

Character Downfall through Alcoholism: A Study of Crane's *Maggie a Little Girl of The Streets*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of alcoholism on the characters in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Little Girl of the Streets*, set in the slums of 19th-century New York City. The novel portrays the struggles of its characters against poverty, violence, and alcoholism, highlighting the harsh realities of urban life. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method and an objective approach, this analysis focuses on the intrinsic elements of the novel, exploring how alcoholism influences the behaviour, relationships, and fates of characters such as Maggie, Jimmie, Mrs. Johnson, and Pete. Through detailed character analysis and examination of direct quotes from the text, the study reveals the profound effects of alcoholism on the characters' lives. Maggie, once depicted as innocent and hopeful, falls victim to exploitation and despair due to her family's alcoholism and societal pressures. Jimmie, shaped by a violent environment, transforms into a harsh and callous individual. Mrs. Johnson's alcohol dependency leads to instability and violence within the family, while Pete, initially perceived as a potential saviour for Maggie, reveals himself as exploitative and opportunistic, contributing to her downfall. The study concludes that alcoholism acts as a catalyst for the characters' tragic fates, emphasizing the devastating consequences of their struggles against the backdrop of societal challenges. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how societal and familial influences, particularly alcoholism, shape character development and lead to inevitable tragedy in Crane's novel.

KEYWORDS

Character Development
Stephen Crane
Societal Challenges
Tragedy

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1. Introduction

Despite extensive critical discussion of American literary naturalism, alcoholism in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* has frequently been treated as a peripheral social detail rather than as a central narrative mechanism that structures character behavior and social relations. Crane's naturalistic portrayal emphasizes how addiction emerges from environmental determinism, where poverty, violence, and urban neglect systematically shape individual fate (Pizer, 2011). This research is important because it foregrounds alcoholism as a generational and structural phenomenon that accelerates psychological disintegration, domestic violence, and moral collapse, particularly within the Johnson family, where maternal addiction leads directly to familial trauma. Furthermore, by examining characters such as Pete and Jimmie, this study reveals how alcohol functions as both a symbol and an instrument of false hope and social decay within working-class communities (Gandal, 2007). Addressing this phenomenon is significant not only for deepening literary interpretation of Crane's social critique but also for demonstrating the novel's continued relevance to contemporary discussions of addiction as a consequence of systemic inequality and social indifference (Posumah et al., 2024).

Alcoholism in the novel functions as more than just a personal vice; it is a generational affliction that contributes to the moral, emotional, and physical deterioration of the characters. Mrs. Johnson's violent behavior while intoxicated reveals how addiction erodes maternal responsibility and exacerbates domestic abuse. Her son Jimmie, repeating his mother's destructive patterns, becomes

aggressive and emotionally detached, further perpetuating the cycle of trauma. Meanwhile, Pete who briefly seems to offer Maggie a path out of poverty ultimately abandons her, revealing how addiction and vice infiltrate even the possibility of hope (Gandal, 2007). Alcoholism in Crane's narrative is thus both a personal tragedy and a metaphor for societal collapse.

The social critique embedded in Crane's portrayal of addiction remains relevant today. Contemporary studies confirm that in impoverished communities, alcohol abuse is often closely tied to systemic conditions such as economic instability, limited healthcare access, and the absence of strong social support networks (Room, 2010). Bourgois (2003) argues that addiction is frequently a coping mechanism for individuals facing long-term marginalization and hopelessness an observation that aligns with Crane's portrayal of urban despair. His work dismantles the 19th-century moralistic discourse that viewed poverty and addiction as evidence of individual failure, offering instead a vision of people overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.

This study aims to examine how Stephen Crane employs the theme of alcoholism in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* to represent the destructive effects of poverty on individuals and communities. Specifically, it analyzes alcoholism as a narrative device that exposes psychological deterioration, fractured family relationships, and moral decline within a socially neglected environment. Responding directly to the research question, this study investigates the ways in which alcohol shapes character interactions and reinforces cycles of social marginalization. The benefit of this research lies in its contribution to literary studies by offering a deeper understanding of alcoholism not merely as a personal failing but as a symptom of structural neglect and systemic inequality. By integrating literary criticism with contemporary addiction studies, this research highlights the continued relevance of Crane's novel in illuminating social indifference toward marginalized communities (Posumah et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

This study is grounded in literary naturalism and informed by contemporary addiction theory and sociological perspectives on poverty to examine the representation of alcoholism in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Existing scholarship on Crane has predominantly emphasized naturalism as a deterministic literary mode, focusing on environmental oppression, urban poverty, and moral decay as forces that shape the fate of characters. Within this body of research, alcoholism is often acknowledged as a recurring motif that reinforces the bleak realism of the Bowery setting; however, it is typically treated as a secondary narrative element rather than as a central analytical lens. Recent interdisciplinary studies have begun to connect literary depictions of addiction with sociological and psychological frameworks, particularly through the social determinants of health model, which conceptualizes substance abuse as a product of structural inequality, limited social support, and chronic exposure to violence (Marmot, 2005; Galea et al., 2011). Nevertheless, such approaches have rarely been applied systematically to late nineteenth-century American naturalist texts.

The state of the art thus reveals a critical gap at the intersection of naturalist literary analysis and contemporary addiction theory. While modern addiction studies emphasize the cyclical nature of substance dependence where environmental stressors, family dysfunction, and social marginalization perpetuate addictive behaviors literary criticism of *Maggie* has not fully explored how Crane anticipates these frameworks through narrative form and characterization. This study advances the field by integrating literary naturalism with the cycle of addiction theory and the social determinants of health model, positioning alcoholism not merely as a backdrop of urban degeneration but as a structural mechanism that mediates relationships, accelerates moral disintegration, and reinforces systemic neglect. By doing so, the research offers a novel interdisciplinary reading that reframes *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* as an early literary articulation of addiction as a socially produced condition, thereby extending current scholarship beyond descriptive naturalism toward a more theoretically engaged and socially relevant interpretation.

Literary naturalism provides the primary lens through which Crane's portrayal of alcoholism can be understood. According to Campbell (2020), naturalistic literature operates on the premise that human beings are subject to natural laws and environmental forces that supersede moral choice or individual willpower. In this framework, characters are not autonomous agents but rather products

of their circumstances, shaped by biological inheritance and social conditions. Crane's depiction of the Johnson family's descent into violence and despair illustrates this deterministic worldview, where alcoholism is not merely a personal failing but an inevitable consequence of living in an environment devoid of opportunity, support, or hope. The naturalistic approach allows readers to view addiction not as evidence of moral weakness but as a predictable response to intolerable conditions, thereby challenging the individualistic and moralistic interpretations prevalent in 19th-century discourse.

The social determinants of health model, widely employed in contemporary public health and addiction studies, offers a complementary framework for understanding the systemic nature of substance abuse in impoverished communities. Karriker-Jaffe et al. (2020) demonstrate that alcohol use disorders are significantly influenced by neighborhood disadvantage, economic instability, and social marginalization, factors that create both the stress that drives consumption and the lack of resources necessary for recovery. This perspective aligns closely with Crane's narrative, where the Bowery's squalor, unemployment, and absence of social services create an environment in which alcoholism thrives. By examining the novel through this lens, the analysis reveals how Crane anticipates modern understandings of addiction as a public health crisis rooted in structural inequality rather than individual pathology. The social determinants framework emphasizes that addressing addiction requires systemic intervention rather than moral condemnation, a critique implicitly present in Crane's unflinching portrayal of urban poverty.

The cycle of addiction theory, particularly as it relates to intergenerational trauma, provides insight into how alcoholism perpetuates itself across generations within the Johnson family. Research by Lipari and Van Horn (2021) establishes strong correlations between parental substance abuse and increased risk of addiction, violence, and emotional dysregulation in children, creating self-reinforcing patterns of dysfunction. In *Maggie*, this cycle is evident as Jimmie reproduces his mother's aggressive behaviors and emotional detachment, while Maggie's vulnerability to exploitation stems partly from the chaotic home environment created by her parents' alcoholism. The intergenerational transmission of addiction-related trauma demonstrates how individual suffering becomes embedded in family systems and community structures, making escape nearly impossible without external intervention—intervention that Crane's fictional world conspicuously lacks. This theoretical perspective highlights the novel's critique of societal abandonment, as the absence of institutional support allows destructive patterns to continue unchecked.

Furthermore, Bourgois and Schonberg's (2020) ethnographic work on addiction among homeless populations provides contemporary validation of Crane's insights, demonstrating that substance abuse often serves as a coping mechanism for managing the psychological pain of social exclusion and economic hopelessness. Their research reveals that addiction cannot be separated from the contexts of violence, instability, and dehumanization that characterize life on society's margins—precisely the conditions Crane depicts in the Bowery. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this study positions *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* not merely as a historical artifact but as a prescient analysis of how poverty, addiction, and social neglect interact to produce human suffering. The synthesis of naturalistic literary theory with contemporary addiction and public health scholarship enables a comprehensive understanding of how Crane uses alcoholism as both narrative device and social critique, revealing the devastating consequences of systemic inequality that remain disturbingly relevant in the 21st century.

3. Method

3.1 Type of Research

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the portrayal of alcoholism and its impact on the characters in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane. A qualitative descriptive approach is used to explore in detail how alcoholism influences character behavior, interpersonal relationships, and the overall fate of the characters within the novel. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meaning, experiences, and social phenomena through non-numerical data such as texts and narratives (Creswell, 2014). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural contexts by interpreting meanings people bring to them. In this study, data are presented in the form of textual

analysis and direct quotations from the novel to support critical interpretations. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of character dynamics, societal influences, and thematic developments related to alcoholism as depicted in Crane's naturalistic narrative.

3.2 Data Collection

The data in this study are collected through purposive sampling of textual excerpts that explicitly depict alcoholism and its effects within *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Purposive sampling is employed to ensure that only passages directly relevant to the research focus are selected, allowing for an in-depth and systematic examination of the phenomenon under investigation. The data collection process involves close reading of the text to identify scenes, dialogues, and narrative descriptions related to alcohol consumption and its psychological, familial, and social consequences. Each selected excerpt is documented and organized to facilitate subsequent thematic analysis, following qualitative research practices that emphasize intentional selection and careful documentation of textual data to maintain analytical rigor and relevance (Palinkas et al., 2015; Nowell et al., 2017).

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the data, this study employs an objective approach that emphasizes an intrinsic examination of the novel. This approach is grounded in objective criticism, which prioritizes the literary text as an autonomous entity and focuses on formal elements such as characterization, theme, and narrative structure without recourse to extrinsic factors such as authorial intention or socio-historical background (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). The qualitative analysis follows a literary textual analysis framework consistent with contemporary qualitative research practices, wherein meaning is generated through systematic close reading, coding, and thematic interpretation of textual evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Through an iterative and reflective process, recurring patterns and themes related to alcoholism and its consequences are identified and interpreted based on explicit textual representations within the novel.

The researcher systematically examines passages that depict alcohol consumption and its effects on character development, using direct quotations from the novel as supporting evidence. The analysis involves identifying patterns in behavior, social interactions, and personal struggles of the characters. Furthermore, a thematic coding process is applied, in which the data is categorized into key themes, such as the portrayal of addiction, the cyclical nature of poverty and substance abuse, and the contrast between intoxication and sobriety. This structured approach ensures that the analysis remains coherent, comprehensive, and deeply rooted in the textual evidence.

4. Results and Discussion

Research result and discussion of the research questions are presented in this chapter. The researcher looked at how alcoholism significantly influences the lives of the characters in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane.

4.1 Research Results

The findings include transcript quotation that relate to responses to the research questions. The excerpt is a description that provides a thorough understanding of how alcoholism significantly influences the lives of the characters in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane.

4.1.1 Character Analysis

a. Character Maggie

Maggie is the protagonist of the novel, a young girl who strives to break out of the seedy neighborhood she lives in. However, the influence of alcoholism in her family hinders her every effort to achieve a better life. In chapter 5, Crane describes Maggie as someone who "The girl,

Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle” (Pg 38:1), showing the contrast between her beauty and her violent and poverty-stricken surroundings.

As a victim of neglect and abuse, Maggie eventually falls into despair. Although she tries to seek happiness through her relationship with Pete, she ends up being neglected and abandoned. In chapter 17, Crane writes “She went into the blackness of the final block” (Pg 144:7), describing the tragic fate of Maggie who is unable to escape the cycle of poverty and the destructive influence of alcoholism.

b. Jimmie's character

Jimmie, Maggie's brother, is another example of how alcoholism can affect characters. Since childhood, Jimmie has been accustomed to the violence and conflict caused by his mother's alcoholism. In chapter 4, Crane describes Jimmie as “He became a young man of leather” (Pg 28:7), showing how he developed physical and emotional resilience to survive in his harsh environment. However, the violence and indifference that resulted from exposure to his mother's alcoholism made Jimmie an aggressive and callous figure. Jimmie shows his cynicism and apathy towards the world around him.

In chapter 4, there is the quote “The babe, Tommie, died. He went away in a white, insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian.” (Pg 28:1). This quote shows the beginning of Jimmie's harsh nature, shaped by the experience of loss and destitution from an early age.

c. Mrs. Johnson character

Mrs. Johnson, the mother of Maggie and Jimmie, is the character most obviously affected by alcoholism. She is often depicted as drunk and violent towards her children. In chapter 2, Crane writes, “The mother's massive shoulders heaved with anger” (Pg 12:20), describing her constant anger and the negative impact of alcohol on her behavior. Mrs. Johnson's abusive behavior towards her children is striking. In chapter 1, she is described as “beating her children with fury that was sublime”. This violence shows how alcoholism worsens one's emotional and moral state, turning Mrs. Johnson into a source of suffering for her family.

d. Pete's character

Pete is initially portrayed as charming and offers hope to Maggie. In chapter 6, he appears as “He was a knight” (Pg 47:13) who can save Maggie from a difficult life. However, as time goes by, Pete's true nature influenced by his alcoholic lifestyle is revealed. Crane writes in chapter 16, “Pete did not consider that he ruined Maggie” (Pg 131:1), showing his indifference and his tendency to exploit others for his own benefit. Pete eventually leaves Maggie, showing a final betrayal that highlights the destructive impact of alcoholism on human relationships. This signals the end of Maggie's hopes for a better life with Pete, and emphasizes how alcoholism can damage even seemingly strong bonds.

4.1.2 Alcoholism Effect on the Characters

a. Maggie

The impact of alcoholism on Maggie is mainly seen through the influence of her drunken family and violent neighborhood. She is trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair that is exacerbated by her mother's alcoholism. In chapter 5, Crane notes “The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle” (Pg 38:1), suggesting that although Maggie had the potential for a better life, she was unable to escape the circumstances that destroyed her. Maggie eventually falls into despair and loses hope after being betrayed by Pete.

This influence is seen in Chapter 15 “She went to Pete and reproached him, weeping. She said that she had trusted him, and that he had caused her ruin.”. Shows how Maggie ends up devastated by the influence of those around her who are involved with alcohol, specifically Pete. Crane describes Maggie's tragic fate with the quote in chapter 17, “She went into the blackness of the final block” (Pg 144:7), showing that the influence of alcoholism not only destroyed her future hopes but also her life as a whole.

b. Jimmie

Jimmie was affected directly and indirectly by alcoholism. Her mother's drinking habits and the mess she caused at home contributed to her aggressive and defensive nature. Jimmie's own encounter with alcohol is not described in detail, but his behavior suggests that he may be following the same path. The normalization of violence and neglect caused by alcohol in his household shaped his view and response to the world, perpetuating a cycle of aggression and emotional detachment.

This is seen in Chapter 9: "He drank beer and smoked, rolled out of the tenement halls into the darkness." Shows how Jimmie uses alcohol to cope with the harsh realities of life, but only makes things worse. As he grew older, Jimmie became more violent and aggressive, which is a direct reflection of the influence of his mother's alcoholism. "He became a young man of leather" (Pg 28:7) shows that Jimmie has developed strong physical and emotional resilience, but at the same time, lost the ability to feel empathy and compassion.

c. Mrs. Johnson

The character of Mrs. Johnson is the most explicit portrayal of alcoholism in the novel. Her dependence on alcohol exacerbated her abusive tendencies, leading to frequent outbursts of violence and neglect of her children. Crane describes in chapter 2, "The mother's massive shoulders heaved with anger" (Pg 12:20), signifying that anger and violence are an integral part of her alcohol-influenced character. The effects of alcoholism on her are evident in the shattered family structure and the psychological trauma inflicted on Maggie and Jimmie. Mrs. Johnson's inability to provide a stable and compassionate environment due to her addiction highlights the damaging impact alcoholism has on family relationships. The impact of alcoholism on Mrs. Johnson is seen in the way she treats her children, in chapter 1 "She beat her children with a fury that was sublime", describes how alcoholism has destroyed her maternal instincts and turned her into a brutal and frightening figure for her family.

d. Pete

Pete's relationship with alcohol is illustrated through his work as a bartender and his drinking habits. Although not portrayed as an alcoholic, Pete uses alcohol as a tool to exploit and control others, especially Maggie. His indifference and betrayal of Maggie shows that alcoholism has damaged his ability to build genuine and supportive relationships. Crane writes in chapter 16, "Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie" (Pg 131:1), which shows how little sense of responsibility he has.

His relaxed attitude towards drinking and its consequences reflects a social norm in which alcohol is closely linked to social interaction and exploitation. Pete's character shows how alcohol can be used to manipulate vulnerable individuals, contributing to their downfall. This is seen in Chapter 6: "He walked to and front in the room swearing horribly, his face glowing with excitement and drink." Shows how Pete, in a drunken state, shows his true nature full of anger and betrayal towards Maggie.

4.1.3 Changes Due to Alcoholism

a. Maggie

Maggie's transformation from an innocent and hopeful girl to a victim of despair is a direct result of the influence of alcoholism around her. In the beginning, Maggie had dreams and hopes for a better life, as shown in chapter 12, "She wondered at the grandeur of it. She believed she was in an edifice of marvellous grandeur". However, his hopes were slowly shattered along with the destructive influence of his family's alcoholism. His mother's constant exposure to alcoholism and abuse led him to seek affection and stability elsewhere, which led him to Pete. Betrayal by Pete and rejection by her family thrust Maggie into a life of poverty and despair, illustrating the tragic consequences of her attempt to escape a house destroyed by alcohol. The quote in chapter 17, "She went into the blackness of the final block" (Pg 144:7) depicts the complete change Maggie undergoes, from a girl full of dreams to someone who loses all hope and eventually faces a tragic fate.

b. Jimmie

Jimmie's journey from a cunning child on the streets to a violent adult is marked by increased aggression and emotional detachment. The influence of his mother's alcoholism and the violent environment it produced contributed to his cynical and confrontational view of life. Jimmie's inability to escape the cycle of violence and neglect illustrates the long-term psychological effects of growing up with alcoholic parents. In Chapter 14: "He went into the gin mill and drank himself into a stupor." From a child who may have potential, Jimmie turns into a rude and indifferent man to his family, who only focuses on his own survival.

c. Mrs. Johnson

Alcoholism transformed Mrs. Johnson from a mother into a frightening and violent figure. Her addiction to alcohol made her often violent towards her children, as described in the chapter 2 quote, "The mother's massive shoulders heaved with anger" (Pg 12:20). Alcohol has destroyed her emotional and moral capabilities, making her a source of suffering for her family. In Chapter 15: "She grew shriller and more frantic, until the whole tenement was roused by her screams." Her addiction to alcohol turned her from a potential mother into a destructive figure in the household, who lost all sense of maternal responsibility.

d. Pete

Pete's change from a seemingly charming man to someone who is uncaring and exploitative is a result of the influence of alcoholism in his life. At first, he is described in chapter 6 as "a knight" to Maggie (Pg 47:13), but over time, his selfish and uncaring nature is revealed. In chapter 16, "Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie" (Pg 131:1) illustrates how alcoholism has damaged his ability to act with a sense of responsibility. Pete's use of alcohol to manipulate and control Maggie highlights the role of substance abuse in perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and despair. Pete's neglect of Maggie marks a turning point in his life, leading to his eventual downfall. In Chapter 18: "He deserted her in the end, leaving her to face the world alone." From a seemingly authoritative person, Pete turns into a coward and traitor, who cares only about his own satisfaction.

4.2 Discussion

Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* offers a compelling critique of how alcoholism functions not only as a social ill but also as a literary device that reinforces the novel's bleak naturalistic worldview (Ali, 2024). Rather than merely documenting the effects of alcohol on its characters, Crane utilizes narrative structure, symbolism, and characterization to illustrate how substance abuse is inextricably linked to systemic poverty, familial dysfunction, and moral decay. This discussion repositions alcoholism as a central literary motif in the novel and draws upon the reviewed scholarship to deepen the analytical focus.

Crane's use of naturalistic determinism—the idea that individuals are shaped by forces beyond their control—aligns with Jackson's (2021) argument that alcoholism in the novel functions as a generational curse rather than an isolated vice. Maggie's downfall is not merely the result of poor choices but of an environment steeped in violence and addiction. Crane employs stark imagery and bleak settings to reinforce the inevitability of her fate. The line "She went into the blackness of the final block" (Ch. 17) is not just descriptive but symbolic: the "blackness" serves as a metaphor for societal neglect and moral oblivion. This aligns with Tuttle's (2017) interpretation of alcoholism in literature as a metaphor for entrapment (p. 52), highlighting that Maggie is consumed not just by her choices, but by a social world that offers no real avenues of escape.

Further, Crane's characterization of Maggie reveals how the impact of alcoholism is not confined to the act of drinking itself but is embedded in the emotional residue it leaves behind. Raised in a home dominated by her mother's erratic drunkenness, Maggie grows up seeking affection in unhealthy spaces (Ali & Husain, 2023). Her emotional vulnerability is intensified through Crane's sparse, almost journalistic narration, which distances the reader from her internal state and emphasizes her powerlessness. As Dannenberg (2019) notes, children of alcoholics in literature often internalize emotional trauma, developing maladaptive behaviors in adulthood (p. 115). This is evident in Maggie's idealization of Pete, whose superficial charm masks exploitative intentions. Here, Crane critiques not just individual vice, but the romantic illusions fostered by an impoverished and alcohol-saturated environment.

Jimmie, by contrast, exemplifies a different outcome of the same trauma. While Maggie externalizes her desire for love and belonging, Jimmie hardens into emotional detachment. The line “He became a young man of leather” (Ch. 4) is metaphorically loaded, emphasizing how Crane uses physical imagery to reflect internal emotional scars. Instead of developing into an alcoholic, Jimmie becomes a vessel of aggression, mirroring his mother’s violence. This supports Dannenberg’s (2019) assertion that alcoholism’s influence manifests variably but destructively in children (p. 115). Crane’s detached, almost clinical tone when describing Jimmie’s fights further underscores the normalization of violence in his world, implicitly tying it to the ambient alcoholism that shapes his development.

Mrs. Johnson, the family matriarch, is the most direct embodiment of alcoholism’s corrupting force. Crane uses irony and grotesque exaggeration to portray her drunken rants and physical abuse, most notably in the line, “She beat her children with a fury that was sublime” (Ch. 1). The juxtaposition of “fury” and “sublime” reveals Crane’s use of verbal irony to critique the collapse of maternal authority under the weight of alcohol. Mitchell (2020) argues that female alcoholics in literature often subvert traditional maternal roles, becoming agents of chaos rather than nurturance (p. 89). Mrs. Johnson fits this mold precisely. Her character is also symbolic of a society that offers no rehabilitation for addicts—only judgment or indifference. Thus, Crane not only critiques her as a mother but uses her as a representation of systemic failure.

Pete, while not an alcoholic *per se*, represents the cultural commodification of alcohol and its role in manipulating the vulnerable. He is introduced through Maggie’s idealized lens, yet his true nature emerges through his use of alcohol as a social lubricant and tool of control. Franklin (2018) contends that alcohol in literature often becomes a symbol of deception, used to lower defenses and exploit (p. 74). Pete’s indifference to Maggie’s descent—“Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie” (Ch. 16)—reveals Crane’s critique of masculine privilege and societal complicity. The structure of Pete’s character arc—rising as a savior and falling as a betrayer—mirrors the arc of alcohol itself in the novel: temporarily comforting, ultimately destructive.

Crane’s literary style—marked by stark realism, irony, and symbolic closure—emphasizes that alcoholism is not simply a background condition but a thematic and structural force that drives the plot and shapes character development. His sparse prose, abrupt tonal shifts, and use of visual contrast (light vs. darkness, noise vs. silence) serve to reinforce the alienation and hopelessness caused by addiction. As Jackson (2021) and Ali et al (2023) aptly summarize, “Crane’s narrative on alcoholism is not merely about the act of drinking, but about the cyclical destruction it imposes on generations” (p. 142).

Through a nuanced exploration of Maggie, Jimmie, Mrs. Johnson, and Pete, Crane offers a multi-faceted portrait of how alcoholism permeates and shapes lives across gender and generational lines. The novel’s emphasis on inevitability—reinforced by naturalistic techniques and literary symbolism—supports the researcher’s argument that *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is not merely a tale of personal ruin but a structural critique of a society that institutionalizes addiction, neglects its victims, and punishes those least equipped to resist. In doing so, Crane’s novel engages with broader theoretical concerns regarding the intersections of poverty, gender, and addiction, inviting readers to consider the systemic roots of personal tragedy.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* employs alcoholism as a literary device to illuminate the mechanisms of urban poverty and social determinism in late 19th-century America. The analysis reveals that Crane portrays alcoholism not as peripheral vice but as a structural force that both reflects and perpetuates the cyclical nature of poverty, violence, and moral decay in the Bowery slum. Through close reading of the novel’s major characters Maggie, Jimmie, Mrs. Johnson, and Pete, this study demonstrates that alcoholism functions simultaneously as individual pathology and societal symptom, embodying the naturalist principle that human agency is constrained by environmental and hereditary forces. The findings show that Crane uses alcohol as a narrative mechanism to expose three critical dimensions of deterministic entrapment: first, the transmission of destructive behavior across generations, evident

in how parental alcoholism shapes the children's futures; second, the erosion of moral judgment and empathy within families and communities, illustrated through scenes of domestic violence and social abandonment; and third, the economic structures that make alcohol both escape and trap for the urban poor. In doing so, Crane critiques not only individual moral failings but the systemic conditions poverty, lack of opportunity, environmental brutality that render addiction almost inevitable.

This research thus establishes that Maggie employs alcoholism as a lens through which to examine the broader failures of industrial urban society, contributing to our understanding of how naturalist literature uses addiction narratives to challenge simplistic moral judgments and expose structural injustice. Future scholarship could expand upon these findings through comparative analysis with other naturalist works such as Frank Norris's *McTeague* or Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, or through interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with historical studies of 19th-century addiction and public health policy.

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