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## THE GENDERING OF SPACE: FEMALE STROLLERS ON THE MARKET IN 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY NEW YORK

### 1. Introduction

This essay aims to shed some light on the concept of urban walking or, using its literary definition, *flânerie* in New York City at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This study specifically focuses on female wanderers walking New York at the turn of the century as strollers on the market, faithfully representing America's social changes as the birth of women's emancipation. In doing so, this essay will analyse a case study based on the comparison of two novels representing two examples of female strollers in American fiction, strolling through the streets of New York City. The ultimate aim of this study is to prove that the female *flâneuse* at the turn of the century walks both as a social signifier and as a symbol of a collective psychology, tracing the history of New York City and representing the salient moments in American cultural history.

The study compares Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). Their representations of female strollers, similar and yet different, will help us understand this figure, providing us with the tools necessary to trace part of America's history and the history of New York City as filtered through the eyes of the *flâneur*.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. The Female Flâneuse

New York has produced different kinds of literary representations of strollers whose nature has been widely affected by the city's historical changes and events. Despite their origins in Europe, walkers across the Atlantic in North America hardly adhere to the traditional canons of *flânerie*. The diversity and geographical influences of the American landscape produce specific kinds of urban walkers that uniquely pertain to the American context. New York sketches different kinds of strollers whose characteristics remind us of the literary *flâneur*, but their attitudes vary, although they eventually emerge as elusive *flâneurs*. In this way, New York's literary walkers are uniquely American. As Dana Brand suggests, the relocation of the *flâneur* in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America is complex and his nature becomes extremely debatable (quoted in Malone 83).

In this essay, we will keep the classic figure of the literary *flâneur* as the basis of the case study, looking at the context of New York City and its literary walkers, who reflect the tradition of *flânerie* while also providing an 'American touch' to their strolling. In this way, we will be able to describe literary walkers that, despite their elusive nature, historically define American *flânerie* in New York City.

The American literature of the late nineteenth century produced an equivocal literary figure, the female *flâneur*, the woman. Literary critics have predominantly referred to men as *flâneurs*, almost excluding women from the literary panorama of urban walking. It is essential to bear in mind that the practice of *flânerie* is prominently associated with male authors and protagonists. Consequently, the female *flâneur* or, as we will call her from now on, the *flâneuse*, is often excluded from examinations or descriptions of *flânerie*.

The practice of *flânerie* was associated with male figures who were undeniably free to roam in the city streets in isolation with no particular convention or stereotype. In the early 1800s, the presence of women in the American metropolis was an illusion. Looking back at the roots of *flânerie*, both Baudelaire and Benjamin<sup>2</sup> acknowledged the feminine presence in the street, but eventually excluded women from the realm of literary *flâneurs*. The French stroller admits the presence of the woman in the street who becomes part of his gaze in his meticulous observation of street life, but the female *flâneur* is a nonexistent figure in the French

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<sup>1</sup> From the French, the noun *flâneur* means stroller, urban walker, man of the crowd, lone walker. Baudelaire contributed to creating this figure, which soon became a literary caricature, an observer of the city, strolling and tracking its changes.

<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire and Benjamin are generally known as the two principal theorists and creators of the figure of the *flâneur*.



literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, both Baudelaire and Benjamin, the two most prominent theorists of *flânerie*, do briefly discuss the role of the woman in the street.

In his essay *The Return of the Flâneur* (1929), Benjamin acknowledges the presence of feminine strollers who populate the streets of Paris as prostitutes. The first image of feminine walker was associated with the prostitute, seen as a deviant outsider. Benjamin in fact claimed, “the city or industrial capitalism masculinises those who come into contact with it” (quoted in Hanssen 100). Considering Benjamin’s definition of the *flâneur* as the direct product of the new capitalism, it is then evident how and why the *flâneur* is a purely masculine figure. The identification of the female stroller as prostitute lies in her relation to commodity, as she becomes an object of the new economy. Benjamin affirms, “In the form taken by prostitution in the big cities, the woman appears not only as commodity, but in a precise sense a mass-produced article” (quoted in Hanssen 103). Hanssen recognizes what Benjamin defines as “the erotics of capitalism” (103), in which the prostitute becomes the symbol of commodity representing the new economy. In Benjamin’s interpretation of the female walker, we are far from the idle *flâneur* who strolls in search of urban changes and modernity. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris women belong to the urban landscape only marginally, representing symbols of sexuality and attractiveness for the *flâneur*.

In the same way, Baudelaire provided a definition of the courtesan as the unique feminine presence in the metropolis. Even Baudelaire referred to the female prostitute and her presence in the city streets. Speaking of the prostitute he states, “they come and go, pass and repass, their eyes wide and astonished like the eyes of animals; they have an air of seeing nothing, but they scrutinize everything” (quoted in Parsons 27). From this description, Baudelaire expresses the nature of the prostitute, whose observatory wandering resembles that of a natural *flâneur*.

Simply put, the female stroller in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the image of a woman on the street market, whose wandering and observing activity is only vaguely similar to that of the idle masculine stroller. Yet neither Baudelaire nor Benjamin provided a traditional and standardized representation of the *flâneur* as this literary figure varies in both. Hence, the lack of a traditional and, definitive, clearly defined, *flâneur* allows us to include women in the realm of urban walking in the 1800s since they encompass some of the characteristics that uniquely define the masculine stroller.

If the figure of the female stroller in the 1800s was only briefly mentioned by the French theorists of *flânerie*, across the Atlantic the ‘woman on sale’ or ‘woman object’ becomes the quintessential female *flâneur* of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the urban reality of New York City. Before a detailed and thorough discussion on this literary figure, let us first frame the cultural events that led to the development of the female American stroller.

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century is widely recognized as a period of gender inequality. Women’s lives were ruled by rigid moral restrictions such as: limited occupational choices, restraint of legal rights, and total dependency on rigid moral rules. Women were firmly ensconced in the domestic sphere. Their goal was to raise children, taking care of both the house and the family. Work outside the home was a typical male practice, as was education, which was only open to men. The wife was the woman of the century, the essence of an age where the woman was seen as “the Angel in the house.” Given this, it is evident how the idea of roaming in the street was a mere illusion for women, who could not abandon their households. The lives of women in America were regulated by the income of their husbands, and marriage was seen as an economic arrangement. Simply put, women were not only confined in their domestic roles, but they often sought marriage only for purely economic reasons. The confinement to the household permanently excluded women from the city, which was seen as the strolling place of men at the beginning of the 1800s in America. It was inconceivable for a woman to walk alone in the city as her role was relegated to the running of the household and her main goal was to sell herself in matrimony and then start a life entirely dedicated to both the family and the house.

However, this adherence to rigid moral duties was subverted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by industrialization, which brought novelties even in its re-definition of gender roles. The economic input of new industrial cities in the 1860s led to the emergence of a new lifestyle for women. In the period of the Civil War, women discovered their capacities as they realized that they could work as men. In the late 1880s, women began to subvert the idea of a purely male work force as they began to populate the city, running shops and businesses. Marriage increased also among the middleclasses, and it was no longer considered an exclusive privilege of the upper class. If before, female education was minimal, with the new industrial



innovation women started to attend schools and universities in America in order to transfer their knowledge to children as mothers were responsible for their children's education at home. This process led to the opening of colleges exclusively reserved to women, such as Vassar College, founded in 1861 as one of the first female colleges of the United States. The empowerment of education and instruction gave birth to the first feminist movements, whose purpose was to raise the voice of women claiming their rights and equality in the United States. The National Suffrage Movement, started in 1869 by Elisabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony, consequently opened the era of suffragettes and female rights manifestations. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution finally gave women the right to vote in 1919.

The opening of universities for women and the increase in woman-run businesses finally allowed women to approach the city. At the end of the 1880s, the presence of women in American cities expanded, as they became both consumers and workers. Consumerism was vital to this urbanization and, together with their new economic empowerment, cities saw the opening of department stores, cafés and amusement parks that attracted women, thus allowing them to roam the city streets.

Commerce hinged on the difficult relationship between the woman and the city. As Swanson affirms, "Women's problematic relationship with the city is thereby enhanced as they enter the city through the route of commerce and consumption" (quoted in Dreyer and McDowall 6). In other words, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, women who belonged to the upper class entered the city as female shoppers or even more prominently, they strolled to display their wealth. As Maureen E. Montgomery explains in reference to the upper class, "In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the leisure that women displayed was no longer restricted at home...Women had to work hard at displaying leisure and making sure that the display was noticed" (quoted in Reus and Usandizaga 110).

The improvement of instruction, the attendance at universities, and the birth of consumerism with the opening of department stores were all developments that led to the presence of the first female walkers in American cities in the late 1800s. Despite their presence in the urban context, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women were not allowed to roam the city streets freely, as they were still subdued by the rigid opposition of men who were threatened by the emancipated feminine stroller. The city saw the development of what Dreyer and McDowell define as the "gendering of space." In other words, the urban landscape became a gendered stereotype at the turn of the century, since women were previously associated with the indoor space of the house and men with the outdoor urban environment of the city. The menacing presence of women in the streets and the consequent disempowerment of men led to the identification of the woman as an object of desire in the street, as she was subjected to the male gaze and her status as commodity thus identifies her as a marketable issue. As a consequence of the objectification of the female walker, American literature at the turn of the century aimed to represent the anxiety toward strolling women, who were defined as female streetwalkers, prostitutes or objects. The role of the woman was to roam for economic purposes, consequently becoming an object of the market.

Despite the controversial nature of the female stroller, critics such as Elisabeth Wilson argued that, "prostitution is the female version of *flânerie*" (quoted in Malone 2). An analysis of the shared traits between the *flâneur* and his female counterpart is necessary before contextualizing this character in 19<sup>th</sup> century New York. We define the *flâneur* as dandy, artist or "man of the crowd"— a literary walker who does not occupy a specific place in society and roams the city streets in isolation (Parsons 20). So does the prostitute, somehow definable as an artist whose isolated condition separates her from the bourgeois society placing her in the lower strata of society. From Baudelaire's perspective, the traditional *flâneur* is an artist who sells his art, poetry, through his perception of the city's changes and so does the female streetwalker in the late 1800s. The prostitute is the woman who sells her art, the body, in the urban landscape. As Parsons clearly explains,

The prostitute corresponds to the narrator-poet himself, a metaphor for the role of the artist as she walks the streets for the material of her profession and offers her constructed body as a commodity in the same way Baudelaire regarded the artist as prostituting his work in publication. (25)

Another shared trait between the male observer and the marketable *flâneuse*, is the fact that as Benjamin's *flâneur* represented the new capitalist culture, the object woman does as well, as a character who



commodifies her femininity. She represents evil in the new commercial culture, as she is made submissive by commerce and capitalism. Her art is sold as a commodity in the changing economy of the city. The concept of commodity mainly referred to women, as they were the first ones to walk in the city, approaching the world of consumerism.

Another shared trait of the *flâneur* and the prostitute is certainly the concept of the crowd. We have seen how the *flâneur* is “the man of the crowd,” the walker who blends with it in the act of understanding the city’s changes. But the crowd is feminine per se and the woman undeniably belongs to the crowd, which is purely feminine. If the *flâneur* has been regarded as “the man of the crowd,” the same can be said for the female streetwalkers who gather en masse in search of anonymity and solitude in the city. She purposefully blends into the crowd, avoiding being victimized by a masculine society.

The practice of *flânerie* has often been associated with anonymity and independence and the same can be said for the *flâneuse*, whose choice to roam in the city streets certainly represents her independence and desire for anonymity. In this way, in the late 1800s, there was a new, gendered crowd, that of the female streetwalker or the upper-class woman on display who gathered to shop in department stores or simply roamed in the city streets to sell their bodies or their beauty, earning money out of an economic necessity. However, if both the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* belong to the city streets and somehow share similar characteristics, only the woman is certainly subjected to the male gaze. In her activity of selling her art in the city, the female *flâneuse* becomes part of the spectacle for the *flâneur*. Unlike the *flâneur*, the prostitute makes an effort to interact with city dwellers that represent the source of her income. Her body is a social threat, seen as unhealthy and often associated with disease and illness. She is seen with scorn, whereas the *flâneur* is almost invisible to the masses. She still adopts a certain isolation, but her presence certainly emerges in the city streets.

Once this premise has been made clear, it is then easy to understand the negative representation of the walking woman. The female streetwalker is seen negatively as she roams the city streets. Even though she enters the metropolis as an emancipated character, the *flâneuse* is an object of scorn as she strays from rigid moral rules. As previously discussed, the reason for this association lies in the presence of women, who represented a threat to men who felt disempowered by the independent woman, or as they were defined, the “New Woman.”

But despite the controversial nature of the female streetwalker, the prostitute and the *flâneur* are undeniably similar. “They are social deviants who are extremely familiar with the geography and inner workings of the city, they were at once observers and members of the visual spectacle that comprised the 19<sup>th</sup> century metropolis” (Malone 100). The feminine lone urban walker was also defined as the “Public Woman,” a figure that, in terms of *flânerie*, corresponded to the prostitute, shopper or streetwalker. As we will see, even “in department stores, women were to become like prostitutes in their active commodified self-display” (Parsons 51). Therefore, the female streetwalker has been often associated with the passerby, also attributable to the *flâneur*. This figure is significant in the identification of the *flâneuse*. The confidence of the female stroller or passerby in the city street equates with that of the dandy *flâneur*.

The object woman in the street became a literary caricature at the turn of the century, as literary feminine walkers faithfully mirrored the gendered cultural stereotype and the economic condition of women in the American metropolis. Women stroll, observing the city, as they are sexually available objects of male walkers. As they enter the city, they become objects of desire and the *flâneur* is certainly attracted by what the city offers and, among its streets, he inevitably meets the *flâneuse*. The literary representation of the *flâneuse* as a character on the market is an attempt to disempower and hide the independence of women in the urban landscape. Because of her definition as a symbol of upheaval, the feminine streetwalker shifted the concept of household, finally roaming into the metropolis, bringing to light her isolated condition as well as her need to be equal to men in the realm of the city.

### 3. Upper and Lower-class Female Strollers

Let us now consider the historical condition of women in New York City, distinguishing between upper and lower-class female strollers. As far as concerns the lower strata of society, New York’s female stroller is associated with the prostitute. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prostitution was fully accepted in American cities, even though its nature was contradictory. People knew of its existence, acknowledging the role of prostitute as the woman on sale, but they disagreed about its practice as they purposefully avoided the topic in conversation.



One of the main reasons for this attitude toward prostitution was the argument that this activity was an inevitable stimulus for other crimes such as drug addiction and alcohol abuse. In expanding cities such as New York, the act of prostitution led to violence and murders, subsequently increasing the high rate of crime already present in most parts of the city.

The first and most renowned case of violence in prostitution in New York was the murder of a twenty-three-year-old prostitute, Helen Jewett. Jewett's body was found dead in a brothel. Once the aggressor had inflicted the lethal blow, her body was then set on fire. This murder marked New York City's history and prostitution was seen as a dangerous extension of crime. Furthermore, the crime generated a public case in the United States. The press publicised the case, creating a daily inquest in the newspapers and the case became one of the most famous in America. In this way, prostitution was seen as scornful and shameful for women who had previously been considered pure. "Critics have argued that the main consequence of American prostitution lies in the exclusion of women from public affairs" (Riegel 442).

Thanks to its openness to diversity and vast melting pot of cultures and activities, New York City in the late 1880s and 1890s was undeniably open to the practice of prostitution and women for sale in the city. As immigrants were divided into different areas of the city, the same was true for prostitution, which was relegated to an area known as the Five Points in Lower Manhattan. This part of the city was constructed at the beginning of the 1800s and it was dedicated to the selling of sexual practices. This neighbourhood was widely known as a diseased and crime-ridden slum characterized by prostitution and a high-rate of child mortality.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, New York's Five Points had the highest murder-rate of any slum in the world. In the 1830s, New York saw the establishment of activities of reformation for prostitutes with the creation of the "Five Points Mission," a group that helped women avoid roaming in the city streets and fought prostitution and other dangerous activities. In 1831, the area of Five Points saw the formation of the Magdalen Society, whose goal was to sensitize people to the causes and avoid acts of violence and prostitution in the city. This group became New York's first female reform society. The society aimed at reducing the instances of female prostitution, providing homes for the repentant women. This new reformation was also reinforced by the establishment of legal punishments in New York, as a deterrent to persuade women to reform. New York's attitude towards women and prostitution slightly changed in the 1890s, when prostitution was a huge business in the city. Hence, when we refer to the New York prostitute, we see her strolling in the slums of the Bowery area of Lower Manhattan.

The condition of women in the street was undeniably different in New York's High Society. In the élite, women obeyed codes and rules and their strolling in the city had a specific goal: displaying wealth and economic stability. Opulent dress was in fact the expression of the feminine cultural capital, and women's wanderings in the streets were purposefully dependent on male consumption and its moral codes. In other words, "women in the High Society were the bearers of cultural capital that set them apart" (Bibby 8).

In the late 1800s, newspapers such as the New York Times, dedicated articles and essays to the strolling women of New York's High Society, displaying wealth by wearing fashionable clothes. Women belonging to the upper class were defined as the leaders of fashion in America. Their privileged role was emphasized by their presence in articles, advertisements and newspapers discussing the essential presence of leisure class women in the streets as harbingers of politeness, etiquette and fashionable standards in the metropolis.

This was also the period of the development of etiquette manuals, written by famous rich socialites such as Emily Post, whose treatises on beauty and fashion aimed at displaying feminine clothes and consumption in New York's fashionable streets. The manuals were intended to be a guideline for the middle class, as the élite was the social class that inspired lower classes. In 1883, wealthy women collaborated on the improvement and construction of important buildings in the city, such as the Metropolitan Opera House, whose construction was the result of the accumulation of funds from New York's famous socialites whose primary aim was to gain access to places of amusement. Society women "stepped beyond the boundaries of exclusivity and traversed outdoor spaces such as streets, shops and restaurants" (Bibby 16). In this way, society women used the street as a display of wealth to maintain exclusivity.

As we have previously classified Lower Manhattan as the walking area of the female prostitute in the slums, in the 1870s, New York's High Society was located in the area around Fourteenth Street and its thoroughfares. Upper-class women in New York strolled in Midtown as well as in the spaces between Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue that featured fashionable shops and fancy boutiques. In the late



afternoon upper-class women strolled up Fifth Avenue and roamed in the city streets, displaying their beauty and social wealth. Another area for social display was the theatre. Women of the *élite* used the Opera as a social activity and the theatre saw the construction of the opera box, which was exclusively reserved for the upper class as a balcony for public display. The opera box aimed at perpetuating the elevated social status of its occupants much as the street was the public space of display for upper-class women. However, because of their multiculturalism and heterogeneous population, there was no distinction of the society women in the streets as they inevitably blended with the crowd.

Despite the division of social classes into different areas of the city, upper-class women could be easily mistaken for streetwalkers if they were seen to stroll in dangerous neighbourhoods at specific times. For example, in the late 1800s, the area of Canal Street was a dangerous place for women, as a woman could be easily mistaken for a prostitute wandering in this area. Emily Bibby clearly explained the fact that American society of the Gilded Age, as Mark Twain defined the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a period of intricate social problems, categorized urban spaces as respectable or not respectable and classified women according to the place they occupied as pure ornaments or products of scorn. “The woman who traversed disreputable spaces left herself vulnerable to harassment from men who mistook her as prostitute or at any rate cheap” (Bibby 42).

Any woman of New York City wandering in the period of the Gilded Age, no matter her socioeconomic position, potentially dealt with disrepute and loss of social acceptability if she strolled in dangerous areas of the city. Despite the clear differentiation of social classes and their relocation to specific neighbourhoods, New York was a city where space differentiation was not so static. As previously mentioned, brothels had their neighbourhoods, but on sidewalks prostitutes strolled alongside other women. By the 1900s, sex districts blended with the Fashion areas of the city, expanding to the areas of Washington Square Park and Fourteenth Street where the High Society lived and strolled. Consequently, New York published manuals that warned upper-class women how to safeguard their reputation while roaming in the city streets. According to writer and upper-class New Yorker Edith Wharton, access to the city space was consequent to the feminine desire for social liberty. In other words, leisure-class women strolled displaying wealth while trying to accomplish their independence thus abandoning the indoor space of the house and entering the city streets as free women.

The streetwalker or prostitute became a popular euphemism for objectified woman and her identification as a marketable commodity predominates at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in American literature. Department stores, education and industrialization dissociated women from the domestic sphere, allowing them to suddenly become part of the urban spectacle. The objectification of women became an inevitable choice for women as they often found themselves wandering in the city streets as a consequence of economic problems. New York society of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century proved that everything had a price. Women were extremely dependent on strict social rules and submitted to their husband's economy. Marriage was the economic way out to avoid total exclusion from the economic patrimony. In other words, women could not support themselves economically without a solid marriage that would have guaranteed economic stability. They were selling themselves to suitable husbands or potential lovers.

In this way, the activity of roaming in the city streets was either a social imposition for display or an inevitable choice as a consequence of a difficult economic position. A woman's choice in case of lack of economic support was to enter urban life on her own, strolling in anonymity, either selling or displaying herself in the city.

#### **4. The Female Flâneuse in Literature: A Case Study**

To define the New York flâneuse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is to refer to the figure of the objectified woman, who became the literary character par excellence, characterized as female streetwalker. Literature portrayed the figures of walking women with the exhibition of their downfall in the economic realm of the city at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Riegel quotes: “The prostitute was explained as the slave of a conscienceless, profit-making organization or as the victim of economic necessity, and it was argued that novelists and dramatists tended to romanticize her” (450). In this way, we consider the city as the place of display for the female walker. On the one hand, the prostitute displays herself, selling her art in the city, and on the other, leisure-class women roamed the city streets as purely ornamental characters who sold themselves in matrimony as objects of leisure.



If before American literature had been dominated by male authors, from the 1890s onward women felt the need to claim their own voice through literature, which aimed at expressing the problems of gender, thus staging their emancipated situation in the urban reality of the city. Female strolling experience predominates in the literature at the turn of the century. The street becomes a fundamental part of women's literary dynamics. The new feminine literature faithfully reflects the stereotypes and economic situation of women. Female characters stroll to be observed either as prostitutes, symbols of scorn and shame in the lower classes or as victims of economic leisure in the upper class, becoming both heroines and victims. Leisure-class women are heroines as they attempt to subvert the rigid moral canons of a society that marginalizes them and victimizes their condition as they are inevitably drawn to poverty and scorn. New York's literature of the late 1800s, proved the emerging need to bring to light the rigid gendered classism as well as the economic position of women in the city. The primary consequence of the economic downfall of women enabled the feminine heroine to roam in the city as a victim of a society that rejected her in her attempt to subvert the moral rules of a gendered masculine predominance. In this way, the strolling objectified woman becomes the quintessential American *flâneur* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Once again, New York mirrors the condition of women, portraying the wandering *flâneuse* as a victim of the economic arrangements of the metropolis. As we will see in the following examples, New York in the 1890s and 1900s displays the figure of the feminine streetwalker as the woman on the market, victim of the new economy, not strolling for pleasure, but as a representation of a rigid moral society regulated by strict gender rules.

#### 4.1. Lily Bart's Strolling Choice in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*

One of the first examples in literature of a female stroller can be found in Edith Wharton's tragic heroine Lily Bart in her famous portrayal of New York's upper-class society in *The House of Mirth* (1905). Edith Wharton certainly followed Henry James' advice when he famously suggested "Do New York" as she started writing one of her most recognized works. Henry James' suggestion was to provide a faithful and vivid portrayal of New York's High Society, representing the entourage and social classes that Wharton habitually frequented. In this way, *The House of Mirth* is the feminist novel par excellence that well represents the rigid moral rules of New York's wealthy society and the weaker sex, women, at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wharton's narrative is in fact populated by feminine figures who are victimized by the domestic aesthetics of the leisure class. We have previously classified the female *flâneuse* as the predominant literary figure of the late 1800s defined as object woman on the market. As previously mentioned, the woman on display, sold in matrimony, uniquely pertains to the upper class.

In the case of Edith Wharton, we will analyze the figure of the female stroller as the beautiful, tragic victim of New York's leisure-class society. The main characteristic of Wharton's novel, together with her portrayal of New York's mannerist hierarchy, lies in the innumerable walking moments of the female protagonist, whose vicissitudes mainly revolve around her strolling in the city. This picture of a feminine stroller undeniably offers a faithful portrayal of New York's High Society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As previously discussed, New York City streets at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were places of social engagements, display and economic activity. In his treatise on economics in the high society, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Thorstein Veblen explains the rules of the leisure class as a complex social hierarchy based on strict principles aimed at displaying wealth. Women were the symbol of economic consumption and their role was to "make more of a show of leisure" (110), thus being regarded as "chief ornaments." In Veblenesque terms, the leisure wife is defined as an "ornament," an object of display whose virtue is sold in matrimony and whose beauty serves as a representation of her social wealth. Women's only option to maintain social status was the choice of a good marriage that would have let them enter or remain in the wealthy society of New York City following its rigid principles. As Veblen clearly suggested, "the woman is still, in theory, the economic dependent of the man" (111). New York City was an important public stage of the intricate consumption of the time. Wharton's Manhattan highlights the destructive impact of consumerism upon cultural life and the female desire for emancipation. The public space of the street in Wharton's novel represents the place to put to the test women who followed the rigid moral rules of the Gilded Age. The New York of Wharton's female protagonist is a city of extremes of wealth and poverty, where the economic élite is competing for social power and her wellborn female protagonist is victimized by the society that produced her.



The tragic female stroller of Wharton's novel, Lily Bart, is a beautiful young woman of the New York elite who struggles to find a suitable husband in order to keep her social status in New York's upper class. Lily Bart is in fact the product of a society and the leisure class which sees her beauty as a symbol of wealth and economic power. Yet walking has a specific goal: exhibit money and beauty. Ammons suggested that the leisure-class flâneuse "experiences herself as others must see her" (quoted in Bach 7). In other words, the female stroller is under the male gaze and her role as feminine beauty roaming in the city street is purely ornamental. Women thus become attractive objects for an increasingly lascivious male audience. It was a pleasure for a man to walk in the company of a beautiful woman who put herself on display on the street. Moreover, the importance and the complexity of Wharton's heroine lie in her downfall in New York society. As we will see, the character of Lily Bart encompasses both the display function of the upper-class walking flâneuse and the poor marginalized female stroller in her inevitable decline toward the poor working class. From the very beginning, Wharton identifies Lily's strolling as a mere act of display. As the scene opens, Lily Bart is waiting for a train at Grand Central Station and she clearly is objectified and observed by the masses. As she blends with the crowd, she stands out from among other people as Lawrence Selden suddenly notices her. His recognition of Lily's function as a woman on display is well explained by his reaction when the sight of her strikes him as she is wandering in the crowded turmoil of Grand Central.

In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart. She stood apart from the crowd, letting it drift by her to the platform or the street, and wearing an air of irresolution which might, as he surmised, be the mask of a very definite purpose. It struck him at once that she was waiting for someone, but he hardly knew why the idea arrested him. There was nothing new about Lily Bart yet he could not see her without a faint movement of interest. (Wharton 5)

This quote expresses the idea that Lily plays the role of authentic object subjected to the male gaze and Lawrence Selden plays the role of a detached masculine spectator. At the beginning of the novel, the role of the *flâneur* is subverted by the fact that the woman is still regarded as a strolling character, object of society, whereas the man represents the spectator. In this case, Lily can be identified as a flâneuse since, as the Baudelairian stroller wandered selling his art, poetry, Lily Bart is selling her beauty through a mere act of display, which finds its synthesis as she roams in the city streets. If we want to define the initial relationship between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden, at the beginning of the novel, the man is identified as the spectator and the woman as the performer. The objectification of the flâneuse persists as Lily struggles to keep up her role in New York's high society. The function of her strolling as an ornamental object, dependent on the masculine gaze, is also confirmed as she purposefully pauses, while walking toward the church, in the hope that she will be noticed. Wharton describes well her intention to pause as she waits to become the performer admired by the masculine observer.

She fell into a gait hardly likely to carry her to church before the sermon, and at length, having passed from the gardens to the wood-path beyond, so far forgot her intention as to sink into a rustic seat at a bend of the walk. The spot was charming, and Lily was not insensible to the charm, or to the fact that her presence enhanced it: but she was not accustomed to taste the joys of a handsome girl and a romantic scene struck her as too good to be wasted. No one, however, appeared to profit by the opportunity; and after a half hour of fruitless waiting she rose and wandered on. (49-50)

In this way, identifying the female flâneuse as the ornamental performer of the street, her role inevitably changes, eventually influencing the urban space. As Reus and Usandizaga affirm in their criticism of the female appropriation and negotiation of public space, "Lily changes the space around her, transforming each area into a platform for sexualized public performance" (108). As the prostitute represents the American flâneuse of the working class, the same can be said for Lily Bart in the upper-class elite. Despite their different social contexts, both the upper-class stroller and the prostitute both use the street as a stage for the mere display of their bodies. In other words, their social reality changes, but they both reinforce the concept of the objectified woman on the street.



In the case of Wharton's doomed heroine, her strolling is conditioned by both the landscape and the social hierarchies of New York society. The role of Lily Bart as wanderer in the public space of the city is key to understanding the dynamics in *The House of Mirth*, as "she experiences herself as others must see her" (Ammons quoted in Bach 7). Her appearance inevitably transforms the urban landscape and "her body is an extension of the public space" (Reus and Usandizaga 108). Considering her female presence as an ornamental object of the New York élite, Lily Bart exists in the street as a social spectacle even though her existence as ornamental object shifts back and forth between public and private spaces, where the private interior inevitably recreates her public urban objectification.

Another important moment of her identification as woman of display shifts the scene from the outdoor space of the city to the private domain of the house. Once Lily has apparently integrated herself in the upper-class society, despite the rumours and vicissitudes that make her position vacillate, at a party she features in a *tableau vivant*, a tradition among the élite that aimed at the re-creation of famous art scenes in which members of the leisure class personified art subjects. The image of the *tableaux vivants*, which were recreated in private house parties, can be read as a metaphor of the urban.

In the first part of the story, Lily Bart can be constantly read as a *tableaux vivants* herself representing a spectacle to be observed. Lily's personification of Mrs. Lloyd in Joshua Reynolds's painting positions her as an object inevitably subjected to the male gaze and a marketable issue for visual consumption. Once more, the choice of featuring such a beautiful subject serves as a way to exhibit Lily on the market, as she has to be included among the high society to be "sold" in matrimony. In this way Lily plays an idealized version of her artistic self. Personifying her image she becomes her own artist. Her strategy to seize the masculine power through her artistic intelligence, employing her gaze upon the audience can be read as an attempt to be an artist and thus a female version of the *flâneur* (Reus and Usandizaga 85). Purposefully putting herself in the position to be observed Lily becomes both an artist and a spectacle like the idle Baudelairian *flâneur* who observed and was observed as an artist roaming in the city. Lily confirms her position in the upper class as she presents herself, featuring in the *tableaux vivants*, as a mere spectacle for the crowd. Even though the scene takes place indoor and not in the outdoor space of the city, she reminds us of an idle *flâneur* as she sells her art becoming an artist herself in the crowded domain of the élite.

However, the identification of Lily Bart as the female streetwalker and idle *flâneuse* predominates in the second half of the novel in Wharton's portrayal of her social decline. The economic downfall of Lily Bart provides a different and thus more vivid perspective of her role as urban walker. Once she attempts to escape from the social rules of marriage, refusing important marriage proposals and thus being accused of a potential adulterous relationship, her role in the city suddenly changes. She shifts from being an ornamental spectacle to being an object of scorn. Her attempt to remove herself from the market place, thus avoiding being considered as a marketable issue, ends tragically and Lily Bart suddenly becomes a lone walker being emarginated from the upper-class urban realities she had previously walked through. Her wanderings are confined at the margins of the poor working-class neighbourhoods of New York. If before her mere aim was to stand out from the crowd and be noticed, now she is suddenly ignored by the crowd that barely accepts her as part of New York's working class, since her high standards alienate her from the working-class society and make her life even harder once she admits her lack of capability at manual jobs.

Lily Bart's final strolling in New York mirrors the tragic condition of poor working women in the city at the turn of the century. Consider the accomplishment of Lily Bart's identification as *flâneuse*, as she observes the urban landscape from a miserable condition, which enables her to establish a close contact with the landscape while also looking at the city as a detached observer. The beautiful scene in the second half of the novel in which she interrupts her strolling as she looks at the afternoon spectacle of Fifth Avenue, confirms her role as a detached urban spectator. The narrator reports,

Lily, lingering for a moment on the corner, looked out on the afternoon spectacle of Fifth Avenue. It was a day late in April, and the sweetness of spring was in the air. It mitigated the ugliness of the long crowded thoroughfare, blurred the gaunt rooflines, threw a mauve veil over the discouraging perspective of the side streets, and gave a touch of poetry to the delicate haze of green that marked the entrance to the Park. As Lily stood there, she recognized several familiar faces in the passing carriages. (231)



The sense of nostalgia for her past life and her condition as poor stroller at the margins of society enables Lily to appreciate the urban spectacle from a different position. The recognition of her role as an object of scorn in society forces her to wander again with a melancholy regret for her disdain of social rules and her past of leisure. If in belonging to New York's high society Lily was previously classified as a city spectacle, now she suddenly has become the city's spectator. As the narrative progresses approaching the tragic end of the story, the innumerable strolling moments of Lily Bart seem her only comfort in her tragic social downfall. Rejected from the society that produced her, Lily seems to find a place in the city by admiring the spectacular urban landscape as she was unable to before, when she was busy presenting herself as a mere spectacle. Inevitably her perception of the urban environment was different as she strolled in terms of display. In her attempt to be part of the landscape herself, she has lost the observatory nature as she adopts her miserable condition of wanderer and stroller at the end of the story.

Another moment of observation of the urban spectacle confirms Lily's role as a reporter of street life as she witnesses the crowded comings and goings on her way to see one of her admirers.

The walk up Fifth Avenue, unfolding before her, in the brilliance of the hard winter sunlight, an interminable procession of fastidiously equipped carriages-giving her, through the little squares of brougham-windows, peeps of familiar profiles bent above visiting lists, of hurried hands dispensing notes and cards to attendant footmen- this glimpse of the ever-revolving wheels of the great social machine made Lily more than ever conscious of the steepness and narrowness of Gerty's stairs, and of the cramped blind-alley of life to which they led. (Wharton 205)

In this way we understand how New York City streets in the late 1800s were regulated by intricate social problems and women were categorized by whether they strolled in the wrong street at the wrong time. If before Lily was free to roam in leisure class areas of the city, now her strolling is mainly regulated by her social status as she is seen with disdain wandering in neighbourhoods that uniquely pertain to the working class. As Lily strolls alone at night she feels herself in danger as she was used to roaming in different areas in the daytime.

Another interesting aspect of Lily's final wanderings is certainly empathized by her quest for loneliness and anonymity. Strolling being marked with a sense of scorn causes Lily to avoid the public space of the street, looking for a refuge in indoor spaces. Her quest for isolation, avoiding the public disdain of the street, forces Lily to sit in a restaurant. Unfortunately, she is not excluded from public shame as a crowded multitude of women stares at her. The narrator reports,

Lily walked up Fifth Avenue toward the Park, hoping to find a sheltered nook where she might sit; but the wind chilled her, and after an hour's wandering under the tossing boughs she yielded to her increasing weariness, and took refuge in a little restaurant in Fifty-ninth Street... The room was full of women and girls, all too much engaged in the rapid absorption of tea and pie to remark her entrance. A hum of shrill voices reverberated against the low ceiling, living Lily shut out in a little circle of silence. She felt a sudden pang of profound loneliness... Lily alone was stranded in a great waste of disoccupation. (235)

Her miserable fall to the lower strata of society overshadows her place in the street. If before her strolling was strictly regulated by the rules that forced her to objectify herself, now avoiding disdain, the street becomes a threatening space. Furthermore, the decision to hide in private indoor spaces miserably fails, as she is not excluded from public observation. If before Lily succeeded in the public space and despaired in the private, being victimized by gossip and rumours, now she fails to protect herself in both realms.

In this way, the public space has a debilitating effect on Wharton's protagonist, who shifts back and forth between finding anonymity and hiding in loneliness. Strolling in such misery offers a unique portrayal of the condition of women roaming the streets of New York at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As her miserable condition progresses, her wanderings cease to have the observatory nature that previously characterized her social status, as they are more and more regulated by long pauses that let Lily reveal her sadness, being somehow unconscious of her surroundings. In this way as her social downfall progresses, by the end of the novel, New York's landscape becomes an almost non-existent environment whose characteristics contribute



to increasing the misery of the female working-class woman who roams through it. This concept is well explained in one of Lily's last moments in the city streets before her final enclosure in her apartment that will inevitably lead to her death. Wharton describes the decaying scene of her protagonist strolling through those areas that used to be her natural streets for display.

The street-lamps were lit, but the rain had ceased, and there was a momentary revival of light in the upper sky. Lily walked on unconscious of her surroundings. She was still treading the buoyant ether which emanates from the high moments of life. But gradually it shrank away from her and she felt the dull pavement beneath her feet. The sense of weariness returned with accumulated force, and for a moment she felt that she could not walk farther. She had reached a corner of Forty-first Street and Fifth Avenue, and she remembered that in Bryant Park there were seats where she might rest. That melancholy pleasure-ground was almost deserted when she entered it, and she sank down on an empty bench in the glare of an electric street-lamp. (242)

This quote frames the identification of Lily Bart's miserable condition as no one notices her anymore on her strolling way home. The characterization of Lily Bart as female *flâneuse* thus changes as her strolling faithfully mirrors her place in New York society at the dawn of the 1900s. Through the multiple facets of Lily's strolling, we perceive her nature as the idle female stroller who roams the streets providing different ways of strolling through the urban landscape, constantly portraying the society that produced it.

Edith Wharton's female walker confirms the identification of the female stroller as the literary caricature par excellence of American Literature in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the *flâneuse* was seen as an object of society. Lily is a product of the marketplace as men try to purchase her. She clearly represents the objectification of the woman at the turn of the century. Her objectification in New York society finds its completion in her affinity with the upper class. First, she is sold in matrimony, then she loses her economic stability, becoming an object of scorn in the society that produced her. As Lily could not seek marriage, which was her only potential vehicle for happiness she eventually experiences scorn and sadness as she refuses to adhere to the rules imposed by New York society. She represents some kind of emancipated woman as she refuses her position as an object. Strolling in *The House of Mirth* mirrors the social status and economic condition of the female protagonist. High society strolls displaying leisure, and the working-class strolls in misery attracting disdain.

The third important quality encompassed by Lily as she faithfully mirrors an idle feminine stroller is the concept of the crowd. If at the beginning she stands apart from the crowd, later as a poor working-class woman, Lily undeniably blends with it. In her identification with the crowd, once more Lily maintains vividly the connection between the *flâneur* and the crowd that represents the essential quality through which the *flâneur* forms him or herself.

In other words, I read *The House of Mirth* as a characterization of the female streetwalker as a representative of New York society, thus expressing the figure of the female *flâneur*. The classification of Lily Bart as female urban stroller faithfully mirrors the hierarchy and intricate mechanisms of New York high society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She gives us glimpses of the city and what helped shape New York's historical events and cultural changes.

#### **4.2. Maggie, the Stroller on the Street in Stephen Crane's Novel**

If Wharton artfully portrayed the intricate hierarchies of New York's High society and its social relations victimizing her feminine heroine, the same can be said of Stephen Crane and his famous portrayal of New York slum society in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). If Wharton classified the upper class as being strictly based on appearance and display, Crane's working class is a stage for violence and oppression. The opening line sets the tone of the novel as a young boy is throwing stones at a group of adults. The street is key in the dynamics of the New York slum and life in the tenements where, because of homelessness and economic unease, life takes place mainly in the street. Crane vividly portrays the decadence of the Lower East Side as he describes its urban reality,



In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street, infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. (5)

As seen in the quote, this gruesome image of the street provides a glimpse of life in the Bowery neighbourhood of New York's Lower East Side, where violent confrontations animate the life of its streets. Working class people are forced to wander in the city as a consequence of their condition of despair. This scene expresses the difference between values and reality, two inexistent qualities of the lower class, which simply relates to a reality based on struggle and misery. Crane describes the Bowery as both a prison and a battlefield, and the whole story revolves around the struggles of a working-class family, affected by the social brutality of New York's slum district. Crane aims at expressing that home is not a safe place, it is more a place of turmoil and intricate social struggle. From the opening line, Crane expresses how honour is an inexistent value in the working class and it is somehow inappropriate to that kind of reality. As we will later see, no honour is used to classify Maggie, the female protagonist, as she wanders in the city as a scornful stroller. It will be this rough and violent society that will inevitably lead her to downfall and disdain. New York is described with such realism that this novel can easily be mistaken for a historical document of slum life. Crane's New York is the tragic urban reality of the poor, the desperate, and the drunkards that faithfully mirrors the extreme conditions of the metropolis as well as the squalid life in the tenements.

The men that populate the story are usually described as violent drunkards prowling the streets in search of physical scuffle. Brutality and drunkenness do not uniquely affect men as they also characterizes the feminine characters. Maggie's mother is an example of brutality and alcoholism. From her first appearance in the novel, Maggie stands out from this sordid society as Crane describes her as gentle, beautiful and pure, qualities that do not belong to her family as it is characterized by violence and alcoholism. Eventually, Maggie is submitted to a brutal family that sees her as an outcast. Her romantic hopes for a better life are inappropriate to her social status. Her moral belief in honesty and truthfulness are two unacceptable qualities that do not belong to the lower class, who live a reality of economic difficulty and social problems. As she is sent wandering in the street, Maggie pays the price for her odd behaviour in the scorn of a society that rejects her.

The relationship between Maggie and the street is inevitable, as it is a consequence of her naïve behaviour and consequent choice to abandon her home, going to live with her boyfriend. Refused by him and rejected from the family, she suddenly becomes part of the street in the absence of a place to live. Desperately roaming in the streets of the Bowery, she is mistaken for a prostitute. In this way, the street becomes an unavoidable choice for Maggie, who is forced to wander in the city as a marginalized stroller. In her identification with the prostitute, undeniably the character of Maggie carries some of the female traits of the *flâneur*. Her character mirrors the objectification of the woman as she is forced to sell herself in the street and strolling is her only option for survival. Crane's vivid realism portrays the downfall of a woman who is doomed to become part of the street at her own expense.

Much as Lily Bart tried to escape from the rigid moral rules of society, the relationship with her boyfriend, Pete, was Maggie's only option for escape from the harsh reality of the slums. What is more, social forces are beyond women's control and none of them can escape from that reality. As usual, the woman's strolling condition makes her a tragic victim as she is sent into the street as a marginalized sinner.

The contrast between Maggie's dreamingly optimistic perceptions of life, which will eventually lead her to streetwalking and then death, is juxtaposed with those of her brother Jimmy. Jimmy's conception of survival is that of emotional and physical toughness. He wanders and looks at the gentlemen he finds on the streets, dandies or aesthetes, whose looks of contempt register on Jimmy's miserable condition as they express their superiority to him. This exchange of gazes between social classes will eventually lead Jimmy to a sense of despair, increasing his use of violence. On the contrary, Maggie's benevolent and naïve attitude forces her to dream a reality she cannot live, aspiring to be one of the beautiful feminine strollers of New York's upper class. As she roams in the city streets with a sense of desperation after being abandoned by her boyfriend and consequently rejected by her family, Maggie, notes high society women in the streets with the same



melancholic sense that Lily Bart perceived while strolling in the city as a working-class woman. Crane describes Maggie's observation of the crowd as a dreamy gaze,

She began to note, with more interest, the well-dressed women she met on the avenues. She envied elegance and soft palms. She craved those adornments of person which she saw every day on the street, conceiving them to be allies of vast importance to women. Studying faces, she thought many of the women and girls she chanced to meet, smiled with serenity as though forever cherished and watched over by those they loved. (41)

If Maggie aims at strolling to observe the upper class as a detached spectator, her dreams of grandeur are a mere utopia. Imagining herself as part of that world, reality confirms her condition of feminine stroller as a victim of society.

Once the importance of the street as a fundamental part of slum reality has been made clear, let us now consider the role of Maggie as a streetwalker or female *flâneuse*. As previously discussed, her presence in the street is the consequence of societal disdain. Sent into the street by her mother, Maggie becomes, as Crane defines her, a "forlorn woman." She strolls aimlessly in the streets of New York inevitably being mistaken for a prostitute. Crane realistically describes Maggie as victim of the male gaze in the street in her aimless strolling in the Bowery,

Soon the girl discovered that if she walked with such apparent aimlessness, some men looked at her with calculating eyes. She quickened her step, frightened. As a protection, she adopted a demeanour of intentness as if going somewhere. After a time she left rattling avenues and passed between rows of houses with sternness and solidity stamped upon their features. She hung her head for she felt their eyes grimly upon her. (85)

As seen in the quote, Maggie is mistaken for a prostitute as her condition of random stroller turns her into an object of society inevitably submitted to the male gaze. In other words, she becomes "a girl of the painted cohorts of the city" (Crane quoted in Miller 116). In the late 1800s, the prostitute was a predominant figure in the streets of New York and it was common for a man to be approached by prostitutes in the city, more prominently in the slum areas of Lower Manhattan. Consequently, in the lower-class reality, "Voyeurism makes those who are being watched objects, while those who are in position to observe the others are the privileged ones" (Shätzle 13). Considering this aspect, once more the feminine heroine is disadvantaged, as she inevitably becomes the object of a masculine voyeuristic crowd. As Russo clearly asserts, "Women and their bodies, certain bodies in certain public framings, in certain public spaces, are always already transgressive- dangerous and in danger" (quoted in Irving 30). This is certainly true for Maggie, whose body becomes the objectified symbol of her strolling and her new possible choice for economic independence. Maggie's strolling and identification as urban walker and eventually *flâneuse*, is only reduced to a short chapter, where Crane aims at emphasising her condition of solitude and disdain. The narrator reports her stroll,

A forlorn woman went along a lighted avenue. The street was filled with people desperately bound on missions. An endless crowd darted at the elevated station stairs and the horse cars were thronged with owners of bundles. The pace of the forlorn woman was slow. She was apparently searching for some one. She loitered near the doors of saloons and watched men emerge from them. She scanned furtively the faces in the rushing stream of pedestrians. (78)

The description of Maggie's stroll through the decaying streets of the Bowery provides another example of a detached female observer. If before she had been used to looking at the dreamlike reality of the upper class, now she was involuntarily absorbed in the world she had refused to be part of. She suddenly becomes a traumatized victim of the street as she represents purity against all odds in the rough social reality of the working class. Her strolling description as a prostitute continues,



A girl of the painted cohorts of the city went along the street. She threw changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations to men of rural or untaught pattern and usually seeming sedately unconscious of the men with a metropolitan seal upon their faces. Crossing avenues, she went into the throng emerging from the places of forgetfulness. She hurried forward through the crowd as if intent upon reaching a distant home, bending forward in her handsome cloak, daintily lifting her skirts and picking for her well-shod feet the dryer spots upon the pavements. (87)

Maggie is somehow unnoticed as she blends with the crowd, watching the urban reality as a detached voyeur, thus wandering as an isolated outsider. Maggie is a *flâneuse* per se as she is observer and thus observed, blending with the crowd representing the objectified voluntary stroller on sale in the street market of New York City.

The prostitute is par excellence the symbol of a woman ruined by the city's economy. As Stephen Marcus asserted: "The complex hostility of all classes of society is directed at the prostitute" (quoted in Hapke 1). This exemplifies the fact that the streetwalker encompasses all the aspects of a marginalized society as well as the world of hatred and violence that focused on the working class; all her misery was the result of one false step. As the upper-class woman sought a husband for economic social purposes, the streetwalker or prostitute is economically dependent on a potential lover. As we learn from Maggie, the image of the prostitute as often innocent and victimized by her behaviour, wandering in the street, is a consequence of the social situation she is experiencing. In his image of the feminine stroller, Crane dramatized the societal cruelty toward the prostitute as his slum reality punishes both good and bad behaviour. Incapable of perceiving her downfall, Maggie clearly represents the idle feminine streetwalker that American literature portrayed at the turn of the century as one of the cruel realities of the metropolis. In this way, Maggie is a woman who tried to subvert the rules much as Lily Bart attempted to change the moral codes of the upper class.

Considering the role of Maggie and her relationship with the street, New York's urban landscape plays an important role in the definition of the female streetwalker. Stephen Crane himself admitted that his novel, was about the tragic overpowering effect of the environment on human lives. Maggie's streetwalking and social condition are mainly influenced by the urban reality in which she lives. In her definition as a prostitute, she is strongly affected by New York slum life and its physical environment. Maggie functions as a symbol of the corrupted urban reality of New York City's life in the Bowery. Her activity as a female stroller is widely affected by the empowering rules of the street, where a woman who strolls alone in decaying areas of the city can be mistaken for a prostitute.

Crane's novel vividly expresses a contemporary preoccupation with women and location. The urban reality of the metropolis is a threatening space for women who, in the late 1800s, could not roam the city streets freely without being judged by society's rigid impositions. This novel is a clear representation of the "gendering of space," where "Maggie's body is the site where the separation between private and public disintegrate" (Irving 30). As she loses her virtue in the street, the prostitute penetrates the external space where she is a powerful signifier for the breakdown of order. The city plays a central role as it influences Maggie's perspective, leading her to her death. Her aspirations are finally destroyed by the urban social reality. In other words, "the cold indifference of the New York metropolis, and the penetrations of the inhabitants of the Bowery make up the necessary prerequisites for Maggie's destiny, which Crane uses in order to present a rather coherent vision of life in this peculiar part of the city" (Shätzle 20). It is then evident how the role of New York is to shape moral values that inevitably influence female urban walkers. Crane's aim was to express how New York's environment influences the life of its residents, eventually expressing how characters symbolically represent their surroundings. The role of the woman as an urban stroller is to become part of the city and its social structure.

Considering Maggie's role in the street as a marginalized prostitute female stroller. She sells her art in the street, observing reality and thus blending with the crowd. Her complicated relationship with urban reality thus illustrates the problematic condition of women and the gendered definition of space in New York's urban reality of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



## 5. Conclusion

The figure of the female stroller undeniably dominates American literature at the turn of the century. The woman and her relationship with the city became a literary caricature in the 1800s, hinging on the difficult gender issue and emphasizing the emerging problem of emancipation. Most importantly New York City, for its social contrasts and extensive urban reality, is chosen as a setting for women who roam the streets, mirroring the intricate social relations of their time. Prominent feminists became literary examples in New York City, emblems of emancipation from which writers recreated their social rebellion, victimizing literary heroines. As a consequence of this literary choice, the relationships between woman and city and woman and the street, become an inevitable part of the life of female characters. The street becomes an essential factor in a woman's life, emphasizing the difference between the working class and the élite. However, societal problems make it rather unbearable to live in a society that aims at fitting women into roles that are not defined by them. In this sense, the tragic choice of suicide seems to be the only option to avoid an intolerable existence, escaping from a society that rejects women and sees them as symbols of scorn and/or marketable objects.

Both female flâneuses, Lily and Maggie, well represent New York's female reality in the 1800s. Maggie and Lily can both be defined as female urban walkers as they represent an example of the female objectification in the street. Despite their different social classes, both women sell themselves in the streets of the metropolis. They are also victims of the same reality as they are forced to stroll in the city as a consequence to their attempt to subvert moral codes and social rules. Their flâneristic ability lies in their consequent identification as outsiders; undertaking solitary strolls while perceiving the city as detached observers. As female flâneurs these two feminine heroines are also artists. They sell their art, body and beauty, in the urban reality of the city.

The feminine stroller symbolizes the self-righteousness of New York and its society respectively in the mechanisms of the upper and working classes. Wharton and Crane created female streetwalkers whose strolling activity well represents the destructiveness of moral codes in 19<sup>th</sup> century New York and the role of women in the city at the turn of the century. Representing New York through literature in the late 1800s is to define the city through feminine heroines who roam the streets as marginalized outsiders in a society marked by intricate social problems. The 19<sup>th</sup> century American flâneuse witnesses an important part of New York's history. To conclude, we define the female streetwalker as the harbinger of New York's cultural patrimony in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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