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*McTeague: An example of American Naturalism*

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## ABSTRACT

American Literary Naturalism took place at the end of the nineteenth century. It was a rebellion against Realism, which no longer satisfied the necessities of the readers. The evolution from American Realism to American Naturalism was influenced by the philosophy of Determinism, Zola and Darwinism. The most recognised American naturalistic author was Frank Norris. His work *McTeague* is a clear exponent of naturalistic trend, where Determinism, Materialism and Darwinism act as forces which control the characters' lives. Characters are compared to animals and they have no free will, violence is latent through the work and sexuality is exposed without censure. The main aim of this essay is to study in detail the novel *McTeague* and exposes the main characteristics by which it is considered the exponent of American literary Naturalism

Keywords: Naturalism, *McTeague*, American literature, Frank Norris, Darwinism, Realism.

El Naturalismo literario llegó a Estados Unidos a finales del siglo diecinueve. Comenzó como una respuesta hacía el Realismo, que ya no satisfacía las peticiones de los lectores. Las influencias de la filosofía determinista, Zola y el Darwinismo dieron lugar a la evolución del Realismo norteamericano hacía el Naturalismo. El autor norteamericano naturalista mas reconocido fue Frank Norris. Su obra *McTeague* es un claro exponente de la tendencia naturalista, donde Determinismo, Materialismo y Darwinism son las fuerzas que controlan a los personajes. Se comparan los personajes con animales sin voluntad propia, la violencia es latente a lo largo de la obra y la vida sexual se presenta sin censura. El objetivo principal de este trabajo es estudiar en detalle la novela *McTeague* y así exponer las características por las que se considera la novela clave del Naturalismo norteamericano.

Palabras clave: Naturalismo, *McTeague*, Literatura Norteamericana, Frank Norris, Darwinismo, Realismo.



## CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	6
2. State of question .....	7
3. Methodology.....	9
4. Realism: Antecedent of Naturalism.....	9
5. Determining factors for the evolution into Naturalism.....	10
6. What is Naturalism?.....	15
6.1.European Naturalism .....	17
6.2American Naturalism.....	18
7. Frank Norris as naturalistic writer .....	25
8. <i>McTeague: A Story of San Francisco</i> by Frank Norris, an example of naturalistic writing. ....	27
8.1 Urban life.....	27
8.2 Determinism.....	27
8.3 Darwinism.....	30
8.4 Sexuality.....	32
8.5 Violence.....	33
8.6 Decadence and Pessimism.....	34
8.7 Literary techniques.....	35
9. Conclusion.....	37
10. Works cited.....	39

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Who cares for fine style! Tell your yarn and let the style go to the devil. We don't want literature, we want life.”(Norris)*

Throughout the centuries, literature was seen as an entertainment for readers. Until nineteenth century, literature exposed the ideal lives of readers and it was used as a manual for good behavior and manners. Moreover, literature was only available for high social classes. However, during the nineteenth century, literature started to be available for middle classes. Thus, readers did not want to read about the life of those who were beyond them. Writers started to leave behind Romanticism, which celebrated imagination, subjectivity and metaphysical, in favor of Realism. They focused on the everyday life of middle classes and plausible events. Literature, as a reflection of reality, evolves at the same time as society. In the mid 90s, the United States experiences huge changes. The rise of industrialization leads into a change in social classes and cities became the principal place for living. As a consequence of this change, a variety of Realism arose, Naturalism. Writers would focus on the life of the lowest social classes as a vindication for the situation of poverty and discrimination, which took place in the cities of the United States. One of these writers would be Frank Norris who would be classified as one of the most important writers in nineteenth century American literature.

Frank Norris (1870-1902) was an American journalist and writer who became popular at the end of nineteenth century. He was considered the architect of American Naturalism and he would be an inspiration for most of naturalistic writers. His job as journalist entailed the necessity of describing real life of citizens in big cities who worked for low incomes, and lived under terrible conditions in the suburbs. Another influence that guided him to write his novels was the influence of Zola.

All the influences would be reflected in his novels about poverty, decadence ,materialism and corruption in the Progressive Era. He depicts the most sordid events of reality in detail in order to expose the situation of American cities at that time. *McTeague:A*

*Story of San Francisco* is considered his most important work by most critics. This novel is the presentation of the decadence of a marriage, McTeague and Trina, guided by money, greed and animal instincts. After that, he expected to write *The Epic of the Wheat* formed by three novels which would describe the situation of the deal of wheat in the United States. This trilogy is unfinished because of his early death in 1902.

The main aim of this work is to present and analyze closely the work *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, as an example of American Naturalism. I decided to write this paper as an extension of the work *Analysis of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* wrote during the course 2014/2015 for the subject Literatura en Lengua Inglesa IV. This work wake up on me an important interest in American Naturalism and how these writers presented human as animals for the first time, and exposed the violence in which they lived without censure.

## **2. STATE OF QUESTION**

American Naturalism is a literary period that did not have the importance of American Realism. However, it is widely studied among the scholars of the epoch and contemporary scholars, either on its own or in relation with Literary Realism. Naturalism is presents in the works that deal with American literature in general such as, *Historia Critica de La Novela Norteamericana* by Gurpegui Palacios, José Antonio. Moreover, Naturalism also appears together with Realism in *American Realism* by Smith, Christopher. Different passages of naturalistic works are gathered in anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of American Literature . C , 1865-1914* by Baym, Nina, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, and Arnold Krupat.

One of the most outstanding writers, is Donald Pizer who defined Naturalism in his book *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*. He has also analyzed McTeague in a critical edition of *McTeague* published by Norton, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco : An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*.

*McTeague* by Frank Norris was a success since its publication. Scholars and academics has studied *McTeague* focusing on one or more of its characteristics as naturalistic novel, *McTeague| A study in determinism, romanticism, and fascism* by Leonard Anthony Lardy. As an example of literary Naturalism, *McTeague* is a work full of tensions – animal/human, nature/city...- which relations influence in the development of the plot, this topic is reflected in "*McTeague* at Ninety: The Novel and Its Tensions by Cook, Don L. Other important study about *McTeague* is the one based on the scenarios of the novel, their symbolical meaning and how they are closely related with the development of the novel, reflected in the article "Configurations of Events in the Narrative Structure of 'McTeague by Cullick, Jonathan S.

Furthermore, the study of characters has also constituted an important topic for scholars, *Comfort and control: Trina and Frank Norris's McTeague* by Kelly Anne Grim. or; focusing on the life and plot of two characters, Old Grannis and Miss Baker, leaving behind the main character in the article "Frank Norris's 'Drama in a Broken Teacup': The Old Grannis-Miss Baker Plot in *McTeague*." by Campbell, Donna M.

Sexuality is an important theme in *McTeague*, thus, it has been studied by many scholars from different points of view. A controversial topic is the one analyzed by Cruz, Denise in "Reconsidering *McTeague*'s 'Mark' and 'Mac': Intersections of U.S. Naturalism, Imperial Masculinities, and Desire between Men.", where she focuses on homosexuality in the work of *McTeague*. Moreover, sexuality is also studied together with domestic violence in the essay by Werner, Mary Beth. "'A Vast and Terrible Drama': Frank Norris's Domestic Violence Fantasy in *McTeague*".

To conclude this section, it is necessary to mention that *McTeague* is a work that has been widely studied through the years among scholars. The works mentioned previously is just a sample of some of the studies. The mentioned works have helped me to write this essay and to study in detail American Literary Naturalism and the work of *McTeague* as an example of this literary trend.



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

First, I would investigate about American Literary Naturalism, its influences, evolution and characteristics by analyzing several American Encyclopedias. After that, I would conduct a close reading of the work *McTeague* and perform an analysis of its characteristics as a naturalistic work in detail, illustrating the characteristic with quotes from the book. Thus, I would obtain the main characteristics that make this work an example of American Literary Naturalism.

### **4. REALISM: ANTECEDENT OF NATURALISM**

The consequences and struggles of the American Civil War ended with Romanticism. Writers no longer communicate the changes of the country with the ideals of the Romantic Period. The literature produced between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the beginning of World War I in 1914 is called Realism. Literature was transformed to meet the new necessities and cultural needs of American society.

As defined in *A Historical Overview of American Realism*, Realism can be associated with the concept of mimesis. Mimesis means the imitation of people, places and events that take place in contemporary life. Realism, as an evolution of Romanticism, focuses on verisimilitude and plausible events and it avoids the sensational and dramatic characteristic of Romanticism. Realists felt that they had the obligation of presenting real life in its complexity and ambiguity. Events narrated in realist novels are plausible and they are introduced closely and in detail. The story is presented in an objective way with no intrusion or comment from the author. The narrator is omniscient; he knows the feelings and thoughts of the characters. He also adds comments or modifies the situation to change the readers' opinion.

Regarding characters, realistic writers focus more on characters than plots, they realize that humans are complex with unclear motives and contradictions. In order to show

the complexity of characters, narrators present them in relation with their own past. Moreover, this complexity is also expounded in the relationship and conflicts between them.

There are no Romantic heroes. Heroes in Realism are ordinary people of middle class with their mistakes. They are what they are and not what they should be. However, in comparison with Naturalism, the characters of Realism decide their own destiny; they are in charge of their decisions and actions. Realistic writers explore the idea of how the individual can live without the influence of the environment.

In realistic novels, the use of a comic or satiric tone and vernacular languages to criticize society is common. The use of vernacular languages is important in prose, because they are used as a way to render reality and a distinction between the different social classes presented in the novel. Furthermore, readers can no longer see the symbolism used in Romanticism. Symbolism is avoided because it does not represent reality and it complicates the reading.

*"Well, you see, it 'uz dis way. Ole missus—dat's Miss Watson—she pecks on me all de time, en treats me pooty rough, but she awluz said she wouldn' sell me down to Orleans. But I noticed dey wuz a nigger trader roun' de place considable lately, en I begin to git oneasy. Well, one night I creeps to de do' pooty late, en de do' warn't quite shet, en I hear old missus tell de widder she gwyne to sell me down to Orleans, but she didn' want to, but she could git eight hund'd dollars for me, en it 'uz sich a big stack o' money she couldn' resis'. De widder she try to git her to say she wouldn' do it, but I never waited to hear de res'. I lit out mighty quick, I tell you."* (Twain, 1884;96)

The previous quote from *Huckleberry Finn* is a good example of Realism. The use of vernacular language and the setting of the work are determinant for the classification of this work as Realism. However, it can also be seen how the character decides his destiny and makes his decisions. It can be concluded that Realism is a literary period which its main purpose is to present reality in detail and characters in their complexity.

## **5. DETERMINING FACTORS FOR THE EVOLUTION INTO NATURALISM**

The American Civil War (1861-1865) had catastrophic consequences for American society and ideologies. Communities were detached, families were destroyed and almost 62000 lives were lost. The war ended with the victory of the North over the South and the abolition of slavery. The victory imposed the North's economic model of industrialization over the South, therefore, the period known as Reconstruction Era started. It was an attempt into force the social, economic and political model of the North over the South. The society experienced a change which would be shown in its literature.

With the end of the Civil War and the industrialization of the northern states, a period of expansion came. It was an age of inventions, discoveries and high productivity. An important consequence of the industrialization of the north was the growth of the wealthy social ranks with corrupt business practices. This was the beginning of the Gilded Age, which was named after the homonymous novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. 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 or ran small business for low wages and lived in ghettos in the cities. The new society was shown in novels, such as *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. The mentioned novel exposes Silas' life, who became rich when he discovered an essential mineral for the composition of painting. He became rich by opportunism, chance and greed.

Before the war, America was an agricultural country where most people lived in the countryside. With the industrialization this vision of American changed, cities became industrialized and they experienced a rapid growth of population. Cities transformed into metropolitans based on industry. American citizens emigrated from rural areas, which were in decline due to industrialization, to cities. This exodus from rural areas to the cities had terrible consequences: crime, discrimination, segmentation of the cities, and the creation of ghettos. Naturalists focused on the low social status and they disclosed the worst side of the

city. They revealed the beast inside the human and these ghettos became the jungle in which the rule of Darwin "*The survival of the fittest*" would be applied.

Another important change in American society was the rise of immigration from Europe to America. The American Dream, the image of immigrants living in America looking for new opportunities across the country, was a myth. Most immigrants started their new life in American cities, working in unskilled jobs with low wages. They formed their own ghettos where people from the same country lived together. They were not integrated in American society. American cities were divided in different suburbs due to race, ethnicity or its social status.

During the nineteenth century, a high number of scientific advances took place. The most influential for literary Naturalism was the biological model proposed by Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution. The explanation of evolution and natural selection constituted a big step on the knowledge about living world and the ideas of evolution proposed before. His book *On the Origin of Species* published in 1859, is considered a pioneer work on scientific literature and a basis for the theory of evolutionary biology. In the book, he states that every living creature has a common background, and each specie has adapted to the environment, struggled for survival and evolved by natural selection.

*"Owing to this struggle, variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, would tend to the preservation of such individuals, and would generally be inherited by the offspring."* (Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* 1859)

This is what Darwin called Natural Selection and which derived into Darwinism. Darwinism is a theory of evolution, initiated by Charles Darwin, which defends that all species have developed through a natural selection process. They inherit small variations in their characteristics that increase their ability for survive, reproduce and adapt to the environment. That is "*The survival of the fittest*", quote stated by Herbert Spencer after

reading *On the Origin of Species*. Even if this quote is not Darwin's many writers and thinkers would use them as a key for the view of society in terms of Darwinian philosophy.

However, Darwin's theory involves two opposites. Organisms and species that have adapted to the environment, and developed new skills for survival mate with each other, and therefore, their offspring would inherit the new acquired characteristics. On the other hand, the organisms that have not developed new skills would mate between themselves and generate their own offspring, they would not have the ability to survive and this would lead to extinction. Organisms and species are determined by heredity, if their ancestors have not developed a specific skill needed for survival, the offspring would not have it and consequently, they would not adapt to the environment. Natural Selection presents the ideas of evolution and degeneration. Darwin's theories would be an inspiration to Naturalistic writers who see the society as a jungle in which everyone should fight for survival, but they would focus more on the degeneration of individuals than in the evolution.

Even though Darwin did not address human evolution in his main work *On the Origin of Species*, the ideas presented in this work would be transformed and adapted into society by Herbert Spencer in Great Britain and after that, by William Graham Sumner in the United States. Social Darwinism is the theory that considers people as subjects of the laws that Darwin proposed. People are determined by their heredity, and the social condition in which they were born. Social Darwinists defend that society is divided into "the strong" and "the weak", while "the strong" adapts to the environment and sees its power and its wealth increase, "the weak" sees its wealth and its power decrease. It is called "the survival of the fittest".

Naturalism was also influenced by philosophy. The theory that influenced most Naturalism was Determinism. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Determinism as the "theory which proposes that all events, including moral choices, are determined by previous causes". This type of philosophy encompasses different types of Determinism, the most

influential for Naturalism are Biological Determinism and Social Determinism. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Biological Determinism is the idea that most of human characteristics, either physical or mental, are determined by hereditary factors inherited from parent to offspring. This philosophy would be depicted in literature. Naturalistic works would show characters with the same characteristics of their parents, even if they tried to improve and change them, it would not be possible. The other branch of the philosophy of Determinism that is important for Naturalism is Social Determinism. It is a theory which considers that social interactions and social environment determine the behavior of the individual. That is, individuals who belong to a low social status are not able to change their status even if they exert themselves. Despite the fact that, the philosophy of determinism was first focused on animals, it spread through human beings. Determinism is very important in Naturalism, because it would be one of the main characteristics of the development of characters in the works.

Literary Naturalism arose as a response to Literary Realism. Realistic writers represent life objectively, but they only focus on the life of middle classes. However, both movements have several characteristics in common such as the belief that art is mimetic and the objective representation of reality. Naturalistic writers believed that the focus on middle classes was not a properly representation of the society of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Because of that, Naturalism chooses shocking subjects and it focus on lower social class. Therefore, Naturalism is more concrete and limited than Realism. Moreover, Naturalism added some new elements to Realism such as the influence of science and philosophy in the works. Naturalist writers are highly influenced by Darwin's theories and the philosophy of determinism. Even though, Naturalism arose as a response to Realism, they are considered two different movements with their own characteristics.

## **6. WHAT IS NATURALISM?**

The term Naturalism is a complex term that has changed through history. The meaning of Naturalism differs depending on the focus area and the time; we cannot define literary Naturalism without looking at the evolution of the term through history.

First of all, it must be distinguished between its two associated words, naturalistic and naturalist. On one hand, as stated in Merriam-Webster Dictionary ‘naturalistic’ is an adjective that describes something which looks like it appears in nature. Besides, this adjective is also used in naturalistic art or literature to show people or things as they really are. On the other hand, Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that naturalist is “a person who studies plants and animals as they live in nature”. Comparing these words, it can be stated that the term “naturalistic” is specific for literature and art while “naturalist” can be used for any subject – a naturalist can be a scientific or a writer whose study of men in nature is used in literature.

Incipiently, Naturalism appeared in ancient philosophy, and it was used to express Materialism, Epicureanism or Secularism. This meaning was established as the primary meaning of the word. However, in the beginning of the 18th century the meaning changed with the thinker Holbach and his philosophical system. This philosophical system studied men living alone in a world that determined his life. This is an idea that would be projected in the definition of literary Naturalism in the nineteenth century. Another important definition of Naturalism was made by Diderot; he called Naturalists those who, instead of believing in God, believed in material substances. (Furst, Lilian R. *Naturalism*)

Regarding art, Naturalism arose in art parallel with Literary Naturalism. In naturalistic paintings, the artist represents objects of everyday life – realist objects- in natural surroundings. However, the most influential definition of the term was imposed by Darwin who is considered the first naturalist – people who studied plants and animals living in nature. It was from art and from Darwin that the term Naturalism was imported to literature by Zola in his work *Thérèse Raquin* (1867).

Naturalism as a literary term is used to describe the type of literature that uses scientific methods and objectivity to its study of human beings that took place from the 1890s to 1920s. Naturalism implies a philosophical position, naturalist writers consider the human being as a beast, so men can be studied through his relation with his surroundings. In order to perform the study, naturalistic writers use scientific methods to focus on the forces that govern human beings, who are determined by instincts and passions, as well as heredity and environment. George Becker described naturalism as 'pessimistic materialistic determinism'.

Donald Pizer in his book *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*, states that a naturalistic novel contains two opposites which constitute the theme and form of the novel. The first contradiction is between the subject of the novel and the emerged concept of man. Naturalistic writers changed from middle classes to lower classes in their novels, and the world that they create is anti heroic and common. However, naturalistic writers show the characters' development in this world as heroic and adventures, involving sex, violence and passion. The contradiction is that, even showing a hero in an anti heroic world, it appears the extraordinary of human being. The second tension involves the theme of the novel. Naturalistic writers describe the characters as determined by environment, heredity or chance. However, the characters also shown humanistic value and they try to escape from their fate. The contradiction is that the naturalistic novel represents the new truth, but also the wish of finding meaning in experience and of escaping for this truth.

For Charles Walcutt, Naturalism is a complex movement that involves two opposites. Naturalism is pessimistic, but it is also optimistic. On the one hand, Naturalists saw life as an endless fight for survival. Human beings are determined by their biological background but also by their surroundings which make them come back to primitivism. On the other hand, naturalistic writers were inspired by Darwin's theory, the theory of evolution in which human beings evolve towards a state of perfection by adapting to the environment. To conclude, Naturalism presents two sides of the same coin, optimism in



those characters who adapt to the environment, but also pessimism in the characters influenced by determinism do not adapt and end in death.

## **6.1. European Naturalism**

France was the fountainhead of Naturalism, as it was of Realism. French Naturalists considered themselves as a second generation of Realists; this image would be projected by many critics. Naturalistic French writers claimed Realists (Balzac or Flaubert) as their models and inspiration.

Darwin and determinism were two of the shaping factors of Naturalism. However, before Darwin's ideas and Determinism were reflected in society; and therefore, in literary Naturalism, they had to be transformed by Zola. Émile Zola (1840-1902) is considered a major figure in the development of Naturalism. Zola applied Darwin's ideas to literature, the writer had to act like a scientist, observe society and reject supernatural events and Imaginism. For Zola, society can be explained using the ideas that Darwin used for individuals. Modern man had been removed from natural environment, he had no contact with his own instinct and he had come back to rudimentary statement. Zola focused on the real portrait of life at the end of the nineteenth century. Society was changing and the struggle for life in the society was necessary to survive. *"I am little concerned with beauty or perfection. I don't care for the great centuries. All I care about is life, struggle, intensity."* (Émile Zola).

Most of Zola's novels are part of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. It is a series of novels which took place during the second wave of Industrial Revolution, they focus on a family formed by two branches, the legitimates and the illegitimates. These novels reflect the environmental influences in the characters; Zola focuses on violence, alcohol and prostitution that became more important during the Industrial Revolution.

Naturalism spread through the rest of Europe during the last decades of nineteenth century. It was not a single and unified movement because of three facts. Firstly, there were different groups formed in each country, and each writer has his own characteristics. It is

hard to find a figure who has developed all the characteristics of Naturalism. Second, Naturalism is not limited to a specific time, while in France it was between the 1870s and 1890s, the rest of Europe was a decade later and in American Naturalism was presented between the two World Wars. Naturalism is a movement that took place at different time in different countries. The third fact is that there is no unity between the different countries. Each movement focuses on a different aim and they adapted the characteristics of naturalism to the environment and society of the country. Nevertheless, they share some common factors:

- The belief in determinism. Characters are determined by heredity or by the environment. They have no free will and they are not responsible for their own decisions.
- The objective representation of reality. The narrator is just an observer; he does not intervene in the work.
- Reproduction of the most despicable events of reality.
- The use of scientific method to reproduce reality.

Europe experienced some changes during the nineteenth century. Literature was no longer used to represent the reality of that time. People's ideals changed and they did not believe anymore in Romantic ideals. The ideals influenced Zola, who started a change in French literature; he wanted to represent reality objectively, and he showed characters who had no free will and they were determined by heredity or environment. Naturalism would reach the United States at the end of the nineteenth century when American was experiencing huge changes.

## **6.2. American Naturalism**

By the end of the nineteenth century, American Realism gave way to Naturalism. The birth of Naturalism in America was influenced by French Naturalism and, specifically, by Zola. Naturalism in America was introduced by Stephen Crane and his sordid novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). After them several American writers – Ambrose

Bierce or Theodor Dreiser among others - would follow this type of narrative. However, the most well-known writer would be Frank Norris because of his bestseller *McTeague*(1899). American naturalistic writers considered that Realism did not represent the reality, they moved from the entrance hall of middle class' houses to the suburbs of big cities and factories. The characters were no longer wealthy and with good manners, they are characters in a constant fight for survival in a hostile environment. The commitment of naturalistic writers for the 'reality' was much more intense than the commitment of realistic writers.

### 6.2.1 Characteristics

Naturalism found the suitable way to express itself in the novel. It follows the heritage of Realism and its greatest writers such as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells or Henry James.

The naturalistic novel attempts to present an objective reality, as if the writer is a scientist that studies human beings. The writer is outside the work narrating just what he sees and recording what happens. He uses a detached method of narration. However, this objectivity is not real is just an illusion. The writers just want to create this effect because it is a way to make the reader believe that he is reading something plausible.

*“Suddenly he saw before him a strange moving object which he took to be some large animal—a dog, a pig—he could not name it; perhaps it was a bear. He had seen pictures of bears, but knew of nothing to their discredit and had vaguely wished to meet one”*. (Bierce, 1889;1)

In this quote from the short story “Chickamauga” by Ambrose Bierce, the narrator describes the reality objectively. There is no intervention and it presents the reality as the protagonist sees it even if he is not sure of what he sees.

Darwin's theory of evolution would be reflected in naturalistic novels where individuals try to adapt to hostile environment, and some of them would fail in this purpose. One of the clearest examples is the novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen

Crane. In the novel, Maggie determined by her socioeconomic surrounding and by heredity cannot adapt to the environment in which she lives. Even though, she tries to adapt by becoming a prostitute, she dies at the end. On the contrary, her brother Jimmy adapts to the environment and becomes stronger by using violence and sex.

*“When Jimmie was a little boy, he began to be arrested. Before he reached a great age, he had a fair record. He developed too great a tendency to climb down from his truck and fight with other drivers. He had been in quite a number of miscellaneous fights, and in some general barroom rows that had become known to the police.”*(Crane, 1893; 16)

Darwinism is the main inspiration of naturalistic writers. *“The survival of the fittest”* would be one of the main topics. It can be seen how some individuals adapt to the society and others died in this effort.

The philosophy of determinism is predominant in all naturalistic novels as a main theme. A naturalistic writer usually makes the reader believe that the characters are previously determined by social and biological factors. Social determinism and Biological determinism – influenced by Darwinism- would be main topics on naturalistic writings.

*“The dog was disappointed and yearned back toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold, of real cold, of cold one hundred and seven degrees below freezing-point. But the dog knew; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge. And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came.”* (London, 1908 ;269)

In the quote above from *“To Build a Fire”* by Jack London, the dog and the man are determined by heredity. While the man does not know how to deal with cold because he has not inherited it from his relatives, the dog has inherited the knowledge of how to deal with it. Both are determined, one in a positive way- the dog -; and the man in a negative way because he is not capable of survive in a cold surrounding.

As a consequence of industrialization, Materialism rose up. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary it can be defined as a way of thinking that give more importance to material possessions than to spiritual or intellectual attributes. In Naturalism, it can be seen how material things, and specifically money, drive the life of the characters.

*“And there before him, mile after mile, illimitable, covering the earth from horizon to horizon, lay the Wheat. The growth, now many days old, was already high from the ground. There it lay, a vast, silent ocean, shimmering a pallid green under the moon and under the stars; a mighty force, the strength of nations, the life of the world. There in the night, under the dome of the sky, it was growing steadily. To Presley's mind, the scene in the room he had just left dwindled to paltry insignificance before this sight.”* (Norris, 1901:56).

George Beckett described Naturalism as “pessimistic materialistic determinism”. Pessimism is present in most of naturalistic novels, because characters are head forward a worse situation than the one in which they started. Inspired by Darwin’s theory, some characters do not adapt to the environment in which they live and they die in the effort. Another type of characters, who act guided by their instincts, passions and looking for a better life, end in failure. They cannot escape from their predicted destiny because they are determined by social circumstances or heredity.

Owing to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Nihilism is “a viewpoint that considers traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless”. The only thing that matters in a naturalistic world is the forces of nature, life and death. They are the ones that would determine the life of human beings, without these forces the lives of human beings are senseless.

*“Men were nothings, mere animalculae, mere ephemerides that fluttered and fell and were forgotten between dawn and dusk. Vanamee had said there was no death. But for one second Presley could go one step further. Men were naught, death was naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed—FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generation, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop.”*(Norris, 1901; 1084)

This quote illustrates the definition of Nihilism and its application in Naturalism. The narrator declares that the only thing that exists is force and men are nothing. Force is what makes the land grow and what brought men into the world.

The detailed description of reality characterized naturalistic writings. Writers take to the extreme a situation by describing the most brutal events in detail. It is used in order to make a clear representation of reality showing the worst part of life that the realists have omitted.

*“He now approached one of these crawling figures from behind and with an agile movement mounted it astride. The man sank upon his breast, recovered, flung the small boy fiercely to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done, then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone. The unnatural prominence of nose, the absence of chin, the fierce eyes, gave this man the appearance of a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast by the blood of its quarry.”* (Bierce, 1889; 2)

The previous extract from the short story “Chickamauga” by Ambrose Bierce, is a clear representation of detailed description of the most shocking events. This scene is described through the eyes of a kid and the narrator does not take part in this description. It is a gore description of a man who has several parts of his body left. The narrator described every single detailed included blood, flesh and splinters.

Naturalism focuses more on characters than plot. In naturalistic novel readers know about the life of the character and how it progresses under the forces of social or biological determinism but there is no clear plot. The characters presented in naturalistic novels belong to lower classes and they have almost no education. Naturalistic writers focused on these types of characters in order to portray the real everyday life of that time, and to distinguish themselves from Realists who represented the life of middle classes.

*“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. Yeh 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. Go teh hell an’ see how yeh likes it.”* (Crane, 1893; 32)

In the previous extract from *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the low social status of the characters is presented by the use of dialects. Characters do not use Standard English because they lack of education. Furthermore, the dialects are used as an attempt to represent objectively the reality of that time.

The “brute within”, each individual is composed of strong emotions, passions, lust and greed. These passions fight to leave the body of the individual and become present in reality. Apart from the fight of the individual against the forces of heredity and environment, the individual has to fight against himself and his animal internal forces. The “brute within each” is closely related with Darwin’s theory and the fact that humans are animals.

*“The glare of a panther came into Pete's eyes. "Dat's what I said! Unnerstan'?" He came through a passage at the end of the bar and swelled down upon the two men. They stepped promptly forward and crowded close to him”:(Crane, 1893; 38)*

In the previous quote from *Maggie A Girl of the Streets*, Cranes uses a metaphor of animals. Pete is compared with a panther and it looks like he has the panther inside of him, Crane uses a panther to express ferocity. With the use of animal metaphor, naturalistic writers liken human beings to animals.

### **6.2.2 Naturalism’s techniques**

The idea of man with free will who controls his own fate is set aside in Naturalism. The objectivity and the scientific method of narration are imposed and the techniques used in Realism changed to adapt to new needs of narration. The most important techniques used are: Multiperspectivism, Impressionism and the use of animal metaphors.

Multiperspectivism is a technique based on using different types of perspectives through the novel to obtain a detached way of narration. Using different perspectives, the narrator presents the reality through different eyes. Multiperspectivism is a characteristic technique of Modernism, this indicates that Naturalism goes beyond Realism and get closer

to Modernism. Writers use this technique to obtain the detached way of narration, representing a scene with just one perspective is not reality. The same scene can be told from different perspectives obtained two different narrations, and two different points of view.

Even if Naturalism gives the impression of objective presentation of reality, in some works –such as *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane –, it can also be found the technique of Impressionism. As stated in Merriam-Webster Dictionary Literary Impressionism is the description of scenes, emotions or characters in detail to evoke subjective and sensory impressions rather than evoking an objective reality. Impressionism uses language to represent how things are seen, with colors, lights... to create an impression on the reader. Writers who use this technique describe reality as if they were describing a painting full of colors, but also they describe characters illusions and how they see the scene.

*“The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness at the noise of rumors. It cast its eyes upon the roads, which were growing from long troughs of liquid mud to proper thoroughfares. A river, amber-tinted in the shadow of its banks, purred at the army’s feet; and at night, when the stream had become of a sorrowful blackness, one could see across it the red, eyelike gleam of hostile campfires set in the low brows of distant hills”.*(Crane, 1895;1)

In the previous quote from *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) by Stephen Crane, it can be seen a subjective description, full of impressions and there is no objectivity. It describes the evolution of the day with colors and darkness. The description recalls an Impressionist painting full of colors and impressions without a clear image.

Naturalistic writers present the man as a beast, because of that metaphors of animals are recurrent. This type of metaphor is used to express the feelings of the character or his behavior and to equal man to animal. Human beings are just another animal guided by their instincts and necessities.



"Jimmie suddenly leaned forward with his head on one side. He snarled like a wild animal. "Well, what if we does? See?" said he. Dark blood flushed into Pete's face, and he shot a lurid glance at Jimmie".  
(Crane, 1893; 39)

These techniques can be seen in naturalistic narrative which is the most important for this literary movement. The techniques are used by writers to create objectivity and to present the man as an animal guided by her instinct and passions.

## **7. FRANK NORRIS AS NATURALISTIC WRITER**

Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr., known as Frank Norris, was a key literary figure of nineteenth century. When he died in 1902, he left a literary legacy much bigger than the one achieved by a writer of his age at that time. He is considered the pioneer in American Literary Naturalism, he found inspiration in real life by presenting it with tragedies and grieves. His works expose injustice, inequality and crime; therefore, his novels are novels with a purpose, to criticize society.

Norris born in Chicago in 1870 in a wealthy family. His father -a well-know jeweler- and his mother -a former actress-, sent him to the best schools and his mother introduced him in the world of art. In 1884, they moved to San Francisco where he enrolled in art classes. Still, Norris did not show interest in literature until he studied in France in 1887. In France, he found his inspiration in medieval literature; he began to see a model of literature based on observation and determined by forces.

He came back to the United States and enrolled in the University of Berkeley in San Francisco. In University, he engaged in lectures about evolution, heritage and ethical behavior, which would be reflected in the character of *McTeague*. By reading Zola, Norris discovered his vocation; expose the drama of everyday life with the technique of observation. Zola began to observe lower classes in San Francisco where sordid events – murders and violations- take place and this will inspire his most famous work *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*.

Berkeley disappointed Norris and he decided to leave university. He focused on writing a massive novel about San Francisco inspired by Zola's ideals. He enrolled in some course at the University of Harvard, such as French literature or English literature courses.

In 1895, Norris was sent to South Africa as correspondent where he has the intention to travel from Cape Town to Cairo as an observer. He suffered South African fever that obliged him to come back to the United States. He joined San Francisco Wave as an assistant editor in 1896. His job at The Wave made him grow as a writer; he learnt to observe the life of San Francisco and to capture it in his writings. His contributions to this magazine were mainly short stories. In this period, Norris had already realized that literature should expose the life and underlife, which involves certain materialism, and the research of facts and records.

Frank Norris moved to New York because he was hired by the New York Tribune, he was sent as correspondent in Spanish-American War in Cuba where he suffered from malaria. After that, he came back to San Francisco, where he married Jeannette Black. He continued writing and publishing his works and his unfinished trilogy of *The Epic of the Wheat*, which remains unfinished because he died before he published the last book *The Wolf: A Story of Empire*. Frank Norris died in October 1902, by appendicitis in his beloved city of San Francisco.

Frank Norris can be classified as naturalistic writer, due to the main topics and plots of his main novels such as *The Octopus: A story of California* (1901) or *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). Norris reflects in his novels the new concept of nature and humanity proposed by Darwin, and the later alienation of men from nature. Moreover, his novels are marked by determinism and characters have no free will. One example of this is his novel *Vandover and the Brute*, in which the protagonist – Vandover- is determined by fate in a materialistic universe and he is an illustration of post-Darwinian humanity. In contrast with Zola, who claimed for social positivism in *Le Roman Experimental*; in Norris' novels there is no positivism.

## **8. MCTEAGUE: A STORY OF SAN FRANCISCO BY FRANK NORRIS, AN EXAMPLE OF NATURALISTIC WRITING.**

The publication of McTeague in 1899 supposed a shock in the American society of that time. Prior to the publication, American literature was mainly formed by Romantic works in which an idealized world and characters can be seen. In Literary Realism, the characters were no longer idealized; they were middle-class people in an ordinary world. The rise of Naturalism changed this situation, in naturalistic works life is taken to the extreme, violence, sex and drugs are frequent themes in these works. Moreover, as explained before, Naturalism is characterized by Determinism and Darwinism. McTeague is a work that gathers almost all the characteristics of Naturalism, and it is considered one of the most important naturalistic works in American literature.

### **8.1 Urban life**

The story is situated in an urban environment, San Francisco. The city is described as a shocking place, full of lights and people with no concrete destination. The city can be considered as a character itself that determines the actions of the rest.

*“Evening began; and one by one a multitude of lights, from the demoniac glare of the druggists' windows to the dazzling blue whiteness of the electric globes, grew thick from street corner to street corner. Once more the street was crowded. Now there was no thought but for amusement. The cable cars were loaded with theatre-goers—men in high hats and young girls in furred opera cloaks. On the sidewalks were groups and couples—the plumbers' apprentices, the girls of the ribbon counters, the little families that lived on the second stories over their shops, the dressmakers, the small doctors, the harness-makers—all the various inhabitants of the street were abroad, strolling idly from shop window to shop window, taking the air after the day's work.”*(Norris, 1899; 6)

### **8.2 Determinism**

Before start talking about Determinism, it is important to know the first descriptions of the characters. McTeague works as a dentist in Dental Parlors. He is presented as a

routine man, his job is monotonous and he works mechanically. He is curt, he has no feeling and no nerves “...*keeping up an incessant noise and movement that would have been maddening to anyone but McTeague, who seemed to have no nerves at all.*”(Norris, 1899; 14). Regarding his physique, early in the novel he is described as a strong and big size man, with marked and squared jaw. The following description relates McTeague with a huge and powerful beast.

*“His arms moved in fierce, uncertain gestures, his face flushed, his enormous jaws shut together with a sharp click at every pause. It was like some colossal brute trapped in a delicate, invisible mesh, raging, exasperated, powerless to extricate himself.”*(Norris, 1899;43)

On the contrary, Trina, is described as a “*small and prettily made*” (Norris, 1899;6) woman, with harmonious features and round face.

In *McTeague*, the role of chance is the one that determines the characters. Chance is the decisive factor for the development of character's actions and plot. The relation between McTeague and Trina started by chance.

*“Chance had brought them face to face, and mysterious instincts as ungovernable as the winds of heaven were at work knitting their lives together. Neither of them had asked that this thing should be—that their destinies, their very souls, should be the sport of chance. If they could have known, they would have shunned the fearful risk. But they were allowed no voice in the matter. Why should it all be?”* (Norris 1899; 71)

Moreover, Trina wins the lottery and McTeague –after being fired- finds a job “*by the greatest good luck.*” (Norris, 1899; 227). Everything in the book is chance, the incidents that happen to them occurred because of chance and no one can be blamed about them. Chance is the force which is outside them and determines their lives.

Heredity determines them through the story, and it reaches the climax in the figure of McTeague. At the beginning of the book, his mother is presented as an energetic and fierce woman. His father was miner and he died because of alcohol “*Every other Sunday he became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol.*”(Norris, 1988;2).

McTeague will inherit the energy from his mother, which will manifest in his fight against Marcus and his loss of control in the murder of Trina. From his father, he has received the addiction to alcohol and at the end of the novel; he will work on the mine. When everything starts to go wrong between him and Trina, he started to drink and became an alcoholic.

*“McTeague hesitated. It was lamentably true that whiskey did not agree with him; he knew it well enough. However, by this time he felt very comfortably warm at the pit of his stomach. (...)Nor could Trina object to this. It wasn't costing a cent. He drank again with Heise.”*(Norris, 1899; 231)

In the case of Trina, she is determined by materialism and money. After she wins the lottery, the desire of hoarding money possessed her. She becomes greed and she puts money ahead of her husband. When he abandons her and takes her money, she begs him to take her money back and leave her if he wanted to.

*“All my money, all my little savings—and deserted me. He's gone, my money's gone, my dear money—my dear, dear gold pieces that I've worked so hard for Oh, give me back my money. Give me back my money, and I'll forgive you. You can leave me then if you want to.”* (Norris, 1899; 273)

Her obsession with money is transformed into a sexual obsession; she obtains pleasure by the contact with money.

*“One evening she had even 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”.*(Norris, 1899;283)

Materialism and Material Determinism are crucial for the development of the novel. Each of the characters is conditioned by it; they took their decisions according to money. This situation is taken to the extreme in *McTeague*, where not only Trina is obsessed with money, but also the characters of Maria Macapa and Zerkow. Both, Trina and Zerkow, are obsessed with Maria Macapa because they wanted to hear the story of the thousand gold dishes that belonged to Maria's family. Zerkow takes to the extreme this obsession and marries with her.

*“Then one evening, about a week after the child's burial, Zerkow had asked Maria to tell him the story of the famous service of gold plate for the hundredth time. Zerkow had come to believe in this story infallibly. He was immovably persuaded that at one time Maria or Maria's people had possessed these hundred golden dishes”.*(Norris, 1899;190)

Even, the death of his child is not enough for Zerkow to forget the story of gold plates. When he realized that she does not have the dishes, she is no longer useful for him. This lead into the death of Maria in Zerkow's hands.

Materialism is the force that guides some of the characters. They are not able to make decisions without thinking about money. They turn miserly and selfish people and guide themselves into decadence. As Naturalism is an evolution of Realism, it shares the function of exposing the real world and criticizing the contemporary society. In the case of this work, it portrays the society of that time corrupted and determined by money.

### **8.3 Darwinism**

Darwinism is another important force that plays a role in the life of the characters. Through the novel, the reader can appreciate the transformation of McTeague, from a gentleman of San Francisco, to a beast. Since the beginning of the book, McTeague is governed by the animal forces which are inside of him. He controls these forces at the beginning when he has not started his decadence:

*“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. (...)He was disturbed, still trembling, still vibrating with the throes of the crisis, but he was the master; the animal was downed, was cowed for this time, at least.* (Norris, 1988; 25)

Nonetheless, McTeague's animal instincts can no longer be controlled when they are related with sexual instincts. *“The male virile desire in him tardily awakened, aroused itself, strong and brutal. It was resistless, untrained, a thing not to be held in leash an instant”.*(Norris, 1899;21). McTeague's animality is also revealed in the fight against Marcus; both are presented as animals grunting and struggling for survival.

*“The party could hear them panting and grunting as they labored and struggled. Their boots tore up great clods of turf. Suddenly they came to the ground with a tremendous shock. But even as they were in the act of falling, Marcus, like a very eel, writhed in the dentist's clasp and fell upon his side. McTeague crashed down upon him like the collapse of a felled ox”.* (Norris, 1899;172).

In the scene of the murder of Trina, the beast inside Trina and the beast inside McTeague can be seen. While McTeague is full of hate and power; Trina's beast surface to fight for survival and to stop McTeague's intentions. However, at that time, the decadence of Trina and her miserable existence are latent, and this effort is inutile.

*“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”.* (Norris, 1899,283)

She fights against him for survival like an animal. However, this is useless. McTeague possessed by *"ape-like agility"* (Norris, 1899:284) and the strength to break down the door, send *"her staggering across the room"*(Norris, 1899:284). This scene shows the awakening of the beast inside him. After that, McTeague does not feel guilty, he just leaves the room and changes his clothes to avoid suspicions.

When he is running away from law- after the murder- , his animal instincts told him to escape to dessert and keep looking for a safe place. Like an animal, the *“strange sixth sense, that obscure brute instinct”* (Norris, 1899;323) drives him. After the fight with Marcus in the dessert, McTeague is left to die, he is not able to adapt to the new environment and his animal instincts did not help him to survive. He dies thirsty because he cannot find water.

*"All about him, vast interminable, stretched the measureless leagues of Death Valley, but, McTeague remained stupidly looking around him, now at the distant horizon, now at the ground, now at the half-dead canary chattering feebly in its little gilt prison."*(Norris, 1899;347)

McTeague is the figure in which the theory of Darwin at work can be seen, he changes through the story and becomes an animal at the end. Even if, his animal instincts work in the city; he ran away from law, he vanquished Trina till her death, and he defeated Marcus in both of their fights. These instincts abandoned him when he is alone in the dessert with no chance of survival. He has become a city animal, which can no longer survive in nature. He has adapted to the city through the years, and he has separated from nature.

### **8.4 Sexuality**

Sexuality is considered another big theme in Literary Naturalism. Sexuality in *McTeague* is presented as a dichotomy, passive/active. The marriage of Trina and McTeague is marked by this dichotomy. McTeague is the one that acquires the role of active sexuality by yielding Trina. His animal instincts arose also in sex, closely related with violence and brutality. McTeague started to be sexuality active when he starts to drink, and it involves hurting Trina.

*“It was curious to note the effect of the alcohol upon the dentist. It did not make him drunk, it made him vicious. So far from being stupefied, he became, after the fourth glass, active, alert, quick-witted, even talkative; a certain wickedness stirred in him then; he was intractable, mean; and when he had drunk a little more heavily than usual, he found a certain pleasure in annoying and exasperating Trina, even in abusing and hurting her.”*(Norris, 1899; 240)

The beast inside McTeague finds pleasure in cuffing his wife or crunching Trina's fingers between his teeth. Trina is the passive role in this sadomasochist relation. Trina usually visits Maria Macapa, who is also victim of brutality from her husband. They talk about the sexual violence of their husbands and they seem to find pleasure in this violence.

*“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. They critically compared each other's bruises, each one glad when she could exhibit the worst.”*(Norris, 1899;245)



This relation can be compared with a relation between animals; the male dominant yields female and female humble herself to his wishes. These facts show one more time, that both are animals that hide their own animal instincts.

## **8.5 Violence**

Violence is presented through the work. It is a key element for the relation between the characters. McTeague abuses Trina, Zerkow abuses Maria and there are continuous fights between Marcus and McTeague. The murder of Trina and Maria in the hands of their husbands is the culmination of this theme.

The connection between greed and violence is latent in the figure of Zerkow. He married Maria just for her gold dishes, which had not been found through the novel. This made Zerkow ill and leads into mistreatment of Maria to find those pieces.

*“At length his continued ill success began to exasperate him. One day he took his whip from his junk wagon and thrashed Maria with it, gasping the while, “Where is it, you beast? Where is it? Tell me where it is; I’ll make you speak.”(Norris, 1899;192)*

The inability to find the gold dishes carries Zerkow to murder Maria and abandons her death body in their house.

*“Trina found Maria sitting in front of the kitchen stove, her chin upon her breast. Trina went up to her. She was dead. And as Trina touched her shoulder, her head rolled sideways and showed a fearful gash in her throat under her ear. All the front of her dress was soaked through and through.” (Norris, 1899: 248)*

Violence in the marriage of Trina and McTeague is present in sex, as sadomasochism, and in the murder of Trina. Violence starts to be present with the decadence of McTeague and the inability of controlling his animal instincts. In the murder, McTeague is possessed by the beast inside him and he cannot control the impulse of killing her.

The relation of Marcus and McTeague is full of violence. In their first fight, they are presented as animals. The last fight between them took place because of greed and money and it ends with the murder of Marcus by McTeague. At this point, McTeague is not conscious of the murder; he does not know how he had killed him, because the beast has possessed him. The figure of McTeague is the representation of violence, beast inside and greed. His decadence starts because of greed; thus, the beast inside him cannot be controlled and runs into violence, which ends in murder.

### **8.6 Decadence and Pessimism**

The whole novel shows the decadence of Trina and McTeague; from the description of both of them as prestige people at the beginning of the novel, to their degradation through novel – *“Trina lost her pretty ways and her good looks. The combined effects of hard work, avarice, poor food, and her husband's brutalities told on her swiftly.”*(Norris, 1988;264) - and their death. The degradation of both protagonists entails the degradation of marriage:

*“McTeague, on his part, never asked himself now-a-days whether he loved Trina the wife as much as he had loved Trina the young girl. There had been a time when to kiss Trina, to take her in his arms, had thrilled him from head to heel with a happiness that was beyond words; even the smell of her wonderful odorous hair had sent a sensation of faintness all through him. That time was long past now.”* (Norris, 1899; 149)

They both wed because of the love that existed between them. However, with the decadence, the feelings changed and they no longer loved each other.

This decadence is devised by determinism, chance and materialism which have influence in them in such ways that they are not in control of their lives. These forces start to control their lives since the beginning, McTeague is determined by heredity, and after that, the trigger is chance when Trina won the lottery. Their lives are determined by money and materialism since this moment. She becomes miserly and gives more importance to money than to her marriage. When everything starts to go wrong in their relationship,

McTeague cannot control the animal inside him anymore, and this leads to violence and animal sex. Even if he is determined by instinct, the last scene of the novel shows a useless and weak McTeague who will not be able to survive in the desert. Pessimism is also present in the novel, when they start to fall there is no way back. They changed their personality to worse, and the relation between them ended in murder. Furthermore, at the end of the book both of the characters are death, their obsessions and instincts have driven them to their end.

### **8.7 Literary techniques**

*McTeague* can be classified as a naturalistic novel, apart from the main themes and topics, because of the literary techniques used. In the novel, Norris acts like scientist, he places the characters in a specific setting determined by different forces and he examines what happens without intercede. The narrator uses a detached way of narration; it is narrated by a detached observer. Nevertheless, a technique widely used in Naturalism that will be used in Modernism is Multiperspectivism. In the case of *McTeague*, this technique is used to see the same scene from different points of view.

*"He did looked pinched," she said half aloud. "Maybe he WAS hungry. I ought to have given him something. I wish I had, I WISH I had. Oh," she cried, suddenly, with a frightened gesture of both hands, "what have I come to be that I would see Mac—my husband—that I would see him starve rather than give him money? No, no. It's too dreadful. I WOULD give him some. I'll send it to him to-morrow. Where?—well, he'll come back." She leaned from the window and called as loudly as she dared, "Mac, oh, Mac." There was no answer. (...)When McTeague had told Trina he had been without food for nearly two days he was speaking the truth. (Norris, 1899; 286)*

In this case, the scene is presented from the points of view. While Trina is not sure about what McTeague has said, McTeague claims his truth in his own perspective.

Another important scene presented through Multiperspectivism is the murder of Trina. While the whole chapter is presented trough the point of view of an observer narrator; when McTeague enters into the room this perspective change. Readers are not

able to see this shocking event because it is shown through the point of view of a cat that is outside the room.

*“Then it became abominable. In the schoolroom outside, behind the coal scuttle, the cat listened to the sounds. ofstamping and struggling and the muffled noise ofblows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs “(Norris, 1899:295).*

Animal instincts are crucial for Naturalism, in *McTeague* the use of metaphors to illustrate the animal instinct and to compare the characters with animals is habitual. In that way, the metaphors are used to state that people are animals and we share characteristics and behaviors. *“The fury in him was as the fury of a young bull in the heat of high summer. But for all that he shook his huge head from time to time, muttering...”* (Norris, 1899;24). In previous quote, McTeague is compared with a bull because of his fury. The comparison of McTeague with an animal is also seen when he hits Trina and the beast inside him cannot be controlled, *“Surely not a great brute of a husband who bit you like a dog”* (Norris, 1899; 265)

Trina is another character presented as an animal. After she won the lottery ticket she became greed and started to live in *“a rat hole”* (Norris, 1899:179). The metaphor compared her with a rat because of greed and because she were living in a small and dilapidated house like a rat hole. Trina is compared with a harassed cat during the fight with McTeague where she fights for survival.

*“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.”* (Norris, 1899;294)

To conclude this point, literary techniques are not remarkable for the development of the novel. They are just considered a tool for the reflection of real life, and the presentation of men as animals. Using Multiperspectivism, Norris shows that there is no single reality and the same action can be seen through different eyes. The use of animal metaphors is related with Darwin’s theory and the comparison of men with animals.

## 9 CONCLUSION

As conclusion, after the study of Naturalism – European and American Literary Naturalism- , the figure of Frank Norris and his work *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, it is indisputable that the work *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* is an example of American Naturalism. On account of, it assembles all the characteristics of this literary movement.

The urban setting pictures real life at that time in San Francisco. The city was crowded with people from different social classes who run their own business. This is the case of McTeague, who worked as a dentist and belonged to middle-high social status. Naturalism as an evolution of Realism, shares the objective of presentation of reality. The setting depicts the everyday life of this middle-high social class. Comparing it with Realism, in this work Norris presents taboo themes, and the worst part of society that were not treated in Realism.

However, the life of the characters is marked by different forces such as Determinism, Darwinism or Materialism and they have no free will. Biological determinism reaches its climax in the figure of McTeague who would be determined by the character of her mother and the alcoholism of her father. On the contrary, the figure of Trina is marked by materialism. After she won the lottery, money became the most important force in her life. She became miserly and this guides her into her decadence.

The ideals changed in the nineteenth century. Religion was left behind and science started to have importance. This leads into the arrival of new theories, such as the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin, which will be reflected in the work of *McTeague*. In the work, characters are animals guided by their instincts and in continuous fight for survival. Even though they are guided by this basic instinct, the last scene of the novel presents a useless McTeague against nature. He will die because he is not able to adapt to the new environment.

Moreover, characters are not only determined by their instincts of survival, but also by the primary instincts of animals - nourishment, sex and violence- .In *McTeague*, sex and violence are presented in detail. In the figure of McTeague, they are related with alcohol. Furthermore, the relation between McTeague and Trina is a relation between animals with a passive/active dichotomy and the presence of violence in sex.

Another characteristic that makes this work a Naturalistic story is pessimism and decadence. Through the novel readers can recognize the decadence of the characters. The characters change their behavior and they deteriorate their self, influenced by Determinism and interior forces. Although, they fight against internal and external forces, it is useless. Pessimism is present because characters cannot escape from the forces that determine them. They are not able to evolve, adapt to the environment or control the forces. This fact states that human are nothing in nature, and the existence is senseless.

To conclude the essay, it is indisputable that *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* is an illustration of American Literary Naturalism. It illustrates the evolution from Realism to Naturalism and the society of nineteenth century. The topics treated in the novel reflect how the society was evolving into a scientific society. The story gathers the influence of forces, the depiction of the cruelest reality, Darwinism, violence and sex. The characters are an example of useless existence and the dominance of inside forces that unable characters to make their own decisions. This work is an immaculate work for the study of the characteristics and development of American Literary Naturalism and, consequently, of the society of nineteenth century.

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