modern society – the mainstream idea of what it is to be ‘ethical’ still does not incorporate the idea of escaping the consumerist trap. Any individual struggling with their consumerist lifestyle is therefore unlikely to receive understanding, guidance or support from mainstream society or their friends if they too are immersed within this mainstream society. (Life Squared 16)

There may well be millions of people who feel this sense of dissatisfaction in their lives but are not able to identify its cause or escape from it. Although consumerism is not the only reason why one might feel dissatisfied or stressed, evidence is building among psychologists that “holding a strongly materialist values orientation is, all else being equal, detrimental to psychological well-being”. (Life Squared 16)

2.3 The American Naturalism

Webster's Dictionary gives naturalism a concise definition: A made of thought (religious, moral or philosophical) glorifying nature and excluding supernatural and spiritual elements close adherence to nature in art or literature, esp. (in literature) the technique, chiefly associated with Zola, used to present a naturalistic philosophy, esp. by emphasizing the effect of heredity and environment on human nature and action (The Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, 1989, p. 667). Naturalism was first proposed and formulated by Emile Zola, the French writer and theorist, who is universally labeled as the founder of literary naturalism. Naturalism was a literary movement taking place from 1865 to 1900 that used detailed realism to suggest that social conditions, heredity, and environment had inescapable force in shaping human character. Naturalistic writers were influenced by the evolution theory of Charles Darwin. They believed that one's heredity and social environment determine one's character and influence the actions of its subjects. (Zhang 195)

It was introduced to America by American novelist Frank Norris; it is a theory in literature emphasizing scientific observation of life without idealism or avoidance of the ugly. American literature naturalists dismissed the validity of comforting moral truths. They attempted to achieve extreme objectivity and frankness, presenting characters of low social and economic classes who were dominated by their environment and heredity. The pessimism and deterministic ideas of naturalism pervaded the works of such writers as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Henry Adams, Theodore Dreiser, and Hemingway etc. (Zhang 195).

There are many defining characteristics of literary naturalism. One of these of naturalism is determinism. Determinism is basically the opposite of the notion of free will. For determinism, the idea that individual characters have a direct influence on the course of their lives is supplanted by a focus on nature or fate. Human beings are living in a natural environment like animals. They can react toward the exterior and interior forces but they are

helpless before these forces (Lin Xianghua, 1989, p.528). Often, a naturalist author will lead the reader to believe that a character's fate has been pre-determined, usually by heredity and environmental factors, that the destiny of humanity is misery in life and oblivion in death and that he/she can do nothing about it (Zhang 195).

Another characteristic of literary naturalism is objectivism. The author often tries to maintain a tone that will be experienced as 'objective.' The author presents himself or herself as an objective observer, similar to a scientist taking note of what he or she sees. Of course, no human being can ever be truly objective, but by detaching the narrator from the story he or she tells, an author can achieve objectivity. Also, an author will sometimes achieve detachment by creating nameless characters (strictly speaking, this is more common among modernists such as Ernest Hemingway). This puts the focus more on the plot and what happens to the character, rather than the characters themselves (Zhang 195).

In addition to, pessimism characteristic. Very often, one or more characters will continue to repeat one line or phrase that tends to have a pessimistic connotation, sometimes emphasizing the inevitability of death. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter, for example, Emile Zola's works had a frankness about sexuality along with a pervasive pessimism. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution, and filth (Zhang 195-196).

American literature was influenced by European naturalists, especially by Emile Zola, at the end of the nineteenth century, a generation of writers arose in America, whose ideas of the workings of the universe and whose perception of society's disorders let them to naturalism, a new and harsher realism (Zhang 196).

Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) was one of the outstanding American writers of naturalism. He was the leading figure in a national literary movement that replaced the observance of Victorian notions of propriety with the unflinching Presentation of real-life subject matter.

Among other themes, his novels explore the new Social problems that had arisen in a rapidly industrializing America. Sinclair Lewis said in his Nobel Prize Lecture of 1930, that Dreiser's great first novel, *Sister Carrie*, which he dared to Publish thirty long years ago and which I read twenty-five years ago, came to housebound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman. (Zhang 196)

Furthermore, Naturalist fiction in the United States often concentrated on the non-Anglo, ethnically marked inhabitants of the growing American cities, many of them immigrants and most belonging to a class-spectrum ranging from the destitute to the lower middle-class. Writers were skeptical towards, or downright hostile to, the notions of bourgeois individualism that characterized realist novels about middle-class life. Most naturalists demonstrated a concern with the animal or the irrational motivations for human behavior, sometimes manifested in connection with sexuality and violence (Zhang 197).

In America, naturalism had been shaped by the war, by the social upheavals that undermined the comforting faith of an earlier age, and by the disturbing teachings of Charles Darwin. Darwinism seemed to stress the animality of man, to suggest that he was dominated by the irresistible forces of evolution (Wu Weiren, 1990, p.8) the pessimism and deterministic ideas of naturalism pervaded the works of such writers as Frank Norris, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser and Hemingway. Their detailed descriptions of the lives of the down-trodden and the abnormal, their frank treatment of human passion and sexuality and their portrayal of men and women overwhelmed by the blind forces of nature still exert a powerful influence on modern writer. (Zhang 197)

It is also important to mention that each element of naturalist fiction (characters, themes, plot, setting) has specific characteristics that differentiate it from other fictions.

Firstly, the Characters are often poorly educated and from the lower class, they are Controlled by forces of heredity, animalistic instinct, raw passion, they have no free will or choice(DETERMINISM) and also Characters cannot control “the brute within”.

Secondly, the most frequent key themes are: Survival (often survival in brutal nature), determinism, violence, social taboo, man against nature, man against himself. In addition to Social determinism, as well “Survival of the fittest”. While the Plotes often follow a “plot of decline”. Or Plot that depicts progression toward degeneration or deat.

Further more naturalist fiction is characterised by settings as slums, sweatshops, factories, farms. In addition to this, nature presents an important element. Nature often pictured as indifferent force acting on the lives of humans. Describe the futile attempts of human beings to exercise free will, often ironically presented, in this universe that reveals free will as an illusion. (American Literary Naturalism)

3. Theodore Dreiser and His Novel

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser was born on August 27, 1871 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He grew up in a poor Catholic family, with nine siblings and a father constantly underemployed. As one can imagine, Dreiser soon learned the difference between the "American Dream" and reality; he soon understood the difficulty of mere survival. That very consciousness would profoundly influence his future writing. Dreiser never completed high school, despite being an excellent student. He attended Indiana University for a year, with the help of his former teacher, Mildred Fielding, but this was the end of his formal education. (Corba par. 2)

By 1890, he began working as a journalist-an occupation. He continued throughout the decade-writing for newspapers and magazines such as the *Chicago Globe*, *Pittsburg Dispatch*, and *Harper's Monthly*. He wrote on a variety of subjects: critiquing plays, writing special

columns, and interviewing prominent figures of the day including Thomas Edison, Andrew Carnegie, and Marshall Field. The experience he gained from reporting would resurface in Dreiser's later fictional works. During his time as a journalist, he also educated himself by reading works on a multitude of subjects, in addition to trying his hand at poetry and playwriting. (Corba par. 3)

Moreover, Theodore, who himself experienced the financial insecurity and the difficult condition of the poor, tried to depict the disparity between the comfortable condition of the upper class and the miserable condition of the lower class in his works. In his first novel, *Sister Carrie*, he portrayed class struggle, oppressive ideologies, and social inequality in a capitalist society.

In addition, Dreiser's "youth and early manhood prepared him for the themes he developed. His unstable home life; ... abject poverty; and his own desires for affluence, acceptance, sexual satisfaction, and recognition were all parts of his fictional commonplace book" (Rollyson, 2000, 311). He portrayed the unjust, unequal, and materialistic conditions of American society in his works and indeed, he was "an instrumental figure in promoting a realistic portrayal of life in America (Ryan, 1991, 872). By a brief review of some of Dreiser's more significant novels, one can perceive that Dreiser represented the negative effects of capitalism and false, constructed ideologies on people and the social competition and class struggle that come with it.

Dreiser began working on his first novel after receiving encouragement from White and his friend Arthur Henry, a novelist and editor of *Toledo Blade*. This novel, *Sister Carrie* (1900), was largely based on Dreiser's sister, Emma, who began a relationship with a married man on the run after embezzling money. Dreiser's story describes the life of Carrie Meeber, a young woman who discovers that the key to her happiness is through men's pockets. The novel was extremely controversial; Dreiser had great difficulty finding a

publisher for the novel. Eventually, Doubleday & McClure Company agreed to publish it, however they made no effort to advertise the novel. A year later, William Heinemann published a heavily edited version of the novel. It has become one of Dreiser's most acclaimed works. (Corba par. 4)

Sister Carrie is the story of a poor country girl who comes to city and seeks her fortune. The novel starts with the description of Carrie Meeber, namely, Sister Carrie. She leaves her poor country family and moves, for the hope of a better life, to Chicago to live with her sister, Minnie, and her husband, Sven Hanson. In her sister's home, she understands that she must work hard and pay the rent to the Hansons. She cannot tolerate working under the degrading and difficult condition and living with her poor sister anymore and she decides to leave them to live with her lover, Charles Drouet. Drouet supports his mistress financially and introduces her to George Hurstwood, the prosperous manager of a famous saloon in Chicago. For Carrie, Hurstwood epitomizes a higher level of success and assurance than Drouet. She abandons Drouet to live with Hurstwood in New York after Hurstwood has left his wife and children and stolen money from his employers. In New York, little by little Hurstwood's conditions get worse while Carrie achieves increasing success as an actress on the popular stages. Carrie leaves Hurstwood and devotes herself to her career completely. Hurstwood commits suicide and Carrie does not know anything about it. She aims to possess more money, beautiful clothes, and a higher position. She becomes familiar with Bob Ames, much better than Hurstwood and Drouet in Carrie's eyes. She soon loses her interest in him as well when she achieves what Bob has herself. As an ambitious woman, she still desires more and at the end of the novel she is not satisfied with her present life, money, and fame and seeks something better. (Omran, et al. 42)

Dreiser, who had experienced a difficult, poor life himself, was able to understand the abject condition of deprived people and expressed his censure against the American capitalist

society and the rich, ruling class for commodifying, oppressing, and victimizing the poor, working class. E. L. Doctorow stated that Dreiser “considered the working poor to be “generally unimaginative, unaspiring, [and] terribly reduced in liveliness by the deadly and repetitive rituals of their work” (*The Novelist Who Was Born Old*, 1983). Dreiser shed light on the class oppression in his society and the unjust commodification of the poor, vulnerable ones and he “has been acclaimed for this sincere and profound consciousness of the tragedy of life as he saw it in America...” (Hart, 1995, 184). (Omrani, et al. 42)

This chapter has reviewed the historical and literary background which construct Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. It has exposed the ideologies that came to dominate the American society in the end of twentieth century.

The chapter has provided the biography of the author and his work in relation to these ideologies. It has also dealt with the Marxist thoughts. Hence, these historical and literary insights help the reader to understand the text and the way it reflects the contextual ideologies of their time period.

Following this chapter, the second chapter will discuss the author's view over consumerism and how this ideology affects individuals.

CHAPTER 2: ANTI-CONSUMERISM IN DREISER'S *SISTER CARRIE*

The influx of immigrants, expanding population and industrialization gradually led the American society to change from producer to consumer society. The production and the demand for products grew equally as well as the social standards among citizens. People want to not only buy but also possess things, money, and even other people and they think if they can escape poverty and rise from rags to riches they will be happy. This is how people became slaves of capitalism and consumerism in general.

This chapter is an analysis of the novel *Sister Carrie*. This analysis will be investigated in the light of the Marxist Theory which is appropriate to the topic of the study, in order to show how Theodore Dreiser criticized the consumer society by depicting its negative outcomes. This chapter is divided into three parts in which the first part discusses how Theodore as anti-capitalist attacked the consumer society while the second part discusses the destruction caused by consumerism to the life of individuals and the last part discusses how characters end up following this ideology.

1. The way Dreiser as anti capitalist did attack consumerism.

One of the most significant writers of the 20th Century who tried to portray the consumer society is Theodore Dreiser. He did not accept the world around him. However, the rules and the norms imposed by society which pushed him to write his first novel *Sister Carrie*. In his novel he criticized consumerism, capitalism, class differences and the problems of individuals living in the consumer society. Theodore drew a vivid picture of the American life in the late of 19th Century and his vividness was depend on his own experience and the influence of Naturalism. So he explored the truth of life and wanted to understand its mysterious through writing his novel *Sister Carrie*. The novel was too far ahead of its time and had been called one of the best powerful naturalistic novels by some novelists and critics.

In addition, Dreiser's novel was based on his early life, who himself experienced the financial insecurity and the difficult condition of the poor, trying to depict the disparity

between the comfortable conditions of the upper class and miserable conditions of the lower class in his work besides the oppressive ideologies that affected individuals badly and led them to brutal competition in materialism. These ideologies were constructed by the ruling class in order to strengthen their economic bases through persuading people to buy their products. One of these false ideologies is consumerism that urges people to buy more and more, even if the products are unnecessary for their lives.

Theodore Dreiser is one of the authors who were against consumerism and to demonstrate his view of consumer society, he introduced his protagonist, who wanted to achieve happiness and believe that happiness comes with being rich and able to afford everything she wants. So people, living in consumer society, started out believing that money can buy happiness and they are disappointed when they do not attain their goals.

Furthermore, individuals in such society try to define their personality and social status through objects and wealth, but the problem lies in the fact that no matter how many things or objects they possess, they will never be completely satisfied and will always long for more.

Moreover they will never be happy because their search for happiness often ends up in disappointment and emptiness. So these kinds of people are materialists; their happiness is measured by what they have, possess or own and as much as they own as much their reputation and status in the city will be. Besides that, their feelings, manners and identity are not important but what makes them who they are and marks them as individuals is their money.

Dreiser as anti-consumerist used Caroline Meeber, the heroine of the novel, to attack consumerism and to demonstrate how this ideology is destructive to individuals. This girl of eighteenth years old traveled from Columbia city to Chicago with the hope of finding job and gather money for better life. She was infatuated by the leisure class and thought that money

is “*something everybody else has and I must get*” (Dreiser 135). Hence, to be happy meant for Carrie to possess and spend money.

At the beginning, when she arrived to Chicago. She stayed with her sister Minnie, who lived with her husband, in a small one-floor resident apartment. The poor Carrie was captivated by the rich people in Chicago, and wished to own what they had; she was attracted to the rich stylish people and things. She liked the luxurious style of the higher class and because she was not one of them, she felt upset. “*A flame of envy lighted in her heart, she realised in a dim way how much the city held wealth, fashion, ease, every adornment for women and she longed for dress and beauty with whole heart.*” (Dreiser 48).

Carrie has decided to find a job and after she did, but Minnie asked her to pay the board with the money she get, leaving her without any money for herself to explore and enjoy in every thing that the city has offer. After time, Carrie got sick because she had not enough money to buy winter clothes and lost her job. This made Carrie unable and unwilling to continue living with her sister. And in her searching for another job she met Drouat again, a traveling salesman, whom she met before on the train in Chicago.

Drouat, who was a rich man, offered her help in a form of twenty dollars. At first she was ashamed to accept this help but later like many women of her time she showed a strong desire, over lust clothes, status and money:

Curiously, after she could not hold hold the money in her hand without feeling some relief. Even after all her depressing conclusions, she could sweep away all thought about the matter and then the twenty dollars seemed a wonderful and delightful thing. Ah, money, money, money! What a thing it was to have. How plenty of it would clear away all these troubles. (Dreiser 66)

Soon after she accepted Drouat's money, they started a relationship and she moved with him to a much larger apartment. She saw an opportunity for a new start and better life in her relationship with Drouet. Even though she was not able to develop any deep feeling toward him but she thought that through him she will be able to buy all the clothes she longs for and have opportunities to be accepted in Chicago. That is why, she left him without any regret and explanation when she met Hurstwood, who was a well-known man and the manager of Fitzgerald and Moy's, she was so impressed by his looks, clothes, jewelry and power because she thought that Hurstwood can offer her more. So she was ready to join Hurstwood's world and denied Drouet from her life.

Dreiser, through his novel *Sister Carrie*, has demonstrated how consumerism has manipulated the protagonist to crave belonging to the high class of society. In other words, she has simply exchanged her first suitor, who helped her in comparison to his wealthier friend just to be rich and to be one of the wealthy people. Thus, for Carrie the real value of people lie in what they wear and own money.

At first every thing went well with Hurstwood, but gradually as Hurstwood lost his power and wealth, Carrie's interest in him reduced but she was obliged to stay with him till she find another financial support for herself.

The influence of consumerism became more intense when she started comparing her self with her neighbor Mr Vance, a young lady of fine manners and expensive taste. Although Carrie clothes were good enough but she still comparing herself with Mr Vance, who used to buy clothes just for showing off. So Carrie felt that she need more and better clothes so she can compare herself with this woman.

Consumerism aroused a sense of rivalry on Carrie and other people. Besides, it has made people believe that the more they buy the more valuable and superior they are. These people buy clothes not because they need them but because they want to show-off.

Later on, she became famous actress in the theater, where she gained respect and admiration only her looks not because she was an extraordinary actress. She even has changed her name and created a new identity. She tried to run away from her miserable past life and create a new better life in which she has every thing she craved for: money, jewelry, a status and fame. Then, Carrie was attracted again to Bob Ames, Vance's cousin and started comparing the men in her life and then desired the best one. She could not bear Hurstwood's poor condition any more and she forced him to leave the apartment. After that, Carrie resolved to find a job for herself and become independent, she started working in the Casino Theater and want to buy a new clothes for herself.

Through *Sister Carrie* novel, Dreiser reveals the power of consumerism as misleading force, that governs people's actions, affected their morals and principles making them selfish and greedy thinking only of themselves. She wanted to spend all money she made for clothes, and costumes rather than helping Hurstwood who needed money in such a difficult situation. She was ready to do any thing to succeed in life and make her dream come true, she has no ethical sense; she does not show any feeling for people around her, she was constantly searching for happiness through material wealth because of consumer society she lives in. She tried to achieve something in life in a wrong way and this is the reason why she can never be happy.

Drouet and Hurstwood can be also seen as representatives of the consumer society. For Drouet, when man possess a woman who is physically attractive and pleasant to men's eyes like Carrie, he will be admired by other men who feel envy and jealousy. While Hurstwood was engaged in creating false appearance, in order to preserve his status and position in society.

On the other hand, the only character in the story, who is not a typical representative of the consumer society, is Ames. He is smart young scholar from Indiana. He believes that the only

thing that should have some social and moral value is art. He does not acknowledge materialism, consumerism or any thing of that kind. He stands in opposition to other characters in the novel who are convinced that money and wealth are the only means to status and power. He believes that education is the most important tool and if one succeeds to cultivate one's mind, he is brighter, better understands the world around him and is closer to reaching the top. He shows contempt against material excess.

1. The distraction caused to individuals by consumerism

Consumerism is double edged weapon. It has a positive impact on economy industry and development in general but it can also have a negative impact on society. It offers false hopes for goals that people try to achieve, and ones they manage to achieve them , they are neither happy , satisfied nor contented. So Dreiser in his novel tried to develop his characters in a sense that every one of them has his own version of life that she or he wants to live. Thus, the author shed more light on three main characters: Caroline, Drouet and Hurstwood, showing how much consumerism is destructive to their personality. All of Dreiser's characters want to achieve happiness, but each one of them attempts this in a different way. However, they have misconception about what it actually means to be happy and they falsely believe that happiness comes with being rich and possessing more things.

Focusing on the main character, Caroline meeber, who left her poor family and went to Chicago dreaming of having happiness. Technically Dreiser begins to cast light on Carrie's vanity and desire for "material things" as soon as she gets on the train, young and timids she is. Carrie observes that there is "an indescribably faint line in the matter of man's apparel " which some how devides for her " those who are worth glancing at and those who are not ". The very scale which Carrie uses to weight up people as above shows her vanity as well as her practical attitude towards life. In case of Drouet who dressed more fashionably and much better then her, she felt ashamed of her own clothes. However, due to the "worn state of her

shoes ", Carrie is also conscious of her own insufficiency and the hard fact of inequality that separates people. No wonder when Drouet accosts her by intruding the moving scenes outside the window of the train, she alerts and watches him closely. (Hans 4)

He reached down in his hip pocket and took out a fat purse, it was filled with slips of papers, some mileage books, a roll of greenbacks it impressed her deeply ... The purse, the shiny tan shoes, the smart new suit, and the air with which he did things, build up for her a dim world of fortune of which he was the center, it disposed her pleasantly towards all he might do (Dreiser. 5)

As quoted, Carrie showed a strong tendency to Drouet wealthy, beautiful clothes and his money-filled purse. Therefore, consumerism affected Carrie strongly, she came to measure happiness by material things she sees. Consequently in her view well-off people like Drouet are very happy and fortunate. For example when she was in a search of job, she met Drouet in the street and they went to a beautiful restaurant. His demeanor is described as such " As he cut the meat his rings almost spoke, His suit created as he stretched to reach the plates, break the bread and pour the coffee " (Dreiser.2009.110). For her the fine appearance of Drouet is a prerequisite sign of his happiness and good fortune. (Nia and Baghbaderani 54)

On the other hand, people who live in this kind of society are materialistic for different reasons they often represent themselves as wealthier or as more powerful than they really are, like Drouet who successfully and desecrately show off himself as a man of money through his dress and manner, the things without which he is nothing.

Furthermore, Dreiser emphasizes how the pressure of capitalist and consumerist society can cause a person to forget about morality of an action to commit deeds, to pursue the ultimate goals, that is, a possession or access to money and material wealth. the question may

arise as to why a person is not capable of realizing the degree of immorality of an action before committing that action, a question that Dreiser does not attempt to answer in *Sister Carrie*. In Dreiser's eyes Carrie simply lacks assessment by default, and hence does not clearly know and care what morality is. (Kruglyak 6). And it is clear when Carrie exceeded the boundaries and assents to living with Drouet even against moral and personal conscience because of poverty and her desire for a better life.

Indeed, the false ideologies like consumerism make people believe that they do not look good enough and if they want to improve appearance, they must buy the commodities and clothes which a consumerist society offers. People, like Carrie, imitate and follow these false ideologies and by more than what they really need to look more attractive, but they do not know that they strengthen the basis of capitalism alongside its false ideology, consumerism, more by purchasing their unnecessary products. For instance, although Carrie had bought a lot of clothes but she still earned more.

Consumerism tries to manipulate people. Making them buy things that are not necessary for their life and they do not need to. Therefore, Dreiser demonstrates how consumerism has manipulated Carrie to crave belonging to the higher classes of the society. Fiercely betraying her lover Drouet who had supported her when she desperately needed help. (Kruglyak 3)

Besides manipulation, increasing consumerism tends to shift away societies from important values such as integrity. Instead, there is a strong focus on materialism and competition and this is what Dreiser has portrayed in his novel, demonstrating that Carrie was materialistic and her materialistic desire overcame her moral conscience, leading her to move from one relationship to another in order to pursue her desire for wealth.

Dreiser also shed light on a very important bad feature of consumerism which is commodification. Obviously, Carrie had commodified Drouet and now she left him to commodify another man, Hurstwood, who is more powerful than Drouet. Commodification

also exists in Hurstwood's character and he was not the innocent victim of Carrie's commodification. He commodified Carrie and compared her to a fresh fruit which shows Carrie was like an object for him that he wanted to use (Omriani, et al 53). In the same time, Drouet commodified Carrie and wanted to own her as an object. The way Drouet described Carrie for Hurstwood shows that Carrie seemed like an object from him which he liked to possess. Drouet told Hurstwood: "I struck a little peach coming in on the train Friday". (Omriani, et al 54)

Moreover, consumerism affected Carrie's sympathy and made her cruel. Having left her sister, she does go back to see her again. For the sake of her gain or lose, she abandons Drouet and later Hurstwood without any mercy (Yu 211). For example, all relationships in the novel are to some extent ruled by greed for money and wealth. One of the first relationships encountered in the novel is a familial one, between Carrie and her sister Minnie. After Carrie moved out of their place, she never again contact Minnie nor does Minnie try to contact Carrie. Similarly, soon after Hurstwood's business failed and he became unemployed, Carrie fall into state of distress because she is afraid of not having enough money not of losing him. Through Marxist perspective, one of the bad effects of capitalism on human values is that it reduces all human relations to commercial relations (Omriani, et al 51).

In addition, Carrie was slave of consumerism, she even changed her name and created a new identity on the manage to succeed in theater. She tried to run away from her miserable past life and creates a new, better life in wich she has everything she craves for: money, clothes, jewelery, status, and fame.

2. The tragic ending of characters caused by consumerism

The social stratification between the wealthy and the poor is more obvious in *Sister Carrie's* novel, only rich people can afford a decent life in a big city, while others work under

wretcher working condition for poor wages. They often become so sick and tired they try to escape their miserable life in search of a better one. Most of people think if they manage to escape poverty and rise from “rags to riches” they will be happy, this is how they became slaves of materialism and consumerism. The incursion in such ideology can bring people’s life to the abyss and causes their downfall.

At the end of the novel, Hurstwood’s business venture has terminated and he found himself unable to find employment. After a period of time, he gave up searching and simply settled back to watch his meager savings dwindle. He lost his pride and dignity. He hardly ever left the house. He continued to decline until he could not accept that he lost everything. Gelfant argues that after Hurstwood loses all his money, reputation and opulent attire, he also loses the essence of his self (qtq in. Obradović 9)

On the other hand, Carrie decides to find a work eventually finds a part as chorus girl in a Broadway opera. Her fortunes rise steadily, she had gained all that she had originally hoped for: wealth, fame and prestige. All these worldly symbols that she thought would bring her happiness, lead to realization that such life is empty and unfulfilling. Lynn observes “as Carrie sits in her opulent suite in the Waldorf. At the end of the novel, in possession of all things her heart has even desired, she is immensely bored”. (Obradović 11)

Carrie remained to the end full of insatiable longings; in other words, she remained poor in spirit as she became dependent on external signs for her happiness. (Nia and Baghbaderani 53). She ended up feeling nothing but discontent; she has not found the tranquility she was looking for or obtains the sentiment of happiness she wanted.

It is obvious that Hurstwood has reached his end both physically and mentally while Carrie is now well-off physically but not mentally.

Furthermore, Drouet aspiration have not changed and still “A good dinner, the company of yung women, and an evening at the theater” are basic things for him (Nia and Baghbaderani 54).

Drouet just wanted to spend time with his beautiful object, Carrie, and did not want to marry her. But after Carrie left Drouet and became a rich, prosperous actress, he desired to regain her and even marry her. “*He began to imagine it would not be so difficult to enter into her life again, high as she was. Ah, what a prize! he thought. How beautiful, how elegant, how famous! In her theatrical and Waldorf setting, Carrie was to him the all desirable*” (Dreiser, 2009, 855). After Carrie rejected him “*Drouet abandoned his claim and was seen no more*” (Dreiser, 2009, 896). Therefore, it is obvious that he wanted to commodify Carrie and his love for her was insincere, since as soon as Carrie rejected her, he easily forgot everything and continued his previous way of life. (Nia and Baghbaderani 54)

This chapter gave a main focus on the application of the Marxist theory on Dreiser's Sister Carrie, aiming at providing adequate analysis and interpretation of the characters's behaviour.

Throughout the analysis, it is given that Dreiser has depicted the damaging effects and the bad consequences of consumerism on human values and human psychology. Besides to how consumerism has made characters selfish, looking only for their own happiness and earning to possess things more and more without regarding to the norms or values which led them to lose their identity.

General Conclusion

During the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the United States underwent the process of industrialization, which led the American society to change to a consumer one. Theodore Dreiser was one of the authors who criticized the consumer society through his first novel *Sister Carrie*. He always presented the life as he saw it, depending on his own experience.

This novel shows that the American society was oriented towards material goods. Moreover, it reflects the fact that the ultimate goal in such society is acquiring wealth even if it was at the expense of others' life.

In his novel, Dreiser documented the socio-historical context of the late 19th century and shows the reader the perilous period that was, using several characters who fight for a better life. But they fall at the end because they believed that happiness and life come with wealth and money. Therefore Dreiser used Carrie as the best representative of the consumer society in the novel. She was ready to do anything in order to succeed and to pursue her own happiness. It is true that she ended up rich and famous but eventually faced the meaninglessness of existence and became a person without identity and consumed by society.

In addition, Theodore Dreiser wanted to address the degree that consumerism can affect people's relations. It could change the personal relationships to a commercial one. Dreiser asserts that such a society, obsessed with obtaining material wealth without regard to the norms and moral values which can bring their tragic ending as what happened with Carrie.

Hence, it is clear that Carrie, Hurstwood and Drouet represent the realm of consumption marked by alluring and enchanting objects which are supposed by everyone, except Ames, to be representatives of happiness, success, freedom, and identity. Ames believes that one does not need so much money to feel happy.

Although the novel was written in 1900, it is still quite relevant for our present-day situation because societies still suffer from such ideologies. In short, Theodore Dreiser is a

great artist he could unite the characters in the novel with his philosophy and view very excellently.

On the basis of this study, the conclusion deduced is that this research could provide an explanation why Theodore Dreiser was against consumer society, to identify the negative effects of such ideology and to demonstrate how much is destructive and what can happen if individuals engaged in such society. People can not be happy or satisfied even they could acheive their goals, because they long for more. The only thing they care for is material aspects of life.

Work Cited

- **Primary Sources**

Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. Signet Classics, 2009.

- **Secondary Sources**

Books

Gronow, Jukka. *On the formation of Marxism*. BRTU, 2016.

E-books

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook*. 8th ed., pdf, Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

Articles

Harmon, Charles. "Cutness and Capitalism in "Sister Carrie"." *University of Illinois Press*, vol. 32, no. 2, 23 Oct. 2015, pp. 126-139, Jstor. www.jstor.org/stable/27746972. Accessed 5 May 2020

Hung, Chuan-hui. "Carrie Meeber's Desire and Vanity in Theodore Dreiser Sister Carrie." *Intergrams Electronic Journal*, 2014, PP. 1-21.

Jahan, Sarwat, and Ahmed Mahmud . "What is Capitalism?" *Finance and Developement* , vol. 52, no. 2, June 2015, pp. 44-45.

Kruglyak, Vladimir. " The Idea of Consumerism in Dreiser's Sister Carrie." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2014, PP. 1-8.

Life squared. *Problem with consumerism*. Richard Docwra, 2009.

Nia, Helen, and Fatemeh Baghbederani. "Consumer Culture in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie." *CSCANADA: Canadian Academy of Oriental and Occidental Culture*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, pp. 25-57.

Omrani, Elham, et al. "Class oppression, commodification, and consumerism in Dreiser's Sister Carrie." *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2016, pp. 39-59.

Saihanqiqige. "Theodore Dreiser's Philosophy and Its Effect on Hurstwood's Downfall in Sister Carrie." *Proceedings of the 2017 2nd International Conference on Humanities and Social Science (HSS 2017)*, 2017, PP. 694-698.

Yu, Hanying. "A Brief Analysis of Sister Carrie's Character." *CCSENET: English Language Teaching*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010. PP. 210-212.

Zhang, Xiaofen. "On the Influence of Naturalism on American Literature." *English Language Teaching*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 195-197.

Theses

Bel, Iris. *Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie Novel in the Context of Consumer Society*. 2014. University of Osijek, BS thesis. Datastream.

www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://repozitorij.ffos.hr/islandora/object/ffos%253A1484/datastream/PDF/view&ved=2ahUKEwj5-M7_4p_rAhV6SxUIHaPkA90QFjAAegQIBhAB&usg=AOvVaw15sYS1RZOT-P3Mk79mulvY.

Gonde, Y B. *Marxism in English and Marathi poetry with special reference to the English poetry of 1930s and the Marathi poetry after 1947 Acomparative study*. 2009. University of Shivaji, PhD dissertation. Shodhagangahdl.handle.net/10603/142174.

Hlaban, Sandra. *The American Dream and the Consumer Culture in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie*. 2017. University of Osijek, BSthesis. [core.ac.uk. core.ac.uk/download/pdf/197553672.pdf](http://core.ac.uk/core.ac.uk/download/pdf/197553672.pdf).

Obradovic, Zvonimir. *Naturalist Elements and Social Critique in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie*. 2018. University of Osijek, BS thesis. DataStream.

www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://repozitorij.ffos.hr/islandora/object/ffos%253A3986/datastream/PDF/view&ved=2ahUKEwjcf3y4Z_rAhWuVBUIHdC3BDsQFjAAegQIAhAB&usg=AOvVaw2_GujORxNjrOYjWnD4Jwj-

Websites

"American Literary Naturalism." *Faculty Web Sites* - Texas A&M University-Commerce, faculty.tamuc.edu/kroggenkamp/archive/English519Naturalism.html.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة عن ما يعنيه مفهوم الرأسمالية و ثقافة المستهلك للأفراد عبر تاريخ المجتمع الأمريكي، من أجل الفهم الكامل لأسباب إنشاء هذا المفهوم. كما تلقي هذه الدراسة نظرة دقيقة (فاحصة) عن ماهية المذهب الرأسمالي و نتائجه و كيفية تأثيره على الناس من طبقات إجتماعية مختلفة. علاوة على ذلك فهذه الدراسة توضح أن تطور المجتمع و الإقتصاد الأمريكي سيجبر الناس على إعادة تقييم قيمهم القديمة و ذلك من أجل الصمود في مثل هذا المجتمع التنافسي. بالتحديد تركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على ثقافة المستهلك في رواية " الأخت كاري " للكاتب الأمريكي ثيودر دريزر، من خلاص ذلك ستوفر نظرة ثاقبة لأعمال النظام الرأسمالي موضحة الجشع المنتشر انذاك و الرغبة الجامحة للأفراد من أجل الحصول على مكانة راقية في العالم التجاري. و من هذا المنطلق سيتم دراسة الرواية المختارة بشكل موضوعي. و بما أنه لا يمكن فصل الأدب عن السياق التاريخي و الإجتماعي، لأنه كان و سيظل سجلا للإضطرابات و المشاكل السياسية و التاريخية، سيسلط الفصل الأول (المبحث الأول) الضوء على الجانب التاريخي و الإجتماعي و الوقائع المحيطة بالرواية . كما يبحث في الايديولوجيات المنتشرة في أمريكا تلك الفترة. أما بالنسبة للفصل الثاني (المبحث الثاني) فهو عبارة عن تحليل للرواية المختارة ، بالتحديد كيف هاجم الكاتب الرأسمالية و ثقافة المستهلك بإعتباره مناهضا لهما. موضحا آثارهما السلبية على حياة الأفراد. هدفنا الأسمى في هذه الدراسة هو توضيح كيفية إنتقاد الكاتب للمجتمع الإستهلاكي و الرغبة الجامحة للناس من أجل النجاح ، و إستعدادهم لفعل أي شيء من أجل تحقيق ذلك حتى و إن كانت أعمالهم ضد القيم الأخلاقية.

