

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*: Carrie's way to socialization and presentation of self: A study from the point of view of symbolic interaction

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Abstract—The present article constitutes an approach of Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*, based on the symbolic interaction theory and an application of Goffman's dramaturgical model as presented in his book *The Presentation of Self in Every Day Life* (1956). The study reveals how the central female character of the novel, learns to interact within a certain social group and environment, how successfully she chooses, uses and controls the appropriate techniques in order to present an acceptable and likeable self and how she undertakes and performs different roles in everyday life.

Keywords— literature, symbolic interaction, dramaturgical approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) has been so far largely analyzed as a result of the extremely important social issues it addresses. This novel is not about a romantic attachment between lovers, or about the love adventures of the main characters. It is mostly about the way in which people interact and develop interpersonal relationships in a modern era affected by constant transformations. All types of human behavior (economic, emotional, social, professional, artistic etc) are redefined on the base of a new morality and within the framework of new patterns of conduct, rules and norms of action. Fluidity and vagueness in human relations, the lack of commitment, the constant change of households, cities, labors, identities, roles, status and positions, recurrent motifs of the novel, are all evidence of the social changes taking place in the late 19th century industrialized America. As a result, institutions and the socio-economic environment in which the social subjects had been shaped, were being profoundly reconsidered. The constant movement in each phase of Carrie's and later on Hurstwood's life, pre-announces the social mobility experienced by both: upward for the former, downward for the latter. The notion of mobility is also apparent in the name of the heroine, "Carrie", which is the same as the sound of the verb "to carry", to move, to convey, to transport, to conduct.

The present article departs from Wald's position about Carrie's story being "a process to socialization" (Wald, 2004, p. 188). From the point of view of the sociologists who study the individual, socialization is related to the

"sociocultural development of the individual" (van de Walle, 2008, p. 40). It concerns the norms, values, customs and ideas that a person has to learn and internalize in order to be a member of a group or a society, contrary to Durkheim's holistic approach which considers socialization as the individual's "submission to the society's authority over him and the exercise of discipline" (van de Walle, 2008, p. 41). Durkheim's vision about society is based on a moral ground. Following mainly Goffman's approach, in the present article I do not search to prove whether Carrie is a moral or immoral agent. The analysis of Carrie's path to socialization and presentation of self, is separated into three distinct phases:

1. Her life with her sister's family, until the second encounter with Drouet in Chicago.
2. Her life with Drouet, until her kidnapping by Hurstwood.
3. Her life with Hurstwood, until the moment she succeeds as a Broadway star.

II. 1st PHASE: CARRIE AS A NON-SOCIALIZED BEING

The novel starts with Carrie's physical description in the train transporting her to Chicago, without any further information regarding her background, family, friends and inner speculations. Her past remains unknown all through the more than 500 pages of the book. The short term cohabitation with her sister Minnie and her family is based on a financial transaction, with signs of detachment and emotional deprivation. Jim Miller claims that the old American family was characterized by seven traditional

functions: 1. economic, 2. religious, 3. protective, 4. educational, 5. recreational, 6. social status, 7. affectional (Miller, 1989, p. 7) The urban American family had already lost the six first functions and when the seventh disappeared as well, the family as institution started to disintegrate (Miller, 1989). Additionally, technological advancements and extreme urbanization, had a great impact on the family institution, causing a loose linkage among the family members. Mass production and immense labor demand between 1900-1910, took women away from home and put them on the production line. However, women's work was mainly related to low paid services without many prospects for career and salary increase (Miller, 1989).

Carrie is perceived and determined by her family on a financial base, as a statement of estimates of revenue and expenditure. Her experience of being involved in the mass production of consumer products exhausts her very early, disappoints and saddens her. Carrie's tasks and working conditions condemn her to a painful repetition, intensifying her social isolation from herself, her colleagues, and the means of production, while depriving her of any hope of improving her life. Carrie is experiencing what Alexis de Tocqueville noticed earlier than Marx during his visit to America in 1831. Referring, without naming him, to Adam Smith's example of making a pin, he argues about the risk of erosion of the individual and his identity from industrial labor.

Tocqueville believed that excessive division of labor estranges the individual from himself and that new methods of production eliminate the worker and enslave his spirit. "As the principle of the division of labor is more completely applied, the worker becomes weaker, more limited, and more dependent. The craft makes progress, the craftsman slips backwards" (Tocqueville, 2003, p.646). The French sociologist and political scientist, raises the subject of the worker's dependence on the master-industrial aristocrat, and the creation of two new distinct classes, one comprised of a small group of people oriented to opulence and another massive one with people condemned to misery. Carrie is unhappy and does not want to be included and categorized into this kind of social and working group. The subsequent adoption of the relevant standards, values and lifestyle, without the exploration of alternative choices, is unbearable for her. At the same time, she is embarrassed by the strict rules of conduct and control imposed by her sister's husband.

However, the stimuli that Carrie receives from her life in the city are multiple and fascinating. She is attracted to urban life, huge avenues and parks, imposing buildings, shops, crowded cafes and restaurants where

elegant people meet enjoying the cheerfulness, well-being and reputability of economic comfort. And as Simmel argues, "spatial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men, but are also symbolic of those relationships" (Simmel, 1971, p.143). Carrie remains physically present regarding her conventional obligations, but mentally distracted from what all the others around her have accepted as regular life. On the contrary she is extremely taken, and tempted by the "intensification of emotional life, due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli" (Simmel, 1971, p.143). During her wandering around in the city, her anonymity and the privilege of being a distant observer, gives her at the same time a sense of freedom. She is experiencing what Simmel calls "a unity of nearness and remoteness" (Simmel, 1971, p. 324). Carrie by being insignificant, anonymous and practically invisible, studies the art of visibility and how people of importance recognize each other, behave, and interact. Dreiser himself claimed that "life, if it is anything at all, is a thing to be observed, studied, interpreted" (Dreiser, 1920, p. 276).

At this phase of her life, Carrie experiences a selective and conscious estrangement from her basic agents of socialization, such as family, peer group, colleagues, work place, neighborhood. At the same time she is completely unaware of the fundamental principles and rules of the urban *modus vivendi*. Her complete ignorance constitutes her a foreign element not yet fully assimilated. She has not yet formed a social self which corresponds to the new metropolitan and social framework, she is a *non-socialized being*. Carrie, before she meets Drouet for the second time in her life, oscillates over a *no-man's land* between three distinct social classes: the rural she abandoned, the industrial-working she does not want to join and in which she seems to have been trapped without the possibility of a way out, and finally the middle and upper class in which she has no means to enter. She has declined the lifestyle of the rural world, rejects the working class mentality, and makes illusions about upward mobility.

Sociologically speaking, at this stage, Carrie is an unformed personality as she is distant from all the agents of her environment which contribute to the socialization process, by not being integrated and fully committed neither to the values and attitudes of her social group nor to those of the new society derived from the constant transformations. She has not proceeded to the same "definition of the situation" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572; Merton, 1995, p. 407), with the individuals around her. Carrie refuses to adopt the common meanings shared

by her colleagues and her sister's family and interprets her current situation and setting differently.

It seems that people from her social environment try to embody her with an identity in which she feels silently degraded. She is reluctant to embrace the official norms and informal codes of communication set at her work and the moral restrictions imposed at home. Carrie is completely unwilling to meet other peoples' socially defined expectations and she tries to find a way out in order to avoid the status and the roles attributed to her. As William Thomas explains: "...the subject's view of the situation, how he regards it, may be the most important element for interpretation. For his immediate behavior is closely related to his definition of the situation which may be in terms of objective reality or in terms of subjective appreciation – "as if" it were so" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572).

Carrie, by thinking about Drouet (and not her family or a friend) in her difficult moments and before their accidental encounter, seeks literally and metaphorically the "industrial exemption" (a term used by Veblen in his book *Theory of Leisure Class*, 1899), and the construction of a more respectful and dignified social self, connected to the vivid and joyful life of the Metropolis. She makes "romantic illusions" (Kaplan, 1992, p. 141) about consumerism, spectacles and "conspicuous" visibility, she imagines herself as a part of the social group which enjoys the good life and reputability. Carrie without even realizing it, is deeply affected by the paradigm shift in the American society, and she therefore chooses to adapt her existence into the new life conditions. According to Veblen, "the life of man in society, just like the life of other species, is a struggle for existence, and therefore is a process of selective adaptation. The evolution of social structure has been a process of natural selection of institutions. The progress which has been and is being made in human institutions and in human character may be set down, broadly, to a natural selection of the fittest habits of thought and to a process of enforced adaptation of individuals to an environment which has progressively changed with the growth of the community and with the changing institutions under which men have lived." (Veblen, 1922, p. 188).

Drouet appears as a "Deus ex machina" at a very crucial moment in Carrie's life, he is the person who offers Carrie the possibility of choice. He is the medium which brings Carrie into a new social situation offering her new perspectives and the possibility not only to improve her life but also to proceed to the formation of her social self. Desperate, almost destitute, lonely and coping with general indifference, she accepts Drouet's help who becomes her

"unmatched friend" in "an unfeeling world" (Choi, 2006, p. 714). She is ready and willing to learn, but first she has to recognize herself in the look of the others.

III. 2nd PHASE: SOCIALIZING CARRIE

Prima facie Drouet may be seen as a ruthless male who takes advantage of weak and naive girls, condemned to extreme poverty. We could think that for him, Carrie is an ephemeral trophy who reinforces and confirms his masculinity, a conquest to exhibit to his peer group. On the other hand, we may also think that Carrie considers Drouet as a stepping stone, a provider who ensures her a comfortable life and upward mobility. For Heike, women entered the consumer society "as customers and as male status symbols – i.e. as passive subjects or rather objectified non-subjects.... Women's upward mobility thus depended on their relation to men" (Heike, 2014, p. 399). Following Heike's view, Drouet could be identified with that "hegemonic male" who is "connected asymmetrically and in complementary fashion" with the female success myth (Heike, 2014, p. 398).

In that sense, we reduce Carrie to a girl of dubious morality, a social climber and Drouet to a pure sexist and unscrupulous opportunist which means that we make an analysis based exclusively on moral appreciations. *Sister Carrie* though is neither a liberal nor a didactic novel. Dreiser deploys the trio's story, he speaks in and through his text, by guiding the readers and exposing his intentions. Nonetheless, despite his interventions as omnipresent narrator, the words speak for themselves and give variant versions. "Every text is eternally written here and now" as it "does not consist of a line of words", but as "a space of many dimensions" (Barthes, 1967, p. 3). The French semiologist Roland Barthes, in his essay "The Death of the Author", argues the disjunction between the text and author. "...Once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality – that is, finally external to any function but the very exercise of the symbol – this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins" (Barthes, 1967, p. 1) as "it is language which speaks and not the author" (Barthes, 1967, p. 2).

An alternative version may lead us to consider Drouet as a modern Pygmalion who sculpts his Galatea or as the University lecturer Frank who delivers lessons to the working-class female student in Willy Russel's play *Educating Rita*. The couple Carrie-Drouet forms a certain type of "elective affinity". Contrary to what Corkin claims, Carrie is neither a passive subject, nor an object, a non-objectified subject, or even a commodity (Corkin, 1987, p. 608). She is an active rational agent who understands her

deficiency in the skills required by the social group or class she desires to enter. She rationally chooses in full awareness her social educator, the most qualified and available person to undertake her socialization project. She aspires to integrate in a certain social group, learn its habits, attitudes and social activities, and acquire the correspondent social identity. Drouet is her instructor, in charge of her preparation backstage and the performances taking place on the front scene. Carrie made a conscious choice, regardless of its moral or immoral dimension and the inner motives. Her interaction with Drouet is socially determined, purposeful and meaningful, a result of consent and reciprocal agreement oriented to the achievement of personal goals. They have therefore mutually established an “elective affinity”.

Elective Affinities (1809), is a romantic novel of the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and a term mentioned in Max Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic* (1905). Michel Löwy in his article “Le Concept d’Affinité Elective chez Max Weber” (“The Concept of Elective Affinity in Max Weber”), explains the term in Weber's work, defined as: “a process through which two cultural forms – religious, intellectual, political or economical – who have certain analogies, intimate kinships or meaning affinities, enter in a relationship of reciprocal attraction and influence, mutual selection, active convergence and mutual reinforcement” (Löwy, 2004, p. 103). For Löwy, the two “sociocultural configurations” of the elective affinity share a common worldview, a certain economic ethos, a social class' lifestyle and material interests. The characteristics of this type of relationship are the following: a) reciprocal attraction and mutual choice, b) previous distance, c) a cultural difference which has to be overcome, d) ideological discontinuity, e) the procedure to certain forms of interaction, f) reciprocal stimulation and g) convergence Löwy, 2004, pp. 98, 101, 102). Throughout, Drouet and Carrie are connected not only by all the above mentioned characteristics, but also by a distant proximity necessary for Carrie's development of self and for Drouet's detachment from institutional obligations, such as marriage and family, and moral commitments, such as loyalty.

From the moment Carrie agrees to receive Drouet's help, a “functional interaction” (Corkin, 1987, p. 610) begins to operate between them. Through their association and communication, Carrie will gradually construct her social self. By communication we mean the adoption of a certain form of behavior “in which the individual may become an object to himself”, an act which contains significant symbols and is “directed not only to the others, but also to the individual himself”, for “the self,

as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (Mead, 1934, p. 140). By listening carefully to Drouet's comments on other women, by observing, imitating and learning how to shop, take care of herself and behave, Carrie is being prepared to communicate and interact appropriately, to perform successfully socially acceptable roles. According to Park, communication “involves interpretation”, it is “a process or form of interaction” (Park, 1938, p. 196) and as Diebel observes, Carrie's future “...seems to rest on her learning how to present herself more effectively” (Diebel, 2014, p. 133).

Carrie's new social reference depends on the perception or imagination of the Others. She will learn to form her attitude by imagining the effect she creates in the mind of a certain category of people belonging to the middle class and by the qualities they attribute to her. Carrie's new social self is a “reflected” or “looking-glass self” hereby defined by Cooley: “As we see our face, figure and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it. A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification” (Cooley, 1902, p. 152). Likewise in Simmel's theory, society exists as a result of “you' and the “other” and interaction can be considered as a sort of association, “a game of representation of the other: the image which I (ego) have formed of an Other (alter) interacts with the image that Other has formed of me, in a back-and-forth interplay that continuous ad infinitum” (Mele, 2018, p. 124).

Drouet is Carrie's “significant other”, her interpreter of what other people think she is. Carrie is systematically trained regarding the practices, codes and behavior of the middle class society so that she can be successfully “exhibited” on stage and convince the audience, exactly as Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* did. Erving Goffman confirms that “when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be” (Goffman, 1956, p. 10).

Successful interaction though with the others, requires a safe distance and closeness with them. Carrie has to remain close enough to observe and learn, far away enough so that people will not understand the uncompleted formation of her individuality or her class origin. She has to prepare herself and make rehearsals back stage so that she can perform successfully her roles on the stage, or else as Goffman calls it the “front region”, by maintaining and embodying certain standards such as “politeness” and “decorum” (Goffman, 1956, pp. 66-67). Carrie has to familiarize herself with a wide range of “social facts” such as “manners, breeding, polite usage, decorum and formal and ceremonial observances” (Veblen, 1922, p. 45). Even the fact that she remains at home without working is an evidence of conspicuous leisure, of as conspicuous abstention from labor, defined by Veblen as “abstention from productive work” (Veblen, 1922, p. 36). For middle and upper class families or couples, household duties, abstention from productive labor and generally from anything that was “gainful” or “of substantial use” (Veblen, 1922, p. 82), consisted “an achievement and the conventional index of reputability” (Veblen, 1922, p. 38).

We have remarked earlier that Carrie appears in the novel with no information, or thoughts given about her past and socio-cultural, family or personal background. In Dreiser’s novel we can see characters with “sexual and/or social past visibly indeterminate” assuming “identities different from their conventional roles” (Wald, 2004, p. 182). We have also analyzed that during her short stay in her sister’s house and her experience on the assembly line, she was a non-socialized personality, a non-developed self. According to Herbert Mead, social interaction is a prerequisite for the development of the self and this process starts in childhood. While living with Drouet, Carrie will have to pass through Mead’s three stages of the development of the self: 1. The play stage, 2. The game stage, 3. The Generalized Other stage (Mead, 1934, pp. 144-164)

During the first stage, the child is play-acting, meaning he plays alone with imaginary companions and performs different roles by imitating. The second stage involves more organized games with the others. In this phase, the child does not play freely as during the first stage, but he has to obey to the game’s rules. He knows the attitudes and the roles of the other players, he can foresee their reactions and elaborate his responses. He is also ready to exchange roles with the persons with whom he interacts during the game. For Mead, the two first stages are important regarding the formation of the self-consciousness, but the unity in self occurs only during the

third stage, where the child comes in contact with the “Generalized Other”.

The Generalized Other reflects the attitudes of the whole community in which the individual belongs and controls the behavior of its members. The individual is committed and engaged to his social group and community and he adopts attitudes towards the various aspects of the common social activity. “He must then, by generalizing these individual attitudes of that organized society or social group itself, as a whole, act toward different social projects which at any given time it is carrying out, or towards the various larger phases of the general social process which constitutes its life and which these projects are specific manifestations” (Mead, 1934, p. 155).

Carrie at the play stage, as mentioned earlier, is performing alone at home while rehearsing in front of her mirror the attitude, postures and facial expressions of the elegant ladies she meets, and by acting as if she is one of them. She is pretending to be someone whom she is still not. Then she successively passes to the second stage where she associates with people, and exposes herself to what we can call a “conspicuous visibility”. She develops a common social life with Drouet and she comes in contact with new informal socialization agents such as popular cafeterias, restaurants, hotel lobbies, theatres and public spaces reserved for people of a certain status.

She has internalized the rules of the game, she attributes common meanings and she can change roles (she acts as Carrie, as Drouet’s companion, as Mrs Drouet, as Carrie Madenda). She is able to predict what the others are expecting from her and she elaborates her reactions accordingly. Carrie completes the final stage of the formation of herself, the moment she acts at her first theatre performance. Her triumphant performance in front of an enthusiastic audience, Drouet and Hurstwood among them, signifies the acceptance of the Generalized Other. It is Carrie’s successful proof that she now is a completed personality. She finally becomes an active member of a social community and reacts in terms of the others’ responses, of a system with which she shares the same general attitudes. Carrie has now achieved entrance into “middleclassness”, she has acquired her own “*Attitude*”, and by that I mean the attitude we obtain by acting.

IV. 3rd PHASE: TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL DRAMATIZATION

If during her stay with Drouet, Carrie has learned how to adopt the views that others have of her, it is while living with Hurstwood that she will demonstrate her skills in “guiding” the impression that people form of her, by predicting and controlling their judgment and evaluation.

Carrie, during her common life with Hurstwood in New York, applies the learned methods of a positive self-image presentation, she knows how to be likable and gain the esteem of the group of people to which she wants to belong. Contrary to what Town claims, Carrie does not resist “being locked into a consistent representation of self” (Town, 1994, p. 46) neither does she “struggle to maintain a stable identity” (Town, 1994, p. 47) for she has already formed a stable individuality conformed to a consistent representation of self. Carrie is resistant to any mutability which does not correspond to her plans for a good life and she has no regrets of escaping when things turn bad no matter what or whom she leaves behind. And just because Carrie has become a consistent, stable and conscious self, she can act purposefully, strategically and convincingly. She can as well proceed to an “*ascription*” of her identity, by having recourse to the “art of impression management” (Cryzewski, 1987, p. 39) or to what Goffman calls “control of the impression” (Goffman, 1956 p. 8). As a result, she is perceived both as a performer and as character (Cryzewski, 1987, p. 32).

We remark that in New York, Carrie is able to recognize the structure of social encounters, she ascribes the same meanings as her peer group, and she succeeds very well in protecting herself by avoiding any embarrassment derived from bad acting or external intruders during the social interaction (contrary to Hurstwood’s constant failures). Despite the financial difficulties in the third year of her life with Hurstwood, she preserves the “setting” inside her own house which functions as the main scene, i.e furniture, decoration, with the purpose of indicating a middle class status. In parallel, she is observing other people’s setting like for example Mrs Vance’s. Even during her neglect by Hurstwood, she preserves with decency and carefulness the “consistency” and “coherence among setting, appearance and manner” (Goffman, 1956 pp. 15 & 16). Carrie excels in adopting socially established roles (wife, neighbor, actress, friend, manager of herself, conspicuous consumer) and as a proof of that she projects all the available “sign” and “expressive equipment” (Goffman, 1956 pp. 14 & 18) at her disposal such as clothes, hairstyle, accessories, posture, expressions, gestures etc.

Hurstwood gradually becomes the negative film of Carrie, in a cinematographic fade in / fade out effect. While Carrie keeps on opening up, Hurstwood on the contrary closes down and loses himself into his ever bygone career and material wealth. During Hurstwood’s mental absence, Carrie results in having another mentor who helps her improve and advance her social skills and her performances. Mrs Vance. They both participate in

various cultural and social events, where the cultural capital serves the social capital. The latter requires extended and radiant visibility, preparation, experience and a wide range of sign equipment. Sociability for Carrie results in a “dramatic realization” as she never neglects to cultivate the impression of herself, project her qualities, and convey during her interaction all those signs confirming the impact of her performance on the others. Subsequently the more Carrie reaches what Goffman calls “idealization” the more Hurstwood strays from it. “Idealization” in Goffman’s theory is “the process ... whereby individuals or teams act to project an idealized image of self or definition of a situation, attempting to conceal realities that might discredit the idealized image” (Branaman, 2003, p. 108).

As Goffman argues in his dramaturgical sociology, idealization presupposes the actor’s tendency to conceal all the inappropriate and incompatible evidences of a non-consistent performance. Furthermore, the performer cultivates the impression in the audience that they share a very special and particular relationship and that he is actually more ideally related to them than he really is (Goffman, 1956 p. 30). In that case the audience identifies performer and individual. The individual though is invited to perform daily, and many times during the day, different and sometimes conflicting roles in front of various audiences, as Carrie and Hurstwood do before and after their escape to New York. Both of them perform different social selves not only conforming to the scene and before distinct groups, but also between themselves as they are at the same time audience and performers one to the other.

In order not only to successfully respond to all these distinct roles’ and audiences’ standards and expectations, but also to prevent the influx of harmful information which may endanger the infallibility of the performance or anything that would possible cause a perturbation, the individual is forced to ensure what Goffman calls an “audience segregation”. Carrie and Hurstwood perform differently between them, before the Vance couple, the grocer, the bar associate, Ames, and so on. What is interesting though in Goffman’s dramaturgical scheme, is his argument about the audience’s tendency to protect the performer even if he consciously or unconsciously undermines his own attempts to present a convincing piece of acting. In Dreiser’s novel, Carrie as an audience herself, tries to protect Hurstwood by warning him about the disastrous consequences of his passivity and apathy. Ames recommends Carrie to be more selective and demanding regarding her intellectual and mental pursuits,

Mrs Vance never poses embarrassing questions and is very willing to defy Carry's evident fluctuant social status.

We could use a short quotation from Erving Goffman's book *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, to describe well Carrie's and Hurstwood moves in opposite directions: "To stay in one's room away from the place where the party is given...is to stay away from where reality is being performed" (Goffman, 1956 p. 23). While Carrie does her best in order to remain at the party called life and interaction, Hurstwood retires, and becomes careless, inconsistent and incoherent regarding his performances and the management of audience segregation. We can mention here the largely analyzed incident of Hurstwood's inappropriate clothing during Mrs Vance's visit. Hurstwood was caught in flagrante delicto in a moment of an obvious and tangible contradiction between the cultivated impressions and reality, which resulted in disgrace and loss of respect and appreciation.

Contrary to Carrie, Hurstwood seems unable to control "communication contingencies" and "accidents". As a result, "even sympathetic audiences can be momentarily disturbed, shocked, and weakened in their faith by the discovery of a picayune discrepancy in the impressions presented to them. Some of these minor accidents and "unmeant gestures", happen to be so aptly designed to give an impression that contradicts the one fostered by the performer that the audience cannot help but be startled from a proper degree of involvement in the interaction, even though the audience may realize that in the last analysis the discordant event is really meaningless and ought to be completely overlooked" (Goffman, 1956 p. 33). The reason for this disruption is caused not as result of a deviation from morality, virtue or value codes, but as the consequence of a different definition of a commonly experienced situation. Hurstwood gradually demonstrates neglectfulness and indifference regarding interaction and his self-presentation suffers from what Goffman calls "inadequate dramaturgical direction" (Goffman, 1956 p. 33).

Carrie, from her point of view, maintains the coherence between her human and social self, she exhibits a sharp rationality which allows her to give homogenous performances and conceals any "discrepancy between fostered appearances and reality" (Goffman, 1956 p. 38). For Goffman a successful performance demands an expectation on the part of the spectators that the actors are truthful. Nonetheless, the actor has not to be actually sincere, but to perform convincingly as if he was. Acting can be sincere, but also a "contrivance" (Goffman, 1956 p. 161; Manning, 1992, p. 46). Through various role assignments Carrie projects different personas, she

improves the interaction and she acquires a high degree of socialization. What is important is to maintain the expected patterns of behavior and appearances of the social group in which she belongs.

V. CONCLUSION

Carrie's life since the moment she arrives in Chicago is always symbiotic. "Symbiosis" derives from the Greek word *συνβίωσις* which means to live together, and in the science of Biology is related to a long term and dynamic association, the interaction between two organisms of the same or different species. The relationship of the interacting species may range from antagonistic to cooperative and mutualistic. "Symbioses can be mutualistic (all partners benefiting), commensalistic (one benefiting and the others unharmed), or parasitic, although many symbiotic associations are complex or poorly understood and do not fit neatly into one category" (Dimijian, 2000, p. 217). The two interacting species, the "symbiotes", evolve together in a beneficial or detrimental way for both or for one of them. Accordingly, Carrie's evolvment and evolution through her various elective affinities and complex symbiotic interactions, range from mutualistic to commensalistic and parasitic.

The recognition of her lack of potentials and options, along with an increasing craving for fitting into the exhilarating and vibrant city life which offers but also withholds opportunities, lead her to rational choices, elective affinities and symbiotic relationships. She is conscious of the fact that she needs to form a complete social self and acquire the skills which correspond to the middle class circle of people. The intense socialization process assumed to a great degree by her male symbiotes, results in the formation of a self, and her being successful not only in performing roles while interacting with people of a certain status or in front of a large theatre audience, but also in remaining devoted to a coherent and consistent front region and setting. She applies all the rules required in order to keep the audience away from the backstage, and control the impression management. Her accomplishment relies on the fact that she is able to keep her balance in vertiginous and turbulent environments, and to turn away from commensalistic and parasitic interactions (e.g. while staying with her sister's family, or during the last stage of her relationship with Drouet and Hurstwood).

Carrie's way to socialization resulted in her self-awareness and self-monitoring to such an extent, that she became an autonomous and independent individual, having the power to survive in a rapidly changing society where social relationships and institutions seem to be

deregulated. Individuals in America at the end of the 19th century were defined mainly in terms of economic and financial standing and social status. Despite Carrie's success, at the end of the book she seems to be insecure and uncertain about the future. Dreiser leaves us with a big question mark about a prospective symbiosis between Carrie and Ames. As Carrie had always been guided by someone with whom she shared a more or less common worldview by being distant and proximate at the same time, she is now facing the possibility of developing a closer relationship with a more cerebral and intellectual man, who despises material wealth and instrumental relations. Is she anxious about her being forced to develop new acting techniques and remain as successful as in the past? Does she have to reform a new social self and follow a different socialization pattern? Will she have to abandon everything and follow a different path by re-educating herself within a more qualitative framework? I guess we will never know what Carrie finally choses.

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