

# The representation of female revolt and emancipation in daisy miller and sister c...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



This essay will be examining the many ways in which Henry James and Theodore Dreiser represent the role of women, female revolt and/or the emancipation in literature in the nineteenth century. *Daisy Miller*, is a novella about a young and pretty American girl named Daisy Miller and her courtship with a young American named Winterbourne. Written by Henry James in 1878, James explored many themes within his novel such as respect, the role of women, foreignness, tradition and many more. *Sister Carrie*, is a novel written by Theodore Dreiser, about a young suburban girl who moves to the big city with an American Dream. Similarly, to James, Dreiser explores many themes within his novel, such as: the role of women and femininity, class, and society, and many more. The readers must bear in mind that the time period of these novels is crucial when discussing the representation of women and female revolts, mainly because the expectations of women in the nineteenth century were to be more domestic and less adventurous and outspoken. Throughout this essay, the representation of women and the female revolt will be heavily examined in terms of its context and origin in time.

*Daisy Miller*, is a story that revolves around the main character Daisy, who is a rather independent, self-confident, and naïve individual in her escapades across Europe. With a rather unrefined American nature, her antics manage to make a reputation for herself within society, leading Winterbourne to become indecisive about his feelings and position with her. James, is successful at exploring the representation of female revolt in his novella as the main character, Daisy, challenges the ideal conventions of a woman in the nineteenth century period. “ I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate

to me, or to interfere with anything I do.” [1] From this quote the reader can infer that Daisy is a very independent lady and doesn't like to rely upon or trust a gentleman's opinion. In a time where society was most likely patriarchal, Daisy is extremely firm when taking a stand against Winterbourne, after he attempts to discourage her from hanging out with a man she just met, Giovanelli, she even uses the term “imperious” [2] to describe Winterbourne's domineering assertion. In Richard Hocks study of short fiction, Hocks explores how Daisy is an individual who “ignores class structures and customary behaviour...treating all she meets as equal human beings.” [3] It is clear that Hock is able to make links between Daisy's character and the theme of class and society in James' novella, he suggests that whilst she goes against the customary behaviour she treats every individual the same, which can be seen as a positive quality as she does not treat anyone differently depending on their status or class. Again, a characteristic that is not conventional for a woman in the nineteenth century.

Another perspective the readers can understand about the female revolt and/or role of women is the way in which the male characters view them. For example, the way in which Winterbourne admirably describes Daisy's beauty is by grouping her into a category with other attractive, American women. “How pretty they are,” [4] Winterbourne is categorizing Daisy with other Americans as he uses the term ‘they’, although he is attracted to her he refuses to identify her as an individual, but instead as part of a group, a type. The fact that Winterbourne chooses to place women into categories shows

that he either objectifies or makes an opinion about the women he comes across. Later in the novel, as Winterbourne realises Daisy is a girl of a flirty nature, the reader can begin to understand why he groups women together. As Robert Weisbuch mentions in Pollack's, *New Essays on Daisy Miller*, and *The Turn of the Screw*. The American Novel Series, he states that, "Winterbourne will not allow women to be, will not grant them an integrating wholeness, will instead dissect and categorize." [5] This explains why Winterbourne is a man who has a demeaning attitude and perspective towards women, as he could dislike them, and even more so when they emit negative traits. This links in to the representation of the female revolt as the way women were perceived by the opposite sex in this book is of a mixed opinion. At one stage they are deemed attractive and vibrant and then considered a 'type' due to their characteristics and qualities.

Considering the idea that Winterbourne could be against women who inhibit negative qualities, he does make Daisy aware that her flirtatious nature is acceptable and appropriate if he is the recipient of that flirting. This declaration makes the reader want to question Winterbourne's motives and character to understand his morals better. In comparison to the other gentleman that Daisy comes across, Mr. Giovanelli, there are many comparisons that can be made between the two male characters. At the end of the novel, Mr. Giovanelli and Winterbourne discuss Daisy over her grave with Giovanelli describing her as, "the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable...and she was the most innocent." [6] This comment by Mr Giovanelli led Winterbourne to respond in shock over Daisy's

innocence. Given the social setting that the two characters are in, the reader can understand that Giovanelli is more mature and socially advanced with knowing what to say at such a sad occasion, emphasising his gentlemanly character. With this in mind, Weisbuch makes another observation claiming that, “ Giovanelli is not Winterbourne’s gigolo opposite so much as his double, and finally his better.” [7] From this the reader can understand that the difference between the two male characters is that Giovanelli is more advanced and educated in social settings and considerate of people’s feelings and their situations. This links to the representation of female revolt and the emancipation in the literature of the period, as it is a moment in the novel where the two-male character are together without their link (Daisy) and they discuss her being and her life. In this section, the reader becomes aware of the conflicting views each gentleman had of Daisy, emphasising the complex character she was.

Sister Carrie, is a story that revolves around a young country girl, named Carrie, who moves from her small midwestern town to the big city, carrying with her the hope of her American Dream. Similarly, to Daisy Miller, Sister Carrie is centralised around the main female character (Carrie Meeber) and the two male characters with her interest (Charles H. Drouet and George W. Hurstwood). Dreiser successfully manages to explore many themes within his novel, as well as the representation of the female revolt and their role in society. “...She began to get the hand of those little things which the pretty woman who has vanity invariably adopts. In short, her knowledge of grace doubled, and with it her appearance changed, She became a girl of

considerable taste.” [8] From this quote the reader can understand that Dreiser is illustrating the momentous scene where Carrie realises she is growing up and maturing, a pivotal moment in the novel, offering the readers insight into how it happens and the significance. This can be linked to Simone de Beauvoir’s article, *The Second Sex*, where she states, “ One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman.” [9] Beauvoir is suggesting that one can distinguish sex from gender and that gender is something that is a part of an individual’s identity that is progressively developed. Carrie is key example of this idea as she is accepting her womanhood as she makes small gestures or actions that accentuate her femininity. This links in with the representation of the female revolt, as whilst Carrie is not as complex as Daisy, she still manages to accept but flaw the stereotypes of women in the nineteenth century, she is deemed to be vainer rather than shy and modest, like most women.

Within this novel, the reader can understand that women might be the cause for their own objectification whilst those objectifying aren’t at fault. “...Mrs. Vance’s manner had rather stiffened under the gaze of handsome men and elegantly dressed ladies...To stare seemed the proper and natural thing. Carrie found herself stared at and ogled...” [10] From this the reader can understand that Carrie is in a position where she is getting used to attention from others, and is almost learning from Mrs. Vance on how to react. Given the setting of this moment, it can be inferred that women almost welcome the attention and criticism from others. In James D. Bloom’s, *Reading the Male Gaze in Literature and Culture: Studies in Erotic Epistemology*, Claire

Eby mentions how Dreiser, “ does not have a single way of depicting women; nor does he concentrate on a particular type as representative” [11] this suggests that Dreiser explores all characteristics and personalities of his female characters and tries to not single out a specific kind. In comparison to *Daisy Miller*, where the reader can see Winterbourne’s category for women. Again, this links in with the representation of women through another character’s perception and how they challenged the conventions at the time.

Another thing that readers can understand from *Sister Carrie*, is that the theme of class and society can play a role in the representation of females. “ It was an important thing to hear one so well-positioned and powerful speaking in this manner...Here was this greatest mystery, the man of money and affairs sitting beside her, appealing to her.” [12] With the readers knowledge of Carrie’s many desires, more specifically to fulfil her desire for riches and success, it is clear that she received a fair amount of warning about materialistic things never amounting to happiness. However, with this in mind, the reader can see that Carrie still wishes to achieve her goals, linking to her American Dream, and believes that being in a position of wealth and power will lead her to a much happier lifestyle. This can be linked to the representation of female revolt as it explores the idea of materialism, society, and class, as wealth is often associated with people of a higher-class and social ranking.

Likewise, to *Daisy Miller*, *Sister Carrie* includes two male characters who have the interest of Carrie. Each are very different to each other, similarly to Winterbourne and Giovanelli, Drouet is portrayed as a materialist whereas

Hurstwood is illustrated as a romanticist. Towards the end of the novel, it is clear that both men loved Carrie deeply but were unsuccessful at keeping her happy and satisfied. Given that Drouet is heavily focused on the finer things in life this allowed him to move on from Carrie easily, whereas Hurstwood, being more emotionally invested, gradually lost his wealth, and became a homeless beggar who eventually commit suicide. Whilst both men went through their trials and tribulations, Carrie finally achieved her American Dream of stardom, wealth and fame but realises that they do not bring her happiness. The reader can understand that the three pivotal characters in the novel have a relation to the representation of female revolt and the emancipation of literature in the period as they explore the theme of love, class and society, and femininity.

There are many similarities and differences between the two texts examined in this essay. Both Daisy Miller and Sister Carrie have a similar character list of two males to one female, involved in the storyline and competing for the female character's heart. With Winterbourne and Giovanelli being portrayed as two gentlemen who have different natures and personalities, each wish to be with Daisy, however have conflicting opinions of her personality and character. This was seen towards the end of the novel when both gentlemen were discussing Daisy over her grave, with Giovanelli admiring her and Winterbourne hurting and blaming Giovanelli for taking Daisy her out when there was an illness spreading, leading her to die. Whereas in Sister Carrie, Drouet and Hurstwood are two different types of men, one being more high-maintenance and the other more emotionally involved and invested,



therefore showing the reader the two different results in what happened next after Carrie exited their lives. As well as this, both explore the themes of society and class and the role of women in greater detail. With Daisy on her travels and coming across many people, but treating everyone the same and not different due to their social stature or class, and Carrie moving to the city with aspirations of making it big and becoming a part of the upper-class. Not only this, both prove to be independent females in their stories, showing they needn't depend on others.

Overall, this essay has examined the many ways in which Henry James and Theodore Dreiser have explored the representation of the female revolt and the emancipation of literature in the period. Each were successful at exploring a range of themes varying from the role of women to class and wealth. In addition to this, both were successful at keeping the female character central to the story where each endured different journey's but still challenged the conventional stereotypes of women in the nineteenth century and in a patriarchal society. The readers can understand that Daisy Miller was successful at telling the story of a care-free American on her travels where she expressed her individuality without showing too much concern about what others thought of her. And with Sister Carrie telling the story of a rising star on her journey to find stardom and achieve her personal American Dream.

1. Page 37 DM

2. Page 36 DM

3. Page 33 Hocks, Richard A. Henry James: A Study of the Short Fiction. Twayne's Studies in Short Fiction. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.
4. Page 10 DM
5. Pollack 76 – Pollak, Vivian R., ed. New Essays on Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw. The American Novel Series. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
6. Page 56 DM
7. Pollack 73
8. Page 74 <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=fGSjEpqOkO4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=sister+carrie&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjfmrDovdnYAhWHDcAKHbAgBuYQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=She%20looked%20in%20the%20mirror%20and%20pursed%20up%20her%20lips%2C%20accompanying%20it%20with%20a%20little%20toss%20of%20the%20head%2C%20as%20she%20had%20seen%20the%20railroad%20treasurer's%20daughter%20do.&f=false>
9. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930225?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930225?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)
10. Page 217 SC
11. Page 76-77 <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=2M04DwAAQBAJ&pg=PA77&lpg=PA77&dq=noticed+suddenly+that+Mrs.+Vance%27s+manner+had+rather+stiffened+under+the+gaze+of+handsome+men+and+elegantly+dressed+ladies,+whose+glances+were+not+modified+by+any+rules+of+propriety.>

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12. Page 90 SC