Hidden Beauty in American Naturalism

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Abstract

Characters in the American Naturalistic literary tradition are seen as helpless products and victims of two major controlling factors: heredity and environment. As a result, the status of these characters deteriorates as the work of fiction progresses, resulting in a disastrous culmination. This paper brings into light the subtle version of beauty and peace created by the authors in selected naturalistic texts, which, through scrutiny and analysis helps acquire not only a better understanding of the obstacles the main characters face, but also a better appreciation of the aesthetics of "ugly" naturalistic writings. Frank Norris's McTeague and Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie are two of the most famous, most representative texts of the American Naturalistic. The main characters in McTeague and Sister Carrie undergo a process of degeneration because of the strong grip of heredity and environment and their end is disastrous as well. However, there are a few episodes/scenes/characters in both novels which offer alternatives, solutions, and contrast to the main characters' lives. This paper argues that despite the fact that American Naturalistic texts deal with the sordid, the ugly, and the horrific, some authors do find a narrow path to bring out some sort of serenity, human dignity, and love within the events that take place in the novel.

Keywords: Frank Norris, McTeague, Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie, American Naturalism, Heredity, Environment

1. Introduction

American naturalistic texts reflect the changes that American society was witnessing at the turn of the twentieth century and were a result of "the rise of industrialism, the advance of science, the westward march of settlement, and the closing of the frontier" (Ahnebrink, 1961, p.14). Literary critics have written extensively on the central characteristics of the characters that have been produced in American literary naturalism. In general, American naturalistic texts deal with characters who are devoid of free will, imprisoned, and chained within the two deterministic factors that are acting against them: heredity and the environment. According to Ahnebrink (1961), "Man has no free will; either external or internal forces, environment, or heredity control him and determine his behavior, for which he is not responsible (p.184).

Literary critics, moreover, emphasize the presence of an element of tension in traditional texts of American naturalism. Charles Child Walcutt (1956), for example, in American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, contends that American Naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century displays a contrast between, on the one hand, idealism, progressivism, and social radicalism, and on the other hand, mechanistic determinism (p.10). Walcutt (1956) further explains that such contradictions exist in every piece of American naturalism: a tension between hope and despair, rebellion and apathy, defying nature and submitting to it, god as science and god as devil, and man's striving and admitting defeat (p.7). Walcutt (1956) concludes by emphasizing the idea that, "All 'naturalistic' novels exist in a tension between determinism and its antithesis" (p.29). In addition, Lilian Furst considers dualism to be intrinsic to naturalism, suggesting that naturalism is torn between "materialism and idealism, between pessimism and optimism" (quoted in Howard, 1985, p.37), and June Howard points out that naturalism contains elements of determinism as well as opposing elements of reformism, sensationalism, and assertions of human will (p.40). In this sense, naturalism writings employ spatial elements which are basically addressed "by local color writers" (Barillas, 2006, p.51).

Donald Pizer (1984), a pioneer in the study of realism and naturalism, in his book entitled Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature, supports Walcutt's (1956) ideas when he claims that a keynote of the fiction of this period is a tension between actuality and hope, between man's limitations—imposed by his biological past and sociological present—and his stature as a creature of

significance and worth. Pizer (1984) characterizes the subject matter of naturalism as an intermingling of contradictory elements: the commonplace and the sensational, the humanly ennobling and the humanly degrading (pp.11-12).

In Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism, Lee Clark Mitchell (1989) reiterates the key concept of tension or contradiction in relation to characters in late nineteenth- century naturalistic fiction. According to Mitchell (1989), each text "defines a contradiction in its central character, between a self-image as an autonomous, integrated, freely willing agent, and the narrative's revelation of him as no more than a set of conflicting desires" (p.xv). In essence, naturalism is an assault on the reader's assumption of a moral self (p.xvi). Furthermore, Mitchell (1989) argues that naturalistic characters cannot refrain from action; they have the compulsion to act in predictable ways, which undermines their opportunities for choice (p.17). Repetition is, therefore, a key device in naturalistic fiction because it helps to show a lack of self-control; involuntary repetition creates and reinforces a sense of helplessness (p.21). Because of this tension due to the deterministic vision, American Naturalistic texts are known to be sordid, ugly, and to a large extent, disturbing to read as the characters eventually cannot be free agents and thus surrender to the hopeless grip of heredity and the surrounding environment the naturalistic text "shows characters wrestling principally with their social context rather than the mostly impersonal forces upon which naturalism is fixated" (Walker, 2026, p.4).

A typical example of the strong grip of these naturalistic forces is Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. With its perilous, dismal portrayal of life and death among residents of New York City's Bowery, the novella, published in 1893, stands as one of the earliest works of American Naturalism. Maggie, who is described as "a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl" (p.823), grows up in an environment that necessitates her, unfortunately, to become a girl of the streets. Maggie works in a sweatshop factory making cuffs and collars, and sees in Pete a future of security and stability as he starts to woo her. In Pete, she sees glimpses of hope—a means of escape. As he escorts her to the theatre, "Maggie lost herself . . . ,]and[always departed with raised spirits from these melodramas. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually overcame the wealthy and wicked" (pp.831-32). Maggie sees these melodramas as small victories for the actors and projects herself as one of these heroines that will, one day, overcome and overturn her circumstances and lead a life better than the one she is leading. However, as the novella progresses, things go from bad to worse for Maggie. The ruination of Maggie is the result of numerous social forces, bad decisions, limited options for someone like Maggie, as well as the domination of heredity and environment. The single escape route for Maggie is her suicide: "she went into the blackness of the final block" (p.851). In Crane's novella, the viciousness and repulsiveness of American society of slum life prevail. The text hardly offers glimpses of hope or alternatives for Maggie, except in the brief scene where Maggie goes to watch a melodrama.

As disturbing as reading a naturalistic text like Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets may be, some writers such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser have been able to find a dim light of hope in order to present to both the characters and to the readers, other than in a melodrama, but rather in creating subplots, scenes, and/or characters that can offer alternatives. In his article, "Fiction is Selection," Norris (1964) draws a comparison between a story writer and a mosaicist and argues that both do not "invent nor imagine" but rather "select and combine" (p.51). Bearing in mind Norris's "selection of details," the paper will not focus on the beauty of the landscape found in several naturalistic works, but will rather focus on minor subplots, scenes, and characters in McTeague and Sister Carrie that do in fact reflect the idea that some writers of this literary tradition attempt to create instances of beauty within the creation of certain characters in this deterministic world interwoven within the construction of the narrative. The present paper argues that despite the fact that American Naturalistic texts deal with the sordid, the ugly, and the horrific, both authors do find a way to bring out the beauty within the events that take place in the novel.

2. Methodology

This research follows a qualitative study of Norris's McTeague and Dreiser's Sister Carrie. It applies a close reading and textual analysis of these works by focusing on their technical and thematic aspects. On the one hand, the technical discussion focuses on two elements, namely, the characters and the settings. The characters will be interpreted as fictional miniatures employed by the authors to identify the relationships between man and nature in naturalistic writings. The settings will be examined as regional circumferences which typify the local topography depicted in the plots. On the other hand, the themes will be limited to the idea of beauty and how it is approached as being hidden and grasped through pursuing their aesthetic portrayal. The selected works' techniques and themes, therefore, will be elaborated by analyzing their fictional structure which reveals hidden beauty in naturalistic writings by dint of authorial narrative savvy. Thus, the characters and settings will be interpreted via exploring their fictional parallel to naturalistic theme of hidden beauty.

The characters and the settings, furthermore, will be tackled by pursuing their fictional traits created by the authors to comment on contemporary issues concerning the regional circumferences dwelt by specific people. That is, the discussion of the setting highlights the deterministic peculiarities of the characters' dwelling place because Naturalism, driven by Determinism, is meticulously concerned with the dwelling places and how they reflect the spirit of contemporary culture. In essence, the settings are the natural topography imagined by the authors to offer a realistic recount of their regions and social milieus. As for the characters, they will be interpreted by analyzing their naturalistic life. They scrupulously behave and act in a deterministic way influenced by the naturalistic idea of the Dynamo i.e., their destiny is controlled by heredity and environment.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Published in 1988, Norris's McTeague depicts a character whose brutality and degeneration are typical of the naturalistic, deterministic world in which he lives. McTeague is a brute who relies heavily on his animalistic instincts—a character devoid of free will, hence a

character who is eventually going to be defeated because of the stronger forces that are operating against him. There is no beauty in the character of McTeague; his only pleasure in life was "to eat, to smoke, to sleep, and to play upon his concertina" (p.6), and as a character, he is described as "immensely strong. stupid, docile, obedient" (p.7). After Norris introduces the reader to McTeague and his lifestyle, McTeague meets Trina Sieppe, who was "very small and prettily made" (p.22), yet who does, at the outset, offer a slight chance of redemption to the life of McTeague.

Because Trina lives in a controlling realm and realizes that she has to find a means of escape from her family, McTeague offers her the perfect opportunity. Ahnebrink (1961) describes Trina as an example of a determined character living in a determined world by asserting that Trina is "weak, passive, often neurotic and hysterical, dominated by heredity and environment" (p.220). McTeague, nevertheless, is captivated and charmed by Trina from the first day they meet. When Trina lies "unconscious and helpless and very pretty" and "absolutely without defense" in "the operating chair" (p.27), McTeague's life takes a completely different turn as he becomes infatuated with Trina. From that moment, his instincts are aroused and his behavior becomes even more beastly than before: "the sudden leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted" (p.28). McTeague manages to marry Trina after many advances and dates. After the marriage takes place, McTeague somehow becomes a more civilized person: "Instead of sinking to McTeague's level as she had feared, Trina found that she could make McTeague rise to hers, and in this saw a solution of many difficult and gloomy complication" (p.147). However, things take a different turn once Trina wins the lottery. As Trina becomes more and more obsessed with hoarding money, McTeague becomes more and more dependent on Trina, and reverts to his old, beastly habits of drinking. The marriage becomes catastrophic and both McTeague and Trina lead themselves to their tragic end. The scene in which McTeague kills Trina is horrific:

> 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. He came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air.
>
> 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. (p.288)

Trina's obsession with money, McTeague's obsession with Trina, Marcus's desperation to win Trina, as well as the symbolism in the novel are all scenes that contribute to the overall narrative. However, and despite all the graphic, horrific scenes that take place, Norris, within the narrative creates two subplots that bring into light the two paths that the marriage of McTeague and Trina can lead to. The two subplots are relevant and read in the context of the relationship between McTeague and Trina, the first as a model for the couple, the latter as a vision of what will become of the couple because naturalistic writings inherently represent "such basic concepts as place, space, and nature" (Waldron and Friedman, 2013, p.VII). The first subplot involves Old Grannis and Miss Baker, who, despite the fact that both are in their sixties, fall in love. Old Grannis and Miss Baker are both shy and reluctant to reveal their love for each other. They spend their time waiting for each other, listening to each other, and sharing experiences with each other. They do all of this through a wall that separates the two lodgers:

> Old Grannis came home from his work at four o'clock, and between that time and six Miss Baker would sit in her room, her hands idle in her lap, doing nothing, listening, waiting. Old Grannis did the same, drawing his armchair near to the wall, knowing that Miss Baker was upon the other side, conscious, perhaps, that she was thinking of him; and there the two would sit through the hours of the afternoon, listening and waiting, they did not know exactly for what, but near to each other, separated only by the thin partition of their rooms. (p.17)

The emotions of the two and the asexual communication between them contrasts sharply with the relationship between McTeague and Trina: "It was their tete-a-tete. Instinctively they felt each other's presence, felt each other thoughts coming to them through the thin partition. It was charming; they were perfectly happy" (p.99). Gradually, the two lonely people overcome their shyness and communicate with each other in the climactic scene in which Miss Baker offers Old Grannis a cup of tea.

The second subplot involves Maria Macapa and Zerkow's affair. Maria is the maid who cleans the building in which McTeague lives, and Zerkow is the Jewish junkman who is fascinated not by Maria but by her story about her ancestors who used to have gold plates. Zerkow and Maria get married and have a child who dies immediately after it is born. Zerkow becomes obsessed with the story of the gold plates and eventually murders Maria because he believes that she is hiding the gold plates from him.

The two subplots offer two alternative paths from which McTeague and Trina can choose. The first path, Miss Baker's path, is the path that Trina almost begins to follow in her relationship with McTeague. This is the path that can lead to her happiness and produce a fruitful love story. Trina begins by taking this path. She is shy with McTeague, reluctant, and in love with him in the beginning. Joseph McElrath, Jr. (1992), points out that "McTeague is a success story for half of its length, transcending the limitations of both his low intelligence and humble origins . . ." (p.36). Seen from this perspective, the marriage could have continued to work if the stronger forces of heredity and environment have not had prevailed. In this case, the subplot of Old Grannis and Miss Baker offers a moral and benevolent view of love and marriage. The most important aspect of this subplot is its asexuality. The couple's relationship may prove to be a success because of their lack of focus on their sexual instincts. Pizer (1984) asserts that "because their subplot contains the only successful love match in the

novel, Norris seems to be saying that love must be asexual if it is to have the virtues of restraint, generosity, and kindness" (p.74). Furthermore, McElrath (1992) believes that "this subplot is satirically fashioned as a counterpart to the more realistic, decidedly anti-Victorian main plot in which not only sexual but other drives loom" (p.47). The relationship between Trina and McTeague does not follow this model and is, therefore, doomed to failure.

Unfortunately, unlike Miss Baker, Trina chooses to further awaken the beastliness in McTeague, ironically after being the reason for taming him, the same way in which Maria Macapa awakens the beast in Zerkow by her repetitive narrative of the gold plates. At one point in the novel, both Trina and Maria take pride in the sadistic nature they have been able to produce in their husbands: "They told each other of their husbands; brutalities, taking a strange sort of pride in recounting some particularly savage blow, each trying to make out that her own husband was the most cruel" (p.240). Miss Baker and Old Grannis, on the other hand, ". . . were thinking of each other and they were conscious of it. Timid, with the timidity of their second childhood, constrained and embarrassed by each other's presence, they were, nevertheless, in a little Elysium of their own creating" (p.136).

Through the meticulous construction of the narrative, and in a brief subplot, Norris acts as the mosaicist who does select and combine the details to send the message that there are different paths the determined character, despite all limitations, can choose from. In the naturalistic world, alas, characters are almost always doomed to failure because of circumstances that are out of their control, yet, they belong to a natural world "any kind of boundary which defines people" (Guignard and Murphy, 2020, p.34).

In Dreiser's Sister Carrie, the relationship between Carrie and Hurstwood also turns out to be a disastrous one. Like the case with McTeague and Trina, Carrie and Hurstwood desperately fall in love and eventually travel together after Hurstwood abandons his family and commits a crime in order to do so. As Carrie starts to gain success, her interest in Hurstwood lessens, ironically, just as he becomes more dependent on her. Hurstwood's end is grotesque: he loses several jobs, and becomes a beggar: "He was beginning to find, in his wretched clothing and meager state of body, that people took him for a chronic type of bum and beggar. Police hustled him along, restaurant and lodging-house keepers turned him out promptly the moment he had his due; pedestrians waved him off" (p.454). Hurstwood eventually commits suicide, thinking to himself "what's the use?" of his life after his past, his present, and his future have all been destroyed (p.462).

However, like Norris, Dreiser offers an alternative image and presents it in the serenity and peace of a couple to which Carrie is introduced via "a distinct ideological point of view about American culture even while implying that his perspective remains objective" (Totten, 2026, p.82). Carrie, "who embodies the capabilities and attitudes that perfectly fit into the new social and economic constellation emerging around 1900" (Reichardt, 2017, p.89) associates with and befriends her neighbor, Mrs. Vance. Carrie is well aware of the contrasts between herself and Mrs. Vance as their relationship develops. First of all, Mrs. Vance is legally married to her husband, unlike Carrie, who is Hurstwood's mistress. Second, Mrs. Vance and her husband are wealthy. Third, Mrs. Vance and her husband enjoy and entertain themselves with the abundance of money they possess. Mrs. Vance plays the piano and can afford to dress elegantly and extravagantly, a factor that particularly disturbs Carrie to a great extent. When, for example, Carrie sees Mrs. Vance elegantly wearing a dark blue dress, "this woman pained her by contrast." Moreover, Mrs. Vance "seemed to have so many dainty little things which Carrie had not. There were trinkets of gold, an elegant green leather purse set with her initials, a fancy handkerchief, exceedingly rich in design, and the like" (p.288). Carrie, who has never been able to rid herself of the strong grip of commodities, is envious of this woman and aspires to be like her. Mrs. Vance plays a significant role in making Carrie contemplate breaking free from Hurstwood and the poverty-stricken lifestyle she is living while with Hurstwood. Carrie

> could not, for the life of her, assume the attitude and smartness of Mrs. Vance, who, in her beauty, was all assurance. It cut her to the quick, and she resolved that she would not come here [Broadway] again until she looked better. At the same time she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy! (p.289)

Instead of aspiring to have the stability of the Vance family and because of the wide social gap between Mrs. Vance and Carrie, Carrie chooses to leave, and the more time Carrie spends with Mrs. Vance, the more determined she becomes to abandon Hurstwood and find a better opportunity for herself. Moreover, having been previously exposed to her sister's lifestyle in Chicago, Mrs. Vance's lifestyle in New York, and Lola's lifestyle on Broadway, Carrie is motivated to break free and leave Hurtswood. She does not want to stay with this man and end up like her sister. Carrie now sees that the state to which Hurstwood has declined is similar to the state of Mr. Hanson, Minnie's husband. Hurstwood has grown accustomed to sitting by the radiator in their dreary flat, reading his newspaper, aloof from life, and dead in spirit. Pizer (2004) explains the scene where Carrie comes back home one night and thus finds Hurstwood:

> Carrie returns to her drab New York flat and finds Hurstwood sitting by the radiator reading his newspaper. The sight throws her into a mood of despair, a mood which has its origin—unknown to her and unexplained by Dreiser—in her subconscious recollection of the dour Hanson reading his newspaper each evening while waiting for his supper. If Hurstwood is Hanson, Carrie is becoming Minnie—a role which had repelled her from her earliest Chicago days. It is the emotional weight upon Carrie's subconscious of a series of such discrete "physical" moments in her relationship with Hurstwood in New York which compels her to leave him, though she consciously attributes her motive to a need for new clothes. (p.86)

Thus, instead of having a positive effect on Carrie, Mrs. Vance's acquaintance plays the exact opposite role. Like McTeague and Trina who do not take the positive role model of Old Grannis and Miss Baker, the Vance's lifestyle makes Carrie repulsed by her own situation with Hurstwood and gradually leads to her separation from him. However, in presenting the lifestyle of this couple, Dreiser is presenting a

lifestyle of a blissful marriage, characterized by peace, stability, as well as love.

Another character created by Dreiser is a minor character Carrie is introduced to, through the Vance's - Robert Ames. Ames is an intriguing character who appears in two extended scenes late in the novel. Carrie meets him for the first time when she escorts the Vance's to dinner in a fancy restaurant. As Carrie enjoys this extravagant atmosphere of high-class society, Ames on the contrary makes a point clear that this is a shallow lifestyle, remarking "do you know . . . I sometimes think it is a shame for people to spend so much money this way" (p.299). The second time Carrie meets again with Ames is at the end of the novel when Carrie is at the top of her career. However, Ames does not regard her success as such, but rather as a failure: "As a matter of fact, her little newspaper fame was nothing at all to him" (p.445). Ames exposes Carrie's follies and advises her "If I were you, . . . I'd change"(p.446).

Despite the brief appearance of Ames in both scenes, Ames in fact does have an aim. His aim is to remind Carrie that this success she is enjoying at this point in life is momentary and that she should look beyond this little fame she has acquired. Many critics have argued that Ames represents the voice of reason in the novel—the voice that can show these determined characters that they can create a small window of escape. For critics regarding this character, Ames is seen as the voice of reason. David E. Sloane (1992) observes, "[Ames'] impact on Carrie is intellectual, for he is the agent for the development of a new and enlarged circle of yearnings in her soul" (p.132). Lawrence Hussman (1983) asserts that Ames "appears to function as the author's spokesman in offering Carrie some perspective on her pursuits and in pointing the way to what he thinks may be her higher calling" (p.24), and Richard Lehan (1996) sees Ames as "the sincere advisor" who encourages Carrie to aim higher (p.65).

In the creation of the Vances in the novel, Dreiser, like Norris, is providing an example of a couple who can survive in the naturalistic world. Moreover, in the creation of Ames in the novel, Dreiser is sending Carrie a message that she can escalate to a higher style of living if she is to use her mind, not her body. Carrie, being exposed to these characters, however, fails to make any significant change—a typical result of living in a naturalistic world which appears through "the physical location of the story-teller during the narrated event" (Slovic, 1992, pp.143-144).

4. Conclusion

In essence, the brutality, ugliness, horrific, and heartless scenes that recur in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, McTeague, and Sister Carrie are abundant due to the nature of this literary movement. Therefore, as Surur and Dengela (2019) contend, "pessimism as a principle provokes the idea that humans in the real world are surrounded by multifarious misery and melancholy. So, naturalistic works often exposed those sordid subject matters like poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution, and filth environment" (p.1724). Nevertheless, as things deteriorate, the writers do not fail to remind the reader that there is hope and light despite all the ugliness that pervades. The subplot of Old Grannis and Miss Baker shows the blissful ending of a love relationship and sends a powerful message that despite the tension that exists in a naturalistic environment, some individuals can and do overcome. Unfortunately for both McTeague and Trina, forces are stronger than them. The happily married couple in Sister Carrie that Carrie associates with further provides a sharp contrast to the circumstances Carrie and Hurstwood are living in. The deterministic world, coupled with the wrong choices of Carrie and Hurstwood, can never allow them to enjoy the beauty of marriage the Vance's couple is endowed with. And unfortunately for both Sister Carrie and Hurstwood, they, too, are defeated.

Norris and Dreiser through these minor episodes within the novels, are sending a message— beauty, love, stability, and peace, can be found, even in the naturalistic world. Pizer (2004), in his article "Late Nineteenth Century American Naturalism," believes that the naturalistic novel should not read as superficial or reductive. The naturalistic novel:

> suggests that even the least significant human being can feel and strive powerfully. Naturalism reflects an affirmative ethical conception of life, for it asserts the value of life be endowing the lowest character with emotion and defeat and with moral ambiguity, no matter how poor or ignoble he may seem. The naturalistic novel derives much of its aesthetic effect from these contrasts. (p.83)

The contradictions Pizer (2004) asserts are the contradictions found in any of the naturalistic texts. In this tradition, despair and aspiration are intermingled—despair having the upper hand, and man admitting defeat is juxtaposed by man striving to create a better environment. Alas, because it is a naturalistic world, there is no happy ending. Despite the determinism and despair that define this tradition, a closer examination reveals subtle countercurrents: brief interludes of tenderness, empathy, and transcendence.

In his article, "Fiction is Selection," Norris (1964) draws a comparison between a story writer and a mosaicist and argues that both do not "invent nor imagine" but rather "select and combine" (p.51). With close scrutiny, this selection of details can be found in several other typical naturalistic texts. For instance, The Call of the Wild by Jack London brings to light the beauty of the Alaskan landscape, and it also shows the strong bond that can formed between humans and animals in this environment. Moreover, John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath further makes use of the beauty of the landscape by emphasizing the characters' determination and struggle to find a way to deal with this natural beauty. And Willa Cather's My Antonia has its own special way of beautifying the Nebraska prairie, which leaves the reader with a sense of tranquility not found in any other naturalistic text. This study has shed light on the fact that American naturalism does not prioritize traditional forms of beauty, like the Romantics for example, elements of beauty can be found within the texts, nevertheless. This paper has focused on certain minor episodes that do reflect the ability of writers like Norris and Dreiser to skillfully craft, within the hideous events of the narrative, the authenticity of human experience—the ugly, as well as the graceful. The light between the gloom, though faint, is what ultimately endows these grim narratives with enduring significance.

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Ghada Sasa was responsible for the abstract, keywords, and introduction. Abdalhadi Nimer Abdalqader Abu Jweid was responsible for data collection and literature review. Hala Abu Taleb was responsible for analysis. Mohammad A. Rawashdeh was responsible for discussion and proofreading. Noor Al Alawneh was responsible for the conclusion. Muhammad Khaled Al Alawneh was responsible for the citation and references. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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