

Self-Reliance in E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*

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Abstract:

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow is a famous American novelist. In *Ragtime*, Doctorow describes the lives of two females, Sarah and Evelyn Nesbit, who are very weak to the extent that they can not control their lives on a patriarchal society. Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance theory will be applied to the novel. It incites man to be self-reliant and think of his personal development. This will be achieved when he believes that he can be a successful 'nonconformist,' one who rejects 'conformity,' individual. He must trust new ideas and make an intellectual revolution. In order to be a great self-reliant man, one must revolt against the world. As a result, he will be one of the world 'kings' that enjoy 'magnetism.' In *Ragtime*, both Nesbit and Sarah decide to follow Emerson's self-reliance. Both plan to be 'kings:' Nesbit plans to be a 'great proprietor;' Sarah plans to be 'noble.' Both plan to revolt against 'society' and become 'nonconformists.' Both face hard obstacles; 'a man is to carry himself in the presence of all oppositions.' The oppositions that Nesbit faces force her to undergo to class distinction and sexual violence; she could overcome both. The oppositions that Sarah faces force her to undergo to racial discrimination and gender oppression; she fail to overcome both. Nesbit victimized her self in order to take money from men; Sarah presents her life in her defense of her man: 'women kill themselves.' Feminism and postmodern issues appear in *Ragtime*. These issues show the American society's contradicted opposing nature.

Key words: Feminism- postmodernism- Self-reliance-patriarchal society

ملخص:

يعتبر إدجار لورنس دكتورو روائي أمريكي مشهور. ففي قصة "موسيقى الراجتيم" يصف حياة اثنتين من النساء: سارة و إيفيلين نيسبيت. إن كل منهما ضعيف لدرجة انه لا يستطيع السيطرة على حياته في مجتمع رجولي السلطة. سيقوم الباحث بتطبيق "نظرية الإعتماد على النفس" لآلف والدو إيمرسون على القصة. وتحت هذه النظرية الانسان على الاعتماد على نفسه والتفكير في تطور الشخص. ويمكن تحقيق ذلك عندما يؤمن بأنة يمكنه ان يكون "غير ممثل للاعراف" ناجح، وهو الشخص الذي يرفض "الإمتثال للاعراف". ويجب عليه ان يثق بالافكار الجديدة ويقوم بعمل ثورة فكرية. يجب ان يقوم بعمل ثورة ضد العالم. ونتيجة لذلك، سيكون احد "ملوك" العالم الذين يتمتعون بالجابدية. فنجد انه في "موسيقى الراجتيم" كل من سارة و إيفيلين نيسبيت يقرر ان يتبع "الإعتماد على النفس" لإيمرسون. فكل منهما يخطط ان يكون "ملكا": فنيبست تخطط ان تكون "من اصحاب الاملاك" و سارة تخطط ان تكون "شخص نبيل". فكل منهما يخطط للثورة على "المجتمع" ويصبح "غير ممثل للاعراف". وكل منهما يواجه صعوبات شديدة "فالإنسان يواجه معوقات". فنجد ان المعوقات التي تواجه نسيبت تجبرها على الخضوع للفروقات الطبقية والعنف الجنسي والتي تستطيع التغلب على كليهما. ونجد ان المعوقات التي تواجه سارة تجبرها على الخضوع للفرقة العنصرية والقهر النوعي والتي تفشل في التغلب عليهما. ونجد ان نسيبت تجعل من نفسها ضحية لكي تتمكن من الحصول على المال من الرجال اما سارة فنجد

انها تدفع حياتها دفاعا عن رجلها: "النساء يقتلن انفسهن." يوجد للنسائية والحادثة المتقدمة موضوعات في "موسيقى الراجتيم." وتلك الموضوعات تظهر طبيعة المجتمع الامريكى المتناقضة و المتعارضة.

The current study investigates Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance theory as presented in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* with particular reference to E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*. Both Postmodernism and Feminism have some influences on the novel; will be analyzed.

E. L. Doctorow is a famous American novelist. *Ragtime* was published in 1975. In *Ragtime*, Doctorow describes the lives of two females, Sarah and Evelyn Nesbit, who are very weak to the extent that they can not control their lives on a patriarchal society. Both suffer on the hands of men; however, decide to follow self-reliance in order to seek success and prosperity. Following self-reliance, both present sacrifices to men in order to attract and please them: both kill themselves. Self-reliance collides with their suffering on the hands of men and led to their sacrifices.

The rationale behind this study is two-fold. Firstly, it is worthy to discover how Doctorow mixes history and fiction to present a story that reflects his views regarding the conditions of America in the beginning of the 20th century: "You will never have read anything like *Ragtime* before. Nothing quite like it has ever been written before." (Bloom- 75) His style of writing in mixing history and fiction to present his views is marvelous; it was rarely used before. Secondly, it is worthwhile to discover how females follow self-reliance in seeking prosperity.

Ragtime is considered a postmodernist novel; among the postmodernist issues that can be found in *Ragtime* are the decentering of society, uncertainty, plurality and indeterminacy of meaning. Among the feminist issues that can be found in *Ragtime* are sexual violence, gender oppression and referring to some feminist demands.

Raman Seldon assures: "Other examples of self-reflexive postmodernist metafiction... would include... E.L. Doctorow... so postmodernist writers break down conventional boundaries of discourse, between fiction and history..." (199-200) Seldon classifies *Ragtime* as a self-reflexive postmodernist novel because it reflects Doctorow's personal views through breaking the boundaries between fiction and history. In *Ragtime*, postmodern elements and themes are presented side by side with feminist ones. Both movements flourished in America: "This movement (feminism) pushed up to the postmodernism that could bloom and balloon widespread together in the USA." (Kumar, 18) In American, both movements spread and succeeded; postmodernism advocates equality between man and woman as well.

There is a clear connection between postmodernism and feminism; Seldom comments: "The condition of postmodernity... is marked by the 'valorization' of the feminine, woman as 'intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking... . Concerned with... feminine 'space' which the master narratives always contain but can not control... 'a woman-in-effect' that is never stable and has no identity." (209-210) Postmodernism is concerned with woman; it is concerned with advocating woman, and with showing woman in struggle while seeking identity.

During the time of the novel, American society was full of female repression and this led to the emergence of many women movements that called for women rights: "The Progressive Era was an extremely important time for America's women. During this time Women gained greater access to education and began to assert their equality in the home."(McNally, 6) Women began to seek equality through the rise of two women movements that declared women demands in public:

In 1869 two distinct factions of the suffrage movement emerged. Stanton and Anthony created the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA)... . Lucy Stone... formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA)... . The NWSA ... was based in New York... .

Between 1910 and 1914, the NAWSA intensified its lobbying efforts...(History)

The Women movements formed two groups and one of them, led by Stanton and Anthony, was in New York which is the setting of *Ragtime*. The ground was paved for the emergence of Feminism theory in literature to reflect the status quo of women in the American society.

Emerson's Self-Reliance theory will be analyzed. Emerson is an American critic who wrote *Self-Reliance*, an essay published in 1841. In this essay, he advocates the individual, considering him the center. Emerson wants to plant this individual in the American society. Surely, by speaking about the individual or self, Emerson does not intend to advocate selfishness; however, he advocates one's personal development. Emerson tells man that "he must take himself for better..." (146) Emerson advices and incites man to develop himself. He asserts: "The genesis and maturation of a planet... are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore the self-relying soul." (159) The world's development depends on the development of its units that are the souls. When a man is self-relying, he will develop himself, hence, developing the world.

Emerson rejects the society that is full of ordinary people; however, it must be full of developed distinctive individuals. For this reason, he repudiates conformity:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members... . Self-reliance is its aversion. Who so would be a man, must be a nonconformist... . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind... . What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions... . A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition... . A man must consider... this game of conformity. (148- 150)

Emerson rejects being a normal man in a society that sticks to traditions and pushes man to be ordinary. Society will be dangerous to man's manhood. When one wants to be a true man, he must reject society's conformity and tries to be better than the usual. One must trust his mind and rejects what is forced upon him by society; nothing is sacred. One must struggle against all society's oppositions. Man will be a distinctive person when he works hard. He must realize the game of conformity so as to be able to defeat it. In rejecting the society's traditions and habits, man must repudiate the past with its archaic ideas and think of new ideas. This will lead to an intellectual revolution.

Emerson rejects being a conformist and considers the world's prominent characters kings:

The world has been instructed by its kings, who have so magnetized the eyes of nations... . The king, the noble, or the great proprietor to walk among them (men) by a law of his own, make his own scale of men and things and reverse theirs... and represent the law in his person... . The magnetism which all original action exert is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust. Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? (155)

In the world, there are leading figures that Emerson calls 'kings.' They enjoy a unique privilege- nobility, richness, or position- that gives them magnetism. People gather around them and these kings impose their laws and measures upon other men and may even reverse these men's measures. Emerson clarifies that men's attraction to and trusting of these kings give them magnetism; as a result, the universal reliance is grounded on these kings,

Emerson rejects fear and advises man: "God will not have his work made manifest by cowards... "(146) Man must trust his new ideas; not to be a coward. To be a courageous man is a must for being a true man. Emerson, also, assures:

Live no longer to the expectations of these deceived and deceiving people... . I must be myself. It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all offices and relations of men." (159- 162)

Emerson warns against being frightened of other men. Man must revolt against the wrong in all life's aspects and in all relations with others.

Emerson's self-reliance theory incites man to be self-reliant and think of his personal development. This will be achieved when he believes that he can be a successful 'nonconformist' individual. He must trust new ideas and make an intellectual revolution. In order to be a great self-reliant man, one must revolt against the world. As a result, he will be one of the world 'kings' that enjoy 'magnetism.'

After analyzing Emerson's theory, it is suitable to analyze *Ragtime*. The title of *Ragtime* refers to the ragtime music. When played on the piano, ragtime music has a repetitive tone: "Like ragtime music, *Ragtime* has a strong repetitive base of true historical events and characters," (Course) The historical events and characters are repeated; however, this time, these characters are connected to fictional ones. Doctorow justifies the name of novel in the final chapter of the text of the novel when he states: "And by that time the era of Ragtime had run out, with the heavy breath of the machine, as if history were no more than a tune on a player piano. (Doctorow, 270) He says that the time of the novel is called the era of Ragtime and this name refers to the repetition of historical events and characters everyday the same way as the tune of ragtime music is repeated. Zohren Ramin gives a similar illustration regarding the title of *Ragtime*:

Like ragtime music, the novel appears to be a syncopation of both sides; the oppressors and the oppressed..., historical facts versus fiction... and yet just as ragtime music is syncopated music (the weak beats in the bar are stressed instead of the strong beats), the novel intends to deconstruct the oppositions by focusing the attention on the inferior or lesser paid attention...; the oppressed immigrants, the blacks, the female, and fiction. (162)

Doctorow's style of writing depends on presenting the oppositions and focuses on the weak side- the oppressed immigrants, the blacks, the

female and fiction- the same way as the ragtime music depends on presenting the weak and the strong beats but focusing on the weak beats.

The setting of the novel refers to U.S. from the beginning of the 20th century to the end of World War I. This period was known as the Progressive Era: "At the turn of the twentieth century America witnessed the Progressive movement... . In the book titled *Ragtime*... E. L. Doctorow presents these times..." (Research) This movement was formed to reform the American social, economic and governmental affairs. The central actions of the novel took place in New York.

The summary of the novel will be handled. Doctorow's *Ragtime* presents three families that interweave in New York after the beginning of the 20th century and before World War I. The major family consists of Father, Mother, Grandfather, Mother's Younger Brother, and The Little Boy. They live in New Rochelle and they live an easy life. The Father leaves for an expedition in the pole. Oneday, Mother rescues a black new born baby whose mother intends to bury him alive in the Mother's garden. She discovers that the baby's mother is Sarah, a neighbour. The baby's father abandoned her and the child. Instead of reporting the police about Sarah's crime, Mother decides to care about both Sarah and her baby. After a short time, the baby's father appears and comes to Sarah. He is a black ragtime pianist whose name is Coalhouse Walker. Now, he wishes to see Sarah, but she refuses. Insisting to see her, she accepts and they meet weekly in Mother's house. Things go well till Coalhouse is involved in a racial fight with some white firefighters. The police officers refuse to help him report their transgression because he is black. He hires a lawyer but he makes things go badly. When Sarah hears about the vice-president's coming, she decides to plead Coalhouse's case to him. However, when she approaches the vice-president, she is mistaken for an assassin and gets killed. On hearing the news of her death, Coalhouse resorts to violence against the government; eventually, he is killed.

Evelyn Nesbit is a model and chorus girl who is married to Harry Kindell Thaw, a millionaire. Now, he is on a trial for murdering her ex-lover, the famous architect Stanford White. Thaw did that out of jealousy. Nesbit testifies in Thaw's defence for \$200000. She meets Tateh and his daughter The Little Girl in court. Tateh decide to draw a portrait of Nesbit. Tateh introduces her to Emma Goldman, a famous anarchist who calls for women rights. Tateh and the Little Girl go to New Jersey. After Sarah's death, Mother, Father, The Little Boy, and Sarah's baby go to New Jersey where they meet Tateh and the Little Girl. After Father's death in World War I, Mother gets in love with Tateh and they get married. The Little Boy and The Little Girl become close friends. Mother,

Tateh, The Little Girl, The Little Boy, and Sarah's baby go to California and live their happily.

Doctorow's style of writing in *Ragtime* is unique; he intermingles history and fiction: "Yet like a ragtime musician, Doctorow 'riffs' on these historical events by blending fact and fiction. It is unlikely that Thaw's model wife Evelyn Nesbit ever met Goldman..." (Course) Thaw, Nesbit, and Goldman are real famous characters in life; however, Nesbit did not meet Goldman. Doctorow, fictionally, makes both close friends- fact is mixed with fiction. Again, the trial of Thaw was the trial of the century in America in real life: "The novel opens with love triangle of Evelyn Nesbit, Harry Kendall Thaw and Stanford White. All the three characters are taken from real life and are involved in the story with the same destinies as in their real lives." (Skřepská, 34) Doctorow borrows this story from real life and, fictionally, uses it in his novel. Doctorow's intention in bringing these historical characters back to life and putting them in newly invented situations is to "create new viewpoints for discussing American history." (Course) These viewpoints are Doctorow's and are transferred to readers through this unique style. Accordingly, Doctorow's handling enables readers to "discover another beat or tone to American life," (Bloom, 66) Doctorow uncovers new dimensions in the American life; otherwise, he reshapes it. Walker L. Knorr assures:

Doctorow, in devising his own social history of the first decade of the Twentieth Century in United States, not only draws from the biographies of actual personages of that period, but also exercises that privilege afforded men of letters to borrow freely from traditions... (225-226)

Doctorow reflects America's social history, presenting real historical characters and borrowing from American tradition of that period.

Doctorow uses the metafiction technique in *Ragtime*: he presents the historical characters and events, such as the trial of Thaw, inside the story of the novel. Another metafiction is found is Doctorow's use of Theodore Dreiser's (an American realist writer) novel *Sister Carrie* inside *Ragtime*. This novel was attacked for its bold handling of the subject of prostitution in America. Doctorow's presenting of Dreiser's novel in *Ragtime* reflects the fact that "much of the concern with the sexual fate of women that Doctorow explores in *Ragtime* was quite clearly inspired by the example of Theodore Dreiser." (Ragtime) In *Ragtime*, Doctorow depicts an image of the "novelist Theodore Dreiser was suffering terribly from the bad reviews and negligible sales of his first book, *Sister Carrie*." (Doctorow, 23) Dreiser was depressed and ashamed of the criticism that his novel received. In *Ragtime*, he is unable to put his chair in the right

direction because he is unable "to align it properly." (Doctorow, 23) His inability to align the chair symbolizes his inability to handle the subject of prostitution properly in his *Sister Carrie*. Doctorow's use of this symbol deepens Dreiser's sense of inability. Another symbol can be found in the marks which Nesbit's corset left on her flesh: "Evelyn finally removes her corset, not only literally but also symbolically..." (Course). These marks symbolize her psychological wounds that were done by men's sexual violence.

Ragtime's plot is built craftily and "the historical figures... are woven into the plot of the story..."(Ramin, 165) The three families present three subplots and they are intermingled and shape the novel's central plot. Two families are connected when Tateh meet Nesbit and introduces her to Goldman whose "beliefs are crucial factor of *Ragtime* plot..." (Grades, 2) Goldman spots the aspects of Nesbit character; exposes the conditions of the American women movements in the beginning of the 20th century.

The narrator of *Ragtime* is The Little Boy. However, the narrator's insight and comments on the events of the novel tells us that he is aware of the American society. He presents wise remarks about the American society's problems using the possessive pronoun 'our' in one occasion: "This was the time in our history." (Doctorow, 23) This tells us that he is a wise American thinker. The uncertainty of narrator makes things ambiguous for readers to determine the real narrator: "This unconstrained consciousness can look in all directions." (Sánchez, 20) His unlimited insight makes him surpass the perspective of a little boy. If so, then, it is Doctorow's perspective that reflects that narrator.

Characterization is one of Doctorow's tools to present his point of view. The first character that will be analyzed is Evelyn Nesbit. She is a beautiful woman from a poor low class. She is a real character in life:

Evelyn Nesbit
December 25, 1884 – January 17, 1967
An American artists' model and
chorus girl, noted for her entanglement
in the murder of her ex-lover,
architect Stanford White, by her first
husband, Harry Kendall Thaw. (McNally, 9)

She is a famous woman and is known to the public as a woman who betrayed her husband, caused the death of her lover and destroyed her husband. Her misery was caused by her poverty. It started from the age fifteen when White raped her, and she became his sex slave since then. In additions, she paved the way for Thaw to rape her to force him to marry her. She is forced to do what society pushed her to do: "A woman forced

by this capitalist society to find her genius in the exercise of her sexual attraction." (Doctorow, 46) She is forced to use her beauty to get money and fame. She is convinced that it is her only weapon in a patriarchal society. She satisfied her need for money by this marriage because she was not strong enough to resist the poverty that is forced by society since she was fifteen years old: she "accepted the conditions." (Doctorow, 48) She took money from Thaw to lie in court: "She had agreed to testify in his behalf for the sum of two hundred thousand dollars." (Doctorow, 23) She has a price for everything and her body was a good for sale. She exploits her beautiful face to get fame and money: "In the tabloid press and magazines of the day, Nesbit was depicted as the ideal of beauty and charm." (Ragtime) She became a famous model of beauty in America.

When Nesbit meets Emma Goldman, Goldman instructs her, calling her prostitution. Being a feminist socialist who demands women's rights, "Goldman.... offers the maximum contrast of feminine archetypes." (Ragtime) Doctorow presents contrasted feminine models in *Ragtime* to show the diversity in America at that time.

The second character is Emma Goldman; "she was not a physically impressive woman, being small, thick-waisted, with a heavy-jawed masculine face. She wore horn-rimmed glasses..." (Doctorow, 45) She is a famous anarchist socialist who demands women rights in the American society. She is not an attractive woman. Doctorow presents Goldman as one of the socialist feminists. In one of her meetings she announces her demands:

One day Tateh invited her (Nesbit) to a meeting of which the Socialist Artists' Alliance... . The features speaker was to be none other than Emma Goldman.

why is marriage not a problem?... . women may not vote, they may not love whom they want, they may not develop their minds and their spirits, they may not commit their lives to the spiritual adventure of life, comrades they may not! And why? Is our genius only in our wombs? (Doctorow, 46)

Goldman's demands are presented through her speech in this meeting and, indirectly, in her conversation with Nesbit. As a matter of fact, these demands are Doctorow's: "Doctorow has a talent for finding characters to state the truth of a situation, and Emma Goldman is perfect here for defining a woman's role at the beginning of the 20th century." (Shmoop) Doctorow's skill in transmitting his point of view to readers through Goldman's views is great.

In this meeting, Goldman attacks marriage when she says: "Why is marriage not a problem?" Goldman condemns marriage for she considers

it a bargain: when a poor girl marries a rich man for food and shelter. Poverty humiliates poor girls and forces them to seek food and shelter under the roof of a rich man through marriage; Goldman says: "Is our genius only in our wombs?" This is clear in "Goldman's meeting, where she expresses her disbelief in the institution of marriage. Goldman compares marriage to slavery, saying that it is oppressing to women." (Ragtime) Goldman announces her demands and shows her repudiation of marriage. Through her conversation with Nesbit, Goldman criticizes Nesbit for marrying Thaw for money and says: "You're nothing more than a clever prostitute... . I have never taken a man to bed without loving him." (Doctorow, 48-49) According to her speech, Goldman accepts having sex with a man without marriage as long as she loves that man. She considers Nesbit's marriage nothing but prostitution. Goldman could convince Nesbit to get free from the bondage of her marriage and to seek love; till then, she offers her masturbation: "With the help of Goldman, she gains autognosis through masturbation... . Nesbit... wants to... get rid of her label as an 'objects'..." (Evelyn) Goldman advises Nesbit to seek love; offers masturbation as a sexual relieve.

Some of Goldman's demands appear when she criticizes Nesbit's tight dress: "Marks of the stays ran vertically like welts around Nesbit's waist. The evidence of garters could be seen in the red lines running around the tops of her thighs. Women kill themselves, Goldman said." (Doctorow, 53) During the time of the novel, women used to dress tight dresses with tight stays that used to leave marks on the flesh. Women used to do so in order to appear thinner so as to attract and please men: "In a man's world, women dressed to please men and accentuate their figure. Goldman... berates Evelyn for the corset and other undergarments she wears." (Shmoop) Goldman, harshly, blames Nesbit for dressing a tight dress in order to please men and Goldman comments: "Women kill themselves." This reflects women's contending to attract men in order to seduce them and marry them for money. Goldman wants women to free themselves from being goods for sale that need to be ornamented. Otherwise, they should seek lovers not buyers.

The last character is Sarah. She is an eighteen years old black girl who lives in Rochelle. She is depicted as an innocent straightforward girl. She had a love affair with Coalhouse, however, he proved a villain. He abandoned her when he knew that she is pregnant to avoid bearing the responsibility of the baby with her. Feeling that she is, financially, unable to raise the baby, she decides to bury it in Mother's garden, but Mother rescues the baby and, even, hosts Sarah in her house. Later on, Coalhouse comes back to her and things went well. When he gets involved in a fight

with some white firefighters, Sarah decides to depend on herself and help him by pleading his case to the vice president; she gets killed. She proves to be a noble loving woman who is ready to present sacrifices for the man that she loves; she already pays her life for her lover.

It is proper to apply Emerson's Self-Reliance theory to *Ragtime* in order to discover how both Nesbit and Sarah follow its principles. The first character that will be analyzed is Nesbit; her plan to become a self-reliant woman will be analyzed.

According to Emerson, her plan is to be a 'king,' who has 'so magnetized the eyes of nations.' Emerson's 'king' may be a 'great proprietor.' Hence, Nesbit needs be a rich woman. Being a poor girl, she decided to use her beauty and sexual attraction to take money from men. In *Ragtime*, Nesbit did four things that prove her hunger for wealth. Firstly, when she was fifteen years old, she was raped by White and her poverty obliged her not to expose his crime or report the authorities. Instead, she accepted being his sex slave in exchange for money. Secondly, the sexual violence to which she was exposed and her submission to White made it easy for her to do this again with Thaw. This time it was planned; Thaw paid her mother to take her in a rented castle in Germany where he raped her: "In Southampton Harry paid of Evelyn's mother and took Evelyn alone to the Continent." (Doctorow, 20) There, he violently raped her and when White saw the torturing marks on her flesh, he called a lawyer to sue Thaw: "He sent her to a lawyer who prepared an affidavit as to what happened in the Schloss Katzenstein. Evelyn signed the affidavit... . Harry K. Thaw read the affidavit, turned pale and immediately proposed marriage." (Doctorow, 21) Thaw had to propose marriage to cover what he did. She accepted that marriage but never forgot White. She was White's mistress but was planning to marry Thaw; he was a very rich man. Her mother was an accomplice in that plan; accepted his money in exchange for her daughter. Her keen wish to have money made her connive at both White's and Thaw's crimes of raping her and she could, even, take advantage of these connivances monetarily. Thirdly, she took money from Thaw to lie in court. Fourthly, she wears a corset in order to attract and please men. San Miguel comments on Nesbit's monetarily aspirations:

Ragtime may be said to manifest underlying criticism of traditional female compliance with their own victimization in an attempt to fulfill economic aspirations which are in turn imposed by the capital values of the patriarchal society that oppresses them..." (104-105)

Women submit to victimization in order to achieve economic aspiration; this is imposed by the patriarchal society that oppresses them. Goldman describes her success: "The victory of the prostitute." (Doctorow, 48) Society biases to men at the expense of women and this forces Nesbit to be a prostitute in order to be rich and a 'king.' As a matter of fact, "Evelyn Nesbit was far from an innocent." (*Ragtime*) She is a cunning woman whose determination is reckless.

According to Emerson, Nesbit decides to raise a revolution against 'society' because 'Self-reliance is its aversion;' she insists that she 'must be a nonconformist.' She agrees with Emerson's notion: 'What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions.' She rejects society with its traditions, following Emerson's notion that 'a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all offices and relations of men.' Nesbit rejects the chains of her patriarchal society and plans for a revolution against it: her plan is to change conformity. During the time of the novel, the family is considered a sacred unit of society and this gave a great respect to marriage and condemned prostitution:

Doctorow's choice of the women movement as the theme is appropriate to the period of his novel, which is set in the decade between 1906 and 1915...

In the Victorian atmosphere where the family unit was sacred... . The whole question of female sexuality was considered taboo, as some feminists formed out when they first gave voice to radical ideas... (*Ragtime*)

Her revolution includes challenging the conformist traditions of the sacred family and of considering female sexuality a taboo through spreading her pictures on tabloid magazines, and destroying her marriage with Thaw.

In additions, her economic aspiration is considered a revolution against a society that considered rising from poverty to richness is only for men:

Evelyn's behaviors... may be alternatively understood as revolutionary... .The rise from rags to riches was a possibility only for men... . In spite of the apparent condemnation of Evelyn's immoral ways to achieve her ambition...it is undeniable that she has achieved her aim. (San Miguel, 105)

Whatever the immoral means of gaining a fortune, Nesbit is victorious and her victory shows the success of her revolution.

The second character that will be analyzed is Sarah; her plan to become a self-reliant woman will be analyzed. She puts a plan to become

a 'king' by being 'noble.' Her nobility raises a revolution against 'society' in order to be a 'nonconformist.' That society biases to the whites at the expense of the blacks. When Coalhouse is oppressed by the whites, she decides to plead his case to the vice president but she is shot dead. Her revolt presents a sacrifice to her man and she dies for his sake.

Both Nesbit and Sarah decide to follow Emerson's self-reliance. Both plan to be 'kings:' Nesbit plans to be a 'great proprietor;' Sarah plans to be 'noble.' Both plan to revolt against 'society' and become 'nonconformists.' Both face hard obstacles; 'a man is to carry himself in the presence of all oppositions.' The oppositions that Nesbit faces force her to undergo to class distinction and sexual violence; she could overcome both. The oppositions that Sarah faces force her to undergo to racial discrimination and gender oppression; she fail to overcome both. In order to be self-reliant, Nesbit victimized her self in order to take money from men; Sarah presents her life in her defense of her man: 'women kill themselves.'

Feminism in *Ragtime* is clear in the following issues: sexual violence and gender oppression. Sexual violence is obvious in Nesbit suffering and rape on the hands of both White and Thaw. Gender oppression is obvious in Sarah's abandonment by Coalhouse in order to avoid taking the responsibility of raising their baby. Both sexual violence and gender oppression makes it clear that women are oppressed in that patriarchal society.

The following postmodernism's issues are clear in *Ragtime*: indeterminacy, uncertainty and decentring. Sanchez elaborates: "*Ragtime* dramatizes American society's loss of... harmony and stability, and its awakening to a decentered world..." (Sánchez, 17) The novel describes diverse conflicts that lead to the loss of stability and to decentricity. The third issue of postmodernism appears in the uncertainty of narrator.

In conclusion, Emerson's self-reliance theory incites man to be self-reliant and think of his personal development. This will be achieved when he believes that he can be a successful 'nonconformist' individual. He must trust new ideas and make an intellectual revolution. In order to be a great self-reliant man, one must revolt against the world. As a result, he will be one of the world 'kings' that enjoy 'magnetism.'

Both Nesbit and Sarah decide to follow Emerson's self-reliance. Both plan to be 'kings:' Nesbit plans to be a 'great proprietor;' Sarah plans to be 'noble.' Both plan to revolt against 'society' and become 'nonconformists.' Both face hard obstacles; 'a man is to carry himself in the presence of all oppositions.' The oppositions that Nesbit faces force her to undergo to class distinction and sexual violence; she could overcome both. The oppositions that Sarah faces force her to undergo to racial discrimination and gender oppression; she fail to overcome both. Nesbit victimized her

self in order to take money from men; Sarah presents her life in her defense of her man: 'women kill themselves.'

Feminism and postmodern issues appear in *Ragtime*. These issues show the American society's contradicted opposing nature.

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