

**Naturalism in Stephen Crane's *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*:
Exploration of Social Determinism**

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Abstract

Literary works often reflect the reality of society, and naturalism, as a literary genre, is a clear example of this practice since naturalistic literature focuses on the scientific observation of life. Nonetheless, naturalistic writers go beyond realism incorporating a deterministic emphasis on environmental factors and heredity. Therefore, they present characters of low social and economic classes overwhelmed by the hostile environment that surrounds them. This pessimistic and deterministic view of naturalism permeated the works of many American writers such as Stephen Crane who adopted its principles to reflect in his work the social reality that American society was experiencing in the late nineteenth century. This thesis aims to analyze Crane's novel *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* focusing on one of the main characteristics of naturalistic literature, social determinism. Therefore, I argue that the most prominent naturalistic aspect of this novel is the deterministic view that the writer incorporates in the story since it depicts characters' lives entirely shaped by their social, familiar, and economic circumstances. For this purpose, the study starts by providing an overview of the historical and cultural background at the time the novel was written together with a brief illustration of the concept of naturalism and its main features in order to offer a framework in which the novel will be analyzed. This analysis will be addressed through the exploration of the main factors that predispose the life of the protagonists. Thus, data collection has been conducted by a close reading of the novel, identifying examples of phrases, dialogues, and discourses through the text that reveal how the characters' wills and desires are entirely governed by unavoidable external forces. Altogether, the analysis of the data and the exploration of the narrative elements in the novel show that, among all the defining characteristics of naturalism, the most predominant naturalistic feature present in the novel is determinism. In this regard, all the main characters in the novel are presented as human beings doomed to a tragic destiny because of environmental factors. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that the novel perfectly reflects the naturalistic theory of social determinism.

Keywords: Naturalism, social determinism, American literature, Stephen Crane, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*

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1. Introduction

Throughout centuries, literature has been regarded as entertainment for readers. Reading a literary work allows readers to identify themselves with some elements of the written work, experience a variety of emotions within the text, enrich their knowledge and enhance critical thinking. Furthermore, literature and history have always been closely interrelated since writers have repeatedly reflected the cultural and ideological movements prevailing at a specific time in history in their works. Literature, as a reflection of real life, evolves at the same time as society.

American literature is no exception. Until the mid-nineteenth century, romanticism dominated the literary scene characterized by its focus on imagination, idealism, and subjectivity over the objective. However, as noted by the scholar Phillip J. Barrish, in the nineteenth century, realism emerged as a distinct literary movement in response to romanticism (13). Realistic literature focused on the faithful and detailed depiction of the everyday lives of people of the middle classes in society showing characters as they truly were rejecting idealization in favour of close observation. Furthermore, the economic and social transformation that took place in Europe and America in the late nineteenth century, together with the leading philosophical theories at that time, originated a new literary movement: naturalism.

Since literary naturalism is similar to realism in its detailed and truthful depiction of real life, it has been regarded as a continuation of it. In the writer Xiaofen Zhang's words: "[n]aturalism is a new and harsher realism" (195). However, the scholar Donald Pizer acknowledges that, although this traditional approach to naturalism through realism is justifiable, naturalistic works exhibit some characteristics that make them different from realistic literature (17). Certainly, authors such as Gustave Flaubert and Honoré Balzac, major figures of realistic literature in France, focused on the accurate description of contemporary life. Nonetheless, Émile Zola, who is considered the first writer to formulate the foundations of naturalism, strove to apply the methods of the physical sciences to literature by incorporating a deterministic emphasis on environmental circumstances and heredity psychological components. Therefore, naturalistic literature placed characters overwhelmed by external factors adding a pessimistic connotation.

This new “Zolaesque naturalism” spread throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century when writers adopted its principles as a means of expressing social reality. In America, Stephen Crane is considered one of the first American writers to embrace the philosophy of naturalism. He often focalized on the theory of social determinism in his works. A clear example of this approach in his writing is his novel *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*. In this novel, the readers are invited to know more about the hard living conditions in a slum area in the city of New York in the late nineteenth century through the narration of the protagonist’s life. The novel forces the readers to look at the power of the environment and how that power influences the characters’ lives.

The main object of this dissertation is to analyze Crane’s novel as an example of American literary naturalism focusing on social determinism through the examination of how socio-economic environment determines the lives of the characters in the work. Thus, the research question that I attempt to answer is the following: To what extent does Crane’s novel *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* exemplify social determinism according to which all events in characters’ lives are determined completely by environmental causes?

In order to achieve this aim, this paper is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the historical and cultural background in the second half of the nineteenth century in America. This context will help to understand how historical events might have affected the writer’s choice of the themes and the presentation of the characters in the novel. The second section will revolve around the origins of naturalism and its expansion in American literature as well as the characteristics of this literary movement in order to discover the naturalistic framework. This section also offers a general outlook on Stephen Crane’s writing style as an introduction to his work as a naturalistic writer. The last section will focus on the analysis of the novel *Maggie, a Girl of Streets*, as a faithful portrait of social determinism. This analysis will be addressed through the exploration of the main factors that determine the life of the protagonist: the urban setting, her living conditions in a tenement in New York City, the poverty and violence that she has to face together with her familiar relationships and her condition as a woman in the context of the nineteenth century, all of which will determine her fate. Finally, I will conclude the study by highlighting the main implications derived from the exploration of determinism in the novel.

Therefore, in this study, I will argue that Stephen Crane's novel, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (hereinafter referred to as *Maggie*), fulfils the requirements of the naturalistic genre since the historical and cultural context in which it was written, the naturalistic approach reflected in the work and the narrative elements included in the novel make it an example of one of the main characteristic of naturalism: social determinism.

2. Methodology and Justification

Considering the thesis statement proposed and its main objective, the methodology I have employed in this paper has followed a qualitative approach. The principal aim of the paper is to analyze the novel *Maggie* with the purpose of finding examples through the text which prove that it can be considered a naturalistic work because of the determinism that accompanies the story. Consequently, data collection has been conducted by a close reading of the novel, identifying sentences, descriptions, and discourses related to social determinism. Furthermore, my research strategy included a literature revision of previous studies, books, scholarly articles, and scientific journals related to American literary naturalism and its characteristics in order to situate the author and his work in the context of nineteenth century literature. After collecting trustworthy data and analyzing a selection of sources, the following step was to synthesize the information gathered with the aim of connecting it to the purpose of the paper and obtaining relevant conclusions.

During my research, I have realized that a large amount of literature regarding naturalism has been published. However, what drew my attention was a major principle of naturalism: determinism. Naturalistic writers describe human beings determined by environmental conditions highlighting the dark side of society more as a social document than to provide readers with entertainment. I found in Stephen Crane's novel *Maggie* the best example of the application of social determinism in literature. The realistic description of events, the plot, the characters, the themes, and the setting in the novel make it a good candidate to explore the characteristics of naturalism.

I consider that, hopefully, this dissertation can go beyond the theoretical notion of naturalism and offer a deeper understanding of this term as a literary genre.

Moreover, the analysis of the deterministic factors in the novel *Maggie* can serve as background information for the readers interested in the theory of social determinism in the novel.

3. Historical and Cultural Background in America in the 19th Century

At the end of the nineteenth century, America experienced changes of great magnitude: technological innovations during the Second Industrial Revolution, agricultural growth, and unprecedented urbanization of cities together with major social changes derived from the massive migration of the population from rural to urban areas. The literature produced during this era was shaped by these changes and contemporary writers reflected the transformation that was taking place in American society at that time in their works.

The American Civil War (1861-1865) had significant consequences for American society and economy. However, the period that followed the Civil War can be defined as a period of enormous growth and changes. As the historians David E. Shi and George B. Tindall highlight in their book *America: A Narrative History*, “[w]ithin three decades after the Civil War, American life had experienced a stunning transformation” (699). By the late nineteenth century, the United States emerged as the world’s leading economic power, experiencing unprecedented growth in technology and industry (Shi and Tindall 619). The advancements in communications with the invention of the telegraph, followed by the telephone, enabled people to exchange news and information faster and more effectively. In addition to this, the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, completed in 1869, created a nationwide mechanized transportation network that reached every corner of the nation (Barrish 2). These technological advances, added to other scientific discoveries, transformed the economy of the American country and changed drastically American people’s lives.

Technology advancements also revolutionized American industry and agriculture. As observed by Shi and Tindall, “[a]fter the Civil War, technological improvements spurred phenomenal increases in industrial productivity” (622). The vast amount of natural resources available such as land and forests also led to an increase in agricultural production (Shi and

Tindall 620). Moreover, the mechanization of production and the new business opportunities provoked the expansion of factories in cities. The industrial revolution marked a period of development in the second half of the nineteenth century that transformed rural areas in America into industrialized and urban ones (Barrish 2). The Second Industrial Revolution transformed American people's lifestyle and customs.

As a result of this industrial development, the demographics of the United States changed significantly. Due to industrialization, a constant flow of people from rural areas migrated to the cities during this period in search of employment opportunities. Millions of young adults left farms and villages to work in factories in cities (Shi and Tindall 704). Moreover, immigrants from all over the world, especially from Eastern Europe, also made their way to America searching for a dream that gave birth to the term "American Dream" still alive today. During the nineteenth century, the population of major cities and towns in the United States grew at a rate that had never occurred before in American history¹.

Furthermore, the rapid growth of cities brought important challenges to the American society since the large influx of people into major urban areas created serious overcrowding problems and social conflicts, "... among them widespread poverty, unsanitary living conditions, and new forms of political corruption" (Shi and Tindall 700). Although industrialization improved the standard of living for the middle and upper classes, poor and working-class people continued to struggle, and poverty and misery were evident among the workers. In 1900, in New York City "... two-thirds of the city's population were living in overcrowded, often filthy tenement housing" (Shi and Tindall 702). The class division between the business and financial elite and the workforce, which was composed of unskilled workers and immigrants, was noticeable.

This period in United States history following the Civil War was known as the "Gilded Age", a term that was derived from the homonymous novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, which criticized this era as a time of greed and political corruption (Barrish 97). Historians often report the Gilded Age as a period of prosperity, unprecedented economic growth, and, a technological, political,

¹ Shi and Tindall report that "[t]he number of immigrants rose from just under 3 million annually in the 1870s to more than 5 million per year in the 1880s, and reached nearly 9 million annually in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1890, four out of five New Yorkers were foreign-born, a higher proportion than in any other city in the world. (704).

and social transformation in North America. However, during this period, the gap between social classes increased: while the new power was concentrated in the hands of a few, the middle and low classes worked in factories and lived in ghettos in the cities (Shi and Tindall 699). Therefore, industrial growth created a wealthy middle class supported by the working class.

Additionally, the arrival of immigrants from a variety of countries contributed to a cultural and ideological transformation. People with different cultures, traditions, and values concentrated in crowded urban areas creating multicultural and multi-ethnic districts where social conflicts emerged (Barrish 3). Furthermore, through the latter part of the nineteenth century social activism that battled injustice and wanted to achieve equality among social classes flowered in America. As the researcher Debbie Lelekis observes, “[a]long with the population explosion in cities came an increased concern over morality, driven by organized groups of reformers” (157).

The literature of that era inevitably reflected that social reality. The result was the emergence of a series of notable authors, who captured in their writings the economic and social shift that the American nation was undergoing at that time. In magazine articles, novels, and professional journals, writers provided a varied and exciting knowledge of a world in transformation publishing new ideas and images of suburbs in the main cities of the country. A clear example was the book *How the Other Half Lives*, an early publication of photojournalism by Jacob A. Riis, documenting the miserable living conditions faced by the inhabitants in New York City slums in the late nineteenth century (Barrish 98). This publication influenced numerous authors such as Stephen Crane, who wrote his first novel, *Maggie*, reflecting life in the slums to give a realistic portrayal of society at that time, and simultaneously, showing how those social and economic conditions determined people’s lives (Pizer 45). Not surprisingly, Crane was regarded as one of the foremost writers of American naturalism.

4. What Is Naturalism?

The term “naturalism” is complex to define since it does not have a precise meaning. It also varies depending on the approach and the time through history. However,

we cannot understand what literary naturalism is without looking at the concept of “naturalism”.

Naturalism is a philosophical doctrine based on the belief that only natural laws and forces can explain all phenomena in the world. Therefore, according to naturalists, there are no supernatural or spiritual elements that justify why things happen and the scientific method should be used to study all areas of reality, including human behaviour.

Beyond philosophy, naturalism is also regarded as an artistic and literary movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century in Europe and America. Many literary critics and historians have attempted to define naturalism as a literary genre and diverse approaches have been suggested over the years. Initially, this literary movement was approached from a philosophical viewpoint. According to the scholar Donna Campbell, “[b]eginning in the late 1950s and 1960s, however, critics such as Lars Åhnebrink, Charles Child Walcutt, George F. Becker, and Donald Pizer began to take a fresh look at naturalism with an eye toward examining its formal properties rather than its overt philosophical and political implications” (“American Literary Naturalism” 506).

Nevertheless, even those critics differ in their interpretations of the concept of literary naturalism: whereas Åhnebrink and Becker define it in terms close to the theory of determinism, for Walcutt, it is a complex movement that involves a duality: one optimistic side and another pessimistic one, in which survival, violence, and taboo are key themes (Campbell, “Naturalism in American Literature”).

Moreover, the literary critic and scholar Donald Pizer has widely contributed to the debate about the definition of naturalism through his analyses of different naturalistic novels, especially with his alternative interpretation of naturalism as different from realism showing features that make it a different literary genre. Furthermore, in the following decades, other scholars have extended and modified these interpretations of naturalism² focusing on issues such as “place, race, and gender” and adding new approaches to the term (Campbell, “American Literary Naturalism” 507).

² For further definitions, see also Donald Pizer’s Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*; Howard June’s *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, chapter 1 and M.H. Abrams’s *A glossary of literary terms*. 7th ed. pp. 261-262.

In this context, Donna Campbell states that “[t]he term *naturalism* refers to a late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literary movement whose practitioners used the techniques and theories of science to convey a truthful picture of life” (“Naturalism” 566). However, although this definition can be considered appropriate, naturalism includes a new element in its narrative: social determinism, as most critics agree. Therefore, the most widely accepted concept of naturalism defines it as a literary movement that was born in the late nineteenth century, which applied scientific principles and objectivity together with detailed descriptions of real life focusing on the theory that social environment and heredity determine human character.

4.1 Origins of Literary Naturalism: European Naturalism

Since naturalism came after realism and both share some features, namely its rejection of romanticism trying to show real life objectively, it has been commonly regarded as an intensification of realism. Some writers, such as Xiaofen Zhang, have focused on this theory emphasizing the relation between both literary genres (195).

In addition to this, as aforementioned, the rapid changes occurring at the end of the nineteenth century, with unprecedented scientific and technological growth, transformed the society at that time increasing the gap between social classes. Naturalism emerged in that context as a new form of literary expression highlighting the degradation and injustices of society at that time. Moreover, the origin of naturalism is also closely related to the philosophical theories and ideas prevailing in the nineteenth century. In this sense, Donna Campbell states that

[t]he origins of naturalism lie in the biological, economic, and psychological discoveries of the nineteenth century, all of which relied on the intensive application of scientific empiricism. The most significant of these discoveries were the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin (1809–82) and Herbert Spencer

(1820–1903). In *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin reported his observations of the manifestations of hereditary traits in successive generations
....

Another naturalistic idea borrowed from evolutionary theory is Herbert Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest", which naturalist authors embraced as an interpretive paradigm for their study of the desperate lives of the poor ("Naturalism" 567).

Naturalism was heavily influenced by the scientist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, suggesting that heredity, environment, and social conditions shape human character. This theory was the basis of the French writer Émile Zola who established the foundations of literary naturalism in his essay *Le Roman Expérimental* (1880). In this work, Zola suggested that the scientific approach used in natural science should be applied to characters in novels. Indeed, Zola is considered the father of literary naturalism (Zhang 195).

Zola's proposed theory influenced writers at that time and naturalism spread throughout Europe rapidly. Writers began to apply this theory in their works dealing with issues such as social differences, violence, survival, and environmental factors determining people's lives.

4.2 *American Naturalism*

American writers at that time were inspired by European theories of human nature and incorporated naturalistic principles in their works, focusing on the social and economic challenges that American society was experiencing. According to the researcher Paul Binford, "[a]s with Zola, American naturalist writers reacted to historical and social phenomena in a way that brought their characters, generally, towards a lower, more natural condition" (172).

During the late nineteenth century, this deterministic view influenced the works of many American writers. As Donna Campbell points out in her article *American Literary Naturalism*, the four American authors principally associated with the theory of naturalism were Frank Norris³, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London since “... their fiction shares certain characteristics, such as settings of urban poverty or an inhospitable wilderness, an interest in heredity and environment, a deterministic philosophy, and a deep sense that U.S. culture and the realist literature it had produced were wholly inadequate to respond to the social problems they saw” (501).

Stephen Crane’s novel *Maggie*, first published in 1893, is considered the first novel to represent American naturalism. Crane’s story about a girl’s life in the New York slums shares many of the characteristics of naturalistic literature, especially the overpowering effect of the environment on the characters’ lives.

4.3 *Characteristics of Naturalism*

The naturalistic writers’ focus on the scientific approach influenced their narrative style. In naturalistic works, the narrative tone is objective and impersonal since writers use scientific techniques to depict characters from an impartial point of view. In addition to this, there are some features that are common in naturalistic novels. According to Donna Campbell,

[t]he characteristics of naturalism include a carefully detailed presentation of modern society, often featuring lower-class characters in an urban setting or a panoramic view of a slice of contemporary life; a deterministic philosophy that emphasizes the effects of heredity and environment; characters who act from passion rather than reason and show little insight into their behaviour; and plots

³ Apart from Stephen Crane, Frank Norris is considered a pioneer in American literary naturalism. His work *McTeague* is a clear exponent of naturalistic literature, where determinism, materialism and Darwin’s theory of natural selection appear as factors that control the characters’ lives.

of decline that show the characters' descent as the inevitable result of the choices they have made ("Naturalism" 566-567).

Therefore, as it is similarly observed by Zhang, the major elements of naturalistic novels are objectivity, determinism, pessimism, urban setting, and the unpredictable and tragic endings of stories in novels (195-196).

As aforementioned, naturalistic writers maintain an objective tone within their literary works. In naturalistic narration, "[t]he author presents himself or herself as an objective observer, similar to a scientist ..." (Zhang 195) since they did not aim to write simply fiction, but rather to create a complete picture of reality with objective detail.

Moreover, social determinism is one of the main themes in naturalistic literature. This philosophical view focuses on the belief that external causes such as social environment, economic conditions, or heredity are responsible for all the events happening in people's lives and determine their entire lives (Barrish 116). This deterministic philosophy is often accompanied in naturalistic works with a pessimistic or fatalistic view of life including themes focusing on the darker aspect of life: poverty, corruption, racism, disease, prostitution, and violence.

Additionally, in naturalistic novels, stories of despair and survival often take place in an urban setting (Campbell, "Naturalism in American Literature"). Since naturalism emphasizes the impact of the environment, location plays a significant role in these works. Therefore, characters living in large cities are often described as people governed by heredity and external factors that lead to tragedy with unfortunate endings in the novels.

4.4 Stephen Crane: A Naturalistic Writer

Stephen Crane has been considered both a realistic and a naturalistic writer. The historical and personal circumstances that surrounded this writer influenced his work. Crane was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1871, and he was the last of a family of fourteen children. Crane's father was a Methodist minister and his mother was a woman

devoted to social concerns. His familiar conditions directed the themes of Crane's writings towards social issues focusing on the characters' environments.

Stephen Crane started his literary career in 1892 when he moved to New York where he worked as a freelance reporter, writing articles about the slums of New York for several newspapers and magazines. As Lelekis mentions: "... Stephen Crane's newspaper work significantly influenced his literary career as a reporter-novelist" (158). He reflected his journalistic approach to the fiction he produced which placed him into the realistic genre. Moreover, after befriending critic William Dean Howells, an advocate of literary realism, Crane's writing focused on the descriptions of ordinary life in an objective and unadorned way becoming a relevant figure of realistic literature.

However, Crane is also characterized as a naturalistic writer. The scholar Donna Campbell defines Stephen Crane as a "classic naturalistic" writer ("American Literary Naturalism" 500). Similarly, the critic Donald Pizer considers him an example of a naturalistic writer since he was a practitioner of Emile Zola's principles. Consequently, Crane's fiction began to present characters objectively as well as "... shaped, conditioned, and usually destroyed by social and biological forces beyond their control" (Pizer 128).

Furthermore, as the American literary critic Harold Bloom reports, Crane was a writer leading a bohemian lifestyle among local artists in the Bowery, one of the worst slums in New York City (15). This first-hand experience of poverty and life of deprivation was reflected in his first novel, *Maggie*, portraying an innovative and realistic depiction of life in the slums and being considered one of the most compelling examples of naturalism in American literature (Lelekis 171). Being initially rejected by publishers who thought that Crane's description of slum life would shock readers, Crane published his first fiction work himself in 1893, under the pseudonym Johnston Smith. This novel was the start of his literary career as a naturalistic writer. Moreover, in 1895, Crane published his second novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*⁴, a realistic portrait of a young soldier fighting in the American Civil War. With this novel, Crane gained international recognition as a writer.

⁴ *The Red Badge of Courage* is considered to be Crane's masterwork for his reflection of naturalistic philosophy. It is also regarded as the first modern war novel and a classic in American literature.

Although Stephen Crane's life was very short, he was dead at twenty-eight, his works have greatly contributed to the canon of American literature. He reflected in his novels heavy themes such as poverty, death, war, and the power of the environment in people's lives. His novel *Maggie* is an example of the application of the theory of social determinism in American literature.

5. *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane: Vivid Portrait of Social Issues and Determinism in 19th Century Slum Life

The novel to be analyzed can be considered a work that includes almost all the characteristics of naturalism as a literary genre. In this novel, the reader is immersed in the daily struggle to survive of an Irish American family whose lack of economic and essential resources for a minimum standard of living, complicated relationships, addictions, and ethical blindness contribute to their unavoidable fate. Therefore, the protagonists are presented under the forces of social and biological determinism that influence their lives.

In the hostile world of the New York City slums, faced with the prospect of a long-term job in a textile factory and a complicated familiar environment, Maggie Johnson dreams of escaping her surroundings with the help of Pete, a handsome man she meets. However, she will be disappointed when she gradually realizes that Pete is not the gentleman that she thought but a skilled seducer and she finds herself trapped in a degenerate society working as a prostitute. All circumstances surrounding Maggie will determine her destiny.

5.1 Urban Life, Slums, and Poverty

The idea that the environment significantly shapes human behaviour is central in the novel. Moreover, as it is observed by Campbell, for naturalistic authors, including Stephen Crane, "the setting for discovering the 'red, living heart of things' was the modern city" ("Naturalism" 569). In the novel in question, the story takes place in the Bowery district of New York City in the late nineteenth century, where immigrants who

arrived in New York City in search of an opportunity to improve their lives were housed. This place is described as an unhealthy location where characters try to unsuccessfully adapt themselves to the adverse circumstances that surround them. Therefore, the urban setting plays an important role in the story becoming a character itself since the novel is not just only a description of the reality of the living conditions in the slum environment but, more importantly, the impact that this environment has on people's lives.

Although from the first lines of the novel the reader is told about the atmosphere in which the story will develop, we have to wait until the second chapter to find a description of the neighbourhood where the Johnson family live:

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. (Crane 7)

The description of the tenement buildings contains specific details that offer a naturalistic point of view allowing the reader to make inferences about the living conditions as well as the emotional state of people living in such a place. Additionally, not only are open spaces described showing the readers the appalling conditions of the slum, but also the private rooms of the house where the family lives are portrayed as dirty places with “dark stairways and along cold, gloomy halls” (Crane 8). These accurate images of the settings surrounding the characters are intended to illustrate the grim condition of these people living in a poverty-stricken area. They are portrayed as human beings inevitably influenced by their unpleasant and dreadful environment.

Moreover, Crane first refers to Maggie as “[a] small ragged girl [who] dragged a red, bawling infant along the crowded ways. He was hanging back, baby-like, bracing his wrinkled, bare legs” (7). This brief depiction of Maggie evidences a deterministic, miserable, and impoverished environment which will be corroborated within the novel.

Even the place where her life comes to an end is described with a “deathly black hue”, as a metaphor for her own life (Crane 87).

Maggie, like most of the characters in the novel, is conscious of the extreme poverty that surrounds her when “... [she] contemplated the dark, dust-stained walls, and the scant and crude furniture of her home” (Crane 30). Consequently, she feels disturbed about her miserable existence and tries to improve her life with the hope of leaving her insalubrious and unsafe house. However, she will be unable to change the course of the events of her life because her fate is marked by the environment where she was born and she will have no chance of escaping from it.

5.2 *Violence*

The novel shows the difficulties that people who lived in the suburbs of New York City at the end of the nineteenth century had to overcome, revealing the poverty and violence inherent in their lives. The opening scene of the book shows the brutality expressed by some children describing the physical damage that they inflict on each other:

A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil’s Row who were circling madly about the heap and pelting at him.

His infantile countenance was livid with fury. His small body was writhing in the delivery of great, crimson oaths.

“Run, Jimmie, run! Dey’ll get yehs,” screamed a retreating Rum Alley child.
(Crane 3)

The scene introduces the character of Jimmie, Maggie’s brother, who is involved in violent episodes from his childhood showing his fierceness, which will remain into his adulthood. Unlike Maggie, her brother adapts to the environment by using strength since, as we can read, “[h]e had been in quite a number of miscellaneous fights, and in some

general barroom rows that had become known to the police” (Crane 23). It could be said that Crane’s characterization of Jimmie reflects the Darwinian evolutionary theory based on Herbert Spencer’s concept of “the survival of the fittest” that inspired naturalistic writers to express the idea that the strongest characters adapt to social circumstances whereas others die in this effort.

Therefore, the opening paragraphs exhibit the ruthlessness of the characters as an important aspect of their daily lives. The negative connotation that the street names (Devil’s Row and Rum Alley) reflect and the narrative description of the event comparing the boys to “true assassins” and “tiny demons” allow the reader to imagine the Bowery district as a place filled with harshness.

However, not only is physical violence present throughout the story with uncountable and intense scenes of brutality and cruelty but also verbal and psychological violence is part of the characters’ lives. For instance, emotional abuse is shown through the explicit language and threatening conduct that Maggie’s mother exhibit towards her. As an illustration, the words used by Mary Johnson to address her daughter: “‘Teh hell wid him and you,’ she said, glowering at her daughter in the gloom. Her eyes seemed to burn balefully. ‘Yeh’ve gone teh deh devil, Mag Johnson, yehs knows yehs have gone teh deh devil. Yer a disgrace teh yer people, damn yeh ...’” (Crane 46).

Overall, the characters use a language characterized by violence and vulgarity. In the dialogues, there is no space for courtesy and kindness. Instead, the use of slang gives readers a faithful portrait of ordinary people trying to express their suffering in the environment of marginal slums where they fight against their unfortunate destiny. For instance, the word “hell” is repeatedly used throughout the text to emphasize the characters’ state of mind. Therefore, physical and emotional violence is presented as an inevitable consequence of the characters’ desperation at not being able to escape their environment, emphasizing the deterministic view that guides the story.

5.3 *Immigration and Unemployment*

Throughout the novel, Crane focuses the reader's attention on the environment by giving a faithful portrayal of the extreme conditions that Bowery's inhabitants endured in the late nineteenth century. Crane's novel contains no middle-class characters since it takes readers right into the slum area where low-class citizens arrived in the city live. Thus, the main characters of the novel represent those immigrants who moved to urban areas of America at the end of the nineteenth century in search of a better life.

Hence, Crane's characters exhibit the characteristics of those people who worked in factories for long hours in hard conditions to make their living, as we can read, for example, when on their first date, Pete takes Maggie to a place where "[t]he great body of the crowd was composed of people who showed that all day they strove with their hands" (Crane 33). Those newcomers mainly consisted of low-skilled workers who were desperately poor and needed to find a job quickly. Therefore, they were willing to accept jobs that were often poorly paid. Crane reflects the difficulties of immigrants living in the slums, including both the Johnson family and their neighbours.

Additionally, in the slums, unemployment became a serious social issue at the time, contributing to poverty and increasing social isolation. In the case of Jimmie, Crane depicts him as a jobless man who spends his time wandering the streets: "Jimmie's occupation for a long time was to stand on street corners and watch the world go by, dreaming blood-red dreams at the passing of pretty women. He menaced mankind at the intersections of streets. On the corners he was in life and of life. The world was going on and he was there to perceive it" (20).

Although he finally becomes a truck driver, being disappointed with his job, Jimmie shows aggressive behaviour towards the rest of the people rejecting everything around him, as we can read when Crane writes: "[h]e himself occupied a down-trodden position that had a private but distinct element of grandeur in its isolation" (21), highlighting the effect that his personal and economic circumstances have on him.

Therefore, as it is observed by the writer Kevin Graham, "Crane's depiction of the Johnson family reflects the lives of those who were excluded from society". Crane gives

a detailed account of the difficulties that the family members have to endure because of their working-class status. Furthermore, the novel expresses the characters' concerns about this class inequality. Most of the residents in the Bowery district, overwhelmed by the environment that surrounds them, react by displaying socially unacceptable behaviour since they spend their time drinking, gambling, and fighting with each other. This atmosphere contributes to a dehumanized and corrupt society that has a devastating effect on the characters' lives. Again, Crane manages to convey the deterministic philosophy of human beings being conditioned by their environment.

5.4 Complex Family Relationships

Through the novel, the reader is shown that Maggie's downfall and death will be inevitable since, despite her best effort, her personal and familiar circumstances will push her to make a dramatic decision.

Maggie, as the daughter of a completely dysfunctional family in which all members live in constant conflict, grows up understanding that such a situation is part of her daily routine. She faces physical, emotional, and verbal abuse in her own home since both her father and mother fail to show any affection towards their children. Instead, they are immersed in a world of vices and violence that is reflected in their family relationships, as it is expressed in the following words: “[t]hey had a lurid altercation, in which they damned each other’s souls with frequency” (Crane 10). Another example of their lack of responsibility towards their family is the death of Tommie, the youngest child, who cannot survive in that hideous environment and dies being an infant, as we can read: “The babe, Tommie, died. He went away in a white, insignificant coffin, ...” (Crane 19).

Therefore, Maggie’s life unfolds in an unhealthy and unsafe environment without no moral boundaries and receiving continuous criticism. This lack of empathy can be found in the episode in which Maggie returns home after her failed attempt to change her life and her mother breaks down her hope by rejecting her. Additionally, Crane reflects the hypocrisy of some characters in the novel when he describes Maggie’s mother mourning the death of the daughter she never loved and, at the same time, Maggie is said to be the one responsible for her mother’s sadness: “Yeh’ll fergive her, Mary!” pleaded

the woman in black. The mourner essayed to speak but her voice gave way. She shook her great shoulders frantically, in an agony of grief. Hot tears seemed to scald her quivering face. Finally, her voice came and arose like a scream of pain. "Oh, yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!" (Crane 99).

Nevertheless, her mother is not the only person who mistreats Maggie, her brother often addresses her by shouting and insulting her. Maggie will try to avoid this harmful environment by leaving her home to find love with Pete. However, she will fail in her attempt since her life is determined by her relationships.

5.5 *Alcoholism*

From the beginning of the novel, the reader is told about alcoholism as a serious social issue conditioning people's lives and preventing them from changing their destiny. The impoverished environment of the slum where people hardly can survive leads most of them to drink alcohol to escape reality. Furthermore, Crane includes several scenes that take place in saloons where characters socialize while drinking alcohol, as an accurate portrait of the urban life in the slums of New York at the end of the nineteenth century.

While all the inhabitants of the Bowery drink excessively throughout the novel, Maggie's mother is presented as the main example of the destructive power of alcohol. During her drunken episodes, Mary Johnson is described as an incredibly violent woman, as we can read: "[h]er mother drank whiskey all Friday morning. With lurid face and tossing hair she cursed and destroyed furniture all Friday afternoon". (Crane 31). She is an alcoholic woman influenced by her environment, which makes her an oppressive and neglectful mother who spends her time terrifying her children. Similarly, Maggie's father drinks alcohol in order to escape a life of poverty until he dies due to his drunkenness. Both characters are victims of alcohol addiction and blame each other for their behaviour, as it is shown in the words: "'You've been drinkin', Mary,' he said. 'You'd better let up on the bot', ol' woman, or you'll git done.' 'You're a liar. I ain't had a drop,' she roared in reply" (Crane 10). In fact, Crane describes a broken family with a mother and a father who regularly attack each other in alcoholic rages. For example, in a scene when Jimmie returns home and he finds both parents drunk exchanging "howls and curses, groans and

shrieks, confusingly in chorus as if a battle were raging” (Crane 15). Thus, through several scenes, Crane vividly displays the powerful effect that this alcoholic environment has on the whole family and especially the children (Dev 88). As a consequence, the emotional scars that the children develop are so deep that they will last into their adulthood.

Furthermore, although Mary Johnson is herself a symbol of viciousness, she does not hesitate to criticize her daughter Maggie for immoral behaviour (Bloom 25). Therefore, it could be said that alcoholism is shown through the story as an important obstacle in the characters’ lives and a major contributing factor to Maggie’s misfortune. Crane gives us a scientific description of American society in the nineteenth century by portraying a vivid picture of the Bowery slum environment and the behaviour of its inhabitants, which has to do with a harsh life that fosters their fall into vice, all of which will determine their existence.

5.6 The Role of Women in the 19th Century Society

Through the character of Maggie, readers are told about poverty, suffering, alcoholism, and prostitution as key elements in the plot of the novel. However, above all, what characterizes Maggie is her feeling of isolation as an immigrant woman living in a patriarchal society that denies her any opportunity to improve her life.

In order to understand the context in which the story develops, we need to look at the social background and attitudes towards women at that time. The great social changes caused by industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth century altered life in the United States. Nonetheless, while an increasing number of women began to enter the labour market and had access to education, women of a lower socioeconomic status received fewer opportunities to improve economically and socially, being confined to a hard-working life in slums (Dev 88). Through the novel, we can read how when Maggie’s father dies, her brother Jimmie becomes the patriarchal head of the family and asks her to go and work: ““Mag, I’ll tell yesh dis! See? Yeh’ve edder got the go to hell or go the work!”” (Crane 25). Furthermore, readers see how Maggie strives to improve her social standing. However, she knows that she will be unable to accomplish this without the help of a man and, therefore, Pete becomes her hope to escape from her miserable life.

Nevertheless, being abandoned by Pete and rejected by her own family, she has no choice but to become a prostitute. Although it seems that Maggie is a woman who has the freedom to make her own decisions, she suffers in a society that gives no voice to lower-class women keeping them subordinated to men.

Moreover, Crane's description of human nature in a Bowery slum is a realistic portrayal of the miserable life that women experienced at that time. Crane captures the prevailing negative attitude towards women, and more specifically, those working as prostitutes, showing how men from different social classes treat Maggie badly in the street. For instance, when "[a] young man in light overcoat and derby hat received a glance shot keenly from the eyes of the girl. He stopped and looked at her, thrusting his hands in his pockets and making a mocking smile curl his lips" (Crane 84-85). In addition, characters like Jimmie and Pete are depicted as men that show abusive treatment towards women seducing them, only to later abandon them. Jimmie seems to dislike the manner in which Pete treats Maggie. However, Crane offers a parallel story of Jimmie's abusive behaviour towards women, for instance, in a scene in which Hattie, a woman that is wandering the streets alone at night, is rejected by Tommie: "'Say, fer Gawd's sake, Hattie, don' foller me from one end of deh city teh deh odder ... Do yehs want people teh get onto me? Go chase yerself, fer Gawd's sake'" (76).

Additionally, Crane initially depicts Maggie as a beautiful girl who is not affected by her environment: "None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins" (25). However, as Campbell points out, her harsh life in the impoverished slum leads to the destruction of her identity and personality ("Naturalism" 569). Crane's depiction of Maggie's journey to prostitution shows that it is a consequence of her unfortunate circumstances at a time when gender inequality was undeniable.

6. Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to demonstrate that the novel *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* belongs to the literary genre known as naturalism focusing on one of the main characteristics of naturalistic literature: social determinism. After conducting a detailed analysis of the novel, I can conclude that this concise novel is a clear example of

naturalistic literature mainly due to the philosophical theory of determinism that the author incorporates in the story.

Stephen Crane has been regarded as a realistic writer because of the accurate and detailed depictions of real life that he includes in his works. However, in practice, he goes beyond realism. The message that he conveys is clearly naturalistic since he places characters determined by their environment and heredity. Furthermore, it is claimed that this novel belongs to the genre of naturalism since it shares the main features of literary naturalism: objectivity, determinism, pessimism, urban setting, and the unfortunate and unpredictable ending of the story. However, the most significant finding to emerge from this study is that, from these naturalistic features, a prominent aspect in the novel is social determinism.

Through this thesis, it has been demonstrated how the historical and cultural context at the time the novel was written influenced Crane's preference for the themes addressed in the novel. During a time in which naturalism emerged as a new literary movement to denounce the injustices that lower classes were experiencing, the novel can be read as a social document giving voice to those people who were completely determined by their disadvantageous circumstances. Additionally, Crane sets the story in an "urban jungle" where only strong people can survive and human beings are condemned to poverty, violence, and ostracism reflecting the naturalistic theory of social determinism.

Crane writes about family life, interpersonal relationships, addictions, and moral degradation to testify how people can be trapped and pre-determined by such irresistible forces and hostile circumstances. Maggie, as the central character in the novel, reflects all the characteristics of life in the slums of New York in the nineteenth century and readers can observe how her life is entirely affected by the social, economic, and familiar circumstances that surround her.

Therefore, the present study confirms previous findings and provides additional evidence to the debate concerning the determinism present in the novel *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*. Crane's work, doubtless, connect social issues with troubled characters for whom life is absolutely meaningless and worthless, questioning the concept of human free will.

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