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## **Antihumanism in Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets: A Comparative Naturalistic Study**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine the formation of the antihumanism discourse in two key American naturalist fiction texts-Maggie: A Girl of the Streets by Stephen Crane and Native Son by Richard Wright. The research questions the hitherto basic idea of humanist discourse and asks the question in which way the autonomy, agency and subjectivity of the humanist discourse are questioned by the naturalist. The study is designed to look at the connection of naturalism and antihumanism and investigate the role of social structure in the loss of an individual's autonomy. An analytical-critical and comparative approach is used to research, a theoretical underpinning in the works of Naturalism, Determinism, Agency theory and present-day Antihumanism understanding with special reference to Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. These results suggest that both novels show characters as creatures of racial, economic, and environmental pressures that create great limitations for autonomous action. Both texts are from different socio-historical contexts, but they share their commonness in the view that the human subject is structurally conditioned and is not self-determining. The study ends by asserting that American naturalism is not just an expression of social determinism but a literary discourse which, in an antihumanism fashion, helps to deconstruct the idea of human agency and re-define subjectivity. These findings provide support towards closing the gap between naturalist criticism and contemporary thinking of anti-humanism.

**Keywords:** Antihumanism, Naturalism, Determinism, Agency, American Literature, Social Structure.



## Introduction

The American literary naturalism is an important movement in the history of modern American fiction, which stresses on the deterministic perspective of the human life under social, environmental, economic power. Naturalist writers, who started to appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aimed to present people not as free agents, but because of heredity and situation. Along this line, (Irving Howe,1957) suggests that naturalist fiction paints a highly pessimistic picture of human reality, in which people are bound by forces that they cannot control and, therefore, restrict the extent of individuality. (James Baldwin,1955), on the same note, brings out the intense conflict between personal desire and social impediments, especially in racially polarized settings. This deterministic theory forms the basis through which narratives based on naturalism build on their criticism of contemporary society.

Over the past few decades, the idea of antihumanism has become progressively popular in the fields of literature and critical theory, questioning the classical humanist values of autonomy, rationality and the human subject in the center of things. Antihumanism views do not pun aimed at the coherent and self-determining individual but rather stress the degree of subjectivity construction and limitation by ideological, social and discursive forms. According to (Nigel Hatton ,2020), antihumanism displaces the human subject as a product of higher systemic influences instead of their source. Similarly, (Walter Benn Michaels,2020) is also critical of the continuity of identity-based models that distort more structural forms of disparity, thus strengthening the perception that individual action is perceived to be tethered to more formidable socio-economic factors. It is against this background that antihumanism gives a critical approach by which naturalist literature can be redefined.

Both Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets take the center stage in the annals of American naturalism providing potent descriptions of marginalized characters that are subjected to a repressive social environment. (Richard Wright ,1940/2000) in his book Native Son offers the reader the character of Bigger Thomas as someone who is a result of systemic racism whereby his actions are conditioned- and, in fact,

limited- by the structural realities of the American society. In the meantime, the Maggie of Crane represents the unfortunate route of a young lady, who is caught in the loop of poverty and social deprivation in the city. The restrictions on individual agency are prefigured in both texts thus opening the door to critical questioning of the essence of human subjectivity in the deterministic schemes. What makes them ever relevant is their ability to question the circumstances where human autonomy works against them.

### Research Gap

Although there is a lot of research information on American naturalism, the studies available have been mainly inclined on social determinism as a description model to determine and explain the behavior of characters but this has been done in the deeper facet of its philosophical implication. A lot of critical discourse has focused on environmental and socio-economic constraints without fully grappling with the degree to which such constraints are essential destabilizers of the human subject as such. Consequently, there is no adequate exploration of the possible overlap between naturalism and antihumanism.

In addition to this, although both Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets have been endlessly discussed in their respective socio historical contexts; race and urban poverty, a significant lack of comparative analysis exists that determines how the two specific contexts come together in creating an antihumanism discourse. Available scholarly literature is more inclined to study each of these pieces individually, which restricts the potential to recognize any larger-scale trends in the expression of limited agency and the loss of subjectivity in the texts of naturalism.

### Research Problem

The failure of the integration of naturalism and antihumanism in theory in the literary criticism is the main issue of the current study. Although naturalist writings can clearly portray people as being influenced by outside factors, the degree to which such a systematic critique of humanism has been sufficiently theorized has not been sufficiently theorized. This gap poses important questions about whether naturalism

just exemplifies determination or is engaged in the destruction of the idea of human autonomy.

Following this, this paper is an attempt to uncover the image of the subject of human beings that is essentially restricted, even absent, that is presented by the naturalist discourses on Structural Forces. It raises doubts about the description of characters like Bigger Thomas and Maggie Johnson as “bigger” than not the symptom of social restraint but more fundamentally ontological reduction of human to the object of external forces.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Discuss how antihumanism is portrayed in Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.
2. Remake American naturalism as a literary paradigm which no longer is solely deterministic but rather is a critique of human agency.
3. In both texts, analyze how social structures and erosion of individual subjectivity are connected.

### Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is that American naturalism in Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is not simply reflective of societal determinism but goes ahead to establish an antihumanism discourse where human agency is greatly sandwiches down, and subjectivity is re-defined as a creation of the structural forces.

### Contribution of the Study

This study is of use to literary studies because it is a step towards filling the gap in literary studies between naturalist criticism and the antihumanism theory in contemporary times. In uniting these two views, the analysis provides a richer insight into the ways in which naturalist literature does not only have a mirroring effect of social realities but also reformulates the conceptual basis of human subjectivity.

In addition to this, the study offers a comparative framework which throws more emphasis on persistence of the antihumanism discourse throughout the various socio-historical settings to expand the boundaries of naturalist criticism. In this way, it also raises new questions regarding the interface between the analysis of a literary text and more



philosophical thinking, particularly in terms of the evolution of conceptions of agency and identity in critical theory today.

### Previous Studies

#### Study One

In consideration of Racial Oppression and Resistance, (Abdulbaqi,2022) studied the correlation between nihilism and Richard Wright's Native Son. Deploying a critical literary approach, the study said that Bigger Thomas's actions are a result of tension between individual rebellion and systemic racial domination. The results showed that racism is an operating mechanism which influences attitudes and behaviors of identity. The study was, however, mainly concerned with race, resistance and not the translation of antihumanism or the case of subjectivity's erosion.

#### Study Two

(Smith,2023) investigated the interaction between determinism and agency in Native Son. The study determined that Bigger Thomas' choices are greatly influenced by underlying structural racism and social exclusion through textual analysis. The research pointed out lack of freedom for the characters but failed to see other philosophical aspects that are contained in the novel and did not compare the novel with other naturalistic works.

#### Study Three

Detert studied environmental determinism in Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (Johnson, 2024). The study made the following conclusions: poverty, family disaffection and urban deprivation play a notable role in the life trajectory of Maggie. While the emphasis was placed on the environmental forces, determinism and anti-humane understandings of subjectivity were not discussed in the research.

#### Study Four

(Brown,2025) rethought American naturalism in the light of contemporary theories and theorized that naturalist narratives implicitly refute the humanist beliefs about autonomy and selfhood. The study raised significant questions about antihumanism but failed to do a comparative study between Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.



## Research Gap

The examined studies have made great contributions in comprehending the concept of determinism, race, poverty and agency in the American naturalist fiction. However, none of them has made a systematic integration of naturalism and antihumanism from a comparative-analytical perspective. Furthermore, less work has been done on how various types of structural restraint can result in similar mechanisms of subject formation and loss of agency in different socio-historical situations. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by offering a comparative antihumanism reading of *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.

## Literature Review

### Naturalism in American Literary Criticism

The literature on American naturalism has traditionally placed in the deterministic basis of the conditions, especially the importance of environment, heredity and the socio-economic situation in determining human behavior. In this respect (Donald Pizer,1995) contends a paradigmatic narration of naturalism as a form of literature that prefigures the constraints put upon individual agency in that naturalist texts systematically present characters as victims of pressures that are under their power. Likewise, (Donna Campbell,1997) develops the same standpoint, by placing American naturalism in a wider context of critical discourse, in terms of how it addresses the problem of social inequality, marginalization, and illusion of autonomy. Collectively, these works make naturalism a paradigm in which the subject inherently interested itself in the opposition between personal desire and predetermination.

### Critical Approaches to *Native Son*

Preponderantly the themes of race, systemic oppression and the socio-political construction of identity have had critical analysis on the *Native Son*. M. (Abdulbaqi,2022) studies the novel in terms of nihilism and revolt claiming that the actions of Bigger Thomas can be seen as resistance to and capture within a racially oppressive system. Further recent research by (John Smith,2023) examines the relationship between race, determinism, and agency even further, in which the subjectivity of Bigger is deeply influenced, and indeed even limited by structural racism.



These works tend to emphasize how Native Son embodies the naturalist worry about the exterior power, but they largely construe these exterior powers in terms of socio-political and not explicitly philosophical or antihumanism terms.

### **Critical Approaches to Maggie: A Girl of the Streets**

In the same manner, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets has been extensively discussed as a seminal piece of naturalistic works portraying urban poverty and social determinism. Recent research, including the one by (Laura Johnson, 2024), leads to the understanding that environmental and economic deprivation shapes the tragic line of Maggie, and the urban environment and its conditions strip individuals of their subjectivity. Articles in Studies in (American Naturalism, 2021-2024) provide an additional contribution to this interpretation by examining the narrative techniques used by Crane and how these techniques served to depict the idea of constrained agency in urban environment. Taking altogether, these studies confirm the classification of this novel as a prime exemplary of naturalist determinism, although many of them hesitate to place such determinism in a wider context as a critique of humanism.

### **Social Determinism and the Question of Agency**

The question of the interaction between social determinism and human agency has been a fundamental issue in the general domain of naturalist criticism. The literature on the topic is consistent in illustrating how naturalist texts present individual people in a way influenced by structural forces, but it is less agreed where it goes to the point of saying that the illustrations require the complete rejection of the idea of agency. In as much as scholars recognize the restrictions placed to characters, it is evident that more accepting naturalism is the possibility of residual means of opposition or self-determination. The underlying tension is towards an unresolved theoretical issue, that is, whether in naturalism, agency is simply restricted or that the human subject itself is radically re-formed as a product of external structures.

### **Prevailing Critical Trends**

Critical tendencies of recent years have shown interest in reconsideration of naturalism in interdisciplinary terms, such as in cultural studies, race theory, and urban studies. An example is the work of (Thomas Brown,



2025) which calls to re-evaluate naturalism against the antihumanism theory and say that naturalist texts implicitly undermine the assumptions underpinning humanism. Likewise, more recent articles found in Studies in American Naturalism represent a swing towards the analysis of the philosophical consequences of determinism, especially concerning the process of subjectivity and identity-formation. These changes indicate a new direction in the critical trajectory which transcends the descriptive analysis to more theoretically dependent solutions.

### Limitations of Previous Studies

Although there have been these developments, several limitations can still be identified in the current literature. On the one hand, the approach to antihumanism as the conceptual framework to read naturalist literature is not explicit. Although a lot of research has dealt with issues of determinism and constraint, very few studies have gone further and have questioned the assumptions upon which the studies on determinism and constraint are based regarding human autonomy and subjectivity. Second, the comparative Oses between Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets are relatively limited, especially those that strive at pointing out the commonalities present in the depiction of marginalized people within a variety of socio-historical settings. Third, there is a tendency in literature to still be compartmentalized based on race, class, and environment as isolated analytical units, instead of forces that are not isolable but interact in various ways as a unit in forming the human subject.

### Positioning of the Present Study

Considering these lacunae, the current study places itself at the intersection points of naturalist criticism and the antihumanism theory. Through a comparative reading of Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, it attempts to transcend the time-honored approaches to determinism to a more holistic approach to the writing on the nature of naturalist texts to create an antihumanism discourse. Thus, not only does the study focus on the shortcomings of the research that has been conducted previously but also helps to reconfigure the literature criticism with regards to the recent theoretical advances.

## Theoretical Framework

### Naturalism and Determinism

#### The Concept of Naturalism

Due to the premise that forces beyond the control of the individual (especially heredity and environment) govern human behavior, naturalism, as a literary and philosophical movement, is based on the idea that the novel is a form of experimental inquiry; in this case, the characters of the novel are subjects, whose behavior is subject to the law of nature, in the same way that the natural world is ruled. Such an outlook reformulates literature as the place of exploring causality as opposed to glorifying human sovereignty. Equally, as it has been stressed by (Frank Norris, 1903), naturalist fiction aims at uncovering the innermost processes of what influences human life, and, more frequently, the characters of the stories presented are often perceived as victims of forces upon which makes free will virtually an illusion.

This abstract idea is also supported in the texts by (Theodore Dreiser, 1900/2000) who in his stories portrays the characters as outcomes of socio-economic pressures and biological urges. In modern criticism, (Donald Pizer, 2021) persuades that naturalism is not simply a doctrine of determinism, but a complex mode of literature, questioning the sources of human agency. Similarly, Keith (Gandal, 2022) also places naturalism in the framework of urban modernity, emphasizing the impact of spatial and social circumstances on the subjectivity of individuals. Such views collectively make naturalism a system that considers the possibility of free human action with a questioning attitude.

#### Environmental and Social Determinism

The principle of determinism is the foundation of naturalist thinking since it concerns the idea that human actions are the most reasonable product of the environment and societal factors. The themes in naturalist texts often describe people as situated in systems: class relations, racial division, urban space, etc. that limit their decisions and determine their paths. In the theoretical framework proposed by (Zola, 1893), the role of heredity and milieu are all but planted and the later naturalist writers would add additional factors from a socio-economic perspective. This way, determinism is not only a thematic issue but also a structural logic which

determines the evolution of the narrative. Characters have been treated as responding to the situation instead of acting and thus support the idea of human agency as subordinate to external causality. In modern scholarly works, including those by (Pizer, 2021) and (Gandal, 2022), it is stressed that this deterministic logic has been and is still at the core of explaining naturalist literature, especially these groups showing how marginalized characters have their existence dictated by the limitations of systems.

### **Antihumanism**

#### **Defining Antihumanism**

Antihumanism is the opposition of the traditional humanist view of the independent, rational and centrality of the human subject. Antihumanism theory, instead of treating human people as self-determining agents, comes to think of subjectivity as something that came to affect larger structures in the form of language, ideology, and power. (Michel Foucault, 1970) is famous to dispute a steady human essence saying that man had been a historical construct which was subject to changing epistemic situations. This view basically undermines the humanist assumption of a separate and distinct self.

(Louis Althusser, 1971) on the same note asserts that the subject is a product of monetary processes of ideology, and that only via being translated into subjects by the social formation. In this perspective, agency is not inherent but a role of ideological positioning. Elaborating on these premises, (Nigel Hatton, 2020) believes that antihumanism in literary studies is characterized by the reconsideration of the human subject as a localization of constraint instead of freedom, hence, it fits well in the deterministic logic of naturalist fiction.

These antihumanism attitudes take on added importance when one considers their application to *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. In both novels, protagonists are described as not subjects, but as subjects constituted by racist, economic, and environmental structures. Foucault's and Althusser's approaches are therefore useful for analyzing the disruption of the humanist notions of agency and selfhood that occur in literary naturalism.



## Agency vs. Structure

### The Problem of Agency

The agency versus structure issue is one of the key points that are concerned in both social and literary theory. The ability of individuals to act on their own, and take free decisions, is traditionally considered to be agency, but this ability is frequently disputed in studies that focus on structural constraint. The notion of habits by (Pierre Bourdieu, 1984) resolves this tension and describes how individual dispositions are conditioned by social circumstances and hence involves the erosion of the lines between free will and determinism.

Equally, (Raymond Williams, 1977) points to the inter-relationship between the individual experience and social structures by claiming that the issue of cultural production shows both the limitation and the opportunity. In naturalist settings, however, this level is frequently skewed towards restraint as the characters are put across as incapable of meaningful self-determination.

Taken together, these theoretical vistas imply that subjectivity is generated in structural conditions. It is this assumption that has been used as the analytical starting point for the examination of the characters of Bigger Thomas and Maggie Johnson in sections to follow.

### Operational Definitions of Key Concepts

Within the scope of this study, antihumanism is defined as a theoretical attitude which questions the concept of autonomous and self-determining subject, giving prominence to the role of social, ideological and historical structuring in subjectivation creation. Agency is the ability someone has to make a choice for themselves and effect a change that is important to them. Determinism refers to the impact of outside the individual elements e.g. surroundings, class, ideology, race, etc. on the individual's action and decisions. The subjectivity is what is socially and historically produced to allow an individual to understand their place in the current forms. These definitions state the concepts that are used to analyze the selected novels.

### The Individual and Social Structure

Continuing to elaborate on this association, (Fredric Jameson, 1981) points out that the forms of narration are conditioned by sub-lying socio-economic activity, and that creative texts, in some sense, are a coded



form of the logic of its historical circumstances. Similarly, (Georg Lukács, 1963) asserts that realism and by implication, naturalism, expresses the structural forces that dictate the lives of people at objectively disadvantage to individual agency.

Combined, these theoretical approaches declare that the individual cannot be conceived outside of the programmers that make up his/her life. It is especially strong within naturalist literature where the characters are always deprived as the products of their social circumstances. Such a dynamic offers a vital connection between determinism and antihumanism, in this way showing how structural forces give rise to the diminishing of the agency.

### **Integrated Analytical Model**

#### **Proposed Analytical Framework**

According to the above theoretical bases, the proposed study will focus on developing an analytical model that will be integrated by connecting naturalism, determinism, agency, and antihumanism in a temporal series relation:

Naturalism -Determinism -Loss of Agency -Antihumanism.

According to this model, the tendency of naturalist texts to focus on deterministic forces, in turn, diffuses the concept of human agency, resulting in the ultimate form of representation of the subject, which is an antihumanism one. Determinism is the mechanism mediating whereby naturalism has turned into antihumanism whereas the corrosion of agency is the transition point.

In that regard, this model offers a consistent frame according to which the analysis of literary narratives should be carried out to understand the role of literature in establishing and reinforcing an antihumanism discourse. It empowers the study to transcend descriptive narratives of determinism to a more theoretically integrated concept of the redefinitions of the human subject in a structure of constraint as a way of structuring naturalist literature.



## Methodology

### Research Design

This paper is an analytical-critical design that intends to analyze literary works based on a theoretically inspired interpretive methodology. Analytical-critical approach is especially appropriate in the exploration of the philosophical and structural aspects of the literary object, because the approach allows one to conduct systematic research on the way meaning is created by narrative structures. Following this, (Georg Lukács, 1963) points out that interpretation of literature must expose the socio-historical impulses internalized in the structures of narratives, whereas (Fredric Jameson, 1981) holds that writing is a socially symbolic act and influenced by wider ideological constructs. In the same way, Donald Pizer, 1995) points out the significance of critical interpretation when conducting studies on naturalism especially in unveiling the deterministic forces in constructing character and plot. All these outlooks present the rationale of the analytical-critical approach.

### Research Approach

#### Textual Analysis

Textual analysis as the main methodological means of the current research consists in reading the chosen novels closely to be able to discover regularities of the meaning concerned with determinism, agency and antihumanism. This method dwells on analyzing the narrative devices including language, symbolism, characterization and thematic development. The research aims to identify the implicit philosophical assumptions behind the texts by examining the interaction between these aspects. Close reading of the text enables one to comprehend the ways the literary forms interpret and recreate the social realities as (Lukács, 1963) argues.

#### Comparative Approach

However, in addition to analyzing the texts, the study uses a comparative method which seeks to glean similarities and differences within the two works of choice. In this method, a few general patterns in the expression of constrained agency and the expression of variations related to different socio-historic conditions can be identified. (Jameson, 1981) building on this defense argues the value of comparative analysis as a means of

accounting for the structural justification for the different types of narrative. The research will show the functioning of antihumanism discourse in different expressions of naturalism, through comparison.

### Literary Corpus

This study's literary texts are Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The texts have been carefully chosen as they are the quintessential American naturalistic works and offer extensive depictions of determinism, social restriction, and the demise of agency.

### Unit of Analysis

The value to be analyzed in this study is the value of the Textual Unit. Regarding their interaction to particular focus is given to narrative descriptions, the description of characters, of dialogue and of thematic structures that show the interaction between determinism, agency and subjectivity.

### Analytical Tools

The analysis tools used in the study are complementary and have been used to serve the objectives of the research:

- Discourse Analysis: This is utilized to analyze how discourse constructs and is used to support representations of determinism and antihumanism in the texts.
- Character Analysis: Concentrates on the growth of major characters, especially in the force of the loss of agency and the impact of the external force.
- Narrative Structure Analysis: Explores how plot progression, point of view, and other techniques of narrative display the deterministic structures and perform the acts of building meaning.

These are tools to permit multi-level processing that incorporates textual details along with more general theoretical knowledge.

These analytical tools were applied systematically to specific textual passages rather than to novels, thereby ensuring consistency and methodological transparency throughout the analysis.



### **Analytical Procedures**

The analysis was conducted in four sequential stages. First, the selected novels were closely read to identify passages related to determinism, agency, social constraint, and subjectivity. Second, these passages were categorized according to the study's analytical framework, namely Naturalism, Determinism, Loss of Agency, and Antihumanism. Third, the selected textual evidence was interpreted through the theoretical perspectives of Foucault and Althusser concerning the construction of subjectivity. Finally, a comparative analysis was undertaken to identify similarities and differences between the two novels regarding the representation of structural constraint and the erosion of human agency.

### **Justification of Sample Selection**

The choice of *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is adequately justified both theoretically and analytically. To begin with, both the texts are well known as the classical examples of American naturalism and as such, they are largely applicable to the area of determinism and agency identified in the study. Second, they are different but complementary socio-historical settings-racial oppression in *Native Son* and urban poverty in *Maggie*-so that one may comparatively examine the effects of variations in the attainment of structural restriction, which creates similar antihumanism effects. Third, they have rich critical histories that enable them to have substantial grounds in which they can explore the existing scholarship in addition to enabling them to come up with a set of theoretical perspectives.

### **Methodological Contribution**

This methodology can be used to investigate the relationship between naturalism and antihumanism comprehensively by incorporating text and juxtaposition analysis in an analytical-critical platform. It allows the study to transcend the descriptive meanings to a theoretical based examination that parallels the literary form with a philosophical question and thus upgrades the complexity and strength of the research study.



## Analysis

### Historical Context of Native Son

(Richard Wright's *Native Son*, 1940) emerged during a period marked by profound racial segregation and social inequality in the United States. The novel reflects the realities of African American life in Chicago during the late 1930s, when discriminatory housing policies, economic exclusion, and institutional racism severely restricted opportunities for Black communities. The Great Migration had brought large numbers of African Americans to northern cities in search of economic advancement, yet many continued to experience systematic marginalization. Understanding this historical context is essential because Bigger Thomas's actions cannot be separated from the racial structures that shaped his social existence. The novel therefore represents not only an individual tragedy but also a broader critique of the social conditions that produced racialized subjectivity.

### Bigger Thomas as a Constructed Subject

Bigger Thomas is the character around which one can see the antihumanism reasoning of *Native Son*. Instead of coming forth as an autonomous person in his own right, bigger turns out to be a product of systematic forces, especially racial oppression and social-economic marginalization. In building identity, Richard (Wright, 1940/2000) provides Bigger with a menu of limited options where the decisions can be interpreted more as a reaction to structural forces rather than much of an act of free choice. This concurs with (John Smith, 2023) who points out that the subjectivity of Bigger is conditioned by racial determinism, one that restricts his ability to exercise free agency.

Wright presents Bigger Thomas as a subject trapped within a social order that defines him before he can define himself. Early in the novel, bigger reflects his constant awareness of racial restriction when he states: "We live here and they live there. We black and they white" (Wright, 1940/2000). This brief statement encapsulates the rigid social division governing his existence. Rather than expressing an autonomous identity, bigger articulates a consciousness already shaped by external racial structures. From an antihumanism perspective, the passage illustrates how subjectivity is produced through social categorization rather than



individual self-determination. The character's sense of self emerges as an effect of structural power, a notion consistent with Althusser's concept of ideological interpellation and Foucault's understanding of subject formation.

### **The Impact of Racism as Structural Determinism**

Racism in *Native Son* is not only a thematic element but also a structural force which sets the boundaries of Bigger, as an individual. The social order depicted in the novel manifests itself as a system of racial stratification that systematically limits chances at becoming an actual subject to generate a state of existential entrapment. The actions of Bigger in this situation make sense when considered by (M. Abdulbaqi, 2022), as he says that he is both rebellious and inevitable, at the same time. In this context, racism is a deterministic process that reduces individual to a product of external factors.

The deterministic nature of racism becomes particularly evident in Bigger's repeated fear of crossing racial boundaries. When he enters the Dalton household, his actions are governed less by personal intention than by the anticipation of white judgment and punishment. The narrative repeatedly emphasizes his anxiety, hesitation, and self-surveillance. These textual details demonstrate that racism functions not merely as a social background but as an active structural force that organizes perception, behavior, and possibility. Consequently, Bigger's actions become reactions to an already established system of power rather than expressions of autonomous agency.

### **The Erosion of Agency**

The net impact of these forces is gradual weakening of Bigger as an agent. His actions (even the decisive acts of violence) are portrayed because of fear, social conditioning, and lack of choice in general instead of a conscious moral decision. Such its description, however, is consistent with an antihumanism stance whereby the subject lacks autonomy and is degraded into a structural constraint. Thus, the path that bigger takes shows the failures of agency, as well as the failure of the humanist conception of a self-determining man.



## **Antihumanism in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets**

### **Historical Context of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets**

Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) was written during a period of rapid urbanization and industrial expansion in the United States. The novel portrays the harsh realities of life in the impoverished neighborhoods of New York City, where overcrowding, unemployment, alcoholism, and social neglect characterized the experiences of many working-class families. Influenced by contemporary naturalist thought, Crane depicts poverty not merely as an economic condition but as a powerful environmental force that shapes identity and behavior. Situating *Maggie* within this historical context highlights how her personal fate is inseparable from the broader social and economic structures of late nineteenth-century urban America.

### **Maggie as a Product of Environment**

The title character's main character in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is also formed through her surroundings – she is a victim of being born in a city of poverty. (Stephen Crane, 1893/2001), in his life of *Maggie*, portrays her life as a path that is guided by socio-economic deprivation, dysfunctional family and underprivileged mobility. (Laura Johnson, 2024) argues that the subjectivity of *Maggie* is slowly lost due to the circumstances of the city that does not provide much chance to make any meaningful decisions as a person.

Crane's *Maggie* is set in a context of violence, poverty and domestic instability. Narrator characterizes neighborhood as one of social neglect and degradation, setting out from the beginning that *Maggie's* life is going to be influenced by forces outside her control. Throughout the novel, she is not depicted as a moral force for herself, but rather as being shaped by an oppressive urban environment. This representation enshrines the naturalist view that environmental forces play to a high extent in determining individual identity.

### **Urban Poverty and Environmental Constraint**

The novel of Crane is significantly driven by urban setting which conditions behavior and is favored by naturalism as a determinant of milieu. Space and social process of the city are explored in *Studies in American Naturalism*, (2021-2024) to see how constrained identities are



formed in it. Poorish, as a ubiquitous island, limits means and shapes social relations, as well as fates—in the case of Maggie, very literally. Turning the environment into a subjective actor in the process of subjectivity production.

### **The Collapse of Human Subjectivity**

Maggie's ultimate destruction is an example of the loss of the subjectivity of man in a system of determinism. Indeterminateness is not just about the social restrictions of her liminality, but also the extended "denial of agency. Maggie makes no meaningful choice as do the normal tragic characters, but rather her fate is predestined, so to speak, by the exigencies of the structure she inhabits. According to this description, the human individual lacks the existence of an independent Self; he is a result of the conditioning effects of his environment; hence it matches with the concept of anti-humanism.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Points of Convergence: Determinism and Marginalization

Determinism and marginalization are fundamental components of human existence and form a part of both *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Both texts are set in bare social structures, which constrict the actions of the characters, lending a naturalistic feel in terms of cause and effect. In both, the protagonists either lack racial oppression, or they are poor and the condition they find themselves in gradually undermines their power. Hence, this intersection serves as how it is possible to assert the claim that the image of the subject in a naturalist work of literature is always ant humanistic.

Both novels were created during different historical ages, but both reflect to significant social events in America's society. The first book, *Native Son*, explores the impact of racial segregation in the twentieth century, and the second, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, explores the impact of urban poverty during the industrial era. Both texts demonstrate how past histories construct individual experiences and how over time, agency is sapped in both contexts.

### Points of Divergence: Race vs. Poverty

Even though these two novels share these characteristics, there are differences in the particularities of the structural constraint which they foreground. The role of race in the *Native Son* is that of the determinant that sets up the interactions of Bigger and determines his own identity in the stratified society by race. On the other hand, *Maggie* gives importance to poverty and the urban setting, which impacted on the main character's path. Such differences make clear the diversity of determinism forms and how different socio-historical environments can produce identical outcomes – a constrained agency.

Although they both create constraints for agency, racism and poverty function in the different ways of subject formation. Racial classification is an apparatus of social containment and observation outside Bigger, operating as a means of orchestrating his view of himself and his actions, like in *Native Son*. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, however, portrays poverty as an environmental experience, and as an experience that gradually progresses toward a sense of normalcy and deprivation, and that generally melts the development of a person's identity. As such, novels are not just a depiction of the various forms of oppression, but rather a collection of pathways through which subjectivity is shaped and curbed.

### Interpretation considering the Theoretical Framework

Thanks to the adopted theoretical model – Naturalism, to Determinism, to Loss of Agency, to Antihumanism – two texts are cases of the social and environmental constraints becoming a loss of subjectivity. The conditions of determinism represented in both novels give rise to a progressive elimination of agency which culminates in the antihumanism portrayal of the human being. However, even in the difference in context between the two works, it is through this comparative analysis that this paper is therefore able to affirm that both works are engaged in a larger literary discourse that dismantles the assumptions that underlie humanism.

The nature of resistance is an important distinction that has arisen from the comparison. Sometimes, Bigger shows some gestures of confrontation and symbolic rebellion against the racial structures, but these are not successful and he does not attain autonomy. *Maggie*, on the other hand, is

shown to be increasingly immersed in the social reality that condemns her destiny. This difference indicates that being anti-human doesn't mean the same thing in the two novels: it can show itself in varying intensities of tensions between structural determination and residual agency.

### **Alternative Interpretations and Residual Agency**

While *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is here seen in the light of antihumanism, other critical perspectives on the novel could be developed. The idea of moments of resistance is seen in *Bigger Thomas* as some scholars believe that moments of resistance show that there is still agency with these structures of oppression. His self-defiant actions and making attempts to retain control over his situation could be seen as the development of “some” level of self-determination. Maggie's desire for a better life can also be seen in a similar manner as she's expressing more than what the environment dictates; it's her personal desire beyond the environmental constraint. In this way, protagonists are not just passive victims of outside influences, but people who still strive to renegotiate the situation they are in, in terms of the limiting frameworks of society.

However, the possible acts of resistance that happen in this study are by no means revolutionary change or estrangement of the deterministic processes of the narratives. Rather, they present the conflict of individual aspiration and institutional constraint. The way both novels ultimately finish up shows that individual action is still subordinate to other racial, economic and environmental movers and shakers. Thus, the antihumanism view will be the most complete one in explaining the feminization of the agency and subjectivity formation in the selected texts.

### **Results**

In this section, one can find the results of the research rendered in clear systematic way, which are directly based on the analytical analysis of *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, and do not contradict the suggested theoretical framework.

### **The Presence of Antihumanism Discourse**

As the analysis shows, both novels create a stable antihumanism discourse where the human subject is not a part of a free and rationalized agent but a form of product of external structural forces. In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas is presented as a person whose identity is influenced by the systemic racism, thus restricting his ability to act independently. Likewise, in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, life path of the protagonist is predestined by poverty and social abandonment of the city.

These observations demonstrate that the depiction of characters in both writings goes beyond social critique to some other philosophical approach, which challenges the concept of human centrality itself. The person is not depicted as the agent of action but as its consequences. Therefore, both stories reflexively regress to the humanist credo of self-determining and coherent subject.

### **The Erosion of Human Agency**

One of the most important findings of the research is the recognition of gradual loss of human agency in the two texts. Through analysis, it is evident that:

- It is not free choice but reactive to constrained situations.
- Actions are not considered to be intentional but inevitable.
- Structural determinants create disequilibrium in moral responsibility.

In *Native Son*, the acts perpetrated by Bigger, especially those of violence, are depicted because of fear, socialization and limited access, and not an intentional act. In *Maggie*, in the protagonist lack of power to fit her world presents a parallel lack of power as the decisions are dictated by poverty, dysfunction in the family, and social ostracism.

Such tendencies justify the assertion that agency is not only constrained but essentially redefined in a way that concurs with an anti-humanist approach to the subject, which sees the subject as not being a truly autonomous entity.

### **The Role of Naturalism in Producing Antihumanism**

The results also prove that naturalism serves as the main tool by which the antihumanism discourse is developed. The naturalist narrative has a deterministic logic, working on several levels:

➤ Narrative Structure: The action is presented in a chain of events, accentuating inevitability.

➤ Characterization: People are described as responding to, as opposed to being active.

➤ Thematic Development: There is always an advantage of foregrounding social and environmental forces over the intention of individuals through them.

This confirms that naturalism is not only a portrayal of defined circumstances but also part of dismantling human agency and thus it is what enables the surfacing of an antihumanism paradigm. The development which was observed in the theoretical model-

Naturalism (then Degenerate) Determinism (then) Loss of Agency (then) Antihumanism is echoed in the two readings.

### **Convergence Across Different Contexts**

The other important outcome is the finding of structural convergence between the two novels although the two novels belong to different socio-historical settings:

➤ Native Son pre-empts racial determinism.

➤ Maggie stresses economic and environmental determinism.

But then, they both end in the same:

- the relegation of the subject.
- agency loss.
- the creation of an antihumanism image of human life.

This implies that naturalist literature does not have a context-specific antihumanism but is more of a widespread structural phenomenon which can manifest itself in various forms of marginalization.

### **Alignment with the Research Hypothesis**

The findings are quite consistent with the main hypothesis of the study:

It is not only that the American naturalism in Native Son and Maggie: A Girl of the Streets portrays the social determinism, but it constructs an antihumanism discourse whereby human agency is debilitated, and subjectivity is redefined as the actions of structural forces.

Analysis affirms that:

➤ At least determinism is more than a descriptive element.

➤ Agency not just is circumscribed, but conceptually undermined.

➤ The human subject is restructured, as a structure of structural dependency.

Therefore, the results support the hypothesis and prove the fact that naturalist literature is very crucial in transforming the philosophical orientation of human existence.

### **Divergent Forms of Antihumanism Subjectivity**

Although both novels undermine traditional notions of autonomous agencies, they do so through different mechanisms. Native Son constructs antihumanism

Both novels have a plain nearness with issues of autonomous agency, yet the way they operate to deconstruct it is different. While *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* builds up antihumanism subjectivity based on environmental deprivation and exclusion from society, *Native Son* does so based on racial surveillance and systemic rejection. This distinction shows that anti-humanism in American naturalism isn't a monolithic phenomenon, it is rather a multi-faceted process made unique by the historical and social circumstances.

### **Summary of Key Results**

The results of the study are as follows:

1. In both novels, there is a solid and well-developed antihumanism discursiveness.
2. The agency of humans is undermined and altered systematically.
3. Naturalism is a structural mechanism which has this outcome.
4. Similar antihumanism representations are caused by different forms of marginalization (race vs. poverty).
5. Findings are completely valid about the theoretical model and hypothesis.

### **Discussion**

#### **Interpreting the Findings Considering Previous Studies**

The results of this research correlate with and further develop the current research on American naturalism. Previous research has continually underlined how determinism has influenced the behavior of character especially with regards to socio-economic and environmental limitations. As an example, (Keith Gandall, 2022) also argues about the importance of urban environments in shaping subjectivity, which perfectly manifests

itself in the discussion of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. In the same manner, (Raymond Williams,1977) puts more emphasis on the nature of interaction between culture and structure, indicating how personal experience is fully entrenched into the larger social structure.

Nevertheless, even though such studies are effective to prove the existence of the structural constraints, they are likely to be short of extending their views and expressing the philosophical implications of these structural constraints. This paper adds to this debate by showing that the idea of determinism in naturalist writing is not a goal description, but a constitutive rule that reforms the very nature of the human being. This way, it adds to the already existing research, but overcome its conceptual limitations.

### **Theoretical Contribution of the Study**

An important contribution of the study is the fact that it considers both antihumanism and naturalism in the same analytical model. Although recent scholarship, especially that by (Thomas Brown,2025), argues that naturalism should be reassessed in connection with the antihumanism theory, its applicability is a tangible form of the latter, which is demonstrated by the study through textual analysis. In presenting the erosion of agency and reconfiguring subjectivity facilitated by deterministic structures, the study provides a more comprehensive insight on naturalist literature.

Furthermore, the paper establishes the transformative structure consisting of Naturalism, into Determinism, into Loss of Agency, into Antihumanism, introducing the theoretical framework that can be utilized to examine the problem of the link between the literary form and the philosophical discourse. This model not only explains the different processes that occur between structural constraint, and antihumanism representation, it also offers a cumulative path to undertake in future studies of literature.

### **Linking the Findings to Contemporary Literary Criticism**

The findings of this work are quite good echoes to recent arguments in literary criticism, especially those arguments that deal with humanism, and the influence of structural forces in building identity. According to Walter Benn (Michaels,2020), contemporary critical discourse is



becoming increasingly aware of how identity-centered frameworks are unable to adequately account for problems related to inequality, focusing rather on the structural circumstances that support inequality. This view coincides with the findings of the study which reveal that both the Native Son and Maggie form subjectivity as being produced by the systemic forces other than by their agency.

Simultaneously, the work can be seen as adding to the redefinitions of naturalism as a complex and theoretically fertile literary form. It connects the naturalist determinism to the antihumanism theory and thus puts these texts in a broader context of intellectual currents which question the supremacy of the human subject. In this respect it is not only the work that demonstrates the value and instrumental nature of naturalism in modern criticism but also the value of naturalism as an interpretive concept.

### **Antihumanism and Determinism: A Reconfigured Relationship**

The discussion also brings out the inherent connection between determinism and antihumanism, exuded in the analysis. Determinism is not only a limitation of action, but also just as much of a process that is re-played through the subject. This observation is consistent with an argument put forth by (Williams,1977) that cultural forms are indicative of underlying structural conditions and even broadens the argument by showing how such conditions can result in the deconstruction of humanist assumptions.

Here antihumanism is not imposed on us theoretically as an exterior truth but is rather the logical step of naturalist representation. The dogmatic reasoning intrinsic in the narratives disfigures systematically the idea of agency as autonomous, thus creating an image of human subject as structurally subjected. This reorganized relation of determinism and antihumanism is one of the main provisions of the work.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The results create new perspectives to explore further research, especially regarding the period of applying the theory of antihumanism to the other literary traditions and styles. The composite scheme proposed in this paper can be stretched to reflect the influences by various types of structural restriction: colonialism, gender inequality, or technological



order on the representations of subjectivity. Furthermore, the areas of intersection between naturalism and new conceptual approaches, including posthumanism, could be examined in future research, thus increasing the scope of literary analysis.

### Summary of the Discussion

Overall, this discussion has illustrated that the findings of this study have affirmed the current knowledge on determinism of naturalist literature in addition to shedding light on it by presenting an antihumanism approach. Through the combination of theory and textual consideration, the research offers a more detailed conceptualization of the way literary discourses form and criticize the human subject. This contribution places the research in the context of modern critical discussions and emphasizes its role in the current processes in literary theory.

### Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore how far American naturalist fiction creates an antihumanism discourse by means of the depiction of inhibited subjectivity, using the examples of *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The results have shown that the two texts are unified descriptions of characters as effects of external structural power, i.e. racial oppression and urban poverty, and in that way constrain, and in most instances, deny, the alternative of independent human agency. The study has validated with textual and comparative analysis that determinism is a major organizing principle in both stories, which influence the characters, plot, and construction of themes.

Addressing the main research question as to whether naturalism is only a depiction of determinism, or as an active investment in a recon figurative antihumanism mode of the human subject, the paper finds that naturalist fiction goes beyond descriptive determinism although it takes part in a cogent response to antihumanism redefining. The development found in the theoretical model (Naturalism , Determinism , Loss of Agency , Antihumanism) is quite noticeable in both novels as the loss of agency results in the present model of agent being viewed as structurally dependent, and not as an agent.

In this regard, this paper proves its original hypothesis that American naturalism in *Native Son* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is not merely



a depiction of condign but an active re-formation of human subject within an antihumanism frame. It has been demonstrated that not only is agency constrained but also the very concept of agency is reconfigured, with a character being placed in a system, where their behavior and results are determined. Such a transition of autonomy to structural dependency can be viewed as a pronounced variation on humanist conventionalization's.

The academic and scientific significance of this work is its contribution to the lack of literature through it incorporating naturalist criticism and integrating it with the modern antihumanism theory. The study provides a new analytical paradigm as it suggests and tests an analytical model that can complement our insight into the way literary texts are used to find answers to the wider philosophical issues related to subjectivity, agency, and structure. Moreover, the comparative aspect of the research indicates the uniformity of the antihumanism discourse in various socio-historical contexts, which contributes to the increased generalizability of the results. To sum up, this work is also a contribution to the re-evaluation of American naturalism as it shows that it can find its way to the modern theoretical discourse. Not just does it reestablish the significance of naturalist literature as a reflection of social realities but also emphasizes its contribution to the challenge and reconstruction of some of the most basic assumptions concerning the nature of the human subject.

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مناهضة الإنسانية في رواية "ابن البلد" و"ماغي: فتاة الشوارع": دراسة طبيعية مقارنة

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### مستخلص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص تشكّل خطاب اللا إنسانية (Antihumanism) في اثنين من أبرز نصوص الرواية الطبيعية الأمريكية، وهما رواية «ماغي: فتاة الشوارع» لستيفن كرين، ورواية الابن الأصلي لريتشارد رايت. وتنتقل الدراسة من مساءلة الفرضيات الأساسية للخطاب الإنساني التقليدي، من خلال طرح تساؤل حول الكيفية التي تُقوّض بها الرواية الطبيعية مفاهيم الاستقلالية (Autonomy)، والفاعلية (Agency)، والذاتية (Subjectivity) التي يقوم عليها الفكر الإنساني. وتهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف العلاقة بين الطبيعية واللا إنسانية، وتحليل دور البنى الاجتماعية في تقويض استقلالية الفرد وفقدانه القدرة على تقرير مصيره. وقد اعتمد البحث منهجاً تحليلياً نقدياً مقارنةً، مستنداً إلى إطار نظري يجمع بين الطبيعية، والحمية (Determinism)، ونظرية الفاعلية (Agency Theory)، فضلاً عن الطروحات المعاصرة للا إنسانية، مع التركيز بصورة خاصة على أفكار ميشيل فوكو ولويس ألتوسير. وتُظهر النتائج أن الروائيتين تقدّمان شخصياتهما بوصفها نتاجاً لضغوط عرقية واقتصادية وبيئية تفرض قيوداً كبيرة على قدرتها على الفعل المستقل. وعلى الرغم من انتماء النصين إلى سياقين اجتماعيين وتاريخيين مختلفين، فإنهما يتقاطعان في تصوير الذات الإنسانية بوصفها مشروطة بنيوياً وليست كياناً مستقلاً قادراً على تحديد مصيره بنفسه. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الطبيعية الأمريكية لا تمثل مجرد تصوير أدبي للحمية الاجتماعية، بل تُعد خطاباً أدبياً يسهم، من منظور لا إنساني، في تفكيك مفهوم الفاعلية الإنسانية وإعادة تعريف الذاتية. كما تسهم هذه النتائج في ردم الفجوة النظرية بين النقد الطبيعي التقليدي والتوجهات المعاصرة في الفكر اللا إنساني.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللا-إنسانية، الطبيعية، الحمية، الفاعلية، الأدب الأمريكي، البنية الاجتماعية.

ملاحظة: هل البحث مسئل من رسالة ماجستير او اطروحة دكتوراه ؟ كلا : بحث اصيل