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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MGS	<i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i>
MT	<i>McTeague</i>
SC	<i>Sister Carrie</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

Overcrowding, anonymity, heterogeneity and vastness are only a few words which best describe the urban experience in the 1890s in the United States. The novelty of these phenomena and the associated experiences resulted in traditional, often religious, values being undermined and in the subsequent desire for stability. Stability, however, could no longer be found in these values, as they were no longer compatible with the new ways of living provided by the city. These circumstances also called for an art form which would re-define, re-evaluate and take into account the relationship between the environment and the individual.

A response to the experiences of the 1890s was American literary naturalism. It was full of immoral behavior and crime, often without moral condemnation of the actions of the characters. The interest in analyzing the occurrence of immoral behavior lies in the fact that the focus on immorality in American naturalist novels has given rise to discussions in literary criticism with, initially, mostly negative reactions. Contemporary critics of naturalism at the end of the 19th century claimed that naturalist fiction was “too honest”, “sensationalist” and “degrading man beyond recognition” (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 14). These statements suggest that the new approach to perceiving and depicting reality addressed issues to which people could possibly relate, but that they were not ready to acknowledge because “to write about something [...] is to confer existence upon it” (Orvell 104). Despite the sensationalism of naturalism, the way the authors approached issues of crime and immorality deserve to be analyzed, as they describe greater societal trends and reveal the troubles of American identity on a micro level. The overall aim of this thesis is, therefore, an examination and exploration of the importance and significance of crime and immorality in selected American naturalist novels of the 1890s.

The inclusion of immorality and crime in American naturalist fiction corresponded to the increasing crime rate in the United States and the concurrent rise in newspaper reporting on crime. More importantly, however, it raises questions about the validity of determinism, the existence of free will and in how far characters are made responsible for their own actions, as well as how immoral behavior is perceived within the novel. The answers to these questions become particularly interesting when considering that naturalist fiction is traditionally perceived as deterministic with the belief that the environment molds the lives of its inhabitants (cf. Pizer, *Theory and*

Practice 14). With any degree of determinism, “the distinction between good and evil – dependent as it is on the existence of moral agents endowed with freedom of choice – no longer obtains” (P. Westbrook 94). Consequently, responsibility for actions wanes, which results in a denial of immorality and, as a further result, leads to an amoral environment. The issue of amorality must be analyzed in the context of the popularity of the scientific theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, which stressed the struggle between species to survive. Morality would, therefore, only be of secondary importance.

This thesis defines immorality and crime as deeds which contradict the predominant concepts of positive normative behavior in the American society of the 1890s. According to Bellah, these structures were particularly shaped by a public religious dimension expressed in “a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals” (*Civil Religion* 42) and in the obligation “to carry out God’s will on earth” that have been inherent in the American tradition since the U.S. was formed (*Civil Religion* 42f). Consequently, deeds or behavior that were considered “wrong” or “immoral” by these values are also treated as such throughout this thesis. In the context of the novels analyzed, immoral deeds include acts related to sex, such as extramarital sex, seduction and adultery, but also greed as one of the deadly seven sins, as well as desertion of family members. More severe acts of immoral behavior involve the violation of other people’s rights and, in particular, their body. Rape, physical violence and murder, therefore, constitute the majority of the crimes analyzed; however, prostitution also counts as a crime according to American laws of the 1890s (Hobson 2158). Alcoholism is included, as it is often viewed as exacerbating violence (cf. Baum 92f).

The first wave of American naturalist writers to address the issue of immorality occurred in the 1890s and included, amongst others, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris. The choice of authors for this thesis reflects the intention to examine the first literary attempts to cope with the vast societal upheavals in the United States at the time. More specifically, the thesis explores the following novels: *Maggie: A Girl of The Streets* (1891), Frank Norris’s *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899) and Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900). The selected novels were the first novels written by each author, so that they reflect the early stages of their thinking. Since the authors were “attempting to introduce new subject matter that had long been denied expression” (Orvell 104), their novels represent their first attempts to put new experience into new literary forms and structures in order to convey meaning. While

choosing only the first works by the respective authors makes the novels more comparable, this method also has limitations, as this choice does not take into account the possibility that the authors' perceptions of crime and immoral behavior may have changed over time. The analysis of this thesis, therefore, solely focuses on the early stages of their thinking rather than exploring their complete development as naturalist authors.

Due to the novelty of perspective, form and philosophy in the novels by Crane, Dreiser and Norris, there has been continuous scholarly engagement with these novels since their publication until this day. While newer journal articles have increasingly re-evaluated the novels on sociological and scientific levels, the most extensive research took place in the 1960s when the importance and value of this literary movement was recognized. The deterministic aspects of these novels are undeniable and easily detectable, so that a large amount of previous literary criticism focused particularly on the causation and justification of immoral behavior. Also for this thesis, issues of causation form a major part of the analyses of the respective novels, as they are essential when establishing the degree of determinism believed in by the author. The research questions of this thesis, therefore, evolve around issues of causation and justification, as well as the perception of immorality and crime within these novels. In particular, it explores the influence of the authors' experiences and individual approaches on the aforementioned aspects.

This thesis claims that in the novels, much of the immoral behavior occurs as a result of people's fear of their new environment, as well as of their inability to deal with the new societal and economic structures provided by their social class and general trends of society. The pressure to act immorally, however, is not only external but rather a combination of external and internal influences and forces provided by the urban experience. Externally, these influences include a combination of the emergence of consumerism, the social class of the characters, as well as their externally acquired habits and the city. Internally, instincts, heredity as well as the personalities and temperaments of the characters are important for their actions. The city as an external force, however, has a major internal effect on the individual, as it brings out dormant, sometimes extreme parts of their personalities. Furthermore, the city and its overwhelming effect on the characters result in a distorted perspective regarding their own actions, as well as those of others. Since they can neither correctly perceive their own behavior nor that of others, they act immorally without being aware of it. This

results in both immoral behavior and, eventually, their own physical or psychological destruction.

The analysis in this thesis attempts to look beyond easily drawn conclusions, so that only by looking at the micro level of the text, i.e. the author's formal choices, is it possible to point out that issues of crime are more complex than they seem. This micro level is examined by performing close readings of essential passages. However, due to the ongoing interest in *Maggie*, *McTeague* and *Sister Carrie*, interpretations of these novels by literary critics are taken into account in order to highlight general trends of interpretations in literary criticism regarding this thematic focus in the novels.

In order to establish similarities and differences in the treatment of immorality in the selected novels, each novel is analyzed individually, after which a comparative analysis of the differing depiction of crime in each novel is provided. This method seemed most efficient for this thesis because the biographies and the individual stylistic choices of the authors had a major impact on how crime is depicted. An analysis of the individual book is combined with a brief exploration of the author's biography and an analysis of how his experiences in life and encounters with scientific and philosophical theories influenced his global view. In order to explore the different dimensions of immorality and crime within the selected novels, the analyses are ordered according to the types of crimes or immoral deeds, as an overview over the types can already give an idea which crimes occur in each individual novel. This method also allows the reader to compare each type of crime or immoral deed between the novels regarding its causation, justification and depiction.

Since naturalist fiction evolved in reaction to literary but particularly to social and economic changes, this thesis also takes the sociological-historical level into account in order to contextualize and evaluate the significance of observations on the micro level. With the aim of further explaining the philosophical, social and economic background of the analyzed novels, the first section is dedicated to an exploration of the major societal and economic trends in the United States. Only by exploring these aspects is it possible to fully understand people's tendencies to behave immorally as well as their reaction to this type of behavior.

2. WRITING IN CONTEXT:

AMERICAN URBAN LIFE AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

2.1. CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

Naturalist philosophies in literature originated as a reaction to the vast societal and economic changes in the U.S., the subsequent acceleration of the pace of life and the increasing circulation of scientific theories (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 7). This section, therefore, serves to provide background information on the major trends and possible effects of economic and societal changes on American culture at the time. As is the case with all representations of history, which are never objective but rather a “subjective interpretation filtered through the historian’s cultural and ideological lens” (Hilf 27), the information presented in this section does not claim to be objective. It only aims to contextualize the novels in order to facilitate the interpretation of the novels discussed within this paper. Consequently, it does not claim to be all-inclusive, so that certain aspects, societal trends or changes, particularly regarding the economic structure of society, may not be discussed. It is also worth mentioning that many of the changes did not only occur in the time covered by the novels, i.e. the 1890s, but that they had been under way for most of the 19th century, resulting in their largest implementation in the closing decades. In addition, a brief survey of the development of the urban-industrial society at the time is essential when considering that naturalists believed in deterministic philosophies. Therefore, detailed accounts of the circumstances, which, according to naturalists, supposedly affected the path of human kind, facilitate an understanding of possible implications in their fiction. Despite the fact that the novels were written in the same decade, the respective authors focused on different external or internal forces within society causing crime and immorality. This may result in the fact that named forces or influences are not equally relevant for each novel.

The closing decades of the 19th century were a time of major economic and subsequent societal upheaval in the United States, impacting the lives of its people and the way they perceived the world (Cassuto 198). Industrialization, urbanization, increased immigration to the United States and its cities in particular, as well as the emergence of large firms were interrelated factors shaping the newly evolving structures within a formerly agrarian nation. Even though the United States had always been a

country of immigration, the 1880s and 1890s particularly were decades when people witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants compared to any other decade before. While it had been German and Irish immigrants who came over in large numbers in most of the 19th century, people moving to the United States now were mostly from Italy, Russia and Greece, thus from Southern and Eastern Europe, leading to an even larger cultural and religious cleavage (Zinn 259; cf. McConnell 162). However, the increase in population was the result of not only one “line of expansion” (Minter 11), but of two: The first line brought immigrants from the Old World to the United States. The second line of expansion included not only immigrants, but particularly rural Americans moving into the city in response to industrialization and the increasing presence of factories and related jobs. The subsequent rise in the urban population due to the growing societal recognition of city life as being desirable cannot only be clearly observed in each city’s population, but also in the growth of towns that could now be considered cities. While in 1870 the U.S. had only fourteen cities with more than 100,000 people, it had thirty-eight by the end of the century (McConnell 164). Chicago and New York were especially considered the “wonder[s] of the age” (McConnell 164) with an increase from two million to 3.5 million inhabitants in the case of New York, and Chicago, which tripled in size in the decade from 1880 to 1890 (Minter 12).

Depending on the line of expansion, a variety of reasons was at the heart of urban magnetism for people to leave their hometowns and move to the city. As for the immigrants’ motivations, it was not only the fulfillment of personal dreams and the myth of the “American Dream”, but also possible traumatic events in connection with political reasons and racial oppression in their home countries which they wanted to escape. The concept of “America” often became the subject of romantic visions and wishful projections for the immigrants to start a new life, as it seemed doubly promising in being culturally and geographically distant, but also economically prosperous. The newly arriving immigrants at the end of the 19th century were desperate to become “true Americans”, but struggled against prejudices due to ascribed cultural differences (Brinkley 490; McConnell 161f). However, in comparison to the people immigrating to America in the centuries and decades before, they were mostly of a rural background and had neither the resources nor the skills to enter a profession. This made their adaptation even more difficult. Consequently, the increase in immigrant population caused a major ethnic diversification of unskilled labor within the cities, which was not

always welcomed by those who resided there at the time (Brinkley 490; 480f). This cultural heterogeneity did not only lead to tensions within the working class, but Stuart McConnell also stresses a certain growing “anxiety” amongst many native-borns of the middle class, who desired to protect their “cultural authority” in the now culturally highly heterogeneous country (162). Nativist movements emerged in response and fuelled great discontent amongst all parties involved.

Regarding the internal migration in the U.S., people were attracted by entertainment venues, conveniences and possibilities to which rural communities had only restricted availability. It was particularly job opportunities, which had arisen due to industrialization, the factory system and the rise of large corporations within cities which were now luring people to experience a completely new and unknown life (Brinkley 487). All rational reasons such as financial advantages aside, for many “the real novelty of city life was the city itself” (McConnell 165), as it had become the subject of mythologization and mystification. Not only had people’s expectations of the city changed, but the growth and industrialization also brought with them changes to the city as such. Particularly for members of the richer part of society or at least of the middle class, higher salaries allowed them to enjoy city life symbolizing modern life: Street-car lines covering the entire city, commercial amusements such as saloons, theatre and restaurants, and other types of consumer culture, in which shopping turned into “[an] alluring and glamorous activity” (Brinkley 500) were the main appeal. As Alan Trachtenberg phrases it, the desire to go shopping was nurtured by one of the novelties provided by the city: “Of all city spectacles, none surpassed the giant department store, *the emporium of consumption born and nurtured in these years*” (*The incorporation* 130; emphasis added). The rise of mass production and subsequent consumption as well as the department stores’ lavish presentation and experimental techniques of advertising added perceived, not actual, value. Issues of value related to products and clothes subsequently enabled the middle and upper classes to dress distinctively to highlight their social standing. In many cases, the emergence of richer social classes within cities and their higher salaries were related to the advent of a *new* middle class made up of so-called “white collar” workers, who were the result of the rise of large corporations (Brinkley 499). The jobs offered by these corporations were characterized by their focus on specialized knowledge and expertise, which increasingly led to a general tendency, even on a municipal level, to hire mostly only specialized professionals (McConnell 159). Despite the advantages enjoyed by the new middle-

class, contemporaries in the 1890s such as the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen already recognized this social class's critical economic position: As the name suggests, members of this class always found themselves caught in the middle between poverty and wealth. Consequently, they were afraid to slip down into poverty because of the loss of their jobs or other misfortunes. However, they also desired to make their life appear more luxurious by acquiring seemingly useless items for "household adornment" or clothing which pretended to the status of a higher class. Veblen calls this "conspicuous consumption", as "wasteful" items are not consumed out of a necessity but as an identity-establishing process (Veblen 82f).

While the city offered advantages to those with financial possibilities, its opportunities were only of restricted availability. This resulted in disillusionment on the part of those who did not have access to the city's opportunities. In this respect, Theodore Dreiser himself serves as the perfect example to illustrate people's hopes and dreams which they projected onto cities, as he himself moved to the city in the hope for a better life. His journey of experiencing this new life has been described as a "typical pattern of hope and illusionment [*sic*]: coming to the city, observing it, responding to it, and evaluating and finally rejecting it" (Gelfant, *The American city novel* 42). Emotions such as "bafflement", "anger" and "despair" leading to a feeling of "helplessness" (Gelfant, *The American city novel* 43) reveal his turbulent reaction to the city life, which is likely to have been characteristic of people's responses to disillusionment.

A reaction like Theodore Dreiser's needs to be seen in the context of the city's ambivalence often experienced by people arriving and attempting to establish their new lives there. The exhilarating life in the city and its opportunities were only one of restricted access and its promise was often bitter. Lears observes that "[t]he city fed dreams [...] but also created new forms of discontent" (63). Since this discontent was likely to have been experienced on a number of levels, it became a ubiquitous part of life for many who chose urban life. One of the consequences of the increasing population in cities was that they grew and spread out, geographically outpacing the planning, building and its proper government. The geographical growth of cities developed new neighborhoods which became "differentiated by class" (McConnell 164) and, subsequently, cultivated new slums, a fairly new phenomenon associated with 19th century cities (Brinkley 493). To make matters worse, working conditions in factories, which employed most of the people inhabiting slums, were often appalling: Low wages, long working hours, a reliance on mostly unskilled labor as well as life-threatening

safety issues at the workplace characterized the life of workers at the time (Brinkley 487). In addition, while housing was never an issue for people with financial stability, working class members' living spaces were mostly restricted to tenements, which Brinkley describes as "miserable places" (493) which had neither windows nor indoor plumbing. Often, these places were subject to overcrowding with three or four families living in one tenement. An impression of the mood of those tenements, their circumstances and the poor's daily struggle for survival can be gained from two quotations taken from Zinn's publication *A People's History of the United States*: "In New York you could see the poor lying in the streets with the garbage. There were no sewers in the slums, and filthy water drained into yards and alleys, into the cellars where the poorest of the poor lived" (213), and

The new industrialism, the crowded cities, the long hours in the factories, the sudden economic crises leading to high prices and lost jobs, the lack of food and water, the freezing winters, the hot tenements in summer, the epidemics of disease, the deaths of children – these led to sporadic reactions from the poor. (216)¹

Crime and related violence were consequences of poverty. Contemporaries of these changes in the 19th century, often believed that the city was the source of evil and the main reason behind the increasing crime rate. American clergyman Josiah Strong, for example, saw the city in 1886 to "breed discontent" and as having the effect of "multiplying the dangerous elements: Here is heaped the social dynamite; here roughs, gamblers, thieves, robbers, lawless, and desperate men of all sorts, congregate" (Strong quoted in Trachtenberg, *The incorporation* 102).

The types of criminal acts committed ranged from petty crimes such as pick-pocketing, scams and robberies to more serious crimes such as murder, as well as hate and sex crime. The ubiquity of crime in the American consciousness at that time can be attributed to two sources: Firstly, crime rates were steadily rising and, secondly, according to Allerfeldt, crimes became almost "commonplace" due to the emergence of the mass press. Journals clamorously reported on "crimes of the century", where crimes were portrayed to trump each other in their atrocities (9). Sensationalist language, overly dramatic accounts of appalling deeds and scandals characterized this magazine and subsequently fuelled the readership's interest in reading suggestedly 'true' crime

¹ This quotation aims to present the strains laborers had to endure. However, it should be mentioned that the initial "sporadic reactions of the poor" increased and led to working-class movements fighting against their appalling conditions (cf. Brinkley 479; Zinn 216ff).

reports (Allerfeldt 8). Often, it was not only the articles themselves, but increasingly the sensationalism mirrored in the headlines which attracted more and more readers. To give a concrete example provided by Allerfeldt, a newspaper once reported on a number of incidents by using the following headlines on the front page: “Chicago, Where A Drunken Woman Was Ravished, Stripped Naked and Murdered” or “A Slaughter of the Innocents” (8). These examples and the readers’ growing interest in these stories clearly indicate that people were aware of the supposed omnipresence of crimes in all richness of detail. In the context of how crimes were generally perceived, there may have been great interest in reading about them in newspapers, but since crime began to rise at approximately the same time as immigration, they were often viewed from a nativist perspective. This was because people found a connection between crime and impoverished areas, which were mostly inhabited by immigrants (Allerfeldt 203).

While crime mirrors people’s ways of dealing with an increasingly, discontent-fostering environment on a larger scale, domestic violence and alcoholism were also issues which should be addressed at this point. Since there are no clear records of these issues, their prevalence and the frequency of their occurrence are difficult to estimate. However, Jerome Nadelhaft and Stuart McConnell give an idea of the possible implications of these problems. In the case of domestic violence, the anonymity provided by the cities and its associated enhancement of the value of individualism had an effect on family life. As family privacy became more important, the problem of domestic violence became worse because the private sphere offered concealment behind the doors of the home (Nadelhaft 2117). In this context, Nadelhaft also stresses that traditional family roles altered due to “continued emphasis on male superiority and male economic control” (2117), which allowed the exertion of male power at home. A further indicator for the prevalence of domestic violence and that particularly women were affected is the emergence of women’s rights movements from the middle of the 19th century (Nadelhaft 2118).

Like domestic violence, alcoholism became more common in society in the 19th century. This can be inferred from the emergence of temperance movements at the beginning of the century, which were movements to urge the reduction or prohibition of alcohol consumption (Nadelhaft 2118). McConnell relates this back to the cultural heterogeneity of the United States, as particularly Irish and Slovak immigrants brought with them differing attitudes towards liquor. They were believed to treat it as part of social life among their respective communities (161). Whether or not McConnell is

right in his attempt to relate the shift in general opinion towards liquor back to these particular groups of immigrants, it is possible that culturally varying differences in perceiving the importance of alcohol may have had an effect on people's mindsets regarding this matter. It is further possible that a rise in alcoholism augmented by immigrants might have further fuelled nativist opinions, as native-borns perceived the habits of the newly arrived immigrants as a threat to traditional values and morals. Since immigrants mostly belonged to lower classes, alcoholism also became a problem of social class and a means of escape for people who had no perspectives (Baum 92f). Furthermore, in the context of the previous paragraph on domestic violence, drunken aggressiveness has been recognized as a "cultural defense mechanism which [...alleviates] stress and hostility" (92). While Baum recognizes a clear relationship between violence and alcohol consumption, Nadelhaft points out that observers acknowledge that a connection exists, but that they are not sure about the nature of the connection (2118).

2.2. CHANGES IN WORLD PERCEPTION

The discontent at appalling labor conditions, the ubiquity of poverty on the streets and crowding in general occurred side by side with the excitement of city life as demonstrated in its entertainment venues and possibilities. This created the aforementioned ambivalence about the city. The growth in population and changes associated with industrialization also strengthened anonymity and impersonalisation among people living in the cities, which was linked to the unsettlement of traditional, American values (Orvell 104). These values had beforehand appeared to be unshakeable. As convincingly stated by J.F.C Harrison, "[t]raditional social habits and customs seldom fitted into the patterns of industrial life, and they had [...] to be discredited as hindrances to progress" (Harrison 268 quoted in Gutman 541). However, the fact that progress in thought as well as in technology was characteristic of that time leads to the unsurprising consequence of a dramatic change in social habits. In the same way in which the following quotation by Sidney Pollard described the effects of industrialization on English culture, Herbert Gutman states that the same process was observable in the United States: "There was a whole new culture to be absorbed and an

old one to be traduced and spurned [...], new relations with employers [...], new marriage patterns and behavior patterns of children within the family and without” (Pollard quoted in Gutman 540). This section, therefore, focuses on the influences of the changes of their environment on people’s perceptions, as well as in how far evolutionary and eugenic scientific theories had an impact on people’s views. Before going into detail which changes in social habit and world perception occurred, one needs to consider people’s traditional views which were now shaken by their changing environment and the increasing emergence of scientific theories. The main focus here is on traditional perceptions of family, gender relations and (religious) morality, as these are relevant for determining which behavior in the novels can be considered as immoral.

As already referred to by Pollard, traditional middle-class family structures as part of the Victorian image of the family, which were prevalent for most of the 19th century, were subject to change. For most of the 19th century, women were traditionally confined to the domestic sphere, spent most of their time at home as the emotional and moral base for the entire family but particularly the children. The home, therefore, became the “site of moral, ethical and religious education” (Cassuto 198). Furthermore, they played a supporting role for their husbands. Men, on the other hand, usually served a more active role and were seen as the bread-winners as well as the protectors of their families (McCurty 189-214). Sexual expression within married life was, at the time, accepted but still systematically repressed. Sexual restraint was so prevalent, as it was viewed to be a lack of control, which was considered to be the “basic building block of personality” (Rosenberg 137). Any loss of control, therefore, was thought to “destroy any hope of creating a truly Christian personality” (137), as well as seen as animalistic (Rosenberg 141). Even though men and women were equally affected by sexual constraint, any departure from this constraint as well as from their traditionally ascribed roles was always considered to be more severe for women. This was due to the fact that women were viewed to be on a “higher moral plane than men” (Odem 1966) because they were responsible for their children’s morality. While a man’s illicit sexual activity was mostly tolerated, any sexual activity outside of marriage of a woman marked her as being “ruined” (Odem 1966). According to Odem, working-class families did not have a comparably strict distinction between which family members would take care of the private or public sphere (1967). This was due to the fact that family members had to contribute equally to the family’s overall income in order to survive. Although laboring

men and women did have their own moral standards and codes, middle-class people had a negative perception of the communities as fostering vice and sin (Odem 1968).

The middle-class family roles were shaken by people's increasing mobility. The movement of children of ranchers and farmers from the countryside to the city separated families, which had been the symbolic base of moral life, and which expected mutual support among all family members. The traditional strings to keep them connected to their moral roots were cut off. The long-known function of the family as a "safety net" (Cassuto 198) for people vanished as soon as they relocated, and this caused an unsettlement of traditional values. As a consequence, society's perception of the importance of family life changed and a shift in the relation between the community and the individual could be observed (Cassuto 199).

Similarly to family life, religion for most of the 19th century was a "place of love and acceptance in an otherwise harsh and competitive society" (Bellah et al. 223). Bellah further maintains that despite the religious pluralism within the United States, people had certain beliefs and shared values that were part of what he calls a civil religion which was shaped by the first few presidents. While these values were mostly derived from Christianity, the civil religion in the United States is not solely nor explicitly Christian (*Civil Religion* 42). Documents written by Benjamin Franklin and George Washington show that they felt the obligation to serve God by "the doing of good to men" (Franklin quoted in Bellah 44) as well as believed that "morality [could not] be maintained without religion" (Washington quoted in Bellah 44). These quotes indicate the importance of religion for public life and, therefore, also render plausible the belief that religious values were ubiquitous in people's lives as well as influenced how they perceived morality.²

Increasingly after the Civil War, religion lost its status with the rise of biblical criticism and in the struggle against increasingly accepted scientific theories (Hofstadter 2). This loss of faith in the modernized structures of society roused in people the need and desire for a new world view which would offer them stability in a life of constant change. Despite earlier theories on evolution, as for example Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique* of 1809, it was particularly Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, first published in 1859, which had a major impact on people's perception of the world (Hofstadter 1). Darwin's theories of natural selection – i.e. that species are subject to

² Bellah's article is not concerned with religion in the United States in the 19th century in particular, but his argumentation is still relevant as he deals with the historical development of civil religion.

change in response to their environment – and the struggle for existence of the individual were not accepted initially. Rather, the rise of these theories developed slowly to replace traditional patterns of thought, even among scientists. In the realm of science, universities played an essential part in spreading the new theories by organizing scientific and philosophical lectures. The general public, however, was only reached through columns in the emerging mass press and popularized scientific magazines. Particularly magazines such as *Appleton's Journal* in 1867 and *Popular Science Monthly* in 1872 are important, as they were among the first to produce great numbers of articles on Darwin (Hofstadter 9). Despite the complexity of his theory, these magazines were widely read. While biblical criticism and the resulting secularization of American thought had already unsettled traditions provided by religion, the application of theories originally designed for animals to man resulted in this increasing alteration of people's perception of the world. The application of Darwin's natural laws led to a movement termed Social Darwinism, which meant that the evolutionary theory of Darwinism was applied to the social realm.³

In the same way in which Darwinism was widely accepted within the population, Herbert Spencer's theories also became increasingly popular: According to Hofstadter, 368,755 volumes of Spencer's books were sold between 1860 and the beginning of the 20th century, which is an impressive number when considering that it was a philosophical and sociological work (21). While Darwin's impact on the general public was fairly easily traceable, Spencer's influence on the general public in the United States is difficult, if not impossible to estimate. It is, however, for the purpose of this thesis, essential to mention, that he was often read by largely or partly self-educated people such as Theodore Dreiser, who himself stated that "Spencer [...] blew him intellectually to bits" (Dreiser quoted in Gelfant, *The American city novel* 45; Hofstadter 21). He saw that his philosophy confirmed the fears and the disorder of life which he had experienced, which is likely to have been the case for a considerable number of people (cf. Gelfant, *The American city novel* 45).

One of the most essential points made within Spencer's philosophy was his theory of the "survival of the fittest" in his *Principles of Biology* in 1864, meaning that individuals better adapted to their environment stand higher chances of survival. While

³ This definition only describes a general tendency of Social Darwinism. However, it has had various and often politically biased interpretations and definitions throughout history. For an overview of its implementations, cf. Becquemont 2011.

Darwin's theory initially only aimed at finding universal and immutable laws of nature which would apply to animal species, the majority of Spencer's theories, particularly those relevant for this paper, were explicitly formulated in terms of human society, as it is said that "his theory of social selection arose out of his concern with population problems" (Hofstadter 25). To grasp the importance of Spencer's philosophy for American literary naturalism, one has to understand that he believed that life progressed in a cyclical fashion repeating itself. Spencer claimed that life develops from a rather simple state of being (homogeneity) to a more complex one (heterogeneity) which reaches its final climax in equilibrium. Whereas in the animal world, dissolution would bring other implementations of homogeneity into existence, which would start a new cycle, Spencer saw in equilibrium the desirable state for society to reach (cf. Lehan, *The City in Literature* 198). This decline, however, is essential for the cyclical nature of life, as the decline and final dissolution of the individual is needed for the "evolutionary march [of the species to move] toward greater perfection" (Lehan, *The City in Literature* 53). Consequently, Spencer's philosophy is also historical, as he claimed that human kind was in the process of developing towards perfection and equilibrium by means of a cyclical fashion.

For American society and even politics, Spencer's theory was often perceived and adopted in a laissez-faire manner. It made people believe that "human perfection is not only possible, but inevitable" (Hofstadter 26), justifying a very limited and inconsistent intervention regarding poverty issues by the government. Therefore, the determinism of both Spencer's sociological theory as well as Social Darwinism, which drove people to believe that poverty was merely the result of unchangeable natural laws, affected pauper laws (Cassuto 199). Clearly, this led to an even greater increase in poverty and worsened the unsanitary conditions of the slums. The feeling that "great industrial and financial combinations of self-serving national political parties [,which] appeared to control the fate of the nation as a whole" (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 18) rather than to take care of the common man resulted in people's perception of having no control over their lives. In addition, their fear fostered a tendency to fight for their survival rather than to prevail morally (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 18).

People's perception of their environment and of each other was further influenced by eugenic theories. As already noted, numerous sociological hypotheses with a biological core mushroomed during the 1890s after evolutionary theories had become an often used 'scientific lens' through which Americans viewed their

experiences. Nativist tendencies were taken up by sociologists and criminologists such as William Sumner or Cesare Lombroso⁴. Their theories address issues evolving around a general concept of cultural atavism and degeneration, which many people feared to be the result of the increasing number of immigrants (cf. Rossetti 172). William Sumner's argumentation in particular goes further, namely that poverty-stricken people – most of them immigrants – are subject to atavistic tendencies, bringing human kind back to its barbaric state of being before civilization. He believed that any contact with people who have returned to this state poses the danger of leading to the same fate. Social Darwinism was the answer for the threat proposed by Sumner, as he believed that inherited evil traits would lead to their own destruction and eradication, so that only civilized people would be left (cf. Rossetti 172).

Sumner, however, was not alone in relating man's atavism to inherited, evil traits. Cesare Lombroso claimed that criminals only committed illegal or immoral deeds because it was in their nature and biologically determined. He had various conclusions as to which type of person would be subject to criminal behavior; most importantly, however, is that he claimed that a criminal's depravity is visible in his physical appearance. Lombroso considered a number of physical features as an indication of criminal tendencies: Firstly, darker skin hints at a criminal mind; secondly, people who exhibit fairly general features such as square jaws, flat noses, brutish postures or oversized ears are more likely to degenerate and commit a crime than those with a regular physiognomy (cf. Rossetti 174f; Pizer, *Ethical Dualism* 558).

These changes in perception and the scientific theories just described found their way into literature, so that naturalists can be considered to have given expression to general tendencies of viewing the world at the time. The theories of the four scientists, i.e. Darwin, Spencer, Lombroso and Sumner are particularly important for naturalist writers and the subsequent analysis of issues of crime and immorality in the following sections.

⁴ The publications *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883) by William Sumner and *L'Homme Criminel* (1895) by Cesare Lombroso are of particular importance in this context.

2.3. APPLICATIONS IN LITERATURE – AMERICAN LITERARY NATURALISM?

The preceding section has pointed out that people living at the turn of the century often felt powerless in the struggle against their own heredity, as well as against the circumscriptions by their environment. The idea that the life of an individual is “limited, shaped, conditioned – determined, if you will” (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 18) by external forces beyond their control was taken up by the generation of Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser and Stephen Crane who incorporated this way of thinking into their novels. Their inspiration to take up a naturalist approach in their work resulted from a number of influences. For the most part, the expressions naturalist writers used to describe their time – “terrible”, “twisted” and “wretched” (Clark 119), to name only a few – point to the fact that they utilized fiction as a tool to process and cope with the changes in society. Their sensing of the dislocation of values also led them to express an implicit, but fierce criticism of the upper- and middle class culture of the late 19th century (Clark 119).

While Crane, Dreiser and Norris were not only inspired by their awareness of and belief in scientific theories, Émile Zola’s essay *Le Roman Expérimental* from 1878 and his following novels were also influential for these writers. At the heart of Zola’s theory was his view that the novelist should act using the techniques of a scientist: Applying science to the progress of writing in the form of observing life as it really is, was considered the only way to enable the writer to convey the objective truth about the human condition. However, while observation may have been essential, it was more the data which, in its arrangement, should provide for experiments in order to present fundamental truths about questions of “how” and “why” particular reactions or characters traits can be found in an individual. It was further the role of the author to meticulously describe man’s impulses and instincts (Walcutt 30). The techniques of the naturalist writer brought with them the necessity to address questions of the influence of heredity and environment on the fates of individuals. Moreover, Zola highlighted the impact of the environment on the individual and inevitably denied free will, as he believed that the external forces of the environment determined people’s lives and decisions (Åhnebrink, *The Influence* 16f). While the theory of European naturalism seems fairly clear, the practices often showed differing implementations and solutions. This resulted in great variety in terms of subject matter and form for naturalist writers who were inspired by Zola’s theory and his novels.

Since Zola's inconsistent approach led to a loose definition, the generation of Crane, Norris and Dreiser adapted Zola's proposals to form, style and themes to an American audience in the context of the emergence of an urban-industrial society and their individual explorations of evolution theories. The way they conceived these general and intellectual influences did not only result in an adaptation of its European precursor, but rather in a specific interpretation, which is now generally perceived as American literary naturalism (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 7). It has been difficult for scholars to pin down the term as well as what exactly is implied when writers are traditionally viewed as naturalists. Since Walcutt's statement that it is "impossible [...]" to reduce naturalism to any single formula" (30) stands in close relationship as to why early scholars have often assailed naturalism, it is worth investigating the reasons for this rejection: One point of criticism is the use of sensationalism and violent tales about man's brutality and "degrading man beyond recognition" (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 14), as it completely strips him of value. Particularly moralists saw their own understanding of the human condition under attack and opposed naturalism for its tendencies to reduce human nature to being determined to such a degree that would deny responsibility for actions. This point is often taken up by critics who feel that naturalism can be equated with pessimistic determinism and, therefore, denies every principle of free will. However, the assumption by scholars that naturalists were deterministic would only further lead to critical comments. The criticism was concerned with inconsistency because naturalistic fiction shows traits of free will while the authors claim that their characters live in a socially conditioned world (cf. Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 14).

The inconsistencies of writers have sparked doubt amongst critics whether this literary movement can even be seen as a literary "school" or "movement" (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 7). Donald Pizer, who has spent over five decades on publishing essays on the phenomenon on American literary naturalism and associated writers, has transformed and re-evaluated the definition of naturalism. He claims that even though naturalists show common tendencies which would characterize them as a literary movement in the first place, critics need to refrain from attempting to find strict rules when it comes to themes, form and subject matter (*Theory and Practice* 7). Although it is understandable that critics argue "that naturalism should have a unified and coherent philosophical base and a distinctive form and style consistent with that base" (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 14), he stresses that it is particularly the absence of a philosophical

center which allows for “great freedom of response (and hence variety)” (*Theory and Practice* 7). In defining American naturalism, Eric Link also states that it is a “thematic exploration out of post-Enlightenment developments in science and philosophy” (71). With this statement he acknowledges that there is no set of styles or forms that would define American naturalism as a “school”.

Pizer further defends the idea of naturalism against criticism by suggesting that even though the characters are portrayed in an animal-like fashion so that they are driven only by their instincts circumscribed by their environment and heredity, there are humanistic aspects that need to be taken into account. He believes that the authors are caught between their desire of newly-found ways to perceive the world as suggested by Zola and the desire “to find meaning in experience that reasserts the validity of the human enterprise” (*Theory and Practice* 87). This means that although the characters in naturalist fiction seem to accept no higher value, the authors do attempt to add layers of value which may not be easily detectable at first sight.

Despite the fact that all three authors of early American literary naturalism in the 1890s were, in some cases more and in other cases less obviously inspired by Zola’s philosophy and his way of understanding reality, they had their individual responses to the overarching questions of determinism, free will and the influence of external or internal forces that dominated the American intellectual mind. These responses to new theories and an urban-industrial life unknown to them was closely related to their own experiences and their respective biographies which shaped the way they incorporated and interpreted these issues in their fiction. While all three of them dealt with the impact of the power of the city, they focused on different aspects of the American life described. Differences in focus are, for example, the social milieu and implied values, the importance of excessive consumption as well as issues of immigrant labor and its social implications, as the following analyses of their novels will highlight. When it comes to looking for an underlying theme, however, Pizer gives an idea of it when he states that “American naturalistic fiction is [about] the tragic incompleteness of life – how little we are or know, despite our capacity to be and our desire to know” (22).

Also Pieter Borghart has engaged with the definition of naturalism and has recognized three points of identification in order to categorize a novel as naturalist: These indicators are “positivist concept of ‘materialism’”, “scientific experiment” and “aesthetics of realistic imitation” (Borghart 211). He bases these points of identification on the naturalist canon in literary criticism when it comes to extracting devices which

can be considered naturalist. Based on Pizer's, Borghart's and Link's ways of defining naturalism, the definition of American literary naturalism throughout this thesis is as follows: American naturalist novels can be recognized from the author's focus on external factors, forces and sensations of a hostile environment which critically influence the decisions and actions of the characters, who are primarily part of a lower social class. While a certain insight into the minds of the characters is given, the depictions are primarily external and, therefore, convey the idea of a scientific experiment. It is essential to point out that the driving forces of the characters – which can be external as well as internal – greatly influence their actions but do not necessarily determine them. Often, however, the characters are not aware of the importance of their instincts, habits and their environment to their actions.

Due to Pizer's emphasis on the discrepancy of definition, the following sections serve to give an idea of each writer's approach to these questions as well as to naturalist theories by relating them back to their respective biographies. While these sections do not attempt to provide a full account of the biographies of the authors, they do, however, try to find connections between their lives and how their personal experiences and knowledge influenced their take on fiction and, more importantly, on crime and immorality in general.

3. STEPHEN CRANE'S *MAGGIE: A GIRL OF THE STREETS*

3.1. STEPHEN CRANE'S LIFE AND ARTISTRY

Stephen Crane was born in 1871 in Newark, New Jersey, as the fourteenth child to a minister of the Methodist church and the daughter of a clergyman. Not much is known about his childhood or his relationship to his parents; however, the death of his father when Crane was only nine years old was “crucial to the child’s growing sense of the world” (Benfey 7).⁵ While Crane’s father wrote sermons and books, his mother started contributing articles to Methodist journals after her husband had died. As a result, Stephen Crane’s interest in writing and the power of words was inspired by his parents from an early age, as indicated by his first poem written at the age of only eight years. Shortly after his father’s death, the Crane family relocated to Asbury Park, New Jersey. His formal education was somewhat erratic, transferring from one school to another, including the contrasting combination of military Claverack College and the ministerial Pennington Seminary. After having studied at Lafayette College as an engineering student, he transferred to Syracuse University in 1891 (Benfey 49). His character in his youth, often described as “rebellious” and “moody” (Stallman 19), was likely to be the reason for his volatile decisions regarding his formal education. Even though Crane did not finish college, Syracuse provided him with his first journalistic experiences, as he contributed articles to the school papers and sent dispatches to the *New York Tribune* (Benfey 49)

1891 was a decisive year for Stephen Crane in a number of ways. He decided to end his formal education in order to pursue his career as a journalist in New York. It is also believed that it was around this time he started writing the initial draft of his first novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The genesis of his first novel and concrete inspirations are, however, unclear. Since Crane is labelled a naturalist writer, critics automatically assumed that his arrival in New York and his experiences with poverty and his observations of the Bowery slums served as the model for his first novel (cf.

⁵ The lack of detailed knowledge about Crane’s childhood and his day-to-day life in general is related to, as Christopher Benfey highlights, Crane’s earliest biographer Thomas Beer (*Stephen Crane*, 1923), who was more inventive than truthful (8). This was only revealed by Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, editors of Crane’s correspondence. Beer’s forged accounts of Crane’s (personal) life are very problematic in so far, as they had a major influence on following biographies. They often depended on the information provided by Beer. Consequently, it is difficult to extract truthful accounts of Crane’s biography, since Beer is very likely to be the source of much biographical material. Therefore, this section is mostly based on the most recent publications by Benfey on Stephen Crane’s life, as they question some of the accounts provided by Beer.

Benfey 61). However, newer sources claim that he drafted his first version of *Maggie* shortly before he left Syracuse, so that his first novel is merely based on his imagination and on expectations of the slums rather than concrete reality (Benfey 61; Ziff 190). Crane rewrote *Maggie* entirely when he came to New York, particularly by modifying the detailed and sensuous accounts of the poverty in the Bowery (Benfey 63). When Stephen Crane reworked his first novel, he also attended a lecture on tenement life by Jacob Riis in Asbury Park. Since Riis's novel *How The Other Half Lives* (1890) is concerned with his own experiences in the slums, it can be assumed that this served as an influence source of data for Crane's first novel (J. Giles, *The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel* 22). He even states his fascination with the slums explicitly in a letter, claiming that it was "the most interesting place in New York" (Cady 31). A further interest for Crane which may have found expression in *Maggie*, was to "study people and places" and "faces on the street", as his former colleagues at Syracuse revealed (Benfey 61). In the same way in which the genesis of *Maggie* and his inspirations are unclear, John Berryman highlights the view that this is not only restricted to his first novel, but that his work in general "seemed to come from nowhere" (30).

Crane's arrival in New York was not as successful as he had hoped. After holding brief positions with the *Tribune* and the *Herald*, he realized that journalism restricted him in his aspirations as an artist. The source of his passion for writing was reporting about "Why-How-and-How-it-Felt", as Cady terms it, rather than simply stating mere facts, as required by newspaper journalism (32). Cady also claims that Crane's personality stood at the heart of his lack of acceptance as a journalist, because contemporary reporters perceived him as "aloof", "stuck-up" and "spoiled" (33). However, his initial failure as a journalist did not keep him from pursuing his career plans as a journalist but caused him to put more focus on his prose and poetry rather than his journalistic pieces. Nevertheless, his initial attempts to publish his first novel were not successful, as he encountered a host of problems finding publishers for *Maggie* before he decided to publish it privately in 1893. Although it received praise by Hamlin Garland, who claimed that *Maggie* was "the most truthful and unhackneyed study of the slums I have yet read, fragment though it is" (Garland quoted in Weatherford 38), it did not sell very well initially, leaving him with even less money than before. Since his novel failed to gain acknowledgement and after subsequent unsuccessful attempts as a free-lance writer, he could barely scrape a living and lived poverty-stricken in boarding houses from 1892 to 1894 (Cady 33). As a consequence, Crane often felt "rootless", and

experienced the city as an “outsider, a stranger, a temporary sojourner” (Benfey 141). He gave expression to this feeling in his letters, stating “how the damned city tore my heart out by the roots and flung it under the heels of it’s [sic] noise” (Crane quoted in Benfey 142).

Despite his poverty, these years of relying on his relatives or friends such as Garland or Howells to bail him out seemed to inspire Crane in his writing. During these times, he wrote two follow-up novels, several poems, and short stories, most of which were published at a later time (Bassan 3). It was also in this period that he became acquainted with Civil War veterans, whose stories and experiences were later processed in his most popular and immediately successful novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). The editor Irvin Bachellor, who serialized his second novel, later hired him and sent him on a trip to the West and Mexico with the order to write newspaper articles (Benfey 119). Only shortly after his trip and his return to New York in late 1895 did Crane publish his first book of poems named *The Black Riders*.

Stephen Crane’s life after his return from Mexico was eventful. He was fascinated by the fates and lives of prostitutes, as can be seen in the theme of prostitution in *Maggie* and certain events in his life. This resulted in his involvement in a legal case of a suspected prostitute named Dora Clark, which led to an investigation by the police (Benfey 175). Consequently, he left for Jacksonville, Florida, where he not only became acquainted with his future partner Cora Taylor, also a prostitute and the madam of the Hotel de Dream, but also experienced the shipwreck of the *Commodore*. According to Benfey, the latter in combination with his romantic feelings for Cora served as an inspiration for his popular short story “The Open Boat” (194).

His fame as the author of *The Red Badge of Courage* aided him in his job-hunting when he resolved to become a war correspondent. He left to report on the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 as well as the Spanish-American War one year later, after which he relocated to England together with Cora Taylor. Stephen Crane contracted tuberculosis at the age of 28 which took him to a health spa near the Black Forest to convalesce. He succumbed to his illness in June 1900 in Badenweiler, Germany (Cady 16).

Crane’s opus is manifold regarding its genres, as it consisted of five novels, three short story collections and two books of poetry.⁶ His first three novels *Maggie*

⁶ *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895), *George Mother* (1896), *The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure* (1898), *War is Kind*

(1891), *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and *George's Mother* (1896) as well as his short stories "The Open Boat" and "The Monster" are particularly frequently discussed in literary criticism. His style and the thematic issues dealt with in his works have marked him as one of the most influential writers in American literature.

Concerning the categorization of Crane as a writer, it is not clear in how far Zola's naturalist theories and European naturalism served as a thematic inspiration or a tool for Crane's writing. As Cunliffe points out, John Berryman and Lars Åhnebrink, for example, are convinced that the story of *Maggie* is clearly connected to Zola's *L'Assommoir*, implying that he had read it before and utilized Zola's ideas. Despite their conviction, there is no proof that Crane had indeed read Zola at this point (cf. Cunliffe 34; Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings* 250). On the basis of the often-quoted inscription of *Maggie*, stating that "it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless" (Crane quoted in Ziff 190), Crane has largely been categorized as a naturalist. While this label is mainly concerned with its deterministic content, Crane's techniques are difficult to fit into the traditional naturalistic notion of observation. He is believed to have based and built his fictional world on his own imagination rather than on reality (Benfey 64; Ziff 190), as the genesis of *Maggie* has already illustrated. To Benfey it even seems that creating his own world resulted in an obsession to "shape his [own] life to the patterns and plots of his own stories" (102), as the thematic similarities between his novels and his life have shown. Although he may not have used the naturalist technique of scientific observation, his third-person narratives in combination with a distanced tone often create a feeling of naturalistic observation in his novels.

Some scholars have regarded Crane as an impressionist due to his fragmented style and his "sensory imagery [creating] an immediacy of the scenes" (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 2; cf. Perosa 80). It was often compared to techniques in photography and painting, where "reality is perceived as fragmentary" and "episodic", utilizing "controlled patterns of imagery" (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 5). When analyzing Crane's artistry, one should also take into account his ironic tone often employed in his prose. This rhetorical device ranged from single ironic words and phrases to a thematic irony regarding the entire novel and its characters (Brennan 3). Irony goes hand in hand with his tendency for narrative distance and to merely report the perceptions of his characters

(1899), *Active Service* (1899), *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), *Wounds in the Rain* (1900), *The O'Ruddy* (1903).

(Bergon 2). Pizer also states in the context of Crane's irony that his work has "characteristics that clash with its neat categorization as naturalistic" because "Crane's intense verbal irony is seldom found in naturalistic fiction" (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 124). Concerning the reason for Crane's employment of irony in his prose, Bassan stresses the writer's upbringing as the son of a minister, and that the "failure of society [...and] of men", as he perceived it, did not give him any other choice but to respond negatively. This response was the reason for his "bitter tone coupled with the submerged pity, hence the ironical gestures" (3).

3.2. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

*Maggie's*⁷ narrative features a third-person narrator who reports on Maggie, her family and the unfortunate circumstances under which she grows up in the slums. The narrator functions as an observer and reporter who merely depicts Bowery's inhabitants and focuses particularly on Maggie and her immediate environment over several years. His depictions, however, are not only external, but his perspective is dual in that he switches between presenting general depictions of the actions of the characters and focalizing their point of view (Hurm 111).

A further narrative technique is that he entirely refrains from explicitly commenting on the actions or decisions of the characters. Crane himself stated in this context that "if there is any moral or lesson in [the literary work], I do not try to point it out, I let the reader find it for himself" (Crane in Hurm 123). As a result, he developed other techniques such as "parallelism, contrast, reversal, and ironic repetition" (Hurm 123) to convey a message to the reader indirectly. A direct insight into the perspectives of the characters can also be considered part of this strategy because it enables the reader to experience the fictitious world through the eyes of the characters. David Fitelson, therefore, does not only define the narrator as an unfold of action, but also as a manipulator of the reader. "As a manipulator, [Crane's] principal technique is irony" (186). According to Brennan, irony in *Maggie* is achieved because the choice of words,

⁷ The following sections analyze Crane's first and unabridged version from 1893 of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The fact that there are two editions was only discovered in 1955 by Robert Stallman ("Stephen Crane's Revision of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*"), which resulted in the republication of Crane's first edition. An analysis of the 1896 edition would leave out essential aspects for the discussion of Maggie's suicide, as passages from the last few chapters were cut in the later edition.

the story line and the reactions of the characters are in discordance with reader expectations (305). A further technique to create irony is “the continual disparity between what is empirically recorded as fact and what the characters comprehend as being real” (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 63). Also Gerd Hurm relates this to duality as a common theme in *Maggie* because the dual perspective enables Crane to present “his own impression of Bowery but also [...] the view from within” (115). This aspect of irony, therefore, makes the reader understand the misperception of the characters of their own environment and values which emerged in reaction to it.

The tenements as Maggie’s home are depicted with sensations of smell and noise, and visual impressions, drawing the readers into the story with all their senses. For example, descriptions such as “the smoke from the lamps settled heavily in the little compartment [...]. The smell of oil, stifling in its intensity, pervaded the air” (MGS 69) and describing the tenements with “gruesome doorways” (MGS 6) and “cold, gloomy halls” (MGS 8) convey the physicality of the environment to the reader. These impressions are scattered throughout the novel in a fragmented manner as part of “sensorially vivid episodes, often discontinuous” (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 63). James Nagel and Norris perceive the constant switching between different sensations in *Maggie* as creating a sense of hurry and rapidity, when the latter comments that “[t]he picture he makes is [...] scores and scores of tiny flashlight photographs, instantaneous, caught, as it were, on the run. Of a necessity, then, the movement of his tale must be rapid, brief very hurried, hardly more than a glimpse” (Norris, *Stephen Crane’s Stories* 114; Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 70). Christopher Benfey, then, convincingly argues that Crane believed that “city life had somehow sped everything up, that people had lost control of their own fates” (70). This fragmented image created in *Maggie* is also achieved when Crane switches between the perspectives of the observer and those of the characters.

The belief that Crane primarily based his novel on his own imagination is supported by Ziff who claim that Crane’s fiction created a “reality projected by his will rather than to one observed and ordered” (190). Crane’s position as an outsider who had never experienced life in the Bowery himself can also be felt in his first novel. While *Maggie* features detailed accounts of her environment, its characters are given no psychological depth and are often only recognized as ‘types’ (Dowling 44). Maggie’s parents display no depth whatsoever beyond alcoholism and outbursts of violence. The fact that they seem generic rather than well-rounded characters is self-induced due to

the distance created by the novel's narrative situation. In any case, the motives of the characters to commit a crime or behave immorally are, therefore, to be interpreted as tendencies of an entire society rather than of individual characters.

Another technique which creates a sense of immediacy is the employment of colloquial Bowery dialect. Although the detailed accounts of sensory impressions convey to the reader that the narrator is inside of the story, he is clearly contrasted to the protagonists by means of his use of standard language and their colloquial speech (Slotkin 41). Their speech marks them as members of the Bowery, an area of New York in the Lower East side which mainly consisted of tenement streets inhabited mostly by immigrants and members of the working-class (Hurm 112). The dialect of the characters does not only clearly separate them from the narrator and, most likely, the reader, but also socially excludes them from other social classes within New York. More important, however, is that their speech reveals a recurring imagery throughout the novel, which is further indicative of their attitude towards their environment and living conditions. Although the exclamations "What deh hell!" and "Go teh hell!" are common colloquial phrases, the characters overuse the word "hell" to such an extent as that it can be considered an unconscious expression of their associations with the Bowery. In other contexts it expresses the protagonist's attitudes explicitly, for example, when Mr. Johnson calls his home a "regl'ar livin' hell" (MGS 12). A more detailed analysis of when the hell imagery occurs will be given in the following sections. The fact that Crane implies the characters' attitudes towards their environment in the form of their speech clearly shows how strongly his formal choices affect the general atmosphere of his novel.

3.3. IRONIC MORALITY

3.3.1. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The novel opens with a fighting scene by which the reader is instantly “plunged into selected detail of urban squalor and human viciousness” (Ziff 191). The fight occurs between members of two children’s street gangs from Rum Alley and Devil’s Row in the Bowery. The brutality of the scene conveys to the reader the pervasiveness of physical violence for the children of the Bowery which is already engrained in its inhabitants from childhood. While this scene sets the tenor for the rest of the story, it is also in this first instance of physical violence that the ironic effects of Crane’s artistry can be observed. The mere fact that Crane employs the telling names of Rum Alley⁸ and Devil’s Row in a seemingly realistic setting of the Bowery is highly ironic. At the same time, however, “rum” and “devil” already suggest the importance of alcohol and the human viciousness of its inhabitants to the reader.

The narrator’s detailed depiction of the fighting scene adds cruelty, such as when “a stone had smashed into Jimmie’s mouth. Blood was bubbling over his chin” (MGS 4). The brutality of the inflicted on Jimmie, which is then celebrated with “songs of triumphant savagery” (MGS 4) suggests the scrupulous viciousness of the children. The ferocity of the scene stands in stark contrast with its depiction, when the children are defending the “honor” (MGS 3) of their home streets, in which “the little champion” (MGS 3) of Rum Alley is fighting with “barbaric trebles [...] in the modes of four thousand years ago” (MGS 5). With this use of language, the narrator employs an “inappropriate code of medieval chivalry for what is, in fact, an episode of gang warfare” (J. Giles, *The Grotesque City* 324). This results in elevating this event to a size disproportional to its importance and, therefore, illustrates Crane’s irony. As Ziff states correctly, “their condition is contrasted with hints of romantic, chivalric, or biblical ideals which never had a real embodiment” (192). The ironic effects are particularly achieved because this use of language indicates a set of values and ideals associated with medieval chivalry which are in great contrast to their actual mode of fighting. As a result, it is from this first scene on that the reader is introduced to the characters’ misperception of their environment and deeds. The perspective is not limited to

⁸ The name “Rum Alley” could be an allusion to William Hogarth’s print *Gin Lane* (1751), which illustrates the consequences of alcoholism. Even though critics have analyzed possible influences of art on Crane’s writing style, it is impossible to say whether he was familiar with this painting (cf. Perosa 81f).

children, as can be inferred from other fight scenes when Jimmie fights Pete with the motivation to revenge Pete's ruining of Maggie. Their argument is described with phrases such as "the faces of the men [...] began to fade to the pallor of warriors in the blood and heat of a battle" (MGS 43). The ironic effects of "mock chivalry" also result in distancing the narrator from these actions (J. Giles, *The Grotesque City* 324).

As the story progresses, the reader finds that physical violence is routine in the Bowery and family life in particular. When Jimmie first comes home and Maggie says to him, "yeh knows it puts mudder out when yehs come home half dead, an' it's like we'll all get a poundin'" (MGS 7), the ubiquity of domestic violence and the fear experienced by the children is suggested. Physical violence dominates the Johnsons' family life and is triggered in reaction to their environment, consisting of "gruesome doorways [which] gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter" (MGS 6) and regions in which darkness, violence and overcrowding are prevalent. Pizer recognizes their environment not only as a place in which these three attributes can be found, but that the depiction of their tenement resembles that of a cave and, therefore, that of an "enclosed world" (*Stephen Crane* 126). The feelings of entrapment illustrated in the tenement's atmosphere cause frustration about the impossibility to escape these conditions as well as the feeling of being powerless. Violence as a release for these emotions also becomes clear when considering that it takes place between all members of the family. The parents beat their children, the parents beat each other and, initially, even Maggie "jerk[s] [her baby brother's] arm impatiently [...] and w]ith a second jerk she pulled him to his feet" (MGS 7). This scene is also an indicator that the children's upbringing does not give them any other choice than to imitate their parents who practice violence and for whom violence is the only way of expressing their frustration. The Bowery offers such horrible living conditions without future options that the children can only follow their parents.

Although the novel's narrative situation often offers insight into the thoughts of the characters, the fact that, all family members except Maggie equally participate in violence but that neither the parents nor other characters involved in violent acts show any feeling of remorse, is striking. In this context, Pizer recognizes their home as a world where no morals can be applied, "since the Johnsons' fundamental guide to conduct is an instinctive amorality" (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 126). That their behavior is instinctive can be inferred from the novel's scattered imagery of animals, in which, for example "Jimmie ducked his head, Bowery-like, with the quickness of a cat" (MGS 43)

and Mrs. Johnson's mourning resembles the "contortions of the dying dog" (MGS 69). Despite the importance of instincts for their behavior, this does not imply that the Johnson family is entirely instinct-driven. Rather, it rouses the Darwinian idea of an animal's struggle for survival, and in this struggle moral behavior is of secondary importance.

Despite the fact that scholars such as Fitelson portray *Maggie's* characters as amoral due to their struggle for existence, Crane's irony regarding their inappropriate middle-class values suggests otherwise (cf. Fitelson 188). The following scene indicates that the characters have a mind of their own regarding their actions: Instead of feelings of remorse, at the ending of the story when Maggie returns to her home, her mother exclaims, "She abused an' ill-treated her own mudder – her own mudder what loved her an' she'll never git anodder chance dis side of hell" (MGS 49). Her mother's perception of her own behavior as loving and caring gives a clear indication of her own deluded and distorted views on her own life. James Nagel summarizes the types of delusion in the characters of *Maggie*: "a false image of self, a distorted view of other people, a blindness of moral responsibility" (95). It is striking, however, that Mrs. Johnson – whose behavior can be considered hellish itself – states that Maggie will never get another chance on "dis side of hell". Consequently, despite Mrs. Johnson's animalistic behavior and (alcohol-induced) distortion of life, she is aware that no matter on which "side" Maggie is, it will be equally a hell for her. Despite Mrs. Johnson's awareness of the horrific conditions of her surroundings, it is less her instinctive struggle for survival rather than her mental limitations that do not leave them any other choice. Mrs. Johnson's, Pete's and Jimmie's inability to perceive their own behavior correctly, however, is not related to mere stupidity but to inappropriate morals. The alcohol-induced violence and violence in general between family members illustrates that the institution of the family does not provide the moral base of mutual support for each other. Pizer even states that the home is "not a sanctuary from the struggle and turmoil of the world but is rather where warfare is even more intense" (*Stephen Crane* 126). Therefore, Mrs. Johnson's distortion of her behavior as loving and caring not so much reflects what she herself perceives, but rather what Victorian family ideals would expect from her. Consequently, her behavior is driven by an inappropriately instilled ideal which has transformed into a habit (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 126f).

The ubiquity of violence in Maggie's life cannot only be inferred from the frequency with which it occurs in the novel, but also from the reactions of the neighbors

to their fights. The neighbors' question "[W]hat is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?" (MGS 19) affirms that the Johnsons' behavior is a routine and in no way exceptional, so that neighbors react with acceptance. Also the statement that "a collection of heads peered curiously out, watching [Mrs. Johnson]" (MGS 33) in a scene of domestic violence, elicits in the reader the idea that the overcrowding of the tenements results in a dissolution of the private space, so that the homes of individuals lose their seclusion. The fact that they are peering out "curiously" – a word with a positive, interested connotation – does not only stress the idea of acceptance, but also that they even view it positively as some sort of entertainment show. Their reaction is, therefore, part of Crane's ironic technique to present the story as a melodrama in which the reactions of the characters make the event appear like a melodramatic theatre show, similarly to those seen by Pete and Maggie (Dowling 44). This observation goes hand in hand with the argument that Maggie's mother acts as expected and in the same way in which the audience of a theatre show has expectations of the performers.

3.3.2. ALCOHOLISM

While violence lingers in the air of the Johnson home, alcoholism further exacerbates the aggressive tendencies of the parents. In the same way in which violence occurs as an expression of frustration and the feeling of powerlessness, their alcohol consumption functions as an escape mechanism from poverty and its repercussions (Baum 94f). Other than the phrase that "it seems that the world had treated [Mrs. Johnson] very badly, and she took a deep revenge upon such portions of it as it came within her reach" (MGS 30), no background information about the parents is given to further explain their tendency towards alcoholism. As a result, the depictions of their environment and their living conditions seem sufficient for Crane to explain their drinking habits.

Rosalie Baum further identifies a function of alcohol in the novel important to the question of responsibility for the actions of the characters. She describes a pattern among Mr. and Mrs. Johnson that they never fully release their anger when they have an argument. The execution of their pent-up frustrations and aggressions in the form of physical violence only occurs after they consume alcohol. This is due to the fact that

their alcohol consumption causes them to no longer feel responsible for their actions because they perceive their own actions as alcohol-driven (Baum 95). Baum's reasoning for this reading is that because "alcohol releases inhibitions, the drinker may commit acts normally unacceptable to self-esteem or reputation without feeling directly responsible for these acts" (92). Consequently, in addition to their distorted vision, there is no need for them to feel remorse for their deeds towards their children and towards each other because alcohol serves as an excuse.

While the mother does not conceal her drunken outbursts and does not mind the attention from her neighbors in this regard, the fact that the tenement community takes interest in her "ruined" daughter angers her and, subsequently, triggers further alcohol consumption. This can be observed in the following scene:

The fact that the neighbors talked of it, maddened her. When women came in, and in the course of their conversation casually asked, "Where's Maggie dese days?" the mother [...] appalled them with curses. [...] [She] took a drink from a sjudgy [*sic*] bottle that sat on the table. She continued her lament. (MGS 29)

The irony lies in the double standards of this scene because, as Baum phrases it, while alcoholism is an "accepted cultural norm" (96), Maggie's seduction, on the other hand, "offends the code of conduct of her subculture and family" (97).

3.3.3. THE FLOWER IN THE MUD PUDDLE

Although Maggie is herself inclined to violent behavior when she jerks her brother's arm impatiently once in the novel, unlike all the other characters, she is not affected by her environment regarding violence and alcoholism. Rather, she "blossomed in a mud puddle" (MGS 18) because "[n]one of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins" (MGS 18). The impossibility of Maggie having a good life is already suggested by the imagery of her as a flower which "blossom[s] in the mud puddle" (MGS 18). In the same way in which a flower cannot survive in a mud puddle, so does Maggie not stand a chance of defying the odds of her environment (P. Westbrook 133). The flower imagery is striking because Crane states in this context that "[s]he grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district" (MGS 18). The mere fact that he mentions that she is a "most rare production" suggests that her innocence

and unaffectedness by her environment is indeed highly unusual under her circumstances. With this statement he keeps the reader from searching for reasons why Maggie is unaffected by her nature, as it is a rare phenomenon. When analyzing her being unaffected by her environment, one should take into account Maggie's innocence and naivety because, as Baum has highlighted, all characters need a means to escape from their maddening living conditions (94ff). This is also true for Maggie, except that she has found a different type of escape than her family.

Before going into detail about the form of Maggie's escape mechanism, it is important to consider how different her circumstances are to those of the rest of her family. While her family life is already hard enough to endure, her brother even points out that she does not have any options: "'Mag, I'll tell yeh dis! See? Yeh've edder got teh go teh hell or go teh work!' Whereupon she went to work, having the feminine aversion of going to hell" (MGS 19) Maggie realizes very quickly that for a young woman from the Bowery, there was no possibility for her not to go to "hell" because "work was hell and hell was work" (Benfey 66). Benfey's observation is accurate when taking into account Maggie's own attitude to her workplace, as she thinks of it as "a dreary place of endless grinding" where "[s]he received a stool and a machine in a room where sat twenty girls of various shades of yellow discontent. She perched on the stool and treadled at her machine all day, turning out collars" (MGS 19). The depiction makes clear that she is turned into a machine when she is at work. As Jimmie points out, an escape from her circumstances is impossible for her.

Since Maggie's working conditions are hardly endurable for her, instead of drowning out her sorrows by consuming alcohol like the rest of her family, she escapes to a world of romantic ideals and hopes that cannot be found in her own societal sphere. This can be observed in many scenes throughout the novel; for example, whereas the reader concludes instantly that Pete resembles Jimmie in numerous ways⁹ and particularly his attitude towards violence, Maggie perceives him as a "formidable man" and a "knight" who could save her from her own reality. Textual evidence for the thesis that her overly and inaccurately romantic views of Pete and their relationship is related to her unconscious wish to escape can be found when she is out with Pete: "She imagined a future, rose-tinted, because of its distance from all that she previously had

⁹Alan Slotkin identifies an almost identical use of Bowery dialect in Jimmie and Pete (45f). Her observation ties these characters even closer together and makes clear that they are "both products of the same Bowery tenement" (46). The explicit and implicit similarities between these two characters make Maggie's romantic perception even more tragic.

experienced” (MGS 46). What is particularly tragic about her situation is that the lack of a close friend and the isolation caused by her social class and job aggravate her situation even more. When she states that “she would have liked to discuss [Pete’s] admirable mannerisms with a reliable mutual friend” (MGS 30), it becomes clear that a friend could have saved her from her idealistic perspective and naivety.

This analysis does not agree with Nagel’s statement that Maggie’s misperception of the world is an inability which hinders her from “coming to a personal judgment how to behave within it” (*Stephen Crane* 96). Rather than an inability, it is a subconscious escape mechanism from her own reality. This does not deny that Maggie’s temperament is one of naivety, but the romantic ideals with which she views the world are instilled by a social class different from her own, namely “Uptown” values, as Hurm claims (124). Uptown values are represented by its amusements amenities, theatre shows, its “luring riches” (Hurm 110) and middle-class people’s clothes. The fact that they draw her into a dream-like state which enables her to forget about the Bowery can be observed in the scene when Pete takes her to the theatre: “Her cheeks were blushing with excitement and her eyes were glistening. She drew deep breaths of pleasure. No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and cuff factory came to her” (MGS 28). Therefore, it is only the act of comparison of her own environment with Uptown values and entertainment venues that make her sink into her dream world even deeper.¹⁰ These external influences instilled by society, therefore, serve as the reasons for mistaking Pete for her savior. However, as the following sections will underline, her “purity is destroyed not by concrete evils but by the moral codes established to safeguard it” (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 129).

¹⁰ Alan Fitelson maintains that Maggie undergoes four stages, of which each one steadily increases in Maggie’s illusionary vision of her environment and its people. As a child, she still has a realistic view on her surroundings and the behavior of other people. In stage two, she is aware of the roughness of the real world, but also begins to sense the segregation of her environment, which leads her to idealize Pete. In stage three, she “loses all contact with the actual world” (Fitelson 193). She reaches stage four when she is left by Pete, which does not leave her any other choice but to recognize her actual circumstances (Fitelson 192f).

3.3.4. SEDUCTION

As the preceding sections have highlighted, the distorted perspectives of the characters determine Maggie's fate. Therefore, they can be considered the main cause of her suicide and it is also "in the context of Maggie's [...] inadequacy to perceive her world that she is seduced by Pete" (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 96). The combination of her "rose-tinted" hope for a relationship with Pete and the fact that he introduced her to Uptown life, thereby making her sink even deeper into her dream, leads her to choose him over her family. Crane crafts this scene quite smartly: Just after another drunken outburst of violence between Jimmie and his raging mother in the Johnson home, Maggie finds herself "standing in the middle of the room [and gazing] about her" (MGS 35). How she feels in this scene is not explained, but the description of the dirt and the broken furniture of the place which she calls her home speaks for itself. As Maggie consciously observes the horridness of her home, Pete enters the room and tells her "Come ahn out wid me! We'll have a hell of a time" (MGS 36). This scene is striking in two aspects: Maggie is confronted with the two choices she has in her future at the same time and is given the possibility to directly compare the mess of her home with her "knight" Pete. The qualities she attributes to Pete who symbolizes her unconscious wish to escape stand in stark contrast to her home, making Pete more appealing. However, this brings us to the second striking aspect of this scene, namely Crane's employment of the hell imagery in the context of seduction. His use of the word "hell" when Pete says "We'll have a hell of a time" (MGS 36) implicitly suggests that, even though this is a common phrase, her opting for him represents a different side of "hell" than what she is already experiencing. This makes it clear that Maggie truly has no option other than hell. It also acts to elucidate the conclusion of the novel. Due to Maggie's naivety, however, she does not understand that Pete represents another side of hell. Maggie does not hesitate to make the decision, which is related to her self-perception, as she "did not feel like a bad woman. To her knowledge she had never seen any better" (MGS 46). Consequently, Maggie "is acting with the best standard environment has permitted her to see" (M. Westbrook 592).

The reaction of Mrs. Johnson, who screams at her, "Yer a disgrace teh yer people, damn yeh. An' now, git out an' go ahn wid dat doe-faced jude of yours. Go teh hell wid him, damn yeh, an' a good riddance" (MGS 36) is quite different to Maggie's own sense of self. While Mrs. Johnson's exclamation also suggests that going with Pete

equals hell, it highlights her own point of view that Maggie's behavior is disloyal and immoral. Initially, Maggie's mother and brother also perceive Pete's behavior as immoral, as the first sentence of the following chapter indicates: "Jimmie had an idea it wasn't common courtesy for a friend to come to one's home and *ruin* one's sister" (MGS 36; emphasis added). However, his reaction to seek out Pete at his workplace in order to beat him up makes clear that Jimmie's own position regarding the matter of "ruining" women is somehow that of a double standard. His "theory that he had always unconsciously held, that all sisters, excepting his own, could advisedly be ruined" confirms his double standards, particularly in the context that he himself had ruined girls. The irony in his seemingly moralistic stance lies in the obvious similarity between his and Pete's treatment of women. Brennan and Alan Slotkin highlight that both characters even use the same phrases in deserting women after having ruined them, such as "Yehs makes me tired!" or "Ah, don't bodder me!" (Brennan 307; Slotkin 46). Their observation does not only illustrate that the adoption of his double standards frees him from responsibility, but also Jimmie's moral blindness to his own deeds (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 97). Despite the obvious double standards, Jimmie's "moral dilemma is of brief duration" (Fitelson 190) because he, like his mother, soon starts to blame Maggie that she has "ill-treated" her family.

As mentioned before in the context of the delusion of Maggie's mother, the Johnsons' condemnation of Maggie mostly occurs in front of an audience that witnesses the execution of exaggerated agitation and outrage about Maggie's behavior (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 128). Only the presence of an audience "encourages the Johnsons to adopt moral poses" due to "the expectations of their audience [...] which identifies itself with maligned and innocent virtue despite the inapplicability of these roles to their own lives" (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 128). In the same way in which theatre shows and melodrama are not related to real life, so unreal are the moral attitudes of the inhabitants of the Bowery. As a result, it is only societal expectation and Mrs. Johnson's "shallow ethic" which causes them to react in this manner, rather than genuine emotion (Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 98).

Furthermore, Max Westbrook brings up a very important point for the interpretation of *Maggie* in the context of how Maggie's seduction is received. While she acts according to her best standards and, subsequently, does not feel guilty about her behavior, Jimmie's initial reaction is that of

[...] arguing with himself, stumbling about in ways that he knew not, he, once, almost came to a conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known why. *However, he felt that he could not hold such a view. He threw it hastily aside.* (MGS 50; emphasis added)

M. Westbrook convincingly interprets Jimmie's action as an active refusal to empathize (592). This observation needs to be seen in the context of Crane's statement that "a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his own vision – he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty" (Crane quoted in M. Westbrook 588). As a result, while all characters in *Maggie* may be victims of their environment because it has instilled in them habits of moral stances and, consequently, contributed to their distorted vision, the Johnsons can be morally condemned because they make no effort to change (591).

3.3.5. PROSTITUTION

Pete's rejection of Maggie and her family's abandonment only leave her the option to ask "But where kin I go?" (MGS 61). Her reaction to her argument with Pete is particularly important for the interpretation of Maggie because of two reasons: Firstly, it indicates that because "she has no other option, such a view seems to relieve her of moral condemnation" (Conder 43) to enter prostitution. Conder's argument implies that even though she does not have any other option, she can still make a choice depending on her free will. Consequently, her decision to enter prostitution is a conscious decision and not exclusively determined by her environment. Rather, the application of a middle-class morality to an environment not suitable for this sort of moral stances brings her into this situation and destroys her (Pizer, *Stephen Crane* 129). This also makes clear that Maggie is a victim of her environment. However, Crane's story did not only criticize the adoption of unsuitable values, but also highlighted the active role of the environment. This can be observed in the scene of Maggie's degeneration as she walks down the street to find customers: "The shutters of the tall buildings were closed liked grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things" (MGS 64). The fact that Crane personifies the

buildings by describing them with “eyes” and “grim lips” is textual evidence that the environment is an agent acting upon Maggie’s fate.

The depiction of her life as a prostitute illustrates her loss of identity. In chapter XVIII, Maggie’s name is never mentioned, which indicates that now, she is only “one of the anonymous prostitutes of the city” (Parker and Higgins 64). The anonymity also indicates that her fate is not that of an individual character, but also the fate of many other women in that position. This chapter’s depiction is striking in general, as the men she encounters and the areas in which she looks for customers in one night is a foreshortened symbolic representation of her psychological degeneration and increasing passivity (Brennan 308). At the beginning of the chapter, she moves within “glittering avenues” and meets men with an “evening dress, a moustache, a chrysanthemum” or “stout gentlem[e]n” (MGS 63). After her unsuccessful attempts to find a customer in the areas of saloons and theatres, she moves on to “darker blocks” where she only meets “laboring” and “drunken men”. Finally, in the “gloomy districts near the river”, Maggie’s strolling ends with her encounter of a man with “grimy hands” and “blood-shot” eyes, and an even worse creature of a “huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” (MGS 64). The fact that only external impressions are presented elicits in the reader the idea of Maggie feeling empty and isolated from love, affection, and a life worth living.

3.3.6. SUICIDE VS. MURDER

As chapter XVIII shows, Maggie’s death is due to her family’s abandonment and Pete’s rejection. As represented by her male encounters, her way to death is portrayed as a steady “regression from wealth and well-being to poverty and physical degeneration” (Brennan 109). Maggie’s death has received much attention in literary criticism, mainly in essays by Robert Dowling and Donald Pizer who could not decide whether Maggie was murdered or if she committed suicide. The reason to assume that Maggie was a victim of murder is related to her encounter with the “huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” (MGS 64) occurring shortly before Maggie descends to the river. Their encounter and her subsequent death are depicted as followed:

His grey hair straggled down over his forehead. His small, bleared eyes, sparkling from amidst great rolls of red fat, swept eagerly over the girl's upturned face. He laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a grey, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped. His whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly fish. Chuckling and leering, he followed the girl of the crimson legions. At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily [sic] against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence. (MGS 64f)

Although the scene of Maggie's death does not explicitly state that it was suicide or murder, scholars generally agree that she killed herself (cf. Nagel, *Stephen Crane* 98; P. Westbrook 133; Conder 43; Benfey 68).¹¹ Interpreting Maggie's death as suicide makes sense in the context of her degeneration as symbolized by the possible customers she encounters. Nagel points out in this context that her suicide was not the result of her failure as a prostitute, but rather the "result of a progressive and moral degeneration" (*Stephen Crane* 98) which ends with the "huge, fat man", marking the lowest point to reach.

Nevertheless, Dowling's assumption that Maggie is murdered is not too farfetched when analyzing the textual level. The man's appearance and his following of Maggie evokes the idea that he was also with her when she went to the river. The narrator's statement of "at their feet" (MGS 65; emphasis added) suggests that the man was still with her at that point. Also James Giles believes that it was murder and relates it to her passivity at the end of the novel, when only external impressions are given rather than a focalized account of her perspective (*The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel* 24). However, this interpretation is only possible when arguing that the events of chapter XVIII occurred in one single night, rather than as a foreshortened account of her degeneration after she entered prostitution. This, however, is highly unlikely.

Pizer's argument that Maggie's death is suicide is more convincing. He takes into account historical factors by highlighting that it was common for prostitutes to drown themselves in the river and the East River on the lower East Side in particular, as it was a typical "final destination for New York prostitutes" (Pizer, *A Cold Case File*

¹¹ The fact that the majority of scholars perceive her death as suicide, however, is related to Crane's deletion of the "huge, fat man" in the later edition of 1896, which was the only edition published until the 1960s. The awareness that there was a different and slightly longer first edition from 1893 only spread with the increasing circulation of publications by Katz ("The Maggie Nobody Knows") and Stallman ("Stephen Crane's Revision of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*") who analyzed the differences between these two publications. Consequently, reinterpreting this scene only occurred in much later literary criticism.

38). His observation also makes sense in the context of Ziff's comment that Crane had a "vision of what typically happens rather than a report of what actually happens" (191). Also on a textual level, the depiction of the greasy, fat man, whose "whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly fish", further suggests his anticipation of having Maggie and his sexual arousal instead of a motive to kill her (Pizer, *A Cold Case File* 49).

The novel ends with a chapter on the family's reaction to her death and the neighbors' attempts to comfort the mourners. The scene is another instance of the delusion of the Johnson family, as it does not occur to them that they might have been responsible for their daughter's fall. Even in this final instance, the scene's depiction stresses the importance of audience due to its resemblance to a theatre show. The inclusion of a musical imagery in their mourning in statements such as "The mourner [...was] crying out in a high strained voice that sounded like a dirge on some forlorn pipe" (MGS 70) and the other woman's reaction to "[begin] to groan in different keys" highlight the scene's theatricality, and the staged and artificial emotion.

3.4. DETERMINISM VS. FREE WILL: FORCES AT WORK

Crane's aforementioned statement that his intention to write *Maggie* was to show that "environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless" (Crane quoted in Ziff 190) may appear like a straightforward answer to the question of forces working upon *Maggie's* characters, but it calls into question the nature of environment and what exactly it implies. Crane's drafting of Maggie as blossoming in the mud puddle suggests, on the one hand, that unsanitary living conditions of the slums are one aspect of environment that molds the lives of those inhabiting it; on the other hand, her environment also implies the people surrounding her. Although both environments present themselves to Maggie in a threatening way, it is rather the Johnsons' hypocrisy which leads to Maggie's destruction. Nye's interpretation responds to these two types of environment, as he recognizes two major forces in the novel, namely the natural and the social. Nye notices that, while people in the Bowery may not have any control over natural forces, they do have the power to

improve their social state collectively. However, he also believes that “hypocrisy, cowardice and social evil” (118) as represented by the Johnson family did not find their origins in individual characters, but in the collective and the reaction of the neighbors and, therefore, in the institution of society (118f). The fact that the Johnsons require an audience when delivering their moral harangues confirms Nye’s observation.

The previous sections have highlighted that the Johnsons’ middle-class moral beliefs left Maggie no other option but to ask “But where kin I go?” (MGS 61), so that they can be considered the main reason to drive her into prostitution and the subsequent suicide. The behavior within Maggie’s social class results in no job opportunities because of her gender, family abandonment and the subsequent social isolation. Two major forces influence the family’s behavior and tendency towards violence, alcoholism and hypocrisy. Firstly, their instincts enable them to survive in a world where every day is a struggle for survival. Their instincts, however, are not the only force driving them and which make them act without reflecting upon their actions. The institution of society expects them to live according to certain, often particularly religious and Victorian values, which they merely accept without reflecting on them and their applicability to their position on the social ladder, because it “conditions their perception, which in turn, influences their behavior” (Hurm 116). The moral attitude embodied by the Bowery tenements is habitual and, more importantly, residual, so that they do not consciously understand and reflect upon whether their moral values are applicable to their situation any longer. This observation is significant in so far as it shows the inability of people of the 1890s to adjust to the vast changes occurring in their environment, so that they still cling to residual values in their need of stability. This observation, however, also needs to be seen in the light of Crane’s irony, the tone of which makes very clear that the Johnsons are not supposed to be viewed as victims. It is in this context that M. Westbrook’s and Conder’s interpretations are of importance. While environment shapes the lives of its inhabitants, the narrator never states that they do not have any free will left (Conder 43). Consequently, due to Maggie’s innocence and purity, she always tries to do her best despite her environment and the deadly influence of her family and workplace. Her family, however, consciously chooses not to try their best, so that they – in contrast to Maggie – can be morally condemned.

4. FRANK NORRIS'S *McTEAGUE*

4.1. FRANK NORRIS'S LIFE AND APPROACH TO NATURALISM

Benjamin Franklin Norris was born in 1870 as one of three sons of a wealthy jeweler and a stage actress in Chicago. By 1885, they had moved to a mansion on “fashionable” (Clark 120) Sacramento Street in San Francisco, which was just around the corner from Polk Street and which would later provide the setting and the social milieu for his first novel *McTeague*. Despite his father's efforts to persuade his son to start a business career in order to become an entrepreneur, he was artistically inspired by his mother who had encouraged Frank Norris's creative mind. Eventually, he entered the San Francisco Art Association where he made acquaintance with Dwight L. Moody, who would later convince the Norris family to set out to London in order to provide their eldest son with the best professional education. However, Frank found greater interest and pleasure in studying in Paris at the Bouguereau studio of the Atelier Julien. During his time in Paris, he developed a deep passion for medieval armor and writing instead of focusing on his painting. It was also in Paris that he published his first work, namely, his medieval verse romance *Yvernelle* (French 23). When his father discovered that his son had pursued a different career path, he ordered him to return to San Francisco instantly.¹² When back living with his family, according to his father's wishes, Frank Norris enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, to foster a business career. Nevertheless, he was determined to become a writer and started taking classes in English and French. Despite the fact that he never received a degree, it was during his time at the University and not in France that he discovered Zola and began attending lectures on evolution theories which often featured a moralistic tone (Clark 118; Pizer, *Ethical Dualism* 553). It was particularly his professor Joseph LeConte, “a popularizer of Darwin, Lamarck and Lombroso” (Ziff 256), who sparked Norris's interest in ideas of the civilized man, the nature of the brute and questions centered on animalistic instincts which would later find expression in his considerations for his novels. According to William Clark, Norris also used his spare time to “wander the streets of San Francisco, notebook in hand, observing the life of its markets and mansions,

¹² The story that his father ordered him to come home is a version in a number of scholar's accounts of his biography (Åhnebrink, *The Influence* 10; Clark 122). As convincingly stated by French, this would remind the reader of “a stereotyped manner of the outraged Victorian parent”. Another version, which he considers to be more likely, is that “of Enerst Peixotto, who says that the young man grew discouraged with his monumental painting of the Battle of Crecy, gave the huge canvas for it to Peixotto and another friend, Guy Rose, and decided to go home” (French 23).

tenements, bars and docks” (122). His interest in his environment can be related back to his discovery of Zola’s naturalism. However, according to Clark, the observations that he made during these strolls were important to him, as it was then that he first observed poorer working class areas of the city, about which he had only read in sensationalized newspaper articles (122). Even though Norris often found that his “inherited position of comfort and genteel taste” only offered a “substitute for life” (Ziff 253), his wealthy childhood provided him with an inside perspective of a social class dominated by consumption and material wealth. This is particularly important in the context of other naturalist writers – Crane and Dreiser included – who had to endure poverty-stricken circumstances. This means that whenever they included characters from the upper social classes, they could only speculate about their perspectives because they had never been part of this part of American society themselves. In contrast to them, Norris’s own social standing and upbringing in financial stability affected his way of perceiving reality, which was unique in this generation of naturalist writers and was given expression in his writing (French 22). The experiences with lower social classes and the meticulous observation/data he made of the streets and people of San Francisco later inspired him to write his two first novels *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute*. In relation to the thematic similarities within these novels, Clark also places emphasis on the divorce of Norris’s parents in 1892 for his later artistic aspirations, as the “loss of economic security that attended the father’s departure had a profound effect on [him]” (123). This resulted in a greater stress on evolutionary theories in his writing as well as a thematically related shift of focus, subject matter and style (123). In 1894 he left San Francisco for Harvard to stay there for a year. In this year he had time to improve his writing and, more importantly, was encouraged by his professor, Lewis E. Gates. Gates’ lectures were an inspiration for Norris, as his approach to creative writing was compatible with Zola’s idea that the naturalist should only write about the truth. Gates “praised not the cultivation of style, but concrete and direct expression, based preferably on ‘the facts of daily life’” (Ziff 253). In order to be truthful, Norris returned to San Francisco to study the circumstances of Californian miners as well as the landscape of Death Valley which he required to finish *McTeague*. His return to San Francisco, however, was also the beginning of his career as a journalist because he was offered a position at the magazine *The Wave*. Later stations of his life include South Africa and Cuba, during which he wrote the first two parts of his unfinished *The Epic of Wheat* trilogy, *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, a story about the conflicts between a railway company

and wheat growing ranchers. After expanding his horizon during his travels, he returned to San Francisco, where he died in 1902 of appendicitis (French 32).

Frank Norris's character and fiction has been the subject to a number of differing interpretations and contradictions evolving around his philosophy, his idea of fiction, or, as Pizer states, the lack of it (*Ethical Dualism* 552). Despite the fact that Norris published a number of essays on his creed as an author during his time at *The Wave*, the versatility of his character is the reason why the interpretations of his novels still seem to evoke doubts in literary critics. Critics today accept that Norris was multi-faceted and "not the naïve naturalist too often presented in the past" (Graham xii). This statement refers to the fact that Norris's style and choice of subject has often been reduced to merely copying ideas and stylistic techniques from Zola (cf. Åhnebrink, *The Influence* 25f). The fact that similarities exist already suggests that Norris's fiction is highly deterministic, observant in style and sensationalist in subject matter. While it is important to give Norris more credit than stealing Zolaesque ideas, Zola's influence on Norris should not be underestimated, as Åhnebrink's monograph *The Influence of Émile Zola on Frank Norris* from 1947 clearly highlights. He points out traits that can be considered genuinely Zolaesque, for example, Norris's character descriptions and the characters in general are strikingly similar to Zola's. Often, one can even observe similarities between specific scenes when directly comparing them (cf. Åhnebrink 25f). Although these similarities are undeniable, Frank Norris's fiction should rather be viewed as utilizing techniques of European naturalism as a tool to express his own views on the human condition (Clark 119).

Norris's idea of human kind was inspired by many sources, such as contemporary ideas of evolution and eugenics provided by his professor LeConte, and was always reflected in the way he presented his characters as well as in his choice of themes (Pizer, *Ethical Dualism* 552f). For a reader new to Norris's fiction, it is most likely his seemingly racist presentation of different ethnicities that is most striking. There are believed to be two sources for his "racism"¹³: Firstly, the scientific discourse about races and ethnicities often showed nativist tendencies which posited the Anglo-Saxon race as superior to all other ethnicities present in the United States at that time (Nisetich 14). Larzer Ziff illustrates the unscientific reasoning behind these theories very clearly: "The LeConte theories were a hodgepodge of rationalizations erected on

¹³ West notes that Frank Norris's character depictions of ethnicities other than Anglo-Saxons "can in fact be called 'racist', but probably no more so than the average person of his time" (5).

the new science in a most unscientific manner in order to explain to the privileged classes why their superiority was normal” (257). Secondly, Ziff also explains in this context that San Francisco, as one of Norris’s main locations, had its impact on his racist perceptions. San Francisco’s multiracialism further fuelled these nativist assumptions (254; 257). Furthermore, eugenic theories argued that inheritance had an influence on people’s personalities and their decisions (Nisetich 2). Thus, heredity and the control, or the loss of control over related instincts is an often treated theme in Norris’s fiction. Consequently, Norris, who “had always written about sex” (West 5), also believed that sexual perversity was an inherited racial trait as well as a contagious disease (Nisetich 1). For that reason, sexuality as an internal and controllable force is central in Norris’s novels.

When trying to examine Norris’s personal definition of naturalism, critics struggle to find a clear answer to this question. Joseph McElrath ironically describes this problem as follows: “Norris was a Realist-Naturalist; Norris was a literary and philosophic Romantic; Norris was a melodramatic, conventional-minded moralist” (Joseph McElrath 27 quoted in West 3). In order to understand Norris’s view of naturalism, one has to grasp his idea of romanticism in relation to Zola. As he describes in Zola as a Romantic Writer, he defined Zola’s scope outside of the interests of realists, who, according to him, only described commonplace people and their daily activity. Norris, however, saw the main concern of romanticists as taking “no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that happen to them are ordinary”. For him and his definition of naturalism, it was important that “everything [should be] extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror” (*Zola as a Romantic Writer* 1107). Consequently, Norris defined naturalism by the choice of milieu, as he attempted to criticize the bourgeois culture “from a point of view outside the mainstream values of the realists” (Clark 119). West and Pizer argue that, for Norris, naturalism functions as a sort of bridge between realism and romanticism (West 3; Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 120). According to Pizer, Norris bridges this apparent gap by including both accuracy and truth (*Theory and Practice* 121). Accuracy, for him, means to depict details and “the surface of things” (Norris quoted in Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 120) meticulously, which he attributed to realists. The desire to achieve *truth*, however, he considered as a typically romantic trait and defines it as “fidelity to the generalization applicable to a large body of experience” (Pizer, *Theory and Practice* 121). Interestingly, while Norris discusses subject matter

and mode in detail, he does not mention determinism or a philosophical base. This distinguishes his approach to naturalism from Zola's definition.

Concerning the subject matter of Norris's novel in relation to crime and immorality, his stories often depict man's mental decline as part of a moral degeneration which often results in death and destruction. The following quotation illustrates his credo on this matter:

Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood and in sudden death. (Norris, *Zola as a Romantic Writer* 1106)

This statement makes the occurrence of crime and deeds related to moral degeneration in his novels almost inevitable. However, it is his way of incorporating these features into his novels and the causation as well as reception of immorality as presented in *McTeague* which are of interest for this thesis.

4.2. *MCTEAGUE*'S GENESIS AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Norris's concrete idea for the story line of *McTeague* was inspired by a true story published in a San Francisco newspaper. This incident involved a woman called Mrs. Collins, who was working in a San Francisco kindergarten and was stabbed to death by her intoxicated husband in the cloakroom because she refused him money. While this incident in itself is already vicious enough, it was also reported that the culprit did not show any signs of regret or guilt after having committed the crime, which further added to the murder's cruelty (Pizer, *The Genesis* 63). Considering Norris's interest in the extraordinary, it is not surprising that the Collins murder caught his attention and triggered an urge in him to utilize it for the climax of his own story. According to Pizer, however, the way this story was reported in the newspaper and their repeated use of "brute" when referring to Mr. Collins was a crucial factor for him to write a novel in response. It sparked his interest to engage the theme of the brute under the veneer of civilization (Pizer, *The Genesis* 63). The nature of the story *per se* already suggests that crime and a sense of degeneration play a major role. Also, the style in

which newspaper articles on the Collins case were written makes very clear as to why Norris adopted this story to illustrate questions on determinism and atavism. The following passage gives a concrete example to illustrate the newspaper's style of reporting: "[W]henever he got drunk he beat [his wife] and if she did not give him money he knocked her down" (quoted in Pizer, *The Genesis* 63). This presentation of an alcohol-induced act of physical violence culminating in murder committed by a man described as a "brute" can very easily be interpreted as evidence for a (moral) degenerative process. Besides these issues, he also addresses greater issues of human kind related to the degree of influence of heredity and particular social circumstances on the behavior of people. At this point it is interesting to note, however, that Norris himself did not mention these implicitly addressed issues when stating the purpose of *McTeague*:

My chief object in writing *McTeague* was to produce an interesting story – nothing more. [...] If I had any secondary motive in its production, it was in the nature of a protest against and a revolt from the 'decadent', artificial and morbid 'prose fancies' of latter-day fiction. I believe that the future of American fiction lies in the direction of a return to the primitive elemental life, and an abandonment of 'elegant prose' and 'fine writing'. (Norris quoted in Isani 118)

Norris's comment on his choice of style is particularly relevant, as it shows that he did not believe in the importance of style and the fineness of its diction but rather in the content of his story. Regarding how critics have received his style, they state that *McTeague* is a ridiculous accumulation of "simple characterization[s]" and features a "ponderous style" (Spangler 88), as well as that Norris depicts "details plainly, carefully, and objectively" (Walcutt 129). As the following analysis will point out, all three comments need to be objected to for a number of reasons. So far, very few scholars have attributed much importance to his diction because the obvious descriptions of the depravity of the characters let them appear flat and strip them entirely of value. However, the style of *McTeague* in juxtaposition with its narrative techniques does have significant effects on the reader in creating a particular atmosphere.

The novel features numerous repetitive terms and phrases, either deployed to describe characters, as well as in key scenes often involving crimes or immoral deeds. The earliest set of words that is employed over and over again are adjectives utilized for

the appearance of the eponymous character in the very beginning of the novel as illustrated by the following extract:

For McTeague was a young giant, carrying his huge shock of blond hair six feet three inches from the ground; moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscles, slowly, ponderously. His hands were enormous, red, and covered with a fell of stiff yellow hair, they were hard as wooden mallets, strong as vises [*sic*], [...] His head was square-cut, angular; the jaw salient, like that of the carnivora. McTeague's mind was as his body, heavy, slow to act, sluggish. Yet there was nothing vicious about the man. Altogether he suggested the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient (MT 2f).

The character description is plain and mostly describes external impressions about his physical appearance. Despite the narrator stating that “there was nothing vicious about the man”, the words “giant”, “ponderously”, his “enormous” hands and a “salient jaw” evoke associations of a brute in the reader from the very beginning. Most of these adjectives are constantly used throughout the novel to describe McTeague. To give concrete examples, while the word “giant” occurs seven times (MT 2, 45, 48, 66, 68, 132, 218), the phrase “enormous strength” is used six times (MT 2, 66, 168, 170, 268, 313) and the word “stupid” can be found even twenty-four times in relation to McTeague.¹⁴ The combination of his immense physical strength in combination with the word “stupid” gives the idea that he might not be aware of his own strength. This creates a lingering suspense and presence of a possible loss of control over the described brutish forces from the very beginning. As a result, the over-usage of these phrases becomes instantly apparent and serves two functions: First of all, it reinforces the image of the character and has a lasting effect on the reader’s visualizations of the physical appearance and personality of the characters. Secondly, the nature of these adjectives prepares the reader for a certain outcome to the story. Particularly when Trina enters the story, for whom Norris repeatedly uses the terms “prettily made” (MT 16), “small” (MT 16) and “innocent” (MT 17). McTeague’s character, whose animalistic qualities have manifested and seared themselves in the reader’s imagination, stands in stark contrast to Trina’s. Therefore, the mere usage of language does not only make clear that McTeague will lose control over his tremendous physical strength and direct them towards Trina

¹⁴ MT 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 21, 31, 37, 45, 64, 71, 107, 137, 174, 182, 189, 193, 196, 197, 203, 210, 218, 223, 247, 273, 318, 322, 324. The word “stupid” is not only used as an attributive adjective, but also as an adverb (“stupidly”, often in combination with the phrase “gazing stupidly” and “looking stupidly”) and as a noun (“stupidity”).

eventually, but it also suggests physical violence as a central theme of the novel to the reader.

Furthermore, the recurrent descriptions of McTeague's distinctive physical appearance, such as his "salient jaw" or his "square cut head", is clearly an allusion to Lombroso's model of physical features typical for a criminal, so that readers with knowledge of his theory can easily detect that the novel's protagonist features numerous characteristics of a Lombrosian criminal (Scharnhorst 340). Pizer disagrees, as he also commented on Norris's usage of the Lombrosian features of a criminal. He argues that McTeague "lacks many of the explicit stigmata listed by Lombroso" (Pizer, *Ethical Dualism* 559) and believes instead that he made use of some of Lombroso's stigmata in order to draw a connection to McTeague's hereditarily determined tendency to alcoholism which would automatically lead to atavism. While Pizer's latter argument may be true, the similarities between McTeague's looks and the criminal stigmata developed by Lombroso are too obvious to deny. Consequently, Norris's repetitive diction may be considered bad style or an example of "simple characterization" (Spangler 88), but its effects on the reader in the context of creating a ubiquitous presence of crime throughout the novel should not be underestimated.

When exploring the effects of Norris's diction, one should take into account Norris's own comments on reasons for his straightforward style. While it has already been mentioned that he only wanted to depict the truth and be truthful in his 'objective' storytelling, he also believed that

[c]omment is superfluous. If the author makes the scene appear terrible to the reader he need not say to himself or in the mouth of some protagonist "It is terrible!" [...] If beautiful, we do not want him to tell us so. We want him to make it beautiful, and our own appreciation will supply the adjectives. (Norris quoted in French 45)

This statement is a clear indication that his plain style is indeed used on purpose. It need not be understood as an expression of his aversion to 'fine style', but also as an apparent interest in encouraging readers to draw their own conclusions of the incidents in the novels. Even though he stated that the only reason to write *McTeague* was to create an interesting story, he apparently did have a secondary motive, as his diction "conveys the meaning of incidents metaphorically through them" (French 54).

The quotation about Norris's style is particularly important in so far as *McTeague* was a story inspired by an event covered by the media. Since newspapers

generally present information as objective, both in respect to the culprit as well as the circumstances and the course of events, it is very likely that Norris's own presentation of the story may have been stylistically influenced by a newspaper style. This is especially important when considering the subject matter of the novel because newspapers provided their readership with overly dramatic accounts of appalling deeds and reported scandals in sensationalist language. In the same way in which newspaper reports on crimes are perceived as recounting the tragedy of an incident objectively, Norris's descriptions can be viewed as linked to the similar idea of 'objectivity' as well as to tendencies towards sensationalist accounts of the crimes committed.

Before tackling Walcutt's description of Norris's style as "objective", one needs to consider the novel's narrative techniques. For the most part, the novel is narrated from a heterodiegetic perspective often focused on giving the reader impressions of the external surroundings of the characters, such as the physical environment of Polk Street, the accumulation of material goods as well as the daily routines of the characters. Even though it is part of Norris's credo to describe only the external lives of the characters, in some instances in the novel, however, it is not clear whether the narration is told by a narrator outside of the story, or whether focalized accounts of an event or a situation are given. To give an example, in the scene shortly after McTeague meets Trina, the narration presents the following scene: "He never would have Trina, he saw that clearly. She was too good for him; too delicate, too refined, too prettily made for him, who was so coarse, so enormous, so stupid" (MT 37). By stating that "he saw that clearly", the narration suggests that the following reasoning as to why he would not have her are a focalized account of his thoughts. This would also imply that McTeague thinks of himself as "coarse", "enormous" and "stupid", which is very unlikely. It would suggest a particular self-reflection on his side, which is contradictory and incompatible with the way he is described in the novel. This inconsistency in narrative technique could indeed be related to Norris's aversion to good style.

The fact that the adjectives to describe McTeague are also employed when the perspective is not clear indicates a particular judgmental tone of the entire narration. The novel presents a variety of examples, whether it may be about Trina, who is fighting "for her *miserable* life" (MT 274, emphasis added), or McTeague, whose "head was quite empty of all thought" (MT 13). Interestingly, while Walcutt claimed that Norris's style is objective, he also remarked that the novel displays the characters "as if they were exhibits in a side show" and that Norris "delight[s] in exhibiting their *follies*

[...] to be saying that these freaks from the grubby levels of society are at least as funny as they are pathetic” (129; emphasis added). Other critics such as Clark, however, believe that despite the sometimes mocking tone, the narration still wants to elicit sympathy for the misfortunes of the characters because he views them as the victims of their circumstances (123). As a result, despite the obviously mocking character depictions, there are different ways of perceiving and interpreting them in literary criticism.

A theory which complements the way how Norris is often perceived, i.e. as advocating Anglo-Saxon supremacy, has been expressed by Rebecca Nisetich, who believes that the narrator is a white male who merely observes the downfall of other ethnicities (27). This theory also supports the claim that there was a possible stylistic influence by the original newspaper article about the Collins case, which was most likely told from the perspective of a white male. Consequently, this could speak for Norris’s adoption of a similar technique for his novel.

This section has shown that Norris employs traditionally naturalist notions of storytelling in that his depictions are primarily external. The effects of his diction, however, have found varying interpretations and reactions in literary criticism. Most importantly, his direct and uncommented style has great importance for creating an atmosphere that gives the reader the idea that crime and immorality is a central theme in this novel.

4.3. CRIME AND IMMORAL BEHAVIOR

This section will provide an overview of the most important crimes and immoralities committed in *McTeague* and will examine selected passages in order to infer possible underlying meanings. The great number of subplots and secondary characters add to the complexity and would make it almost impossible to describe all scenes in which immoral behavior occurs. Consequently, only particularly relevant scenes are analyzed in detail.

While certainly the immoral deeds feature varying degrees of severity, behavioral patterns as well as the actual committing of crimes do not occur randomly but as part of a development. Also, all incidents of immoral behavior are interrelated.

They all contribute to the conclusion of the story because the deeds of one character cause a knock-on effect. Since the characters (morally) degenerate in the course of the story, it makes sense to look at each crime and immorality individually as they chronologically occur in the story. Therefore, this section does not order them according to their severity but to their contribution to the degeneration of the characters. This procedure is to highlight certain developments in behavior in order to examine whether they are apparent in their presentation, the narrative techniques involved as well as in which ways they contribute to the plot.

4.3.1. RAPE

The first immoral deed occurs between McTeague and Trina at the very beginning of their relationship. The following scene, in which he anaesthetizes her as part of her dental treatment, already alludes to the entering of sexuality as an uncontrollable force to influence his actions throughout the novel:

Suddenly the animal in the man stirred and *woke*; the *evil instincts* that in him were *so close to the surface* leaped to life, shouting and clamoring [...] it was a crisis – a crisis that had arisen all in an instant. [...] Within him, *a certain second self*, another better McTeague rose with the brute; both were strong, with the huge crude strength of the man himself [...] *It was the old battle, as old as the world, wide as the world* – the sudden panther leap of the animals, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted, and the simultaneous arousing of the other man, the better self that cries “Down, down” without knowing why; that grips the monster, that fights to strangle it, to thrust it down and back.[...] Suddenly he leaned over and kissed her, *grossly, fully on the mouth*. The thing was done before he knew it. *Terrified at his weakness* at the very moment he believed himself strong [...] he was the master, the animal was downed, was cowed for this time, at least. [...] Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer. The vices and sins of his father and of his father's father, to the third and fourth and five hundredth generation, tainted him. The evil of an entire race flowed in his veins. Why should it be? He did not desire it. (22f, emphases added)

Generally, this scene has received mixed reactions amongst scholars as to whether it can even be labelled as an actual rape: Conder claimed that the actual desire in McTeague triggered by Trina's unconsciousness was rape, but that he was strong enough and able to restrain himself only to kiss her (83). His reading is plausible in relation to the last

sentence of this extract, when McTeague's "animal was downed", which indicates that, eventually, he gained control over himself to avoid a rape. A kiss, in comparison, is not as severe as a violation of Trina's rights. Cavalier, on the other hand, still views this scene as a violation of Trina's body because McTeague robs her of her ability to give her consent to any action involving her (134). The latter theory is accepted within this thesis.

Similarly to the effects of Norris's repetitive diction, this scene sets the tone for the rest of the novel, as it can be considered to be the first instance in which McTeague's animalistic qualities have an actual effect on his behavior in a criminal sense. In this extract, it can be observed that his "awakening", from which it can be inferred that this "evil instinct" has always existed but has only been dormant, occurs completely unexpectedly. That it occurs unexpectedly is indicated by the double usage of "suddenly" both in respect to the beginning of his feeling of the urge as well as to the actual acting out of his desire.

The words "evil instincts" raise the question what exactly is implied and to which sort of evil instincts this wording refers. To answer this question, one needs to consider the circumstances under which this awakening occurs. Prior to this scene, the protagonist becomes acquainted with a woman with whom "the feminine element suddenly entered his little world" (MT 20), but, at the same time, with whom sexuality is not directly connected because Trina is initially described as "almost like a boy" (MT 17) and as being "without sex" (MT 17). On the one hand, this scene can be interpreted as symbolizing McTeague's unexpected realization of his own sexuality of which he had not been aware of until that moment, i.e. the awakening of his sexual drive. On the other hand, it is striking that it was not his interest in Trina, but rather her unconsciousness triggers these instincts in him to rise to the surface. Certainly, her physical attraction and his urge to rape her speak for the fact that sexuality has now entered his world. However, the fact that it awakens in response to Trina's powerlessness makes clear that her condition is a "condition which arouses in McTeague a desire to do violence" (Cavalier 133).

Furthermore, the earlier scene features an interesting juxtaposition. On the one hand, the statement that a "foul stream of hereditary evil" was flowing through his veins frees the criminal from all responsibility for his own deed (Scharnhorst 340). On the other hand, only a few lines before, elements of free will are introduced when "another better McTeague" is mentioned. Even though this scene describes that there is indeed a

“good” and rational, as well as a “bad” and instinct-driven part of McTeague, this particular moment is the only time this other, good part of the protagonist emerges in the novel. The fact that Norris included this scene has been one of the reasons that scholars claim that his naturalism is inconsistent. According to Donald Pizer, the main objection regarding this scene is that “he appears to free McTeague from responsibility for his behavior and yet adopts a moral tone when discussing McTeague’s sexual desires” (*Ethical Dualism* 552). The fact that there is, indeed, an element of free will can be inferred from McTeague’s fighting against his instinctual self, as well as from his awareness of his misdeed. Also, the fact that McTeague does finally settle for a kiss means that, despite his desperate efforts to control himself, his will is not strong enough to overcome his instincts. The brief duration of McTeague’s internal conflict between desire and duty illustrates that, for the rest of his life, his good side increasingly succumbs to the “evil instinct”, which, consequently, takes complete control over his actions and does not leave him any other choice.

As convincingly stated by Cavalier, “this [...] non-consensual sexual contact sets up a pattern of behaviour that will continue throughout their courtship and married life” (134). The first step into this direction can be observed in the following extract when McTeague enters Trina’s room for the very first time. He is overwhelmed by the smell and the vision of “pure and clean” clothes, which, for him, represent “a whole group of Trinas [that] faced him there” (MT 59). As Cavalier claimed, Norris’s obvious usage of a simile, namely that her clothes represent her body makes this scene a symbolic rape (135):

All at once, seized with an unreasoned impulse, McTeague opened his huge arms and gathered the little garments close to him, plunging his face deep amongst them, savoring their delicious odor with long breaths of luxury and supreme content. (MT 60)

Once again, even this ‘rape’ occurs unexpectedly and out of an impulse, which indicates a loss of control. Considering how much he “plung[es] his face deep amongst them” in Trina’s “pure and clean” garments, the reader most likely imagines how initially flawless clothes are left behind dirty and full of creases. Since Rebecca Nisetich claims that it was Norris’s belief that sexual perversity was a contagious disease, this symbolic transformation serves as an indicator that he is symbolically staining her innocence as well as transfers his sexuality-driven instinct onto her (1). Trina’s tarnish can, therefore,

be viewed as being partly caused by McTeague forcing himself in all his “evil instincts” onto her.

While the scene in the closet is, of course, only symbolical, the actual ‘disease transmission’ takes place a few pages later: In the scene of the first occurrence of rape, it says that “he was the master”, the reader is made to believe that he has gained control over his instincts regarding his desire to rape Trina. However, exactly the same wording of “grossly, full on the mouth” used in the scene when he desperately attempts to convince Trina that she should marry him indicates otherwise. He, once again, desires to possess her and force himself as well as his animalistic desires onto her, only with the difference that, this time, Trina is conscious (Cavalier 135). This already serves as an indicator that the awakening of this instinct has further developed so that he also wants to possess Trina when she is conscious.

The occurrence of rape as the first criminal deed in *McTeague* illustrates the importance of instincts regarding the driving forces of the characters. Consequently, their actions are driven and determined by their instincts and sexuality, in particular, which Norris believed to be a contagious disease, so that McTeague could pass it on to Trina.

4.3.2. GREED, PATHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR AND ISSUES OF CONSUMPTION

From the fact that Erich von Stroheim’s famous film adaptation of *McTeague* from 1924 was named *Greed*, it can be inferred that people often viewed greed as the central driving force and a crucial factor for the story ending in abominable violence and murder. The importance of greed is not to be denied; nevertheless, it should be noted that the matter is more complex than merely reducing the story to being “a study in greed” (Åhnebrink, *The Influence* 26). While greed certainly stands at the heart of Trina’s and Zerkow’s behavior, particularly because they are associated with being “greedy” or a “miser” throughout the novel, it develops into what one may call pathological behavior related to consumption, triggered by their environment.

The first instance within the novel that greed plays a certain role is only as part of the subplot of Zerkow and Maria when the former’s character is introduced:

He had the thin, eager, cat-like lips of the covetous; eyes that had grown keen as those of a lynx from long searching amidst much and debris; and claw-like, prehensile fingers – the fingers of a man who accumulates, but never disburses. It was impossible to look at Zerkow and not know instantly that greed – inordinate, insatiable greed – was the dominant passion of the man. (MT 32f)

In the same way that certain character traits are visible in McTeague's physicality, Zerkow is also clearly marked in a way that evokes associations of greediness in people facing his appearance. At the same time, his "cat-like lips", "claw-like, prehensile fingers" and eyes "as those of a lynx" are clearly animalistic qualities of Norris's characters which are frequently employed within the novel to clearly establish mankind's heredity as a lingering force, which only needs to be awakened. Since this character trait is already portrayed through his appearance, this also makes clear that he has no free will in this respect, as it is part of his biology. Choosing the image of a cat as a simile for his looks and behavior should also be viewed in terms of typical negative connotations of a cat's character, such as self-involvement and maliciousness. Interestingly, while he is initially the only character for which the simile of the cat is employed, the same simile is used for Trina when she "fought [for her life] with the strength of a harassed cat" (MT 274). This use of language draws the characters closer together in their abnormal temper.

Trina's tendency to be avaricious is only implicitly suggested shortly after McTeague and Trina are getting married when it is described that "[a] good deal of peasant blood still ran undiluted through her veins, and she had the instinct of a hardy and penurious mountain race – the instinct which saves without any thought, without idea of consequence – saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why" (MT 99). This extract clearly illustrates the idea of instincts driving her behavior. While it is never stated that Zerkow reflects on his behavior, Trina herself at least realizes her own transformation, but does not give it much thought when she is thinking to herself "It's growing on me, but never mind, it's a good fault, and, anyhow, I can't help it" (MT 155). This scene and particularly her statement about not having any power over her own behavior give the reason why Norris's naturalism was often rejected by critics, as the characters are no longer made responsible for their own actions. Also French claimed in this context that even though Norris despised greed, "he did not know much about its causes" (69), which is easily detectable in the extracts just given.

It is fairly straightforward to conclude that "Trina's greed [...] is derived from her Swiss ancestry" (Walcutt 130), whose blood flows purely and "undiluted through

her veins". This is also true for Zerkow, as his ethnicity and associated behavioral stereotypes are given as the cause for his behavior. However, the tendency to accumulate for the sake of accumulating and hoarding goes far beyond greed. The fact that the standard definition of greed is not sufficient to describe the characters' desire for more can be inferred when considering the following argumentation: Firstly, the object of desire both in Trina's and Zerkow's case is always gold, whether it is actual money or the endless repetition of Maria's story about her dinner service and Zerkow's lunatic fantasy of possessing it eventually. The employment of golden objects, namely Maria's golden dinner service, McTeague's golden tooth, his canary's gilt cage, Trina's golden dollar pieces, occurs as a recurrent theme in the novel by which the majority of *McTeague's* characters are affected. As French convincingly argues, their desires for possession needs to be seen in the context of their "ostentatious, superficial age" (67). This was, not by chance, named "The Gilded Age" by Mark Twain to allude to the obsession with gold and consumption (French 67). The superficiality raises questions of value of these golden objects: They are acquired and accumulated haphazardly, but its actual value is of no importance for neither Trina nor Zerkow. It is the idea of possession beyond the object's value or utility and, especially for Trina, its physicality which instills in them the boundless and insatiable longing for more.

Secondly, while Zerkow's desire of possession is fuelled by Maria's story of her golden service and results in an obsession, it is his reaction to the story as well as to objects of value which is striking. It is depicted in a way which makes clear that the mere idea of gold elicits bodily sensations and reactions in him. Not only when Zerkow views gold with the hope of possessing it eventually, but also when he hears about other people's fortunes, as for example Trina's winning the lottery, does his greed and envy manifest itself physically as "a spasm of an almost physical pain twisted his face – his entire body" (MT 93). This illustrates very clearly the intensity of his desire, as it even takes control of his body, as well as shows that he is not consciously aware of how strong this desire actually is and that he has indeed no power over it. In fact, almost every time Zerkow and his "insatiable greed" is mentioned within *McTeague*, he reacts in a similar way, as for example, "the sight of gold invariably sent a qualm all through him" (MT 92) or that he was "breathing short" (MT 34). While this is another example of Norris's repetitive diction which, once again, reinforces the character's personality and the strangeness of his behavior, one needs to look particularly closely at the previous example. In this instance, Norris's use of language elicits associations of

sexual arousal in the reader. Therefore, the mere thought of the gold's physicality, i.e. touching it and, therefore, consuming and possessing it, results in Zerkow getting sexually aroused. His physical need for gold further explains his obsession with Maria's story and their betrothal, as listening to it over and over again is as close as he gets to actually 'sexually consuming' it in his thoughts. His reaction, however, goes beyond issues of sexuality, but even introduces to the novel a self-destructive force and a form of masochism when he is "gnawing at his fingers" (MT 30) when he desires to hear the story. This type of behavior only emerges when there is the prospect of accumulating more gold and can be interpreted as giving his desire a physical expression.

In the same way in which Zerkow's desire for possession stands in very close relation to issues of sexuality, so is it also the gold's physicality which triggers in Trina the urge to possess and consume it. While initially only her instinct for hoarding and saving seems a little over the top, her unhealthy relationship to her gold coins is only fully developed after McTeague has left Trina. Then she is "quivering with pleasure" (MT 261) when playing with her coins and she likes to listen to the "delicious clink of pieces tumbling against each other" (MT 261), which clearly speaks for Trina's obsession with touching and feeling her gold pieces. Particularly the word "delicious" can be interpreted as a fairly obvious allusion to consumption, as this word is usually only used in the context of food. The climax of her behavior's oddity is reached and a clear indication that her longing for her coins has a sexual connotation is given when she has withdrawn all her savings from the bank and finally – as if this were her greatest desire – "she had [...] spread all the gold pieces between the sheets, and had then gone to bed, stripping herself, and had slept all night upon the money, taking a strange and ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth flat pieces the length of her entire body" (MT 264).

Both Zerkow and Trina's behavior may have started with greed but have developed into pathological behavior which Norris may even call a perversity (Nisetich 7). Their instincts to hoard for the sake of hoarding or to be dominated by the passion of greed may have been due to biologically determined behavior, but the proportions they assume are not only alarming but also abnormal to such a degree that they can no longer be ascribed to greediness. This has also been pointed out by French, who believes that it is rather "lustful acquisitiveness – a form of gluttony", as well as "the fear of being deprived of something tangible" (71) which accounts for further developments of the plot. This, of course, raises the question as to why their behavior, which initially may

have been a form of excessive, but in itself still harmless conduct, developed into a destructive force.

In the case of Trina, the previous section has already highlighted that McTeague may be partly responsible because he symbolically smirched her innocence so that his disease, i.e. sexuality, spread onto her. As a consequence, her sexual interest in her coins might be due to this tarnish. However, the ecstatic pleasure Trina and Zerkow take in fondling their coins can be considered some kind of consumption. The constant and destructive necessity to consume and reasons for it need to be seen in the larger context of the novel, as well as in relation to the description of material objects throughout the novel. Already at the very beginning of *McTeague*, the reader begins to feel the importance of consumption due to the meticulous descriptions of the objects in the Parlors, McTeague's eating habits as well as, in the following chapter, Maria's collecting of no longer desirable objects, i.e. junk. The mere fact that it is Maria's job to acquire other people's discarded property for a junk shop speaks for people's consumption of objects of no utility without the actual need to consume. Consequently, the opening chapters of this novel do not only serve the purpose of introducing and providing a physical description of the setting, but already create an atmosphere of junk just as the descriptions of material objects seem completely useless for the story itself in the same way they are of no value for their consumers. Particularly in Trina's case, the reader realizes that she is only confronted with issues of value and money when she wins the lottery and starts hoarding as soon as it is revealed that McTeague can no longer practice dentistry. This means that Trina's pathological hoarding is triggered as soon as money and issues of value enter her world. The accumulation of needless objects goes hand in hand with the identity-establishing process of the lower middle class presented in *McTeague*. As a consequence, the lingering ubiquity of consumption caused by modern city life and the social standing of the characters has two consequences: It results not only in a distorted perspective and in the inability to understand the difference between necessity and Veblen's "conspicuous consumption" (82), but is also the driving force to turn an inherited trait into (self-) destructive behavior. A similar observation has been made by McGlynn, who, instead of relating the development from greed to pathological behavior to consumption, believes that the desire for possession is at the heart of the transformations of the characters (25).

4.3.3. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The novel provides a variety of scenes in which physical violence occurs between a number of characters. In some instances, scenes of actual beatings are given, such as McTeague's fight with Marcus, Zerkow's beating of Maria or McTeague's final beating of Trina, which eventually leads to her death. In other scenes, physical violence is only suggested. This is done by illustrating their aggressions and unexpressed frustrations (e.g. McTeague's buying of the theater tickets) or by presenting a moment in which violence was attempted, but not successful (Marcus's throwing his knife at McTeague). While it is already unusual that physical violence is committed by so many characters of a novel, it is even more striking that only male characters are inclined to aggressive behavior. Even this can be attributed to human kind's heredity, as the often used phrase "the intuitive feminine fear of the male" (MT 24, 132) experienced by female characters in *McTeague*, suggests.¹⁵ Generally, the exact causation to act violently seems to differ from character to character – for McTeague, his heredity is responsible for his aggressive tendencies. For Zerkow, the fact that Maria has forgotten the story about the golden service in combination with his inbred greed results in pathological behavior expressed in beating Maria. Marcus's violence is due to feelings of betrayal, envy and greed for Trina's money.

Regarding the perception of physical violence of the other, particularly Trina and Maria's way of dealing with abuse of their husbands is significant and shows how their environment and social standing distorts their perception. Instead of trying to escape their misery and physical mutilations caused by their spouses, "they told each other of their husbands' brutalities, taking a strange sort of pride [...] each trying to make out that her own husband was the most cruel. They critically compared each other's bruises, each one glad when she could exhibit the worst" (MT 228). Trina's reaction needs to be seen in relation to the importance of consumption within the novel, as it often also brings with it a certain sense of orality. Especially regarding McTeague, it is not only his eating habits and his profession as a dentist where aspects of orality dominate his life, but even in his violence towards Trina. Here, the connection between

¹⁵ This observation reflects the trends mentioned in section 2 regarding the private sphere and how it offered concealment of domestic violence behind the doors of the home. Nadelhaft's statement that the "continued emphasis on male superiority" (2117), which allowed for the exertion of male power at home, can be observed in *McTeague*, as both Maria and Trina are beaten by their husbands. While it is interesting to see how gender relations and an increase in domestic violence are reflected within Norris's novel, the following interpretations focus on the general tendency to immoral behavior and crime in all characters rather than on gender specific behavior.

consumption and orality is reflected when McTeague bites Trina's fingers, "crunching and grinding them with his immense teeth" (MT 227) whilst under the influence of alcohol. Whereas Trina's enjoyment of being consumed is another face of her pathological behavior at that stage, McGlynn's argumentation to provide further reasons for her reaction is convincing: "Her life appears meaningful only insofar as she possesses and is possessed. She loves McTeague 'because she belonged to him' and she loves her lottery money because her possession of it allows her the potential to participate in the city economy" (31).

It is striking that literary critics often reduce the inclinations and sudden outbreaks of violence of the characters only to the animalistic qualities caused by heredity "until they become little better than animals" (Campbell 77; cf. Scharnhorst 340f). Even though Norris indeed employs the rhetorical device of the simile in order to draw comparisons between the behavior of the characters to that of a variety of animals, so that "it was something no longer human; it was rather an echo from the jungle" (MT 172), scenes involving actual animals have been ignored by most scholars. Norris particularly highlights the connection between their behavior and the conduct of the characters in the scenes featuring the collie and the setter of the neighborhood when Trina says to Miss Baker that "those dogs hate each other just like humans [...] They'll fight sure" (MT 159). Although the following example does not feature physical violence *per se*, Trina's statement does not only show that she expects them to attack each other, but also stands for the claim that the characters perceive the behavior of animals as human rather than the other way round. It also supports the impression the reader receives when reading the parts in which these dogs occur, namely that it is Norris's use of language that makes them appear somewhat human. Their aggressive tendencies are demonstrated when they are "rag[ing] at each other, snarling and barking frantic with hate" when "they [are tearing] at the fence with their front paws" (MT 46). Even though animals can demonstrate signs of dislike for each other, the word "hate" is a type of emotion only found in human beings. This tendency for anthropomorphism can also be observed when they do finally meet, but, unexpectedly, do not end up fighting. Instead, "the collie [...] pretended an interest in an old shoe" until they "[g]radually and with all the dignity of monarchs, they moved away from each other" (MT 159). Depicting them to "pretend" or directly comparing them to a "monarch" draws them closer to human beings. Strikingly though, while humans do not possess enough control over their own instincts, animals are described as having the "dignity" to

refrain from such actions. As a consequence, quite contrary to Campbell's claim, animals are better than human beings in Norris's novel. This is textual evidence that man's animalistic instincts cannot be considered the only reason for the tendency of the characters towards physical violence.

4.3.4 ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism as a theme is already introduced in the opening pages of *McTeague*; this, however, is done implicitly, as it is mentioned in the context of McTeague's father, who "became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol" (MT 2) every other Sunday. Similarly to Trina's tendency to hoard because of biological factors, he has inherited the inclination to alcoholism and evil. This, also, should be connected to Lombroso's idea of a criminal and how their degeneration is a consequence of a deterioration of the nervous system due to alcohol abuse (Pizer, *Ethical Dualism* 558).

Initially, McTeague's alcohol consumption, which is only depicted as a fixed part of his daily routine and which consists of only one pitcher of steam beer, seems harmless and innocent. That McTeague becomes "crazy with alcohol" like his father does not occur until much later in the book when a certain degree of (moral) degeneration has already taken place in McTeague's character. Interestingly, McGlynn highlights that superficially, it seems as if McTeague has inherited the inclination to alcoholism from his father (35). However, when looking more closely at the textual level, the scenes in which the protagonist drinks may make him vicious, but he is also described as "active, alert, quick-witted, even talkative; a certain wickedness stirred in him then" (MT 223). Thus, he is depicted with adjectives that are all positively connoted. These newly awakened abilities enable him increasingly to express his growing dislike for his wife.

At this point, one needs to raise the question why he turns to alcohol at a particular moment in the book and not earlier. While certainly a certain degenerative process has already taken place, scholars relate the protagonist's evil to a view advanced by Norris, i.e. that civilization only functions as a veneer to hide the brutish qualities of human kind (Campbell 77). Even though the protagonist has already been immersed in middle class and city life and is, therefore, already civilized, his actual "civilization"

only takes place under Trina's influence. The quotation "[g]radually the dentist improved under the influence of his little wife" (MT 140) is followed by a definition as to what exactly improved: Preferring bottled beer over steam beer and having opinions, convictions and ambitions is viewed as an improvement for McTeague (MT 149). However, with Trina's increasing miserliness, the idea of a good life that she has established in her husband can no longer be satisfied. As a result, McTeague is no longer attracted to Trina sexually and he starts to drink whiskey because steam beer is no longer good enough for him. This means that because a satisfaction of his improved and newly established needs can no longer be achieved by their poverty, he degenerates to drinking alcohol regularly.

While alcohol abuse can certainly be considered an element in McTeague's degeneration, Spangler correctly observes that the effects of alcohol on him are often overestimated because "drinking merely allows for rather than causes McTeague's brutal treatment of his wife" (50). This observation is also true in the case of Marcus, whose attack on his friend with his jack-knife was not caused by alcohol but rather by his fierce envy and greed for Trina's money. Consequently, for both characters, alcoholism may be an inherited character trait, but it is only dangerous for them because it exacerbates other immoral tendencies.

4.3.5. MURDER

In *McTeague*, three murders are committed by two different culprits. While aspects of causation of physical violence have already been explored within the preceding sections, in the case of murder, it is particularly its presentation as well as its reception by the characters that is striking and significant for further interpretation.

The first murder is committed by Zerkow in reaction to the withdrawal of Maria's story and the subsequent intensification of his pathological behavior related to greed. The reader does not get the full account of the details of the deed and which situation in particular triggered Zerkow's escalated act of violence. The novel only gives Trina's initial reaction to Maria's dead body and her view of how the body is mutilated. Trina's response to the murder is natural and full of horror, expressed by an "unutterable horror twisting her face" (MT 231) and the need to share it with somebody

else. Even though she is petrified, she is still able to control herself in how to deal with the horror of the situation, which can be observed in the following extract: “Trina wondered why she didn’t scream, how she could keep from it – how, at such a moment as this, she could remember that it was improper to make a disturbance and create a scene in the street” (MT 232). This shows her awareness of how people may react to it. Her idea that it is improper to make a disturbance can only be fully understood when considering how Polk Street inhabitants react to the incident: Crowds “in tremendous excitement” (MT 234) are gathering in the streets to get a peek of the murder, so that cable cars were nearly blocked “until seven o’clock that evening” (MT 234). People’s conversations center on theories on who had committed the crime and other related issues, as well as even “little parties were made up in [saloons]” (MT 235) to discuss the crime. This “tremendous excitement” about a murder and the sensationalist attitude to even get a glimpse of the site of crime resulting in such an uproar is to be interpreted on two levels. While it certainly reflects the sensationalism fuelled by the emergence of the mass press in Norris’s time, it should also be understood as a sudden unsettlement of the daily routines of Polk Street inhabitants. A shocked reaction to a murder is certainly normal, but in this case, the extent of excitement seems a little out of proportion. To understand this exaggeration, one should look closely at the particularizing accounts of their daily routines on the opening pages in *McTeague*, which give a vivid impression of how their lives are lived as if according to a plan and, subsequently, of the dullness experienced by all people living according to these routines. More important, however, are scenes describing their uncertain status in relation to their social class and economic function:

The shop girls, the plumbers' apprentices, the small tradespeople, and their like, whose social position was not clearly defined, could never be sure how far they could go and yet preserve their "respectability." When they wished to be "proper," they invariably overdid the thing. It was not as if they belonged to the "tough" element, who had no appearances to keep up. [...] There were certain limits which its dwellers could not overstep; but unfortunately for them, these limits were poorly defined. They could never be sure of themselves. (MT 69)

“Overdoing the thing” and the wish “to be ‘proper’” is exactly what characterizes the scene of the murder, especially because Trina’s fear of doing something “improper” even employs the exact same wording. This scene also illustrates how their social class, namely the lower middle class, affects and distorts people’s ways of (self-) perception

and results in insecurity about their identity. Therefore, reacting to the murder in such an exaggerated manner can be related back to the dullness of their lives due to mechanical routines, as well as to their inability to understand which kind of behavior would be appropriate for an incident like this.

In the second occurrence of a murder, i.e. McTeague's killing of Trina, Norris provides the reader with much more detail and concrete ideas as to the situation that triggered the crime:

Usually the dentist was slow in his movements, but now the alcohol had awakened in him an ape-like agility. [...] Beside herself with terror, Trina turned and fought him back; fought for her miserable life with the exasperation and strength of a harassed cat; and with such energy and such wild, unnatural force, that even McTeague for the moment drew back from her. But her resistance was the one thing to drive him to the top of his fury. [...] Then it became abominable. In the schoolroom outside, behind the coal scuttle, the cat listened to the sounds of stamping and struggling and the muffled noise of blows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs. At last the sounds stopped on a sudden; he heard nothing more. Then McTeague came out, closing the door. The cat followed him with distended eyes as he crossed the room and disappeared through the street door. The dentist paused for a moment on the sidewalk, looking carefully up and down the street. It was deserted and quiet (MT 274).

This extract shows that even though Norris builds up tension to an "abominable" scene, he refrains from giving a detailed account but rather settles on the phrase "then it became abominable" and makes the scene even more bizarre by including a cat's perspective. Similarly to the scene with the dogs in section 3.3.3, Norris humanizes the cat not only by employing the personal pronouns "he" and "his" when referring to it, but also by saying that "he" is "wildly terrified", which, once again, is an emotion only found in human beings. Considering that the cat grows "wildly terrified" about a scene in which both Trina ("a harassed cat") and McTeague ("ape-like") are compared to animals, it becomes clear that their behavior and the cruelty of the deed is even shocking to an animal.

Once McTeague's deed is done, the phrase "looking carefully up and down the street" gives a certain indication that he is aware that what he has just done is not only morally despicable, but should also be hidden from public. At the same time, his "closing the door" does not only serve as a metaphor that the murder should indeed not be revealed, but also that his deed no longer has any importance for him and that he does not have any feelings of remorse. This means that despite the indication that the culprit is aware of his ill-doing, he is no longer "terrified at his weakness" (MT 23) as

he was when he first ‘raped’ Trina. This clearly speaks for that fact that his instinct for “good” and “bad” has completely vanished in his process of degeneration.

Concerning the perception of the murder, no clear indication is given as to whether or not people reacted similarly as they have done with Maria’s murder. Nevertheless, the last phrase of the extract given above, “it was deserted and quiet” serves as an indication of two aspects: Firstly, the murder has not been witnessed by anybody else but the cat and, secondly, it could also be viewed as some sort of “calm before the storm” before the children find Trina’s dead body, so that a subsequent newspaper coverage and “excitement” about the event is possible.

In conclusion, the murderers do not experience feelings of remorse, as the combination of external drives of the environment and the internal forces of their instincts do not leave them any other choice. Consequently, their deeds are not reflected, conscious actions. The occurrence of murder is also striking, as it illustrates the distorted perspectives of the inhabitants of Polk Street to perceive a murder as an “exciting” event. This delusion only occurs due to the instable position of their social class.

4.4. IMMORAL DEEDS AS A DETERMINING FACTOR FOR *McTEAGUE*’S STRUCTURE

Generally, the structure of *McTeague* is straightforward, as it is told chronologically and covers the narrative time of approximately two years. Walcutt claims that the novel’s structure does not depend “upon a ‘cycle of degeneration’ in which internal forces direct the movement [...] The structure consists, rather, of very much the sort of plot that might be found in any novel of adventure or intrigue – except that it is not conceived in terms of free will” (131). This statement is objectionable, as the internal forces of the characters clearly have an effect on the way the novel is structured. In this context, it is also worth looking at Norris’s own considerations concerning the mechanics of a story:

All good novels have [a pivotal event]. Up to that point the action must lead; from it, it must decline. But – and here one holds at least one mechanical

problem – the approach, the leading up to this pivotal event must be infinitely slower than the decline. (Norris, *The Mechanics* 1161f)

Considering that Norris based his story on the Collins case, it is obvious that the pivotal event is the murder of Trina. That this event is pivotal can further be inferred from the following factors: The ‘criminal atmosphere’ created by Norris’s character descriptions elicits the idea that McTeague is going to kill Trina eventually, so that a dramatic ending is suggested from the very beginning. Also, the remaining part after her murder is not only considerably shorter than the preceding one, but it also has a tangential relationship to the rest of the novel. This is due to its depiction in an entirely different setting and a new episode of McTeague’s life.

When arguing for Trina’s murder as the pivotal event, one should not forget that there are a number of consequential events with wide-reaching ramifications that can be considered “structural centers” (Spangler 89). These events are not always of an immoral nature, as for example Trina’s lottery win and McTeague’s loss of his license. Despite the importance of these twists of fate, it is mainly the characters’ immoral behavior, such as McTeague’s reaction to his wife’s obsessive greed, that lead up to Trina’s murder. As a result, whereas one should not deny the importance of external circumstances, the novel’s structure consists of a chain of ill-doings each worse than the last, eventually leading to murder.¹⁶ Consequently, murder is the climax of crime regarding its severity and atrociousness, but it also marks the ‘lowest’ point for the characters in terms of their (moral) degeneration.

4.5. FORCES AT WORK

As the previous sections have illustrated, the forces at work and the motives of the characters to turn to violence or to behave immorally, as well as how they are perceived, are manifold. Each crime and immoral deed is part of a web of reasons for its occurrence. Regarding this web, Walcutt stated that “[i]n this story, we are not to witness the interaction of heredity and environment according to scientific rules, but to observe the web of circumstances which brings about the destruction of the leading characters” (131). The analysis of this thesis, however, has shown that the reasoning

¹⁶ The increase of severity becomes clear when analyzing each character’s immoral deeds individually.

behind immoral behavior is too complex to merely reduce it to ‘circumstances’. This web consists of external factors, such as social class, the effects of city life, consumerism and civilization, as well as internal factors, such as heredity and instincts, also including sexuality. Only because of this juxtaposition of forces is it possible to explain why immoral behavior occurred in the first place. Nevertheless, Walcutt’s statement implies that there are no clear-cut reasons for one particular type of ill-doing. This is certainly true for most of the immoral deeds, so that, for each character, different reasons/forces are at the heart of their causation. This shows that the interplay of the forces just mentioned has numerous repercussions. These repercussions and the proportions they assume depend on the extent to which the characters are exposed to their environment, possible ingrained tendencies or character traits or their social standing. In this context, Old Grannis and Miss Baker are the best examples to give. They are not subject to immoral behavior because their age and their limited interaction with the world outside (i.e. the city and their unawareness of the precariousness of their social class) have sheltered them from a full exposure to unsettling values or influences on their sexuality resulting in perversity.

The opinions of scholars on the nature of forces acting upon the characters are divided. Scharnhorst argues that due to McTeague’s physical appearance and the belief that criminal behavior is inherited, it is clear that he will commit a crime sooner or later (340). While it is true that his instincts are driving him, the analysis of the previous sections has shown that his argumentation does not take into account the complexity of the matter. His claim leaves out, among other aspects, that McTeague is not the only character to commit an immoral deed, as well as that his “evil instincts” only awoke in reaction to his environment. Rather, in terms of the responsible forces, the outcome of the analysis agrees with Conder’s interpretation that the characters find themselves in a world that is determined on a number of levels, namely socially, culturally and biologically (cf. Conder 69f). Consequently, while instincts make up an essential part of driving the characters, they only assume immoral proportions due to their environment and social class, as well as their inability to deal with it.

5. THEODORE DREISER'S *SISTER CARRIE*

5.1. THEODORE DREISER'S LIFE AND ARTISTRY

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser was born in 1871 in Terre Haute, Indiana, as the ninth son of Johann Dreiser, a Catholic German immigrant and a second generation German mother of a Mennonite background. Only two years before his birth, his father's wool factory in Sullivan burned to the ground. Due to Johann Dreiser's "[increasing fanaticism] with concern for his salvation" (Gerber 23) he saw the need to pay back the farmers who had lost their fleece. As a result, the family, consisting of thirteen members, was left in utter poverty. Theodore Dreiser's youth under poverty-stricken circumstances and the problematic relationship with his parents had a major influence on the development of his personality, as he was "very much the product of two very different parents" (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 4). His father is described as "a figure of grim authority to his children", instilling in them a "narrow, rigid scheme of thou-shalt-nots" (Gerber 23). Dreiser's mother, on the other hand, "had accepted immorality as a fact of life" (Swanberg 83) and was described as sentimental, dreamy and sympathetic (Gerber 26). The father's obsession with moral behavior had a great influence on his children, as it caused rebellious behavior in them, as well as Dreiser's increasing repulsion of Catholicism. His father's obsession with living a moral life resulted in Dreiser's perception of immorality as "necessary, wholesome and inspiring, and that conventional morality was an enormous national fraud" (Swanberg 83). Therefore, he questioned the objective status of ethical standards of Roman Catholic beliefs espoused by his father. Later, his idea of immorality often concerned itself with sexual taboos, which he found needed readjustment when he stated that "we were being dominated mentally by a theory that had no relationship to life whatsoever" (Dreiser quoted in Gelfant, *The American city novel* 59). This idea was later often expressed in his fiction.

Theodore Dreiser's youth was further affected by the family's continuous relocation in search of ever cheaper housing, which, consequently, led to reduced living conditions. As a result, he longed to escape from the small town life in poverty, which he often viewed as humiliating because people could instantly guess the family's social standing from his clothes. Due to his wish to escape, he was fascinated by and drawn to Chicago, which he viewed as his entrance gate to the world and a "source of escape" (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 18). However, Dreiser was quickly disillusioned when going

there, as he initially merely scratched a living from working as a dishwasher, stove cleaner and warehouse clerk. By 1892, he finally became a reporter for the Chicago *Daily Globe* in 1892 which, at last, gave him the impression that he was making use of his potential (Pizer, *The Novels* 2). His essays for the *Daily Globe* featured general topics such as money, science and the meaning of life and “reveal[ed his] speculative mind as well as a sharp eye for detail” (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 19f). He mainly dealt with these themes by abstractly referring to people living and working in the city, as well as to the myth of the city itself. Dreiser’s obsession with the forces of the city is related to his belief that the city functioned as a catalyst, helping him to wake dormant elements of his personality (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 29).

For most of his life Dreiser was, like many of the characters in his fiction, constantly striving for something “better” or “higher” and has generally been described by critics as “the seeker of beauty” (Pizer, *The Novels* 3; cf. Seltzer 193). This tendency is likely to have been the reason that he accepted an offer from his brother Paul in 1894 to move to New York. After the subsequent discouragement of being unemployed for months, he became editor of the magazine *Ev’ry Month* founded by Paul Dreiser. It was during this time that Dreiser immersed himself in Spencer’s theories, which spoke to him “on an emotional as well as an intellectual level because [he] would find in Spencer’s writing just what he wanted to find” (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 46). Spencer’s ideas “blew [him] intellectually to bits” (Dreiser quoted in Gelfant, *The American City Novel* 45), mostly because the idea of “survival of the fittest” confirmed his own ideas and experiences with poverty. Nevertheless, he was so obsessed with the idea of success that he gave up editing the newspaper three years later and began working as a free-lance writer. While, initially, he was not particularly interested in writing fiction, he wrote his first short story “Nigger Jeff” in 1894 and was later encouraged to write his first novel *Sister Carrie* by his friend Arthur Henry in 1899 (Pizer, *Introduction* 4).

Although he tried to overcome the religious and conservative mentality espoused by his father, he married Sallie White – a woman who embodied exactly the values he rejected so fiercely. Throughout his life and particularly during his free-lance years, he was in search of stability and in constant fear of, once again, slipping into poverty. After being on the verge of suicide in 1903 and recovering from a nervous breakdown with the help of his brother Paul, he again worked for magazines, such as the *New York Daily News*, *Smith’s Magazine*, *Broadway Magazine* and numerous others, in different positions. His life, however, started taking a different path when he temporarily left for

California to pursue his long-time love affair with Helen Richardson in 1919. Only focusing on fiction during the following years in Brooklyn, he also became politically active in the 1930s, increasingly supporting social interests. His novels, essays and political statements were not always supported by contemporaries, but Dreiser's writing had made him a public figure (Riggio, *Biography* paragraph 29, 33). In the late thirties, he permanently settled in California, where he died in 1945 of heart failure (Riggio, *Biography* paragraph 32, 36).

Even though Dreiser's novels have received the most attention, he wrote in many genres, such as plays, poetry, philosophical essays, autobiographies and many more so that his oeuvre consists overall of twenty-seven books, only eight of which are novels (Riggio, *Biography* paragraph 18). His later literary works include *Jennie Gerhardt* (1910), *An American Tragedy* (1925), and his *Trilogy of Desire*, consisting of *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and *The Stoic* (published posthumously in 1945). Though his novels lacked a wide readership, they became the subject of criticism and later even censorship. Since contemporaries found Dreiser's fiction too immoral and its characters too promiscuous, he was constantly fighting against censorship and restriction of expression (Riggio, *Biography* paragraph 16, 20).

Generally, scholars have perceived Dreiser's writing as highly autobiographical (cf. Riggio, *Dreiser* 30). The characters of his fiction frequently mirror, in one way or other, his own desires, strivings for beauty, as well as the restrictions and struggles he experienced throughout his life. In this sense, *Sister Carrie*, for example, mirrors the earlier stages of his philosophy: Poverty in its most appalling forms, being a hopeless job seeker as well as being a celebrity as a journalist (Pizer, *The Novels* 6). Dreiser's experiences often found expression not only through one character in a novel, but through many, so that, for example, Carrie can be interpreted to embody his quest for beauty, while Hurstwood stands for his fears of degradation (Pizer, *The Novels* 4). While his characters were often, at least partly, formed upon his own personality, he also frequently used the patterns of his siblings' lives (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 9). This is particularly striking, as these were often marked by rebellious and, as perceived at the time, immoral behavior.¹⁷ Dreiser was further inspired by realist writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Thomas Hardy (Pizer, *The Novels* 6). Balzac and Hardy were also an

¹⁷ For an extensive overview of the influences of Dreiser's siblings on his fiction, cf. Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser*, chapter 1.

inspiration for Dreiser's novels in terms of form because he often employed very realistically crafted and detailed depictions.¹⁸

Since Dreiser abstracted his own experience and his idea of human kind in his work, his novels "reveal a continuous questioning of tradition, dogma, received morality and social justice" (Walcutt 180). At the same time, his journalistic pieces and the way he treated his characters in his novels reveals that Dreiser perceived life as something without purpose, which is related to his mechanistic approach to the individual (Walcutt 186). This idea can best be described in Dreiser's own words, who wrote that "[man] is a mechanism built to respond chemically or sensorially to exterior forces which are both good and evil, or neither" (Dreiser, *Good and Evil* 254). Even though his view on life seems solely pessimistic, Spencer's historical philosophy significantly influenced him. He believed that the fact that individuals are circumscribed by their environment is necessary for human condition in order to improve and move towards perfection (Lehan, *The City in Literature* 53). The ambivalence of these two concepts can be felt very clearly in Dreiser's fiction.

Regarding Dreiser's approach, Walcutt argues that his novels are purposely crafted in a manner that does not create suspense (191). His motive was a rather different one, namely that "[i]t is the quality of the lives represented that moves the reader, not the excitement of what the characters do" (191). Even though this argument seems to imply that Dreiser did not care about what happened to his characters, he treated his characters sympathetically while still adhering to traditionally naturalist notions. Critics agree that the sympathy Dreiser creates in telling the fates of characters gives them a psychological depth which is highly unusual for a naturalist writer (cf. Cojoca 8). As a result, Dreiser's approach is special in that it is a combination of "scientific methods of observation with compassionate understanding of the frailty and instability of human nature constrained to live according to the often absurd social and moral conventions of its times" (Cojoca 8).

¹⁸ Hakutani's article "Dreiser and the French Realists" provides an analysis of the extent of the influence of realism on Dreiser's fiction.

5.2. *SISTER CARRIE*'S GENESIS AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

As with most of his novels, the story of *Sister Carrie*¹⁹ was inspired by the fate of one of his sisters. His sister Emma fell in love with a married clerk named Hopkins, who, after his wife's discovery of the affair, stole \$ 3,500 from his employer. To escape the police, they both fled to Montreal. After he returned the money to its rightful owner, they later relocated to New York.²⁰ Although it was Dreiser's intention to tell his sister's story, he made the story his own not only by changing the ending of the story, but particularly by introducing themes "deriving primarily from his own experience and feelings" (Pizer, *Evolution* 216). This resulted in Carrie's rise and Hurstwood's social downfall – an ending which originated entirely from Dreiser's imagination.²¹

Emma's behavior "stirred up the greatest scandal" (Lingeman x) and even became the headline of tabloids (x). Whereas, apparently, contemporaries of this incident thought of Emma's behavior as immoral, Dreiser himself stated that "I must disagree with many as to what is bad and what good" (Dreiser quoted in Steinbrecher 492). This attitude he "carried to the fictional ground" (Steinbrecher 492) of *Sister Carrie*, so that instead of only telling his sister's story, he frames the story in a moralizing way. Concerning this tone, one should take into consideration his choice of style in order to express his moralizing stance in the text. Comments such as "[Dreiser] writes badly" (Trilling 11 quoted in P. Giles 47) and that his style should rather be termed "antistylism" and "thick prose" (cf. Jaekle 3) indicate a mostly negative view of his novels' formal aspects. Sam Bellow plays a particularly crucial role in this context because he also addressed this issue by asking the question "what bad writing in a powerful novelist signified" (Petrey 102). Since then, discussions amongst literary critics about whether Dreiser's "bad" writing may be intentional have increased. Rather than concluding that Dreiser's novels "[achieved its effect] in spite of his style" (Philips 572), one should focus on the effects his style actually achieves. These effects are particularly important in the context of the topic of this thesis, as the moralizing tone shapes the interpretation of the narrator's view on immoral behavior.

¹⁹ The analysis of *Sister Carrie* is based on Dreiser's revised edition of the novel. His revision is particularly concerned with the ending of the novel, as the initial version is slightly longer and with a stronger focus on the relationship between Carrie and Ames (Pizer, *Novels of Dreiser* 45).

²⁰ According to Steinbrecher, whose account is assumed in this thesis, critics spread varying versions of Emma's story where the amount of the money stolen or the couple's destination were altered (cf. 491f)

²¹ Riggio shows in his essay that also women other than his sisters in Dreiser's life inspired Carrie's character (cf. Riggio, *Dreiser* 38f). The idea of the rising artist and the degraded man, however, originated indeed in Dreiser's imagination.

As both Alan Trachtenberg and Sandy Petrey argue, rather than being stylistically coherent, *Sister Carrie* juxtaposes “two irreconcilable styles” (Petrey 102). Petrey distinguishes between “straightforward prose narration” and “moral meditations” (102), with which she refers to the narrator’s comments within the story. Trachtenberg, however, discriminates between “narration” and “discourse” as defined by Genette (*Who Narrates* 97). Trachtenberg’s classification of ‘discourse’ is more plausible because it does not limit the narrator’s comments to being solely moralistic, but also allows for ascribing to it numerous functions.²² Whereas “narration” is quite straightforward in both interpretations, their classifications of the author’s comments calls into question whose voice and moral views the reader receives. According to Petrey and Richard Lehan, extracts from some of the moralistic passages are taken word for word from some of Dreiser’s essays published for the journals for which he reported (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 54; Petrey 102).²³ Consequently, Dreiser establishes himself as a seemingly non-graspable presence in his novel and makes indirectly clear that he himself is the narrator. This presence of the narrator can not only be inferred from his comments laid out to the reader, but also from the infrequent pronouns of “let *me*” (SC 4) and “I” (SC 47), as the practice of an authorial narrator requires.

The narrator tells the events from a third-person omniscient perspective, which is maintained in both narration and discourse. His knowledge is not only restricted to knowing the characters’ peculiarities, emotions and their future, but he also understands the causation and consequences of their actions. The latter can already be inferred from the first page of *Sister Carrie*: “When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse” (SC 1). The idea of “good” and “bad” is established by stating that she could only become “better” or “worse”, so that the narration already suggests the presence of a predefined sense of “good” and “bad” in the novel. The narrator’s knowledge about the fate of Carrie can further be inferred from the comment on the “cunning wiles” (SC 2) of the city and how “forces wholly superhuman” (SC 2) provided by the city act upon people’s minds. This

²² Trachtenberg’s article claims that the narrator fulfills several functions: he does not only give a moral statement, but also acts as a historian (i.e. giving the reader background information) as well as provides information about social aspects implied in the personalities and behavior of the characters (e.g. classifying Drouet as a drummer and the subsequent explanation of which behavior and social class is associated with this term, cf. SC 3).

²³ Lehan gives an extensive overview regarding which parts of Dreiser’s essays were used in *Sister Carrie*.

moral meditation, therefore, stresses the importance of these forces on Carrie's future in a pessimistic way so that the reader already expects a negative outcome. This passage, however, can lead to rash conclusions: While the forces of the city have a great influence on her behavior and her fate, the sentence "she *does* one of two things" is striking. The traditionally naturalist idea of forces acting upon the protagonists would call for a phrasing of "one of two things can happen to her" rather than to use the verb "do". "To do something" is active and suggests that, whether "good" or "bad", her action is consciously decided for and an act of free will. Consequently, this reading suggests that her decision is still active even though the city and related external forces do have an effect on her. Since this passage occurs at the very beginning, the readers' interpretations are immediately shaped by Dreiser's moralistic stance in the novel. Whereas Dreiser did not believe in an objective truth of ethical standards and, consequently, denies these standards in his moralistic passages, they also need to be seen in the context of people's longing for meaning which offers them stability. Dreiser's moralistic meditations, therefore, can be interpreted as his own attempts to establish a universal truth for the characters in his novel.

A further aspect concerning Dreiser's style is that he uses repetition as a rhetorical device to highlight some of the most important concerns of his novels. This device does not only serve to connect the characters with each other in ways of which they are unaware, but it enables the reader to understand the reasoning behind their decisions to behave immorally. Repetition is not only restricted to single words or phrases, but also includes grammatical features. To briefly illustrate this, mostly Carrie, but in certain scenes also Hurstwood, is often found "wavering" (SC 67, 92, 94, 254, 265, 411) when taking decisions or when not knowing how to feel about a particular situation. This "wavering" expresses their inability to decide, so that often the characters fail to take a conscious decision but let circumstances or other characters guide them.²⁴ Another example is that the comparative is often employed, particularly with words such as "better" or "higher" occurring in comparison to other people's personalities, clothes or social standing. This technique instills a sense of instability in the reader and also suggests a related dissatisfaction of the characters with the present state of things, as they are constantly striving for something better. The importance of such repetitive diction has been analyzed by Jeff Jaeckle and William Philips. Jaeckle particularly

²⁴ The characters waver, for example, when Hurstwood is undecided whether or not to steal the money or when Carrie does not know if to accept Drouet's money.

focused on the sense of implicit imbalance as part of Dreiser's debt to Spencer's philosophy in the first descriptions of the city, in which Dreiser utilizes "vast" up to eight times, as well as other semantically related words such as "great" (10). Jaeckle, therefore, claims that Dreiser's use of language deliberately creates a feeling of imbalance between the characters and the world created by the novel (11). This, he states, is not only traceable to Dreiser's usage of Spencer's theories, but to a general atmosphere created by the novel's repetitive imagery. Philips highlights the recurrent image of the sea in *Sister Carrie* which is often employed, so that the characters are merely helpless fish who are tossed around (572). By moving to the city, Carrie is "rushing into a great sea of life and endeavor" (SC 8) and is later found in a "tossing, thoughtless sea" (SC 10). The combination of the insignificant size of the characters in the "vast sea" of the city and their inability to make decisions as illustrated by their constant "wavering" makes them appear to be "moved around like driftwood caught in the ocean's tide [...] always spoken through by a larger self, which is the voice of the city itself" (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 67). When keeping this atmosphere in mind and reconsidering the earlier quotation stating that "she *does* one of two things" (SC 1; emphasis added), one realizes that even though the characters are like small fish in the sea, the fact that they let external forces make the decision for them can still be viewed as an active process.

Furthermore, Dreiser's repetitive diction stresses another important theme throughout the novel, namely the importance of habit and instincts as driving forces for the actions of the characters. The phrase "wont to", as employed in phrases such as "it was [Hurstwood's] wont" (SC 111) or "as he was wont to" (SC 111) illustrates how the overwhelming effect of the environment of the characters makes them rely on their habits and instincts. As such, Dreiser's narrative techniques and rhetorical devices have a colossal effect on the reader's interpretation throughout the novel. Also, they serve as an indication of how powerless the characters are in their environment and how they often rely on unconscious behavior such as instinct and habit.

5.3. MORAL – IMMORAL – AMORAL?

DEPICTION AND PERCEPTION OF IMMORALITY IN *SISTER CARRIE*

5.3.1. THE DESIRE FOR MORE AND ISSUES OF CONSUMPTION

The previous sections have highlighted that Dreiser's life and experiences, particularly his insatiable desire for goods, found expression in Carrie's character. While the mere act of striving for something better *per se* is not immoral – especially not in Dreiser's eyes, as he aimed to create an amoral setting for *Sister Carrie* as the following sections will highlight – it is rather Carrie's use of others as a means to an end which has been perceived as a character deficit by literary critics (cf. Walcutt 189). This part of her personality resulted in many critics describing her as “driven by hard cold selfishness” or being “malicious” (cf. Riggio, *Carrie's Blues* 23).²⁵ Despite all her sacrifices, in the end, Carrie is not satisfied, but rather “still longing and wondering” (Walcutt 189). At this point, one should mention that her desire for more could easily be associated with greed, but the novel explicitly states that desire for material possessions in the novel is not related to greed when describing Drouet's mind, which is “free of any consideration of the problems or forces of the world and actuated not by greed, but an insatiable love of variable pleasure” (SC 4). Also Carrie is described as “too full of wonder and desire to be greedy” (SC 121). Even though her longing for better clothes and the desire for more money could be perceived in terms of greed, it is not so much the material possessions she wishes to acquire but rather the social benefits associated with these.

Regarding the causation of Carrie's desires as indicated by the novel, similarly to Drouet's “insatiable love of variable pleasure” (SC 4), her desire has been viewed as a pursuit of beauty (Pizer, *Evolution* 217; Seltzer 193; Riggio, *Carrie's Blues* 24)²⁶; however, while beauty may be her overall aim, her desire occurs on three levels. The first level becomes apparent in the first chapter on her train ride to Chicago when the narrator describes the hopes associated with the city, and “what does it not hold for the weary!” (SC 8). Consequently, the city *per se* functions as a symbol of “more” and

²⁵ As Riggio maintains, reactions to Carrie's character are quite controversial: describing her as “malicious” implies that her behavior is perceived as immoral; however, other critics view her as – a term used by Dreiser – “a waif amid forces” (SC 1) implying that she has little power over her actions (*Carrie's Blues* 23).

²⁶ Although Seltzer convincingly states that her quest is a pursuit of beauty, the argument of this thesis, however, does not agree with Seltzer's overall claim that Carrie is “a creature of romance than as a fictional by-product of naturalistic dogma” and that her longing is “a longing for love and emotional relatedness” (192f).

“better” things, commodities and employment possibilities, so that it instills desire by itself.

The second level becomes apparent as early as the first level: Shortly after her encounter with Drouet when she compares her own clothes with his, Carrie feels unequal in terms of appearance. Comparing her own garments to those of others occurs several times in the book.²⁷ This habit is always related to questions of social class and her superficial attempt to appear as part of a class higher than her own. Even though Carrie herself starts out as a working-class woman, her desire for more reminds the reader of Thorstein Veblen’s “conspicuous consumption” normally associated with the middle-class, because she attempts to appear wealthier than she actually is. The importance of dress as an identity-constituting process can be inferred from the first description of Drouet when the authorial voice says: “Good clothes, of course, were the first essential, the things without which he was nothing” (SC 4). The emotive response to this desire experienced by Carrie is especially visible in the scene when she first wanders through the streets of Chicago and towards a store briefly after Drouet had offered her money:

When Carrie began wandering around the store amid the fine displays she was in this mood. [...] Now she paused at each individual bit of finery, where before she had hurried on. Her woman's heart was warm with desire for them. [...] What would she not have given if she could have had them all! She would look fine too, if only she had some of these things (SC 67)²⁸

The image of Carrie looking at the shop displays luring her into a world of finery, even causing her to feel warm inside, marks her as an outsider who can only view the world she would like to belong to from the outside. This feeling of being on the outside due to social class restrictions is also later experienced by Hurstwood. Briefly after realizing that his position in New York no longer offers him access to higher social spheres, “[h]e began to see as one sees a city with a wall about it. [...] You could not get in. Those inside did not care to come out to see who you were. They were so merry inside there that all those outside were forgotten, and he was on the outside” (SC 317). This passage

²⁷ Carrie compares her own appearance during, for example, her first encounter with shop-girls “with whom she now compared poorly” (SC 22) or when she first meets Mrs. Vance (cf. SC 296f).

²⁸ Dreiser’s comment that “her woman’s heart was warm with desire for them” as well as similar comments throughout the novel suggest gender-specific behavior. Gender, however, is not relevant in the context of immorality and crime, as both genders equally commit crimes due to the same driving forces. An analysis focusing on the importance of gender in *Sister Carrie* can be found in Lori Merish’s article “Engendering Naturalism. Narrative Form and Commodity Spectacle in U.S. Naturalist Fiction”.

reflects Dreiser's concern with the lack of "care" expressed by urban crowds as well as the marginalization of lower social classes, so that people who are not part of higher social classes are simply left out. This feeling of Hurstwood, therefore, originates in the fear of being an outsider and of being "forgotten" in the "vast sea" of the city where "a common fish [disappears] wholly from view" (SC 281).

Though closely related to the other levels, the third level of desire is concerned with money. In Carrie's permanent intent to appear as part of a higher social class, her need to buy clothes can only be fulfilled through the possession of money. From her focalized exclamation "Ah, money, money, money! What a thing it was to have. How plenty of it would clear away all these troubles" (SC 66), it can be inferred that Carrie believes that money and the connected climbing of the social ladder is the key to happiness. Gelfant convincingly states in this context that money as a physical object of desire is "[a] socially constructed artifact imbued with impossible dreams of happiness" (*What More* 179). She also claims that there is a sequential pattern of desire in *Sister Carrie*: The order of seeing, wanting and buying/consuming is indicated every time Carrie desires something new (*What More* 179). As Gelfant's analysis shows, this pattern is relevant for most levels of desire. For example, when Drouet speaks to Carrie for the first time talking about Chicago, he says, "So much to see – theaters, crowds, fine houses" (SC 5) and "You'll find lots to see there" (SC 8). Drouet enables her to get a first sight of these amenities provided by the city, as well as instills in her the need for more (Gelfant, *What More* 181). This sequential pattern of desire becomes important once one realizes that the desire Carrie is experiencing is learned rather than inherent. What Gelfant rightly terms "social conditioning" and that "she is learning to want" (*What More* 181) is also explicitly established in *Sister Carrie* when the narrator states that "[t]he glamour of the high life of the city had [...] seized her completely. She had been taught how to dress and where to go" (SC 325). This passage also implies that the reason why Carrie cannot be happy is related to the fact that every time one of her desires is satisfied, new desire arises, so that her striving for something "better" or "higher" is never fulfilled. Gelfant claims that this is due to 19th century American society's belief that "material success [is] man's highest goal, the individual [is] helplessly and irresistibly conditioned to pursue it" (*The American city novel* 88). Consequently, desire is imposed by a system which keeps her from distinguishing "necessity from pure capitalist, inflicted desire" (Cojoca 5). While Gelfant's theory is plausible, Lehan also puts the release of an ever higher need in the context of

Spencerian ideas implied in *Sister Carrie*. He relates Carrie's "starting the desiring machine all over again" to the aim to move "towards more complete forms of fulfillment" (Lehan, *The City, the Self* 73).

The last level of desire is sexual; however, this is experienced by Drouet and Hurstwood rather than Carrie. Their desire for her, however, is striking in a number of ways. Even though Pizer correctly recognizes Hurstwood's desire for Carrie to be nothing more than "the commonplace infatuation of a middle-aged man with a much younger woman" (*Evolution* 219), one needs to attribute more importance to Hurstwood's desire as it becomes entirely uncontrollable. This can be observed when the narrator states that "[Hurstwood's] passion had gotten to that stage now where it was no longer colored with reason [...] He would promise anything, everything, and trust to fortune to disentangle him" (SC 197). Thus, his desire for the other sex – i.e. an instinctive force – results in his willingness to give up his well-established life and, therefore, becomes a driving force of the novel.

Sexual desire as a driving force, however, is not only as explicit as it is in the case of Hurstwood's desire, but also implicitly described when thinking in terms of consumption. Despite Hurstwood's infatuation with her, the following passage reveals that, nevertheless, he thinks of Carrie as an object to consume: "The manager looked at his lovely prize, so beautiful, so winsome, so difficult to be won" (SC 197). It is in this instance that Carrie's, as well as Drouet and Hurstwood's behavior becomes immoral. Regarding the men's sexual desires, Brinkley claims that Carrie is "exploited by predatory men" (496). Thereby, he implies that Hurstwood's and Drouet's behavior is immoral, as they merely objectify her.²⁹ However, Carrie is equally immoral, as she only views Drouet and Hurstwood as providers of financial means for her consumption as well as in terms of what they have to offer her socially. This becomes explicit when the narrator states that "true love she had never felt for [Hurstwood]" (SC 278), so that it becomes clear that for Carrie, love never played a crucial role in her desire to marry him. Lehan relates Carrie's personal relationships more concretely to money, stating that they are "inseparable from commodity relationships" because "in this novel everything, including love and friendship, has a price" (*The City, the Self* 70). This interpretation is not only implied in the narrative, but also explicitly stated on the very

²⁹ Due to the prevalent gender structures at the time, interpreting the behavior of the male characters as immoral does most likely not agree with how Dreiser and his contemporaries viewed Drouet and Hurstwood's behavior.

last pages of the story: “Chicago, New York; Drouet, Hurstwood; the world of fashion and the world of stage – these were but incidents. Not them, but that which they represented, she longed for. Time proved the representation false” (SC 485). Interestingly, the immoral behavior of both men and women is closely interrelated: Only through Drouet’s and Hurstwood’s sexual consumption of Carrie is she able to consume and acquire more and more pretty clothes.

The tendency to reduce other characters to their social status and economic function is not restricted to Carrie, but is also true for Mrs. Hurstwood. When the narrator states that “she still took a faint pride in him, which was augmented by her *desire to have her social integrity maintained*” (SC 110; emphasis added), it becomes clear that even for his wife, Hurstwood’s only function was to provide social security within their own class and giving her access to consumption. This way of perceiving each other offers the characters of this novel means to consume better clothes as well as achieve higher social status. As a result, all characters are equally affected by the idea of consumption and social status because their choice of spouse, mistress or friend is mostly based solely on these aspects. The levels of desire are interrelated in that they all represent a form of consumption, in which all characters take part in consuming or being consumed.

Despite the consequences of Carrie’s insatiable desire, it is important to take into account Dreiser’s own comment as to why he included desire as such a central theme. Dreiser’s statement in an interview in 1907 on the reissue of *Sister Carrie* reveals how important for his characters he viewed this desire: “even where there are no ideals, where there is only personal desire to survive. The fight to win, the stretching out of the fingers to grasp – these things I want to write about” (Dreiser quoted in Pizer, *Evolution* 216). Carrie’s desire, therefore, can be interpreted as her instinctive means of surviving in a world where men live off other men, rather than “cruelty of the heart” (Cojoca 8). Interestingly, although Carrie’s desire and her consequent abandonment of her husband can be interpreted as maliciousness of character and immoral behavior, Dreiser rather views her conduct as a reaction to a world in which there are no ideals and in which the personal desire is the only thing left. However, in the context of Dreiser’s statement it needs to be highlighted that while initially her desire for more was indeed related to survival and escaping poverty, the release of yet an even higher level of desire finally results in her exclamation “What a wonderful thing it was to be rich” (SC 308), so that it goes far beyond survival. This shows that at the end of the novel, her incessant desire

for more is generated socially and unrelated to biological survival. The fact that Dreiser did not perceive the behavior of his character as immoral but as a means to survive is related to Carrie representing Dreiser's own constant desire.

5.3.2. EXTRAMARITAL SEX

In literary criticism, Carrie is accused of being immoral due to extramarital sex with Drouet and Hurstwood (cf. Pizer, *Evolution* 216). While this is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, the extent of Carrie's initial feelings of remorse indicates that her misconduct goes beyond deserting her sister, but is rather related to her relationship to Drouet. Feelings of remorse are particularly often found in Carrie in the context of extramarital sex and betraying the people with whom she lives. For example, briefly after she leaves her sister's home in order to stay with Drouet,

There she heard a [...] voice, with which she argued, pleaded, excused[...] It was only an average little conscience, a thing which represented the world, her past environment, habit, convention, in a confused way. [...] "Oh, thou failure!" said the voice. [...] "Look at those who are good. How would they scorn to do what you have done. Look at the good girls; how will they draw away from such as you when they know you have been weak. You had not tried before you failed. (SC 92)

The voice in this passage represents her conscience and shows how she perceives her own behavior as wrong. Particularly when reading the following extract, which occurs a few pages earlier, it is striking that the voice is described as being represented by, amongst others, habit.

If any habits ever had time to fix upon [Carrie], they would have operated here. Habits are peculiar things. They will drive the really non-religious mind out of bed to say prayers that are only a custom and not a devotion. [...] the still, small voice that is urging him ever to righteousness. If the digression is unusual enough, the drag of habit will be heavy enough to cause the unreasoning victim to return and perform the perfunctory thing. "Now, bless me," says such a mind, "I have done my duty," when, as a matter of fact, it has merely done its old, unbreakable trick once again. (SC 79)

This extract mirrors Dreiser's own conflict of morality as instilled by his father's restrictive "thou-shalt-not" mentality. By applying this to the characters of *Sister*

Carrie, he makes clear from the beginning that any feeling of remorse and guilt in the characters, which are related to behavior usually labeled as “immoral”, is only a matter of habit, not so much of genuinely reflecting their deeds. While habits are an externally acquired behavior, they share the same characteristics of instincts in that they are entirely unconscious acts. This, therefore, shows that Carrie’s behavior is dominated not by reason, but by irrational behavior such as produced by instincts and habits, so that her feelings of remorse are equally not reflected upon.

Reducing feelings of remorse to a habit adds a sense of amorality to the novel. Amorality is also a keyword in the context of the reactions of critics, as the novel indicates neither punishment nor that there should be a penalty for Carrie as a “fallen woman”. Appalled and shocked reactions to *Sister Carrie* by many contemporaries were the result. These negative reactions were the reason for Dreiser’s long lasting dispute with his editors who were reluctant even to publish his novel (Riggio, *Biography* paragraph 9). The discussion whether the behavior of the characters in *Sister Carrie* is amoral or immoral illustrates the different ways of perceiving this novel. While Dreiser believed in neither good nor bad and, therefore, created an amoral world in his novel, the contemporary readers and critics of his book had a different sense of morality and, therefore, thought of the actions of the characters as immoral.

5.3.3. ADULTERY AND DESERTION

The behavior of both Carrie and Hurstwood reveals a sense of egocentricity, as they both pursue their needs regardless of what happens to other people and, in particular, their spouses. While Carrie and Hurstwood are often worried that their behavior is viewed as immoral, in the case of the betrayal of Hurstwood’s wife, no indication of remorse is given. As strong and uncontrollable his desire and passion for Carrie may be, it only serves as the trigger to desert his family, rather than as the cause. That other reasons are at the heart of his adultery can be observed in the chapters when Hurstwood’s family is described and when his focalized perspective states that “for years he had been steadily modifying his matrimonial devotion, and found her company dull. Now that a new light shone upon the horizon, this older luminary paled in the west” (SC 112). Dreiser’s use of the light metaphor in relation to Carrie illustrates the

extent of dullness Hurstwood experiences regarding his wife and family.³⁰ It also implies that he needed a “light” like Carrie in order to understand his feelings of boredom towards his family. The narrator goes even further when he states that the passion for Carrie and the dislike for his wife are part of a balance: “The feeling of mutual antagonism was increased. On the other hand, [Hurstwood’s] interest in Drouet’s little shop-girl grew in an almost evenly balanced proportion” (SC 113). Considering how great his dislike of his family already was, it is reasonable to agree with Gelfant’s argument that Hurstwood’s desertion of his family was not an impulsive act, but rather caused by the fact that “the emotional links with his family had been so weakened that he felt no real hesitation in running off with a woman he loved” (*The American city novel* 80). The fact that he shows no remorse also occurs later in the novel, when “his thoughts occasionally reverted to his wife and family” and “[h]e [still] hated her, and he could get along without her” (SC 325).

Even though Hurstwood’s hatred and the distancing from his family over the years may serve as a reason to explain why he does not show any remorse, the entire issue also needs to be analyzed in the light of the economic functions Hurstwood fulfilled in his family. The fact that his wife, as well as his children only perceive him in terms of financial stability shows that his marriage and family life is entirely dominated by economic functions rather than love and affection. In *Sister Carrie*, the life in the city and the constant rise of new desires, therefore, leads to an alienation amongst family members and alters the function of the family as the moral basis. This can be observed not only in Hurstwood’s desertion of his family, but also when Carrie leaves her sister because she only perceives them as a representation of poverty and narrowness. Due to this lack of a safety net provided by the institution of the family, the characters no longer have a sense for innate morality instilled in them, so that neither Carrie nor Hurstwood feel any responsibility towards their family members.

³⁰ As Dreiser’s article “Varieties of Force” in *Notes on Life* reveals, he even viewed light as an external force. As a result, the light metaphor in reference to Carrie illustrates that because light itself is a force, Hurstwood was driven to follow that light.

5.3.4. THEFT AND ALCOHOLISM

The scene of Hurstwood's theft is central to *Sister Carrie* and this analysis for a number of reasons: Firstly, it is striking that it serves as the novel's climax which is, therefore, an act of crime. Secondly, it functions as the threshold from Hurstwood's development from an affluent to an impoverished state of being. Lastly, the depiction of Hurstwood's theft scene is further textual evidence that the characters may be "moved around like driftwood caught in the ocean's tide" (Lehan, *The City, the Self* 67), but that the fact that they let their environment take the decision for them can be interpreted as a conscious decision.

The desire to steal the money in the first place is triggered in reaction to "all the entanglement of the day" (SC 252) – namely, the homelessness caused by his family's desertion and the threatening divorce from his wife. He was also "drawn by such a keen desire for Carrie and by such a state of turmoil" (SC 254) – so "that money would do it" (SC 252) and be the solution for his troubles making it possible for him to run away with her. This means that also in the case of Hurstwood, money is viewed as a necessity in order to survive as well as to pursue his dream of 'possessing' Carrie. The fact that their relationship is built on the basis of money demonstrates that their relationship has a price. In this scene, the connection between money and his access to Carrie in a sexual sense is also formally implied when Hurstwood first touches the stolen bills, which are depicted with sexual overtones when stating that "they were so smooth" (SC 253).³¹ As a result, his sexual desire for Carrie and the related emotional turmoil drives him to take the money.

A further theme is introduced in this instance, as Hurstwood's consumption of alcohol "gives him a warm view of the situation" (SC 252). When exploring the importance of the protagonist's inebriated state on the commitment of his crime, two aspects need to be taken into consideration: It is striking that Hurstwood's drinking and alcohol in general becomes relevant in this scene, but is only mentioned in unrelated scenes in the rest of the novel. Various sources claim that this may be due to the fact that Dreiser could not decide upon how Hurstwood's theft could be presented as accidental and an act of chance rather than as a crime (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 63f;

³¹ These sexual overtones in relation to money's physicality are employed throughout the novel as pointed out by James Giles (*The Grotesque City* 334). For example, when Drouet first gives Carrie the money, she is described as accepting "two soft, green, handsome ten-dollar bills" (SC 61). Markov, however, relates this depiction of money in the scene with Carrie and Drouet to her "sensuousness" (5). Since Hurstwood perceives the bills as "smooth", it is reasonable to interpret its depiction as sexual overtones rather than as Carrie's sensuous quality.

Pizer, *The Novels* 44f). Consequently, with the narrator's question "Did he do it?" (SC 254) briefly after the safe closes, he purposely leaves the reader in the dark, resulting in critics to claim that this crime was "the most provocative and ambiguous depiction of a theft in American literary naturalism" (Scharnhorst 343). This scene's ambiguity cannot only be related to describing Hurstwood's act as accidental, but also to Dreiser's introduction of intoxication as releasing inhibitions so that "the drunk may commit acts normally unacceptable" (Baum 28). Thus, alcohol may have influenced Hurstwood to consider the crime, but its main purpose is to further obscure his guilt to the reader.

A lack of clarity whether Hurstwood decided to take the money or if it was only a misfortune that the lock clicked is also achieved by Dreiser's formal choices and the overall depiction of the scene. The scene is crafted in way that reminds the reader of a dialogue between Hurstwood's mind and a 'voice' giving him ambivalent advice on whether or not to take the money. This dialogue between two voices is explicitly recognizable as an exploration of the opposition between "duty and desire" (SC 253) – according to Cassuto, an interest which Dreiser continued exploring throughout his career (200). These voices have been subject to many interpretations as to what exactly they signify. While they could merely represent an inner conflict between two opposing ideas of Hurstwood's conscience, Nelson explores this conflict sociologically and identifies these voices to be the result of two contradicting ideas generated by social circumstances (112). His "duty" has been formed by "codes of behavior, formalized by the state that structure [his] position within the urban community" (Nelson 113). His desire, on the other hand, is similar to Carrie's, in that it is part of an "economy of desire" (113). Consequently, according to Nelson, Hurstwood's conflict is not internal but rather generated entirely by social and cultural conditions surrounding him (113). Despite the plausibility of Nelson's argument, it is important to analyze Dreiser's own reasoning as presented in the novel. St. Jean, for example, identifies the voices in line with the narrator's own discourse on the conflict between instinct and free will:

To those who have never wavered in conscience, the predicament of the individual whose mind is less strongly constituted and who trembles in the balance between duty and desire is scarcely appreciable, unless graphically portrayed. Those who have never heard that solemn voice of the ghostly clock which ticks with awful distinctness, "thou shalt," "thou shalt not," "thou shalt," "thou shalt not," are in no position to judge. Not alone in sensitive, highly organized natures is such a mental conflict possible. The dullest specimen of humanity, when drawn by desire toward evil, is recalled by a sense of right,

which is proportionate in power and strength to his evil tendency. We must remember that it may not be a knowledge of right, for no knowledge of right is predicated of the animal's instinctive recoil at evil. Men are still led by instinct before they are regulated by knowledge. It is instinct which recalls the criminal – it is instinct (where highly organized reasoning is absent) which gives the criminal his feeling of danger, his fear of wrong. (SC 252)

Consequently, Nelson's theory that both of Hurstwood's voices are constituted externally rather than internally does not agree with Dreiser's own thoughts on the cause of Hurstwood's wavering as presented in this passage. This is because instinct – an entirely internal force – is taken to be the cause to “recall the criminal”. Since instinct is particularly stressed to be the reason for man's sense of right and his “fear of wrong”, one voice can be interpreted as being an externally caused tendency. The other voice, however, is the voice of his instinct representing man's inherent sense of right. This means that man is caught between two forces: “the forces from within, the compulsion that are experienced as temperamental drives, and the forces from without, the social influences that act upon the character as conditioning forces” (Gelfant, *The American city novel* 70). Particularly Dreiser's image of “the ghostly clock which ticks with awful distinctness, ‘thou shalt,’ ‘thou shalt not,’ ‘thou shalt,’ ‘thou shalt not,’” representing those voices elicits in the reader the idea of a consciousness similar to a machine, ticking away about the rights and wrongs of a situation. The image of a machine and the inherent nature of instinctual behavior are similar to Carrie's habitual feelings of remorse (see section 4.3.2). With the difference that habit is caused by external influences and instinct is innate, both of them are not reflected upon. Since instinct and habit occur in the context of the decisions of the characters of choosing right or wrong, they deny a conscious understanding of right or wrong.

As persuasively stated by St. Jean, the theft scene's purposely crafted ambiguity cannot give a clear answer to the question of whether Hurstwood's theft is an act of free will or entirely dominated by external and internal forces (253). St. Jean does, however, highlight that some of Hurstwood's thoughts, such as “I wish I hadn't done that. That was a mistake” (SC 255) indicate a certain acceptance of responsibility for his deed (253). In the same way in which Carrie *does* one of two things when coming to the city (cf. section 4.2), Hurstwood also admits that what he has *done* was a mistake. Nevertheless, his later exclamation “Still [...] what could I have done?” (SC 259) is an indicator that he believes that he did not have any other choice due to his precarious situation. This argument is particularly important when considering that in this passage

as well as in extracts following this passage in the novel, Dreiser, once again, employs the word “wavering” to depict Hurstwood’s state of being in this moment of indecisiveness. Consequently, although Dreiser crafts a world in which forces beyond the control of the characters have a considerable influence on their actions, their “wavering” in conscience in their refusal to act can still be considered conscious, as they let their environment decide for them. This argument supports St. Jean’s claim that the “muddle between guilt and innocence [...] becomes available to readers – that the protagonist’s deterministic muddle is, in reality, self-imposed” (254) so that “outside forces don’t deprive him of choice, he won’t accept choice” (254).

The importance of instincts for Hurstwood’s actions can further be inferred from the fact that he flees to Montreal. This is because, as the novel indicates, the “accidental robbery” (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 64) causes him to experience great, instinct-driven fear and brings out his temperament’s weaknesses. The narrator indicates this fear very clearly by stating that “the sweat burst out upon his brow and he trembled violently” (SC 255) as well as by the mere fact that Hurstwood becomes a fugitive by fleeing to Montreal. Consequently, a fear so strong resulting in physical reactions such as sweating and trembling drove him to kidnap Carrie and move away from Chicago. Though his fear may be instinct-driven, it occurs only under the circumstances of his environment and his belief that he did not have any other choice. As a result, his theft is Hurstwood’s desperate way of responding to his environment, which, then, makes him rely on his instincts, so that he acts according to his fear and flees. Hurstwood’s great fear is even present at later times when he has already returned parts of the money stolen, which indicates that his fear has become a strong driving force throughout his life. Thus, his further action of kidnapping her, moving to New York, and “indeed, [...] his eventual death” (St. Jean 254) are caused by fear.

5.4. SPENCERIAN IDEAS AND CONSEQUENTIALITY IN *SISTER CARRIE*'S STRUCTURE

Hurstwood's theft marks the turning point and climax of the story. From this moment on, his decline and Carrie's social rise as an actress can be observed. It is also from this point of the story that Spencer's *First Principles* can be recognized as having influenced Dreiser's thinking and writing. It serves as a key to understanding the novel's structure, as it represents life in a cyclical fashion. Whereas Carrie's fate represents the rising towards completion, Drouet illustrates equilibrium and Hurstwood stands for dissolution (Lehan, *The City, The Self* 67). The notions of the movement from homogeneity and heterogeneity of Spencer's *First Principles* are also present in the main force influencing the characters, i.e. the city, when the characters move from the less complex city, Chicago, to the more complex form of New York (Lehan, *The City in Literature* 198).³²

The story's structure and the fact that Carrie rises while Hurstwood falls calls into question why one character can be as successful as Carrie while another has to live in poverty and die even though they are influenced by the same forces. This is certainly related to Dreiser's belief that life operated in a cyclic fashion. However, he could only apply this Spencerian structure to this novel because the novel suggests that the extent of the effects of environment on the characters depends on the temperament, weaknesses and strengths of each individual character. Dreiser's belief that the city functions as a catalyst to bring out dormant parts of his personality is of relevance in this context because this notion can also be applied to the characters of *Sister Carrie*. Gelfant states in this context that Dreiser's characters are part of a dual concept, in which temperament is inborn and character is externally acquired (*The American City Novel* 66). To Gelfant's theory one should add, however, that, in the end, the character depends on the temperament of an individual. Dreiser's understanding of the city as a catalyst was unfortunate for Hurstwood, as in responding to the external world and events of chance, he could not defy the odds of the city. Carrie, however, was able to become wealthy and successful. Interestingly, while the city had such different effects on the characters of the novel, it equally brought out immoral tendencies in all of them.

³² An in-depth analysis of the influence of Spencer's *First Principles* can be found in Katope's article, as well as Zanine's exploration of this topic. As Pizer maintains, however, the extent of impact of Spencer's theory on *Sister Carrie* should not be overestimated, as they assume "too much conscious intent" (Pizer, *Evolution* 210) on the side of Dreiser. Rather than being a detailed interpretation of Spencer's theory, *Sister Carrie* is still the fictionalized story of Dreiser's sister for which Spencer's theory served as a tool.

Despite the omnipresent influence of forces on the decisions and deeds of the characters, immoral behavior *per se* is crucial for the structure of the story. As part of a “self-imposed determinism” (St. Jean 254), the immoral behavior in *Sister Carrie* occurs because the characters do not decide but let their environment decide for them. Consequently, the story line features a certain consequentiality, as one deed or behavior – “no matter how casual a character’s gesture, look, or comment [seems]” (Gelfant, *What More* 179) – becomes the motive and cause for the next (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 72; Gelfant, *What More* 179).

5.5. FORCES AT WORK

As the previous sections have shown, fear, desire, discontent and sexuality as human characteristics are the driving forces of the novel. If we put this into the context of section 2, in which the city was described as a “*discontent*-breeding” environment, as nurturing *desire* through city novelties such as department stores, as well as creating *fear* to slip into poverty, it becomes clear that the forces in *Sister Carrie* respond to exactly these aspects of the city. As a result, the city functions as a catalyst to bring out these characteristics in the novel’s protagonists and to make them act out “the deepest levels of their temperaments and desires” (Pizer, *Evolution* 216). The city itself has, therefore, been recognized to be the “antagonist” to the characters, as if it almost takes an active part in the novel: “[A]s an atmosphere it stirs in [them] false hopes, as an economic structure it educates [them] to want money and success; and as a way of life it engulfs [them] in its own disorder and leaves [them] helpless and alone” (Gelfant, *The American city novel* 72).

The previous sections have illustrated how all characters are driven by the same forces, with the mere difference that the extent of these influences finds more or less expression depending on the character’s temperaments. The most striking characteristic they have in common is the wish to be a member of the higher social classes and in attempting to do so, they all take immoral decisions in one way or the other. Their tendency to immoral behavior is, therefore, the result of two aspects: Firstly, they have a distorted perspective so that they can no longer distinguish between necessary and unnecessary consumption. Secondly, the external forces of the city causes them to feel

small and, thus, leads to their “wavering”, so that they let the environment make the decisions for them. The imbalance of the city and their inability to deal with it has to result in, as Gelfant argues, that “they all have the same moral composition, for they are all reflections of the same influences” (*The American city novel* 91). Gelfant’s choice of the word “reflection” is also related to it being explicitly mentioned in *Sister Carrie* when the narrator states shortly after the arrival of Hurstwood and Carrie in Montreal that “[t]hings new are too important to be neglected, and mind, which is a mere reflection of sensory impressions, succumbs to the flood of objects” (SC 269). Consequently, the characters are “merely an extension of their surrounding [where] the mood of a place could and did become a matter of mind” (Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser* 71). In the context of immoral behavior, this also means that because mood and environment create motives, the characters merely act out these motives because they are exposed to these moods, so that their actions are not reflected. The excessive demands of city life, therefore, cause them to rely on behavioral patterns and ideas of morality that are instilled by instinct and habit. Consequently, they are not reflected, conscious decisions.

Despite the obvious influences of external forces and the subsequent pessimism of the interpretation of this thesis, Dreiser’s discourse on instincts and evolution puts this interpretation in a different light:

Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason. [...] We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to free-will, his free-will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance [...] As a beast, the forces of life aligned him with them; as a man, he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces. In this intermediate stage he wavers – neither drawn in harmony with nature by his instincts nor yet wisely putting himself into harmony by his own free-will. He is even as a wisp in the wind, moved by every breath of passion, acting now by his will and now by his instincts, erring with one, only to retrieve by the other, falling by one, only to rise by the other – a creature of incalculable variability. We have the consolation of knowing that evolution is ever in action, that the ideal is a light that cannot fail. He will not forever balance thus between good and evil. When this jangle of free-will and instinct shall have been adjusted, when perfect understanding has given the former the power to replace the latter entirely, man will no longer vary. The needle of understanding will yet point steadfast and unwavering to the distant pole of truth. (SC 74)

What Merish calls “Dreiser’s [lapsing] into a Darwinian rhetoric of ‘instinct’” (319) also reflects a certain sense of optimism often denied in the context of American literary naturalism. Darwin’s evolutionary theory, therefore, serves for Dreiser as a comforting idea and a “light that cannot fail”. This extract also needs to be viewed as part of Spencer’s historical philosophy which emphasizes physical processes of the universe only unfolding over time. By describing that “our civilization is still in a middle stage”, developing from a creature driven by instincts to man with free will, Dreiser admits that the stage depicted in *Sister Carrie* is necessary in order to develop further. The pessimism felt in *Sister Carrie* created by a struggle to survive in a world where men live off other men is, therefore, expressed in relation to the individual fates of the characters ending in death and destruction, but not concerning human kind’s general moving upwards towards perfection. This illustrates the ambivalence, i.e. the bright and dark sides of progress of Dreiser’s literary naturalism.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

For the characters of *McTeague*, *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*, the city acts as a complex web of factors that influence and drive their actions and perceptions. Habits of consumption, practices of their lower social class, instinctual behavior such as sexuality and fear, as well as feeling powerless in the city, which is in itself a force, can be considered the major aspects influencing not only the causation of immoral behavior, but also its perception.

The tendency towards immorality and crime is due to a combination of the emergence of consumerism, mass production and the conditions of the social class the characters represent in the novels. In Polk Street and the Bowery, the characters are restricted to a particular place or part of town which segregates and isolates them not only socially but even physically from other social classes. The sense of restriction in both of these physical places can be inferred from the imagery of the prison employed in *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*. The imprisonment occurs due to their social class and the environment in which the characters are trapped. Consequently, the feeling of segregation is not only enhanced but also results in an unconscious wish to escape their social class and space. For Maggie, the experience of segregation in combination with the horrible conditions of her home as “hell” are part of the reason to create her own, unrealistic dream world fuelled by middle-class values, which is her only means of escape from this prison. Similarly, the precarious social standing of the middle-class inhabitants of Polk Street unconsciously drives them to accumulate goods and to “conspicuously consume”. This consumption makes them appear to belong to a higher class, so that they can seemingly escape their prison. The prison constituted by Polk Street, by their social class and their routines is inescapable, so that their lives seem purposeless and dull. Consequently, every single change in routine – may it be the entry of sexuality in McTeague’s life through Trina, or Maria’s murder and the reactions of the general public – causes the characters to react inappropriately and exaggeratedly. The dullness of their daily life and the insecurity of their social status, therefore, cause the characters to unconsciously view crime as a welcome change of routine.

While the Bowery and Polk Street as urban spaces are depicted as prisons, the feeling of purposelessness due to a lower social class is also predominant in *Sister Carrie*. However, in this novel, the city as a physical space is not so much associated with a prison, but, quite on the contrary, to a “vast sea” in which its fish are tossed about

helplessly. Instead of being imprisoned, the characters face the difficulty of not being lost within the immense crowds of the city so that they constantly fear being lost in the vast sea of the city. This unconscious fear of their environment has unfortunate repercussions for the behavior of the characters. Though the portrayal of the city in *Sister Carrie* is so different from the “imprisoning” cities in the other novels, the fact that the characters react in similar ways shows that either way of perceiving urban spaces is equally threatening and intimidating to the characters.

The precarious situation of the social class of the characters combined with the fear to remain in that particular class for the rest of their lives results in a distorted perspective, which, subsequently, explains the characters’ tendency towards immoral behavior. Due to the isolation of their class from the upper classes, they are inexperienced and unequipped with an understanding for what the values within higher social classes signify and that they are not applicable to their own environment. Due to this inability, Maggie and Carrie contrast their own conditions to those of higher classes without knowing what their values mean. Thus, the consumerism of higher social classes is viewed by these two characters as a means to escape their own social class. In both novels, the consequentiality of seeing a desired object or part of society and consequently desiring to acquire or be part of it occurs. Carrie’s perspective is distorted and deprives her of the ability to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary consumption. This results in the negligence of her personal relationships and in the disregard of other people’s needs. Maggie’s delusion occurs on a different level, as she does not wish to consume or acquire, but rather takes on romantic middle class values. Her obscured vision in combination with her family’s reaction and delusion do not leave her any other choice but to enter prostitution. More important for Maggie’s fall are certainly her family’s inappropriate beliefs and their double standards, which are also the results of delusion. Also *McTeague* features a distortion regarding the views of the characters. Although Trina’s excessive hoarding does not serve as a means of escape, her behavior is in line with that of the protagonists of the other novels, as it proves that her superficial and ostentatious environment distorts her self-perspective. The delusion of the characters in *Polk Street* can further be inferred from the fact that their middle class position fails in their identity-establishing process, so that they are no longer sure how to behave. As different as the implications of the distorted visions of the characters of the novels may be, they all contribute to immoral, strange or excessive behavior.

The misperceptions of the characters of their own behavior and that of other people are related to the fact that they often perceive each other in terms of their economic function. The grotesque portrayal of the inhabitants of Polk Street shows that the characters are only conceived of in their economic function following a stupefying routine in their physically restricted place. Perceiving other people in terms of their economic function and relating it to immoral behavior, however, is not only possible in *McTeague* but also in *Sister Carrie*. While it is clear that Carrie views the men she encounters in terms of their social position, a means for her to consume and to escape her circumstances, the fact that she does is not perceived as immorally condemnable because *Sister Carrie's* characters equally consume each other. Consequently, they do not perceive their own behavior as immoral or wrong and, therefore, carry on with it until it either physically (Hurstwood) or mentally (Carrie) destroys them. This is also true for Maggie, as her delusion allows her to view Pete as an honored bartender and “knight” who would not only love her, but whose social position would help her to escape her social class. Perceiving him in such a manner, however, is part of the reason why she is later destroyed by her environment and by her family's hypocrisy.

Closely related to economic functions is the aspect of consumption present in all three novels. Consuming and being consumed plays a central role with regard to immoral behavior and crime: Carrie consumes Drouet and Hurstwood for their social status and in order to consume, but she is also sexually consumed by them; Maggie is sexually consumed by Pete and her customers as a prostitute, and McTeague and Trina consume each other in the form of rape or her biting his fingers. In all three cases, the omnipresence of consumption and consumer culture in the lives of the characters results in immoral behavior, such as making use of other people, prostitution, rape or physical violence. The mental or physical destruction of those who consume and are consumed is the result.

The mere fact that the characters view each other in terms of their economic function is, particularly in *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*, related to the dissolution of the institution of the family as providing the moral base for its members and, particularly, for the children. This observation is important, as the absence of a genuine sense of morality results in an increasing tendency for the characters to behave immorally. In both cases, the city serves as the reason for this dissolution: The city lures Carrie to leave her home and family, and then further instills the need in her to even leave her sister. Also for the Johnsons, the city's segregation according to their social class and

the resulting unsanitary conditions instills in them the need to adhere to an obsolete and inadequate sense of morals. Although the Johnson family is entirely dysfunctional and only adheres to its own morality *pro forma*, they still view themselves as representing the traditional ideals of the family. This is due to their deluded self-perspective and tendency to alcoholism which frees them from responsibility and results in a double standard. The characters in *Maggie* are, therefore, not able to understand that their traditional, Christian sense of morality is no longer applicable to their own environment and social class. In *McTeague*, the institution of the family is only present in Zerkow and Maria when they have a baby. However, their pathological behavior caused by their environment leads to the destruction of the baby and the family. Despite the dysfunction of the families of all three novels, the inevitable downfall of the characters begins as soon as they leave their families.

Relating the dissolution of the institution of the family in the novels to an absence of a sense of morality does not mean that the characters do not have a sense of right and wrong at all. Rather, *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie* stress that instead of actively reflecting on issues of morality and guilt, the morality of the characters is constituted by the unconscious, habitual and normative tendencies of the time. Since their thoughts on immorality are habitual and not reflected, any sense of right or wrong is not genuinely felt. Instead, they perceive immoral behavior as how they are expected to perceive it according to obsolete values. Both in the cases of Carrie and the Johnsons family, their habitual morality deprives them of the ability to recognize the inapplicability of this morality to their own environment. The absence of this ability to reflect upon their actions, but to merely act according to habits results in that they themselves act immorally, which then leads to the destruction of other people. Regarding the characters' sense of morality, *McTeague* does not address this issue. While habit as an unconscious force is certainly of importance for Polk Street people in the form of their routines, the novel is not concerned with the reflections of the characters upon their deeds. Immoral behavior, such as Zerkow's excessive greed, is merely perceived as strange or drawn back to his heredity.

In the same way in which habit as an unconscious behavior is stressed as influencing the actions of the characters, so are instincts an important factor for how the characters behave. For all three authors, instincts play a major role, which is shown in the recurring employment of animal imagery to which the characters are compared. This evokes the idea that the protagonists are merely acting according to their instincts rather

than with reason, which would distinguish them from animals. Through the imagery of animals in all three novels, the influence of Darwin and/or Spencer on the writing of the authors can be observed. In the same way in which animals fight helplessly for survival, the characters need their instincts in order to survive. However, none of the characters are entirely reduced to their instincts.

To make a distinction between animals and humans in terms of whether they act according to reason and knowledge or to their instincts is particularly important in Dreiser's historical philosophy. This is due to the fact that he defines human kind to be in a middle stage to develop from instinct-driven to entirely reason-driven. The fact that his characters are, consequently, stuck in the middle between these two driving forces indicates that some of the actions of the characters occur due to free will and others because of instinct. A mixture between these two forces can also be observed in *Maggie*. Here, the characters may have to follow their instincts in order to survive, but Pete, for example, is still reflective of his deeds and moral standards, but purposely and actively decides against taking his sister's position. *McTeague*, therefore, represents the most extreme form because instincts entirely determine the actions of the characters. Any sign of free will entirely succumbs to their instincts at the beginning of the novel, so that it is clear that they can be considered the major force driving the characters. This point is also made clear by Norris's constant reference to ethnicity, so that the instincts of the characters are specific to ethnicity or nationality, and they are not given any other choice but to act according to them. Generally, Norris's perception regarding instincts is unique compared to Dreiser and Crane. He does not view the city as a catalyst, but rather to represent civilization which suppresses instincts in people. Sexuality as a driving force is particularly stressed in this context, as it lingers in the characters as if it were only waiting to surface in reaction to an unusual event.

As a result, the degree of determinism of these three novels varies, as previous analyses, as for example Conder's, have shown. The main point of this thesis regarding the novel's determinism in the context of crime and immorality was to show that the interplay of forces driving the characters is too complex to reduce them to only one force. Therefore, one cannot label them as "hereditary" or "environmental" crimes as Scharnhorst has done (339, 341). Rather, the crimes occur due to a web of environmental reasons which interact with the instincts and temperaments of the characters. It is only the combination of external and internal drives with individual character traits that makes the characters commit immoral deeds or crimes, rather than

just one or the other. Also, the analyses have further shown that although it seems that environment determines their actions, ‘determine’ is too strong of a word to apply it to the characters of *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*. Instead, the normative structure of society, the need to consume, the fear not to survive and the wrong morals for their environment have a strong influence on the characters; yet they do not determine them entirely. Although it might seem as though the distorted vision in *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*, as well as the social conditioning in the former make the characters products of their environment, they are merely influenced by their environment, but not products. The characters merely reflect the normative tendencies of their environment instilled in people’s mindsets at the time. Despite the fact that the characters do not have psychological depth, the reader can still detect that they have temperaments of their own. The city works as a catalyst rather than as fully and entirely forming the characters. While they are limited in their decisions due to restricted possibilities of their social class as well as their distorted vision, their actions can still be considered a result of their free will. The approach to this thematic issue in *McTeague* is, in comparison to the other two novels, the most radical, as the characters in Norris’s novel are entirely determined by the combination of forces provided by external factors as well as internal drives such as their instincts and their heredity.

Structurally, *Sister Carrie* and *McTeague* are similar in that the main criminal deed, i.e. Trina’s murder and Hurstwood’s theft, serves as the climax of the story. They also resemble each other in that each action within these two novels – be it immoral, a twist of fate or just an incident of chance – are consequential and “the cause of an effect” (Gelfant, *What More* 179). Consequently, each “structural center” (Spangler 89) is part of a chain of events all leading up to the major (immoral) event within the novel. However, while it is certainly important to recognize that a crime makes up the pivotal event of these novels, one should not forget to recognize the omnipresence of immoral behavior and crime within these novels. This aspect also draws them closer to *Maggie*, in which there is no clear climax. Rather, it attempts to depict the general abusive and violent atmosphere in the Bowery, in which immoral behavior and physical violence are part of people’s daily lives.

The decision of the authors to make crime and immoral behavior such a central element of their novels is due to a number of reasons, such as Norris’s literary creed, Dreiser’s need to express his repulsion of Catholic morality, or Crane’s critique of inadequately applied morality. The analyses of their novels, however, have shown the

importance of their newspaper activity regarding their formal choices and, in particular, their choice of topic. The sensationalism employed in 19th century newspaper reports on crime seems to have sparked an interest in all three authors to make it a tool to express their perspectives on life. For Dreiser and Norris this even meant to employ a style that either resembles their own published articles or the style that was often utilized for sensationalist stories at the time. Their novels, therefore, show that they recognized two aspects: Firstly, they understood the effect of a story written in a style similar to the journalistic style. Secondly, and more importantly, all three authors recognized the potential of stories involving crime to express their views on human kind and condition. In the context of the fact that their novels were part of an important American literary movement, they made an important statement about the significance of crime for American identity by talking about immoral behavior in their works.

The findings of this thesis are significant when considering the time in which the novels were written. As different as the approaches of the authors to life, science, naturalism and the function of literature may have been, they equally expressed the desperate struggle with which people of the lower social classes faced the vast economic and social changes. In combination with the experiences the authors had in their lives, they express the fear of losing stability and control over how much their environment influences them. The authors also illustrate people's desperate attempts to find a way through the impersonal jungle of the city, in which they encountered excessive consumerism and the juxtaposition of different ethnicities. To experience these changes without knowing their own identity due to their social class had fatal consequences. Thus, the inability to deal with changing circumstances and the application of traditional morals to a new and threatening environment had often unforeseen effects. These were, according to *McTeague*, *Sister Carrie* and *Maggie*, almost exclusively related to crime, immoral behavior and inevitable destruction.

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8. APPENDIX

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with crimes and immoral behavior in selected novels of the first wave of American naturalist authors in the 1890s. It analyzes Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1891), Frank Norris's *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), as these novels feature characters that show tendencies towards criminal and immoral behavior in reaction to their environment, which ultimately lead to their inevitable physical and psychological destruction.

The presentation, causation and perception of crime and immoral behavior and how the individual authors approach these aspects are of particular interest within the analysis of this thesis. Since it takes into account the social history and the vast economic and social upheavals of the United States in the 1890s, the occurrence of crime and immorality in these novels can be understood as a response to the novelty of urban life as the central point of experience. The individual analysis of each novel shows that the tendency of the characters to commit a crime or to behave immorally occurs due to their loss of stability and the consequent fear of their environment as well as due to their inability to deal with the new societal and economic structures, and their social position within these structures. The city is of particular importance for the moral degeneration of the characters, as it does not only function as a catalyst to bring out dormant and often evil parts of their personalities, but manifests itself as a phenomenon where the societal changes are experienced in its highest concentration. The specific driving forces are external as well as internal. Externally, they are influenced by the emergence of consumerism, the vastness of the city and the precarious situation of their social class. Internally, instincts, heredity and temperament are essential factors influencing the characters' behavior and their tendency towards immoral behavior. Furthermore, immorality lies within the inability of the characters to cope with their circumstances results in a distorted perspective regarding their own actions as well as those of others, so that they act immorally without being aware of it.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit Kriminalität und Unmoral in ausgesuchten Werken des frühen Amerikanischen Naturalismus der 1890er. Für die Analyse wurden Stephen Cranes *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), Frank Norris' *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899) und Theodore Dreisers *Sister Carrie* (1900) ausgewählt, da diese Prosaromane die ersten Werke der jeweiligen Autoren darstellen. Weiters fiel die Wahl auf diese Romane, da beinahe alle Charaktere dieser Werke eine starke Tendenz zu kriminellem und unmoralischem Verhalten zeigen und diese, in weiterer Folge, zu ihrer unvermeidlichen physischen oder psychologischen Zerstörung führen.

Die Analyse der Werke in dieser Arbeit konzentriert sich vermehrt auf die Entstehung, Darstellung und Perzeption von unmoralischem Verhalten der Charaktere, sowie auf den unterschiedlichen Umgang mit diesen Aspekten der jeweiligen Autoren. Unter Miteinbeziehung der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Veränderungen des urbanen Lebens in den 1890ern zeigt die Analyse, dass die Tendenz zu unmoralischem Verhalten als Konsequenz der folgenden Faktoren entsteht: Aufgrund der schwerwiegenden Veränderungen des Umfeldes der Charaktere erfahren sie das Gefühl von Stabilitätsverlust als auch Angst vor ihrer Umgebung. Die Angst vor den neuen sozialen sowie wirtschaftlichen Strukturen wird weiters durch ihr Unvermögen verstärkt, mit ihrer eigenen Position innerhalb dieser neuen Strukturen umzugehen, welches, in weiterer Folge, zu unmoralischem Verhalten führt. Die Stadt wird in diesem Zusammenhang nicht nur als das bedrohliche Umfeld, sondern auch als Phänomen *per se* gesehen, da es als Katalysator fungiert und versteckte – oftmals unmoralische – Charaktereigenschaften erweckt, sowie sich als Ort manifestiert, in dem sich viele der sozialen Veränderungen konzentrieren und eine exzessive Ausformung dieser bewirken. Die spezifischen Einflüsse auf die Charaktere, welche sie zu unmoralischem und kriminellem Verhalten verleiten, sind äußerlich als auch innerlich. Äußerlich werden die Charaktere verstärkt von dem Aufkommen von übersteigertem Konsumverhalten, der unermesslichen Größe der Stadt, sowie der prekären Situation ihrer Gesellschaftsschicht beeinflusst. Innerlich haben die Instinkte, das Temperament und vererbte Eigenschaften der Charaktere große Auswirkungen auf ihr oftmals unmoralisches Verhalten. Des Weiteren liegt die Unmoral der Charaktere in einer verzerrten Wahrnehmung ihrer selbst und ihres Umfeldes, so dass sie ein Verbrechen begehen ohne sich dessen bewusst zu sein.

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