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**In the Shadow of the Giant: The Impact of the Industrial City on Identity in Late
Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century American Literature**

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**In the Shadow of the Giant: The Impact of the Industrial City on Identity in Late
Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century American Literature**

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The Industrial Era in America ushered in a time of unprecedented economic growth, yet unfortunately, the industrial-consumer culture created by this growth fostered a devaluation of the American individual during this time in history. This study looks at four novels written during this era—Steven Crane's *Maggie*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*, and John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*—and discusses the ways in which the authors of these books highlight the devaluation of people in the Industrial Era through their depictions of urban life in these novels. In *Maggie*, Crane uses an impressionistic portrayal of New York City to reveal deep social contrasts that affect the value its inhabitants place on themselves and others around them. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* shows how industrialism during the late nineteenth century spawned a crazed consumerism in American culture that encouraged people to ground their senses of significance in their social status and buying power. The growth of Bidwell, Ohio, into an industrial city in Anderson's *Poor White* illustrates the sense of confusion and displacement people experienced during industrialism, a confusion that came as a result of being alienated from things in which they once found their value and significance. Finally, in *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos likens the industrial city to an unyielding machine and, by way of this analogy, shows the way in which the industrial

city robbed people of individual significance by demanding conformity to the industrial system.

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Introduction

"Better morals, better sanitary conditions, better health, better wages, ... these are the practical results of the factory system, as compared with what preceded it, and the results of all these have been a keener intelligence"—these words come from a paper by Carroll D. Wright published in the *Journal of Social Science* in 1882 (qtd. by Trachtenberg 42) and embody the optimism some Americans had regarding industrialization in the late nineteenth century. Yet not all Americans shared this great optimism, as Howard notes, "Any study of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America encounters not just a vague discomfort but the sense, widely articulated by contemporaries and uniformly reflected by historians, that there is an immediate threat to social order, a sense that the very foundations of American life are endangered" (75). One of the obvious effects of the processes of industrialism at this time was the burgeoning of large industrial cities,¹ some seeming to have appeared over night, and as the main hubs for the great majority of the country's industrial activities,² these cities inevitably absorbed the same sentiments of optimism and trepidation that were attributed to industrialization itself. The literature of this time illustrates the tension between these two sentiments. Much of the contemporary popular literature, such as the Horatio Alger stories, reinforced an optimistic view of the city and touted the claim that success waited just around every city corner. The literature of the realists, naturalists and eventually the modernists of the period, however, highlights the uncertainty, frustration, and degradation

of industrial urban life. The works of this type of literature not only underscore the harsh and many times brutal realities endured by the majority of city-dwellers but also vividly depicts the ways in which the industrial urban environment affected personal identity at this time. In this way, these works most significantly identified the way in which industrialization was leading to the devaluation of the majority of American citizens. Four American novels from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Steven Crane's *Maggie*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*, and John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*—do just this; the ways in which each of these authors depict urban life during this time period reveal the effect of the industrial city on characters' identities and thus illustrate the reality of the devaluation of people during the industrial era.

In order to understand why these authors chose to highlight the harsh reality of the devaluation of people during industrialism, it is important to look at some of the key elements of industrialization that led to these changes in identity during this time. The processes of industrialization as well as the effects of industrialization experienced in the cities at this time of history redefined for many Americans the way in which they identified themselves in society, for these new industrial realities quickly alienated people from many of the things in which they previously found personal value. The mechanization of manufacturing is one such industrial process. As the manufacturing of goods became more and more mechanized, many city inhabitants found that their knowledge and skills of craftsmanship by which they had previously identified themselves and in which they had found their value prior to mechanization were of little to no value in the new industrial age. Instead of being leaders in their communities and

known for the products they supplied, the majority of workers in industrial cities found themselves as parts of nameless masses doing mindless labor as feeders and operators of machines. According to Trachtenberg, "The new breed of business leaders were often skilled in finance, in market manipulation, in corporate organization. . . . And industrial laborers now tended to be men and women without traditional skills, operators and machine tenders, with little hope of significant social improvement through their own talents and efforts" (54). Instead of being identified and valued in society by their skills and the products of their labor, millions of industrial workers found that their value to society had been reduced to how much work they could accomplish in a given amount of time: "Measurement by time represented the transformation of the laborer's efforts, his skills, intelligence, and muscle power, into a salable commodity: his own labor converted into a market value, into wages" (Trachtenberg 91). Mechanization ultimately alienated workers from the productive and meaningful labor in which they once found personal value and reduced them to mere parts of the factory machinery, valuable only in their cost-effectiveness and easily interchangeable with nameless others waiting to take their places.

Following quickly on the heels of mechanization, incorporation, another process of industrialization, began to further alienate workers from that with which they had previously identified themselves in society. In an effort to build capital and to control competition in markets, business leaders began creating corporations; they joined together several of their forces of production and management into large legal entities that could "hold property, sue and be sued, enter contracts, and continue in existence beyond the lifetime or membership of any of [their] participants" (Trachtenberg 82-3).

The public at large was issued shares in these corporations, but most shareholders had no authority or say in how the corporations would run; these decisions instead were made by a small board of business leaders and managers. In this way, the inhuman corporation itself ironically took precedence over the people who owned it, as it was more valuable in the industrial system than its individual owners, leading Trachtenberg to call them "artificial persons with a legal and economic life of their own" (86). He claims that, in short order, "the corporation swiftly displaced unincorporated forms (individual ownership, partnership) as the most significant organization of business" (Trachtenberg 83), capable of crushing the competition of small businesses with ease. Where factory machines became more valuable in society than workers' skills and craftsmanship, corporate entities became more valuable in society than individual businessmen and artisans, again alienating a mass of workers who had previously found their identity in business ownership and independence. Instead of being valued as private owners of needed businesses, many people found themselves as failed businessmen, searching for alternative means of survival in the factories of the corporations that forced them out of business. Stanley Corkin sums up the effects of both mechanization and incorporation on the majority of Americans when he writes, "Whereas in the agrarian past labor was an intrinsic part of an individual's life, something he controlled and used to produce a substance of personal value and utility, now labor became a commodity to sell in the industrial market, controlled by others and used to produce objects of no particular personal meaning" (606).

Although the processes of mechanization and incorporation directly affected the identities of a large portion of Americans, they also helped to usher in perhaps the

greatest cause of the devaluation of people at this time: class stratification. A difference in wealth and status among citizens existed in American society prior to the late nineteenth century but never on as great a scale as was ushered in by industrialization. Never had such wealth and opulence been seen in America prior to this time, and never had the distribution of wealth across the citizenry been so unequal. Trachtenberg claims that, during the late nineteenth century, "social contrasts reached a pitch without precedent in American life outside the slave South" (72), with a miniscule portion of the population controlling the vast majority of the wealth and the majority of industrial workers either at or below the poverty line.³ Urban areas saw the highest concentration of these social contrasts, as scads of people moved into the burgeoning cities from outlying rural areas. Many of them came with hopes of amassing great wealth only to be disappointed by the great lack of the social mobility they had believed the industrial city promised. Andrew Lawson describes the city of New York at this time as "a city polarized" between the lavishly wealthy and the dreadfully impoverished (596), and regarding his own experience with New York at this time, Theodore Dreiser remarked, "There was that astounding contrast between wealth and poverty, here more sharply emphasized than anywhere else in America, which gave the great city a gross and cruel and mechanical look..." (qtd. in White, 135). This great discrepancy in the wealth and status of people in society significantly alienated people from the sense of community and friendship in which they previously found personal value, for as the gulf between classes became wider, so the gulf between the acquaintances of people among these different classes became greater. Additionally, people who found themselves in the lower classes—which was the majority of society—were alienated from each other, as

many found that they must compete with each other in order to find and keep industrial jobs, and this reality ate away at the sense of community as well. Class stratification also alienated the majority of people from a feeling of self worth in their ability to provide for and make a decent life for themselves and their families. People of all classes began to believe that their value rested in how much wealth they garnered and to which class they belonged. This belief not only devalued the majority of Americans, who had little to no wealth, but it also devalued people as a whole by reducing personal value to bank accounts and club memberships.

This is the harsh reality of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America: the processes of industrialization and their effects on society, seen most palpably in unprecedented class stratification, alienated people from the things in which they commonly found personal value and led to an overall devaluation of people in the industrial era. As Crane, Dreiser, Anderson and Dos Passos sought to underscore this devaluation to their reading public, they turned to the depiction of urban life in order to do so, for all of these processes were, for the most part, centered in the city, making the city the place where the effects of industrialization were most keenly experienced. Stuart Blumin writes that "most nineteenth-century industrialization occurred within the city," as most "industrial firms" flocked together seeking "the same transactional efficiencies ... at or near sources of capital, labor, managerial skill, information, the products of ancillary firms, transportational breakpoints, municipal services, and ... power, including great piles of inexpensive coal" (49). Because the city became the center for most industrial processes and because so many people were flocking to these cities, all four authors in this study use the industrial city as the setting for their novels and use the experience of

urban life to show industrialism's effect on people's sense of identity and personal value. Through their writings, these authors make the industrial city in their novels a symbol of industrialism itself to show the devastating effect industrialization had on the way people were valued and the way they valued themselves during this time.

Some people at this time believed the best about industrialization and, like Carroll D. Wright, believed it was ushering in the America of everyone's dreams. Many others, such as the authors discussed in this study, were more critical of industrialism because they also saw the harsh and brutal consequences it was wreaking on the sense of identity and value of the majority of Americans. As the authors in this study sought to illustrate the devaluation of people that was resulting from rapid industrialization, they turned to the city for use not only as a setting for their novels but, more importantly, as a symbol of industrialization itself. It is in their vivid depictions of urban life during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and its great effect on their characters' identity that they give their boldest observations about the devaluation of the American people during the industrial era.

Chapter One

Drowning in a Mud Puddle: Surviving the City in Crane's Maggie

In 1893, under the pseudonym "Johnston Smith," Stephen Crane originally printed his novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* at his own expense, printing 1,100 copies but selling only a few ("Preface," xi). After the success of Crane's second novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, D. Appleton and Company officially published *Maggie* in 1896, but they did so only after Crane made several revisions to his original edition ("Preface," xi). Among the revisions made was the removal of a parenthetical subtitle that appeared after the novel's title in the 1893 version; the removed subtitle read, "A Story of New York." This modification may seem inconsequential, but a reading of the book's content shows that Crane's parenthetical subtitle suitably describes the book and probably should have remained a part of it. As much as Crane's novel is the story of Maggie Johnson and her seduction and subsequent prostitution, the novel is just as much, if not more, a story about the slums of New York City in the late nineteenth century. Crane uses the tenement-stocked streets of a fictional Rum Alley and an impoverished immigrant family to tell the non-fictional story of the myriad thousands of poor living in the Bowery of New York City in the late 1800's, and Maggie's story simply reflects the reality of countless girls in this city.⁴ The novel largely focuses on the effects of rapid industrialization on the poor during this era, and Crane illustrates the city in his novel with vivid contrasts of color and light and shocking images of brutality and inhumanity to underscore these effects. By employing these contrasts in *Maggie*, Crane crafts an impressionistic portrayal of New York City that reveals the deep social contrasts that

existed as a result of industrialization, where a greedy upper class relegates the poor to the violent world of the slums where the fight for survival devalues people to the level of brutish animals.

In his book *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, James Nagel points out that the impressionistic movement that rose to prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century was grounded in the belief that people perceive reality in fragments, as bursts of sensory impressions, and that impressionistic artists therefore strive to capture in their art life as it is “actually seen” through these impressions (11).⁵ In the area of literary impressionism, authors endeavor to communicate to their readers impressions of life as experienced by the characters within their texts, with the hope of creating "the effect of a more accurate 'realism' in the rendering of nature as it is perceived" (Nagel 11). Where Nagel argues that Crane's works reflect this style of writing, his discussion of impressionism is particularly significant in understanding the manner in which Crane depicts city life in *Maggie*. For the majority of the novel, Crane skillfully employs the literary impressionistic technique that Nagel calls "imagistic evocation," or the use of vivid sensory images, to illustrate the novel's urban setting. Just as impressionistic painting relies on contrasts and variations of light and color in order to create on canvas an impression of a scene, Crane uses various expressions of color and contrast to convey the perceived reality of the city scenes of *Maggie*. His impressionistic portrayal of New York through contrasting colors, the use of light and shadow and juxtapositions of scenes of violence with scenes of indifference proves an appropriate method to express the extreme social contrasts that were the reality of the city in the late nineteenth century.

The color imagery Crane uses in describing the city and the inhabitants of Rum Alley aids the reader in visually perceiving the scenes described and also generates moods represented by the different colors he uses. Speaking of these descriptions of color, Katherine Simoneaux writes, "The colors used, usually strong and pure, heighten the emotions that surround the characters, their environment, and their problems" (222).⁶ In other words, Crane's use of color to portray setting as seen through the eyes of his characters also evokes a general mood or emotional response that is associated with those colors. In Chapter II, for example, Crane uses dark and shadowy color images to paint the tenement building that is Maggie's home, writing that the building resided in "a dark region" and contained "gruesome doorways," "dark stairways" and "gloomy halls" (Crane 6-7).⁷ Although none of these descriptions clearly names a color, the overall visual impression evoked by these images is that of a heavy and consuming blackness, black being a color that suggests moods ranging from fear to depression and oppression. In a similar fashion, Crane describes the Johnson apartment with images that suggest the dirty shades of brown and grey: "Maggie contemplated the dark, dust-stained walls" and "the appearance of a dingy curtain," "displaced lids and open doors showed heaps of sullen grey ashes," while "[t]he remnants of a meal, ghastly, like dead fish, lay in a corner" (20-1).⁸ The impressions evoked by these images convey an overall sense of squalor and griminess that characterize the Johnson home as a place of dullness and degradation. Crane's portrayal of the tenement building and the Johnsons' apartment communicates no note of brightness that one might associate with joy or hope but instead aptly gives the reader a general impression of the oppressiveness and dreariness of slum life.

In addition to using color, light and shadow to create an impression of the city's look and mood, Crane uses contrasting colors and variations of light and shadow to distinguish between different types of settings within the city in order to highlight the social contrasts in New York's Bowery. The color images evoked in Crane's descriptions of the "orchestra of yellow silk women" and gilt chandeliers of the "great green-hued hall" from Chapter VII (Crane 21-2) and the "olive and bronze" tinted wallpaper, "shimmering glasses" and lemons and oranges of the bar in which Pete worked (33-4) create a sense of the way these settings look to the characters. When contrasted to the scene in Chapter XIV of the "hilarious hall" in which Pete eventually abandons Maggie (42), the previous color images also differentiate among the social ranking of the three establishments. Crane uses images of brightness by speaking of gilt chandeliers, shimmering glasses and the colors of yellow, green and orange in portraying the first two establishments, evoking a relative sense of the elegance and cleanliness associated with places of means. He uses no bright images at all, however, in describing the "hilarious hall," associating it more with his dreary descriptions of the Johnson's tenement. Where the smoke in the "green-hued hall" hangs "high in the air about ... the chandeliers" (22), the smoke cloud in the "hilarious hall" is low and "so dense that heads and arms seemed entangled in it" as it "eddied and swirled like a shadowy river" about the room (42), evoking images of darkness and suffocation. "Soiled waiters" and the images of "dusty monstrosities painted on the walls of the room" (42) round off the description of the third establishment, creating a sense of seediness and dinginess that distinguishes it from the relative social repute of the first two establishments. Such contrasts in color, light and

shadow as seen in the descriptions of these saloons occur throughout the novel and underscore the social contrasts that existed even within the Bowery itself.

Crane not only utilizes color contrasts and variations of light and shadow to give an impression of the look and mood of the city; he also uses contrasts between light and shadow to show the impact of the industrial city on its inhabitants. He presents one example of this at the end of Chapter II, when a young Jimmie runs out of his apartment to avoid the fury his mother is unleashing on Maggie: “He floundered about in darkness until he found the stairs. He stumbled, panic-stricken, to the next floor. An old woman opened a door. A light behind her threw a flare on the urchin’s quivering face” (Crane 9). The old woman subsequently offers her apartment as a refuge to Jimmie for that night if he decides he does not want to return home. In this scene, Jimmie runs into the darkness to escape his fear, but his fear only intensifies in the shadows until he encounters the light of the woman’s apartment and her offer of safety. Crane’s images of light and shadow create a vivid impression of this scene and give insight into Jimmie’s character at this point of the novel: Jimmie is a scared little boy trying to survive the darkness of his environment. Another contrast between light and shadow that involves Jimmie takes place in Chapter XV, as he once again tries to escape, this time from a woman whom he has seduced and abandoned. Here, the associations with light and darkness are reversed. After Hattie confronts him on the lighted street and he tells her to “go teh hell,” the scene unfolds as follows: “[Jimmie] darted into the front door of a convenient saloon and a moment later came out into the shadows that surrounded the side door. On the brilliantly lighted avenue he perceived the forlorn woman dodging about like a scout. Jimmie laughed with an air of relief and went away” (47). In the previous

scene, the shadows of the tenement building had amplified Jimmie's fears; in this scene, the shadows of the alley become Jimmie's refuge, as the light of the street offers no safety and only threatens to expose his cruelty. This scene reveals a significant development in Jimmie's character; at this point of the novel, he has grown hardened to the darkness of the city and even exploits it for his survival.

Crane's most poignant use of contrasting light and darkness occurs as he describes Maggie's fate in Chapter XVII, which renders visually the progressive degradation Maggie experiences as a prostitute before her death. Crane utilizes light and shadow to show the impact of the city on Maggie, but he also uses it to comment on the social stratification of the city as well. In "A Cold Case File Reopened," Donald Pizer points out that several critics, including Edwin Cady, Joseph Katz and Matthew Brucoli believe as Pizer does that Crane telescopes time in this chapter in order to underscore Maggie's descent. Pizer argues:

The chapter, it was now understood, did not describe one evening's work by Maggie, even though that is its ostensible time frame. Maggie's descent from soliciting in the brightly lit fashionable theater district to her final client—the "huge fat man"—in the darkness of the adjacent East River, though cast as one evening's journey, is also a rendering of the conventional downward spiral of a New York prostitute over a considerable span of time. ("A Cold Case," 40)

Read in this way, Maggie's descent from light into darkness over a period of time is all the more frightful and tragic in its prolonged misery, yet even if the chapter represents a single evening of work for her, the images of light and shadow within the shifting scenes

artfully portray the degradation and despair that culminates in Maggie's death. At the beginning of the chapter, for instance, Maggie walks in a setting of light, with the "blurred radiance" of electric lights and the hearts of theater-goers "still kindling from the glowings of the stage" as they travel on the "glittering avenues" (Crane 51-2). At first Maggie, too, crosses these glittering avenues, but later in the chapter, she passes by these avenues and goes "into darker blocks" (52). During this initial period in the light, she meets three different men, also of descending status or character who, one by one, turn down her invitations in some way. As she enters the darker blocks, she encounters four more men and, from each, suffers the same demeaning rejection of her overtures, so she travels further into darkness, "into gloomy districts near the river, where the tall black factories shut in the street" (53). She is rejected twice more before she goes "into the blackness of the final block," where "the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance," and here she meets the only man who will accept her advances, a "huge fat man in torn and greasy garments," with "brown, disordered teeth under a grey, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped" (53). As she walks with him to the river, the waters have a "deathly black hue," the ultimate darkness at the end of her journey. Her passage from light into darkness in this chapter vividly depicts the course her life has taken since her first involvement with Pete. Crane uses these contrasts of light and shadow to highlight the most significant difference between Jimmie and Maggie's identities: whereas Jimmie has been hardened to the city's darkness and is able to survive it, Maggie does not adapt and is eventually consumed by the darkness. Additionally, this scene portrays the social descent Maggie endures in her career of prostitution and, in so doing, underscores the deep social contrasts that marked the city in

the late nineteenth century. Her travels from the brightly lit streets of theater-goers into progressively darker and gloomier blocks, coupled with the descending classes of the men who reject her, show the extreme class stratification of the city in such a tight compass of space.

Crane's most powerful use of contrast, though, comes not through color imagery or contrasts of light and shadow but through his juxtaposition of scenes of violence with scenes of indifference which show the brutal realities of slum life and also show the way in which the city impacts the identities of its inhabitants.⁹ Crane places scenes of frenzied city life contiguously to attitudes of apathy, and visions of cold and indifferent buildings and streets appear side by side with the violent actions of the city's inhabitants. Just such a juxtaposition greets the reader at the beginning of the novel, in the scene of Jimmie's defense of Rum Alley. In the first sentence of the book, Jimmie stands atop a pile of gravel, fighting for his honor amidst the "howls of renewed wrath" and "convulsed faces" of the Devil's Row gang members who, "with the grins of true assassins," hurl stones at him (Crane 3). Jimmie stumbles off the pile looking like an "insane demon" with torn clothes, bruises all over his body and blood running from his head (3). Amid this near-homicidal violence, Crane describes the surrounding city:

From a window of an apartment house that upreared its form from amid squat, ignorant stables, there leaned a curious woman. Some laborers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river, paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily to a railing and watched. Over on the Island, a worm of yellow convicts came from the

shadow of a grey ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank. (3-4)

The “squat, ignorant stables,” the pausing laborers, the lazy engineer of the “passive tugboat” and the convicts crawling “slowly along the river's bank” all suggest the city's general indifference to the murderous scene between Jimmie and the Devil's Row gang. David Fitelson describes the impression created by this juxtaposition when he says, “These are unenchanted lives. Their fundamental condition is violence, and this fact seems to be neither haphazard nor peculiar, but reasonable and inevitable” (184). The indifference of the urban onlookers indicates how deeply violence has permeated the very being of the city—so much so that violence is not only accepted as the norm but is even, at times, entertaining. This initial scene marks the beginning of a trend in the novel of pairing scenes of violence with scenes of indifference, a trend that reflects the reality of the savage and yet apathetic industrial city.

Just a few pages later, Crane again pairs violence and indifference. Jimmie's father eventually drags him away from the fight and toward their dark and gloomy tenement dwelling, described in Chapter II as “a careening building” with “a dozen gruesome doorways,” children fighting and playing or just sitting in the street “in the way of vehicles” and disorderly women “leaning on railings,” gossiping or screaming and quarreling with one another (Crane 6). The last sentence of this description encapsulates this atmosphere of violence: “The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels” (6). One sentence within this paragraph, though, stands out conspicuously: “Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners” (6). This description of quiet and

unmoving submission amid the agitated motion and energy of the tenement suggests passivity and acquiescence; it conveys the indifference of people who have given up and submitted to something beyond their control. Although the contrast here is less glaring, the juxtaposition reinforces the impression that violence is a normative and accepted reality within the slums of the city.

The scene of the “hilarious hall” in Chapter IX portrays a similar frenzied setting, featuring waiters “swooping down like hawks on the unwary in the throng; clattering along the aisles with trays covered with glasses; stumbling over women’s skirts and charging two prices for everything but beer” (Crane 42). The scene includes a bouncer “plung[ing] about in the crowd” and a “rumble of conversation” that quickly turns into a “roar,” laced with “the shrill voices of women bubbling o’er with drink-laughter” (42). The description reaches a crescendo when claiming, “The musicians played in intent fury. . . . The rate at which the piano, cornet and violins were going, seemed to impart wildness to the half-drunken crowd” (42). Amid all of this violent chaos and fury, though, Crane interjects this impassive scene: “Three weeks had passed since the girl had left home. The air of spaniel-like dependence had been magnified and showed its direct effect in the peculiar off-handedness and ease of Pete’s ways toward her” (43). As Maggie sits at a table, anxiously watching Pete for some sign of any interest in her, he scans the room indifferently, unaffected by the music hall and, more significant, unaffected by Maggie. Pete’s disinterest provides a sharp contrast to the near-explosive energy of the hall, a contrast that underscores the coldness and cruelty of Pete’s attitude toward Maggie now that he has seduced her. His boredom in this scene is, in fact, sandwiched between two acts of violence that he inflicts on Maggie: one, his seduction of her, and two, his

complete abandonment of her. Pete's indifference in the "hilarious hall" also mirrors the callous disregard evoked by the indifference of the withered tenement dwellers and the spectators of the gang fight described at the beginning of the novel.

Keith Gandal notes that "most of the sounds the reader has heard in the novel have been violent, mindless and argumentative" (768), and Fitelson agrees, stating that "it is self-evident within the novel that violence is the predominant form of human communication" (186). While Crane shows that violence does indeed pervade the urban environment, in places of the novel he also personifies the city as indifferent and coldly judgmental in contrast to the violent actions and attitudes of others. The most glaring instances of such a juxtaposition occur toward the end of the novel, in Chapters XVI and XVII, after Mrs. Johnson, Jimmie, and Pete effectively cut Maggie out of their lives. At the end of Chapter XVI, as Maggie forlornly wanders the city after Pete violently tells her to "go teh hell," Crane writes, "After a time she left rattling avenues and passed between rows of houses with sternness and stolidity stamped upon their features. She hung her head for she felt their eyes grimly upon her" (Crane 50-1).¹⁰ Later, at the end of Chapter XVII, Maggie, identified only as a "girl of the painted cohorts of the city," walks the streets, passed by and rejected by several men, until: "She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things. Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance" (53). These cold and indifferent city structures, either glaring sternly at her in judgment or, even more tragically, glaring over and beyond her, make Maggie's total rejection complete and foretell her violent end. Although he describes it quietly and subtly, Crane laces the

depiction of Maggie's death with ominous and terrifying images: "At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away into silence" (53). In these scenes, the city judging and eventually turning its back on Maggie makes her violent end appear almost inevitable, as the violence and indifference throughout the book seem to have been foreshadowing this moment from the start.

In addition to using scenes of violence and indifference to describe the industrial city, Crane uses this contrast to describe people in the novel as well. Crane's utilization of violence and indifference to portray Mrs. Johnson, Pete and Jimmie, the three people closest to Maggie, shows the way in which the environment of the slums affected people's identities in the industrial city.¹¹ Mrs. Johnson reflects the extreme violence seen in the city to the extent that her drunken and frenzied rampages are reminiscent of the careening tenement building in which she stamps about and of the wildness of the third beer hall. Joseph Brennan cannot help but symbolically equate her with fire engine described in Chapter IV as he remarks, "It is also noteworthy that, whether intentionally or not, the mother is frequently described in terms strongly suggestive of the fire engine: she is 'immense,' 'rampant,' 'chieftain-like,' 'crimson,' 'puffing and snorting,' 'fervent red,' and 'inflamed.' ...Like the fire engine, the mother smashes everything in her path once her drunken rage runs wild" (313). Maggie's boyfriend, Pete, also reflects the city's violence, communicated in his language, his involvement with three different fights throughout the book and his violent intentions toward Maggie. Yet Crane characterizes Pete chiefly as indifferent with respect to his relationship with Maggie, as can be seen in

his aloofness during their day trips before his seduction of her and his abandonment and complete rejection of her after it. Crane characterizes Jimmie with an equal mixture of violence and indifference; he seems to have “pounded on” everyone in the novel at one point or another, save his mother, and yet he expresses indifference not only to Hattie and the other women he has seduced but to his own sister as well. Crane at times shows Jimmie’s indifference toward these women to be feigned, as he wrestles at different times throughout the book with his actions and attitudes toward them, but each time, Jimmie casts these ruminations aside and steels himself against compassion and sympathy. In the manner in which Crane presents them, all three of these characters mirror in their words and actions the violence and indifference that they experience in the city around them, showing the effect that life in the slums has had on them.

Ultimately, Crane’s impressionistic portrayal of the city in *Maggie* through color and contrast depicts Rum Alley to be a dark and violent place, indifferent to the sufferings of its inhabitants and interminably distanced from the radiance and merriment of the theater district described in Chapter XVII. Brennan claims that Crane’s description of the city from the outset of the book “sounds a significant and pervasive theme of the novel,” that of “human indifference to human suffering” (310), yet this violence and indifference is not simply a literary theme. By using vivid contrasts to describe the Bowery environment and by juxtaposing violence and indifference throughout the novel, Crane shows in *Maggie* the way in which people in late-nineteenth century New York were being devalued by the effects of industrialization. Crane's vivid contrasts used throughout the novel reflect the deep social contrasts experienced in the city as a result of industrialization, and the pairing of violence and indifference mirrors the violent greed of

the upper class and their indifference to the plight of the poor. Trachtenberg claims that the rich at this time maintained a vicious mentality regarding gaining and keeping wealth. He observes that "business was a kind of warfare, in which all's fair which succeeds" and claims that many of the rich of the day were attracted to Spencer's idea of "Social Darwinism" (81), a theory that applies the law of survival of the fittest to society and claims that the strong people of society will necessarily grow more powerful and wealthy while the weak naturally will decrease in wealth and status. Feeling entitled to do whatever was necessary to obtain wealth, the majority of the rich placed no human value on the poor and cared little for their plight, believing that poverty was society's way of weeding out the weak of the race.¹² In fact, much of the violence seen within the slums was in response to the oppressive greed and indifference of the rich that relegated the poor to survive on next to nothing while they sought to fatten their wallets.

Crane's characterizations of the brutal city and of the violent and indifferent lives of Mrs. Johnson, Pete and Jimmie show the effect the careless greed of the wealthy has on the poor of the city, yet this leads these characters to do more than simply imitate the violence being inflicted on them. The violence in the slums transforms the Bowery into a barbarous territory where one must adapt to survive, and the characters of *Maggie* do what they feel they must do in order to survive in this atmosphere. In response to a society they see as increasingly brutal and uncaring toward their lives, they adopt new codes of behavior and morality—Gandal describes them as “alternative ethics ... developed in response to [the slum’s] inferior social status and physical misery” (760)—meant to help them adapt to and survive the slum's dark environment. Each of the three main characters in Maggie’s life does whatever they must in order to survive in the

violent environment of Rum Alley, and Crane uses their codes of survival to illustrate further the way in which people were devalued in late nineteenth-century New York.

In the slum of *Maggie*, where violence is rampant and sympathy nonexistent, only force is truly valued and respected, and reputation is seen as paramount to survival in Rum Alley. Shows of force are the chief way in which to earn respect, and Crane reveals this value system in the various behavioral and moral postures the characters portray throughout the novel. For Jimmie and Pete, this alternative value system manifests itself in overblown pride and self-righteousness to compensate for their feelings of inferiority and weakness that come from their lack of wealth and social status.¹³ Of Jimmie, Crane writes, “his sneer became chronic” (Crane 13), and he explains, “He maintained a belligerent attitude toward all well-dressed men. ...He and his order were kings, to a certain extent, over the men of untarnished clothes, because these latter dreaded, perhaps, to be either killed or laughed at” (14). Later Crane says that Jimmie “considered himself above” both the clergy and the aristocrat, claiming that he feared “neither the devil nor the leader of society” (14). Crane attributes these same traits to Pete, of whom he observes, “That swing of the shoulders that had frozen the timid when he was but a lad had increased with his growth and education at the ratio of ten to one. It, combined with the sneer upon his mouth, told mankind that there was nothing in space which could appall him” (19). When Crane introduces the adult Pete to the reader in Chapter V, he is bragging profusely about the manner in which he forcefully expelled a man from the bar at which he works. Crane later describes how both Jimmie and Pete shun Maggie out of their desire to maintain their public reputation. Society places the disgrace of the seduction squarely on Maggie’s shoulders,¹⁴ so in order to maintain social status, both

Jimmie and Pete hypocritically cling to their senses of self-righteousness and distance themselves from her—Jimmie out of a desire to “appear on a higher social plane” (42) and Pete out of a desire to maintain the respectability and rank he perceived in himself. For brief times, both Jimmie and Pete struggle with their consciences over their attitudes toward Maggie’s circumstances, as Jimmie has been complicit in the seduction of other women and Pete, of course, is complicit in Maggie’s. In the end, though, both men either dismiss these twinges of conscience or justify themselves in spite of them, finding these twinges to be antithetical to survival in the slums. To defend themselves against a brutal environment in which force equals respect, both Jimmie and Pete steel themselves and their consciences with inflated pride and self-righteousness in order to survive their environment.

Maggie’s mother also develops a prideful and self-righteous attitude in response to her environment, an attitude very similar to that of Jimmie and Pete, although it manifests itself in different ways. For one, Mrs. Johnson has a penchant for destruction: “It seems that the world had treated this woman very badly, and she took a deep revenge upon such portions of it as came within her reach. She broke furniture as if she were at last getting her rights” (Crane 26). Throughout the novel, Mrs. Johnson constantly gets drunk and spews her indignation in a destructive manner through physical or verbal abuse of whatever or whomever is unlucky enough to be in her path, and she does so with a prideful attitude of entitlement, as if she has earned the right to inflict her wrath on others. The other manifestation of her pride and self-righteousness comes in the form of the dramatically skewed moral outlook she assumes, which entails an overblown outrage at even the hint of sexual impurity in her daughter. This moral outrage is most clearly

exhibited in Mrs. Johnson's exaggerated posturing regarding Maggie's relationship with Pete. Crane pictures Mrs. Johnson as publically and obnoxiously drunk, abusive, argumentative and ridiculous on several occasions throughout the book, and yet she piously contends that Maggie is the disgrace of the family, accusing her of being "a reg'lar devil" even before Maggie becomes intimate with Pete (21). Mrs. Johnson's hollow and inflated piety, which appears to be a dominant characteristic of Rum Alley residents given the similar way in which fellow tenement dwellers respond to Maggie,¹⁵ culminates in her kicking Maggie out of the home, which leads to the seduction for which Mrs. Johnson has already accused and condemned her daughter. Her self-righteous posturing hits its climactic note during her performance before an audience of tenement dwellers who have come to mourn Maggie's death at the end of the novel; when urged by another mourner to forgive her devil of a daughter, she theatrically cries, "Oh, yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!" (58). Pizer sums up Mrs. Johnson's character by saying, "Her drunken rages symbolize the animal fury of a slum home, and her quickness to judge, condemn, and cast out Maggie symbolizes the self-righteousness of Bowery morality. In a sense she symbolizes the entire Bowery world, both its primitive amorality and its sentimental morality" ("American Naturalism," 190). In response to a world that she believes has acted unjustly toward her, Mrs. Johnson executes her own twisted justice on anyone whom she deems to be in need of it, particularly her daughter Maggie.

Among the main characters in the novel, Maggie reacts to the violence and indifference of her world in a completely different way from the others. Crane foreshadows this anomaly in his description of Maggie at the beginning of Chapter V, claiming that she "blossomed in a mud puddle" and observing, "None of the dirt of Rum

Alley seemed to be in her veins” (Crane 16). Some might argue that these statements show that Maggie, unlike the others, is unaffected by her Rum Alley environment—that while the others, tremendously influenced by the city, adopt behavioral and moral codes by which to survive, Maggie is untouched by the urban environment. As explained previously, though, the whole of the novel shows that the violence and indifference of the city and its inhabitants influences Maggie enormously, which shows that Crane’s comments must mean something else. That Maggie does not have “the dirt of Rum Alley” in her does not imply that the city does not affect her but rather that she responds to the effects of the city in a manner opposite from that of other Rum Alley residents. She responds to the harshness of her environment by deluding herself with visions of escaping it, and Crane’s initial description of her, and ultimately the novel as a whole, underscores the naïveté of her choice.¹⁶ When Maggie first encounters the adult Pete in Chapter V as he is cursing away while regaling Jimmie with his conquests, she envisions him as “elegant,” “graceful” and “aristocratic” (18-9). Crane writes that she “perceived that here was the beau ideal of a man,” and in the next sentence he reveals why: “Her dim thoughts were often searching for far away lands where, as God says, the little hills sing together in the morning” (19). Later, Crane says, “To her the earth was composed of hardships and insults. She felt instant admiration for a man who openly defied it” (20). Maggie sees in Pete a man who will stand up for her against the cruelty of Rum Alley and eventually rescue her from it, and as Pete is in her eyes a man of means, in her mind she builds up a delusively grandiose vision of him. Eric Solomon claims, “The only motivation for Maggie’s perverse romanticizing of this oaf, quixotically converting him from a brute into a knight, is the ugliness of her dark, dusty home that clouds her vision.

Pete represents a way of escape to a world of finer quality, at least in her estimation” (38). In other words, Maggie dreams of escape and of Pete as her rescuer as a means of dealing with the violence and indifference of her living conditions. Unfortunately, her dream of Pete as her rescuer falls through when he abandons her, and as she does not have any of Rum Alley’s dirt in her veins, she has no inflated pride or reputation to protect her from or help her fight back against her mother’s barrage of insults or Jimmie’s self-righteous rejection of her. Maggie’s simplicity and dreaminess are no match against the violence and indifference she finds in the city and in those around her. Her dreams of escape keep her from seeing the reality of her environment—that no one is coming to save her because they are all too busy saving themselves.

The way in which Crane first describes Maggie—as a flower in a mud-puddle—hints at the Darwinian idea of survival of the fittest that he weaves throughout the novel in the survival codes adopted by those closest to her. Fitelson points out that "her situation is somewhat analogous to that of a plant on the edge of a desert, for whom, as Darwin among others has suggested, survival is problematic at best" (188). She has none of the violence of her environment in her, while Jimmie, Pete and Mrs. Johnson mirror their environment and all willingly and easily cast her life aside in order to ensure their own survival. Their actions reflect the law of survival of the fittest in that they have not only adapted to their environment, but they also maintain a kind of jungle-like "eat or be eaten" (Fitelson 184) mentality seen in their actions toward Maggie. Crane uses the codes of survival followed by Jimmie, Pete and Mrs. Johnson in order to illustrate further the devaluation of people in the industrial city. Through the fight for survival described in *Maggie*, Crane shows that people in the slums have taken on animal-like identities; life

for them is about sustaining existence and not much else. When it comes to survival, they show no value for the lives of others because they feel that society puts no value on them as well. Not only are the poor valued very little if any at all by the upper classes of society, but they have little to know value for each others' lives as well.

In his book *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism*, Eric Solomon argues that, in *Maggie*, Crane "simply exhibits how human beings live under certain conditions" (21). He writes, "That [the characters'] lives are impoverished and violent, marked by illicit sex, whiskey, beatings, and suicide attempts, is far less important than that they are struggling people, doing the best they can" (Solomon 21). Yet the way in which Crane all throughout the novel uses stark contrasts to describe the Bowery and the social contrasts experienced there and the way in which he juxtaposes violence and indifference to underscore the normative brutality of the slums shows that the reality that the characters' lives are impoverished and violent is the most important part of the book. As his 1893 subtitle suggests, *Maggie* is a story of New York—perhaps even *the* story of New York at that time. It is not the story of the struggling lives of four characters as much as it is the story of a city experiencing the effects of a rapid industrialization and how this industrialization affects the hundreds of thousands of poor in this city, of which the characters of *Maggie* are representations. Crane's portrayal of the fight for survival in the brutal slums of New York's Bowery highlights the deep social contrasts of the late nineteenth century that resulted in the devaluation of the poor during this time. That the gruesome fight for survival portrayed by Crane was indeed a reality for thousands in New York makes the impoverishment and violence of his characters one of the most significant parts of the novel.

Chapter Two

Breaching the Wall: Class, Identity and the Industrial City in Dreiser's

Sister Carrie

At the beginning of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, the young Caroline Meeber travels by train to the booming city of Chicago for the first time, and as she enters the city in August of 1889, she is filled with wonder and amazement at the sight of it. Dreiser signals to the reader in the first pages of the book that this newly-forming relationship between Carrie and the industrial city will be of utmost importance throughout the entirety of the novel, as he shows that Carrie is looking to redefine her life according to the pleasures she expects to find in the industrial city. Of Carrie, he writes, "A half-equipped little knight she was, venturing to reconnoiter the mysterious city and dreaming wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy, which should make it prey and subject—the proper penitent, groveling at a woman's slipper" (*Sister Carrie*, 3).¹⁷ His description of the city a few paragraphs previous to this hints that the city is all too willing to help Carrie define herself, and he foreshadows the effect the city will ultimately have on her when he writes:

The city has its cunning wiles, no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. There are large forces which allure with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights is often as effective as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye. Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman. (2)

In this depiction of the city, Dreiser introduces the kind of imagery he will use throughout the novel to describe the industrial city and the attraction it holds for Carrie. His use of the phrases "large forces" and "gleam of a thousand lights," for instance, intimates the way in which Dreiser portrays the city with images of power and light throughout the book, imagery that aids in the set-up of his most useful image of the city in the novel: the image of the "walled city." Through this powerful image of the "walled city" and Carrie's desire for it, Dreiser creates a jarring picture of industrial urban culture in which personal significance is found in social status and the objectifying of relationships devalues people to the level of commodities.

Dreiser titles his first novel *Sister Carrie*, "sister" being an identity that distinguishes his main character for only seven chapters of the book, not even one-fifth of its length, and one from which she tries to distance herself from the start of the novel. *Sister Carrie*, in fact, is largely a book about its heroine striving to recreate her identity in relation to the burgeoning cities in which she makes her residence. Dreiser showcases this reality by renaming his main character several times throughout the novel, each name indicating a new step in her identity-defining process. He first introduces us to Caroline Meeber, naïve country-girl traveling to the great city of Chicago to make something of herself, "Sister Carrie" as she is known to her family. Throughout the book, though, "Sister Carrie" takes the names of Mrs. Drouet, Carrie Madenda, Mrs. Murdock (though she is unaware of this momentary name), Mrs. Wheeler and finally Carrie Madenda once more. These several name-changes that occur once she takes up residence in the city show that Carrie indeed does redefine herself in her new urban environments, and, through the way in which he describes the city, Dreiser makes clear in the novel that the

industrial city's effect on Carrie has had a hand in this redefinition. Dreiser accomplishes this by describing the urban environment with images of power and light in order to set up his dominant image of the city, that of the "walled city," which is introduced later in the novel.

Dreiser first begins using images of power to describe the industrial city in the scenes of Carrie's initial job search in Chicago at the beginning of the book. He describes the booming industrial city as a "giant magnet, drawing to itself, from all quarters, the hopeful and the hopeless..." explaining that, even in its population of 500,000, it had the "ambition" and "daring" of a great "metropolis of a million" (*Sister Carrie*, 15). Dreiser often uses the word "imposing" when depicting the power of the city in the novel, and the word first appears in this same scene as he describes how the "firms of any pretension occupied individual buildings" in the commercial district, giving these houses "an imposing appearance" (16). He explains the way in which the large, plate-glass windows on the ground floors of these houses allow passers-by to have glimpses of their inner-workings, adding to the impressive and yet daunting atmosphere of the city streets that Carrie encounters. Dreiser summarizes the scene in saying, "The entire metropolitan center possessed a high and mighty air calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant," and among all of this, Carrie walks forward to seek employment with "a sense of helplessness amid so much evidence of power and force" (17).¹⁸ Within these first several pages, Dreiser sets up the industrial city as a powerful and forceful entity with a commanding presence in the novel.

Dreiser continues using imagery of power to depict the upscale part of the city, portraying it as a powerful and magnetic force. In Chapter VII, for instance, as Drouet

seduces Carrie while taking her to lunch, she looks out of the restaurant window at an “elegant coach ... carrying in its upholstered depths a young lady” and ponders “the admirable, great city,” acknowledging its fineness when one is not poor (*Sister Carrie*, 74). The magnetic influence of what the city has to offer, combined with her deep aversion to going back to Columbia City, aids Carrie in choosing to allow Drouet to put her up in an apartment. Explaining Carrie’s lack of conscience at making this choice, Dreiser simply explains, “She was again the victim of the city’s hypnotic influence” (85), and Dreiser consistently showcases the hypnotism the city has on Carrie by showing, just as in this case, the way in which different scenes of luxury affect her thoughts and dreams. Another instance of this comes when Carrie accompanies Mrs. Hale on a ride along Chicago’s North Shore Drive where reside brilliant mansions of the extremely wealthy. Dreiser again uses the word “imposing” to describe these houses, yet in the midst of this description, he also discloses the hypnotic effect this scene has on Carrie. As she looks upon the sprawling lawns and rich exteriors of the mansions, she lapses into a dream-like state where “childish fancies as she had had of fairy palaces and kingly quarters now came back” (122), and she quickly begins to imagine strolling up the walks to these houses, entering into their opulence and taking possession of them. Even when back at her own apartment, these fantasies linger within her and color her perception of her current state. Another occurrence of the city’s hypnotic effect on Carrie comes after she witnesses the great parade of wealthy women on Broadway in New York. Immediately after she witnesses this parade, as she and Mrs. Vance attend a play, Dreiser mentions that Carrie is already “stirred to her heart’s core” by the scene on Broadway, so much so that she proceeds to fantasize about the lives of the women she just observed in

the parade, imagining their houses and carriages and boudoirs, believing that if New York held no such fantastic “bowers” for these women, then they must be kept in hot houses (326). Just as Dreiser likens the effect of the luxurious city’s atmosphere to that of an addictive drug—“like opium to the untried body” (306)—so Carrie remains hypnotized by the city’s power, allured by what it offers to those who pursue it.

Perhaps one of the greatest uses of power imagery within the novel is found in Dreiser’s description of Sherry’s, the grand restaurant that catered to the magnificently rich of New York City and at which Carrie eats with the Vance’s and Mr. Ames. As Carrie and her party approach the exclusive Sherry’s by way of Fifth Avenue, which is crowded with fine carriages and well-dressed gentlemen, Dreiser includes in his description of their arrival several images that indicate the commanding atmosphere of the restaurant. As they arrive at the entrance of the eatery, “an imposing doorman” comes to help them out of their coach (*Sister Carrie*, 333). Additionally, in order to gain entrance to Sherry’s, patrons must ascend the “imposing steps” that lead into the restaurant, steps that are “guarded by the large and portly doorman” (334). Yet another “large and portly gentleman” guards the lobby of the establishment, and, evoking the image of the military, “uniformed youths” take care of their coats, canes and personal items (334). Dreiser’s use of powerful words, such as “imposing,” “guarded,” and “uniformed,” to describe the entrance of Sherry’s suggests the idea that the building must contain something very precious or rare, so much so that it must be protected by such an intimidating frontage (333-4). Dreiser at one point even refers to the place as a “wonderful temple of gastronomy” (334), as if it contained some spiritual power within that must be kept sacred and holy. Making her way into the posh dining hall, Carrie

cannot help but be keenly observant of every detail, fully enthralled by the power of the restaurant's "imposing" façade and, eventually, its opulence within.

Once inside the doors of Sherry's, Dreiser allows the imagery of light to dominate his description of the grand restaurant, and he uses this light imagery throughout the novel to portray the mysterious draw the city has on its inhabitants. As Carrie and her friends make their way through "lanes of shining tables," images of light overpower their senses: "Incandescent lights, the reflection of their glow in polished glasses, and the shine of gilt upon the walls, combined into one tone of light which it requires minutes of complacent observation to separate and take particular note of" (*Sister Carrie*, 334). He also mentions that the "white shirt fronts," "the bright costumes," and the "diamonds" and "jewels" of Sherry's patrons serve to augment the brightness of the scene, all of it "exceedingly noticeable" (334). Just a few paragraphs later, Dreiser continues to describe the glowing scene: "On the ceilings were colored trceries with more gilt, leading to a center where spread a cluster of lights—incandescent globes mingled with glittering prisms and stucco tendrils of gilt" (335). He goes on to point out the "waxed and polished floors" and the "brilliant, bevel-edged mirrors" that reflect not only the images of the diners but also "candelabra a score and a hundred times," transforming the dining chamber of Sherry's into a radiant mirrored light show that continuously dazzles its patrons (335). Carrie cannot help but equate Sherry's brilliant show of light with all of the great city, as Dreiser says that she applies "each scene to all society. . . . It must be glow and shine everywhere" (336).

Carrie is not completely wrong in equating the city with light. "Glow and shine everywhere" aptly describes Dreiser's light imagery used to depict the city in *Sister*

Carrie, as Sherry's is not the only place he makes use of this imagery. His descriptions of the streets of Chicago and New York as well as of Fitzgerald and Moy's, Hurstwood's initial place of employment, contain ample amounts of light imagery that not only illustrate glow and shine but also imply warmth. In describing the streets of Chicago at night, Dreiser writes, "The lights in the stores were already shining out in gushes of golden hue. The arc lights were sputtering over-head, and high up were the lighted windows of the tall office buildings" (*Sister Carrie*, 83). Juxtaposed as this description is with images of people hurrying home from work with their "overcoats turned up about the ears" and hats turned down (83), the light imagery here presents not only a picture of radiance and reflection but also one of welcomed or sought-after heat. He describes Broadway of New York City in a similar fashion: "Fire signs announcing the night's amusements blazed on every hand. Cabs and carriages, their lamps gleaming like yellow eyes, pattered by. . . . Across the way the great hotels showed a hundred gleaming windows, their cafés and billiard-rooms filled with a comfortable, well-dressed, and pleasure-loving throng. All about was the night, pulsating with the thoughts of pleasure and exhilaration..." (488-9). Juxtaposed with the image of a cold, hungry and exhausted Hurstwood seeking with others like himself a place to stay for the night, the light imagery here again produces a picture of not only glow and shine but also a heat that draws others to itself.

Similar to his depiction of Sherry's, Dreiser introduces Fitzgerald and Moy's to the reader as "ornamented with a blaze of incandescent lights, held in handsome chandeliers," with floors "of brightly colored tiles," walls of wood "which reflected the light," and a "long bar [that] was a blaze of lights, polished wood-work, colored and cut

glassware, and many fancy bottles” (*Sister Carrie*, 46-7). A couple of pages later, he likens the resort and the people that are drawn to it to a bright flame that draws moths and other insects to itself with its radiance and heat: “To one not inclined to drink, and gifted with a more serious turn of mind, such a bubbling, chattering, glittering chamber must ever seem an anomaly, a strange commentary on nature and life. Here come the moths, in endless procession, to bask in the light of the flame” (49). He at last describes Fitzgerald and Moy’s as “a strange, glittering night-flower, odor-yielding, insect-drawing, insect-infested rose of pleasure” (51). This picture of Fitzgerald and Moy’s as an insect-attracting show of light is, for Dreiser, simply a miniature picture of the city itself and the draw it affects on the people within it. Dreiser explains:

If it were not for the artificial fires of merriment, the rush of profit-seeking trade, and pleasure-selling amusements; . . . if our streets were not strung with signs of gorgeous hues and thronged with hurrying purchasers, we would quickly discover how firmly the chill hand of winter lays upon the heart; how dispiriting are the days during which the sun withholds a portion of our allowance of light and warmth. We are more dependent on these things than is often thought. We are insects produced by heat, and pass without it. (100)

Dreiser explains the phenomenon that this moth-to-a-flame trope signifies in a column he wrote in *Ev’ry Month* in 1896: “There is a magnetism in nature that gives more to the many, and this you will see in the constant augmentation of population in the great cities. . . . It is a magnetism which no one understands, which philosophers call the law of segregation, and which simply means that there is something in nature to make the many

wish to be where the many are” (“Reflections,” 410).¹⁹ Throughout the novel, Dreiser consistently illustrates the phenomenon above by portraying people who are drawn to the demonstrations of light and power within the new city. He shows that when the “many” are drawn to places such as these, like moths to a flame others will naturally follow, and through this he exhibits the powerful magnetism the industrial city has on its many inhabitants, especially Carrie Meeber.

The vivid imagery of power and light and the moths-to-a-flame trope that Dreiser uses in depicting the city in *Sister Carrie* sets up a dominant image that permeates the entire novel: the image of the “walled city.” Dreiser uses the imagery of power and light, in fact, mainly to describe the upscale portions of the city, and this imagery helps to define the “walled city” image. When Dreiser first directly names this image, Carrie and Hurstwood are already in New York, and Hurstwood’s decline into poverty is looming: “He began to see as one sees a city with a wall about it. Men were posted at the gates. You could not get in. Those inside did not care to come out to see who you were. They were so merry inside there that all those outside were forgotten, and he was on the outside” (*Sister Carrie*, 334). Subsequently, when a lonely Hurstwood later reads in the newspaper about Carrie’s theatrical success, instead of meditating on thoughts of her, he instead broods over the world into which she has gained entrance and of which he had once been a part, and the image of the “walled city” is again mentioned: “Ah, she was in the walled city now! Its splendid gates had opened, admitting her from a cold, dreary outside. She seemed a creature afar off—like every other celebrity he had known” (468). In both of these passages, Dreiser implies that the image of the “walled city” does not refer to the industrial city as a whole; it refers to a figurative city that is inhabited by the

wealthy, the famous and the powerful. A metaphor for the stark contrast existing in the city between the rich and the poor, the conception of the "walled city" is that of an exclusive city within a city, inhabited only by those of the wealthy class and giving access only to those of the same social status.

Dreiser does not use these passages alone to invoke the "walled city" image nor to define its exclusivity. From the very beginning of the novel, he implies the idea of the "walled city" in various scenes by displaying interior and exterior spaces that are not only spatial contrasts but socioeconomic contrasts as well. One way in which Dreiser creates this effect of inside and outside throughout the book is by consistently using windows in various scenes to illustrate this contrast. His use of windows to reinforce his "walled city" image is surprising in that one generally thinks of a wall as a divider through which nothing can be seen. Yet in several scenes in the novel, windows function as the wall of the "walled city," forming barriers that divide what is inside the city from what is outside of it while also allowing those on either side of the wall to see through to the opposite side. These windows create desire for what is inside the "walled city" by displaying its goods for everyone to see, and yet they also reinforce the exclusivity of the "walled city" in that they form a divider between those inside the city and those outside of it. These windows serve as cruel reminders of what those on the outside of the wall are missing. In his article "Acting, Reading, Fortune's Wheel," Philip Fisher puts it this way, "The window creates a polarized world of inside and outside, actor and spectator, rich and poor that would not occur if what were going on inside were simply unknown. All scenes become opportunities for self-classification in that they seem to invite you in and invite you to imagine being in while strongly reminding you that you are out" (261).²⁰ During

Carrie's job search, for instance, the large plate-glass windows of the businesses in the shopping district allow her to see their inner workings, their "polished array of office fixtures, much frosted glass, clerks hard at work, and genteel business men in 'nobby' suits and clean linen lounging about or sitting in groups" (*Sister Carrie*, 16). Upon seeking a job at these places, however, the work and prosperity Carrie sees through the windows reminds her that she is unemployed and simply an outsider looking in. She in turn begins to classify herself as an outsider to society, and, overwhelmed by her feelings of conspicuousness at this classification, she remains on the other side of these windows for much of her job search. Perhaps one of the greatest contrasts of inside and outside created by windows in the novel, though, comes toward the end of the book when a homeless and hungry Hurstwood finds himself looking in on a posh restaurant:

Once he paused in an aimless, incoherent sort of way and looked through the windows of an imposing restaurant, before which blazed a fire sign, and through the large, plate windows of which could be seen the red and gold decorations, the palms, the white napery, and shining glassware, and, above all, the comfortable crowd. Weak as his mind had become, his hunger was sharp enough to show the importance of this. He stopped stock still, his frayed trousers soaking in the slush, and peered foolishly in.
(516)

The opulence the poverty-stricken Hurstwood observes through the restaurant windows throws in stark relief the difference between not only Hurstwood and the diners but the two sides of the "walled city" as well, and it highlights the social contrast of rich and poor that defines the "walled city" image. In each of these scenes, what these characters see

through windows fills them with longing to be on the other side of the wall, but this desire to be on the other side also cruelly reminds them of their place in society as outsiders to the “walled city.”

Dreiser also uses physical walls to underscore his image of the “walled city” and to portray the social contrast that it highlights. Although, for example, Carrie’s ride with Mrs. Hale to view the North Shore Drive mansions in Chicago fills her with warm dreams and fantasies of being rich, the walls of these mansions are no more inviting than the businesses she encounters on her job hunt. Pages after this ride, Dreiser shows how shut off to Carrie this world is; as she thinks on how the world of the theater has opened its arms to her, she muses that the theater atmosphere “was wholly unlike the great brilliant mansions which waved her coldly away, permitting her only awe and distant wonder” (*Sister Carrie*, 181). Another example of physical walls reinforcing the “walled city” image comes in the novel when, after Hurstwood receives an ultimatum from his wife, he returns to his home to find himself completely locked outside of its walls. He will eventually find that this is the end of his life as the well-to-do resort manager, and viewing this scene in the light of his subsequent decline into poverty, his inability to breach the walls of his own home also signifies his dismissal from the glamorous “walled city.” From this point forward, he will continually reminisce of the fine life he used to have and will continually mourn the reality that he has been shut out from its riches. Dreiser additionally uses the fortress-like Sherry’s as a microcosm of the “walled city,” with its imposing walls and guarded steps keeping out all deemed unworthy of entrance and demonstrating the deep contrast that existed between rich and poor in the industrial city.

Dreiser's reinforcement of this dominant "walled city" image throughout *Sister Carrie* ultimately shows the way in which the city in the novel most significantly exerts its influence over Carrie and her identity. Much has been written by critics about the role that desire plays within the novel, and many connect this role of desire to the way in which characters in the book build their identities. Leonard Cassuto, for instance, writes, "Desire has many faces in the work of Dreiser; ultimately, it is responsible for identity, the way that characters see themselves, and the way that we see them" (112). James Livingston similarly claims, "Indeed, Carrie's desire is the medium through which her memory is restored, her consciousness is awakened, her personality constructed" (225). Desire does play an identity-defining role in the life of Carrie Meeber, but the question of what it is that she most desires remains the key to understanding how Carrie's desire defines her and what role the city plays in this. At the surface, Carrie's immediate desire seems to be aimed at the objects the commodity-driven city of the novel dangles constantly before her. Paula Geyh asserts as much, writing, "*Sister Carrie* depicts clothing and accessories as the principle objects of desire..." (n.p.), and Stanley Corkin agrees, claiming that if the objects of the novel did not "represent reified emotions and desires," then "the novel would deteriorate into a mass of banal descriptions of the junk of American society" (617). Dreiser indeed depicts Carrie longing after expensive items of luxury, such as certain articles of clothing and opulent houses and mansions, and yet he also makes clear from the first of the novel that this desire is nothing new for Carrie, that the city does not awaken Carrie to this desire. In the first pages of the book, Dreiser describes Carrie as already "quick to understand the keener pleasures of life" and "ambitious to gain in material things" (*Sister Carrie*, 3), and this before her train even

nears Chicago. In the first sentence of the novel, he mentions that she carries “a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel” (1), indicating her penchant for fine things and simply her lack of wealth at that point to afford them. As Carrie already possesses a desire for fine things from the outset of the novel, her surface desire for commodities proves not to be the foundation on which she builds her identity in the city nor the way in which the city most influences her.

Although throughout the novel fine clothes and other objects of luxury speak “Jesuitically” to Carrie (*Sister Carrie*, 106), her desire is rooted in something beyond these commodities. Dreiser points to this reality when he writes, “In fine raiment and elegant surroundings, men seemed to be contented. Hence, [Carrie] drew near these things, Chicago, New York: Drouet, Hurstwood; the world of fashion and the world of stage—these were but incidents. Not them, but that which they represented, she longed for” (524). Dreiser’s words beg the question, then, of what it is that these things represent to Carrie. Donald Pizer claims that Dreiser’s intention in the novel is to show that the thing that commodities and wealth represent for Carrie and thus the thing for which she truly longs is beauty—that Carrie is a seeker of beauty and that her desire for clothing and possessions is actually a naïve and mistaken understanding of what is truly beautiful (54-5). Yet although Dreiser says as much at the end of the novel—“she was now an illustration of the devious ways by which one who feels, rather than reasons, may be led in the pursuit of beauty” (*Sister Carrie*, 527)—he has not done enough throughout the book to adequately paint this picture. From the outset, he describes Carrie as one who is foremost seeking pleasure and material possessions, and he points out that Carrie’s “guiding characteristic” is her sense of “self-interest,” not a quest for beauty. Few places

in the novel, in fact, portray an aesthetically-motivated Carrie, and beyond her success on the stage (which has more to do with her looks and her aptitude for emulating others than for an aesthetic inclination) and her few sentimental reactions to certain kinds of music, Carrie does not seem capable of such deep feeling as Dreiser wishes his readers to believe of her. She never deviates from her pursuit of wealth and luxury and her penchant for self-advancement, even when other pursuits of beauty are brought to her attention. When Bob Ames reveals to her the alternative beauty to be found in giving back to others through her art—what Dreiser seems to be advocating in the novel as true beauty, she is still unable to release her grip on the wealth that she has accumulated and the luxury she enjoys in order to pursue this higher goal, making Dreiser’s claim that she is an innocent seeker of beauty implausible at best. Carrie does long for something beyond the objects she pursues in the novel, but her actions and thoughts in the book do not portray her as ultimately desirous for beauty. They show her as desirous for entrance into the “walled city” and the social status that it promises, and she sees fine objects and wealth as the fee that must be paid to order to gain entrance. She sees the power and the commanding presence of the upper class and the way in which, like moths to heat and flame, many are drawn to attempt entrance to this “walled city,” and she longs to be a part of this figurative city as well and to define herself according to the reputability of their social status.²¹

Some critics explain that the way in which Carrie's desire defines her is that she builds her identity by comparing herself to the wealthy and then emulating what she sees. Paul Orlov, for instance, asserts, “Carrie judges her own and others’ identities in terms of the clothes they wear, the possessions they have, the appearance they present in society.

To her... who one is seems equivalent to what one *appears* to be" (163). Carrie sees the lifestyle of the wealthy, which in American culture at this time is the standard of everything one should want,²² and wishing to be equal to them in status, she desires to emulate them in all that she pursues. Clare Eby explains, "What is 'innate' to the mind of modern man and woman, according to Dreiser, is first to compare one's self and its objects to others, then to improve the self by emulation" (n.p.). Carrie's inclination for emulating the dress and manner of the wealthy women in the novel does stem from her desire to define herself according to the standard of the wealthy class, and yet Carrie seeks to define herself according to more than just a standard of appearance. She desires to appear as they do in order to gain the reputability and social status attributed to them and so to gain access into their social class.²³ In all instances in the novel where Carrie is seen to emulate others, her emulation comes from her desire to adhere to the culture's standards of reputability in order to be accepted as equal to others in social status. For example, when Dreiser first mentions Carrie's natural propensity for imitation in Chapter XI, he shows her emulation of others as flowing from a desire to imitate what Drouet finds attractive and beautiful, using him as her measuring stick to discover what is culturally reputable and therefore worthy of imitation. When he mentions how fine she looks one day in imitating a new hairstyle, his approval "made her try for other effects that selfsame day" (*Sister Carrie*, 111). Similarly, when Carrie begins to compare herself with Mrs. Vance in New York and to feel shabby in the comparison, she notes that "any one looking at the two would pick Mrs. Vance for her raiment alone" (323), signifying that Carrie's desire to favorably compare with Mrs. Vance ultimately indicates her desire to be equal to her in social status. As they go out to the matinee later in that day, during

their walk down Broadway she imagines that “it must be evident to many that she was the less handsomely dressed of the two,” and she vows not to return to Broadway until she could “feel the delight of parading [there] as an equal” (325). Carrie compares herself to the wealthy of society, emulating them as a means by which to construct her sense of self, and this emulation ultimately signifies her deep desire to be accepted as an equal in the "walled city" of the wealthy.

Dreiser illustrates Carrie’s desire to gain entrance into the "walled city" by showing the way in which her affinity for expensive commodities connects to her desire for higher social status. Her pursuit of objects in the novel is never separate from her desire to climb higher socially. When, for instance, she first walks through the department stores of Chicago and observes the commodities they sell, she cannot “help feeling the claim of each trinket and valuable upon her personally.... There was nothing there which she could not have used—nothing which she did not long to own” (*Sister Carrie*, 23). Dreiser tries to explain this desire away by subsequently saying that all women feel this way about apparel, but he then immediately connects Carrie’s desire for these objects with her observance of the wealthy women of society and her desire to be equal to them:

...she noticed, too, with a touch at the heart, the fine ladies who elbowed and ignored her, brushing past in utter disregard of her presence, themselves eagerly enlisted in the materials which the store contained.

...Their clothes were neat, in many instances fine, and wherever she encountered the eye of one it was only to recognize in it a keen analysis of her own position—her individual shortcomings of dress and that shadow

of *manner* which she thought must hang about her and make clear to all who and what she was. A flame of envy lighted in her heart. (*Sister Carrie*, 24)

From this point forward, Carrie longs “for dress and beauty with a whole heart” (24) due to her envy of these “fine ladies,” as she realizes that her “shortcomings of dress” show her to be in a different social class than they. Likewise, upon returning from seeing the mansions along the North Shore Drive in Chicago, where she glimpses “broad lawns” and “rich interiors,” she compares her own apartment with these lavish homes and finds it insignificant in the comparison. She additionally compares the community to which she currently belongs with that of North Shore Drive and finds it severely lacking as well. Pondering over what she has seen, she asks herself, “What, after all, was Drouet? What was she?” and finally concludes that “her state was one of loneliness and forsakenness” (123). Although at this point she enjoys the company of Drouet, Mrs. Hale, and, to a lesser extent, Hurstwood, she feels lonely because she desires most of all to be in the company of the wealthy and to be seen as one of them. Additionally, as mentioned previously, her parade on New York’s Broadway with the fashionable Mrs. Vance not only offers a view of the wealthy apparel and trinkets of high society but also portrays what the scenes of the department store and North Shore Drive exemplify—that Carrie’s attraction to fine objects is connected to her desire to be equal to the women she sees and to be seen as part of their social class.

Dreiser also shows throughout the novel that Carrie feels like she belongs in the “walled city” with the wealthy upper class. Donald Pizer observes, “Throughout most of the novel, Carrie’s conscious motivation is to escape drabness, poverty, and gloom to

gain ease, comfort, and contentment” (70). Yet while at times Carrie's actions seem to be motivated by an aversion to the drab life represented by her sister and brother-in-law, Dreiser indicates in many scenes that her desire to gain wealth denotes more than mere avoidance of shabbiness. During her first day of working at the shoe factory, in fact, she judges the social status of the workers there and surmises that she deserves to be in a higher class than they. Dreiser writes that, while Carrie is observing her co-workers during her lunch break, she makes “the average feminine distinction between clothes, putting worth, goodness and distinction in a dress suit, and leaving all the unlovely qualities and those beneath notice in overalls and jumper,” making her feel “sure that she did not want to make friends with any of these” (*Sister Carrie*, 43). As she makes her way home from work this first day, Dreiser claims, “She felt ashamed in the face of better dressed girls who went by. She felt as though she should be better served, and her heart revolted” (44). Later, when Minnie rebukes Carrie for buying a new umbrella because her “vanity” is “troubled” by having to use Minnie's old one, Dreiser writes, “Carrie resented this, though she did not reply. She was not going to be a common shop-girl, she thought; they need not think it, either” (58). Later in the novel, after Carrie has taken up residence in the apartment Drouet provides for her, she puts on the clothes that his money has bought and looks at her reflection: “The mirror convinced her of a few things which she had long believed. She was pretty, yes, indeed! How nice her hat set, and weren't her eyes pretty. She caught her little red lip with her teeth and felt her first thrill of power” (82). According to Dreiser, Carrie has “long believed” that she is pretty, and this scene implies her further belief that she is fitted for the “thrill of power” that accompanies the belongings of the wealthy class. These scenes show that Carrie not only desires to be

a part of the upper class; she also lives with the belief that she belongs in these higher classes.

Dreiser most convincingly shows Carrie's desire to gain entrance to the figurative "walled city" in the many scenes in which he comments that she feels like an outsider and longs to be a part of the inner social life of the rich. When writing of Carrie's first experiences in Chicago, Dreiser observes that she feels like the city "grew larger, harder, more stolid in its indifference" and that it seems "as if it was all closed to her" (*Sister Carrie*, 27). Carrie revisits these sentiments of Chicago when dining at Sherry's, recalling that "all Chicago [seemed] a cold and closed world" to her during her stay there (335). As Carrie moves on from her relationship with Drouet to one with Hurstwood and finds herself friends with the Vances in New York, surrounded by luxury, she begins to feel even more like an outsider to the great "walled city" and determines in her heart to somehow find a way to breach the wall. When, for instance, she parades down Broadway for the first time with Mrs. Vance and feels poor in comparison to all the fine ladies walking there, Dreiser writes, "The whole street bore the flavor of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it" (325). Her state of mind is so changed by this display of wealth and opulence that Dreiser states, "It clinched her convictions concerning her state. She had not lived, could not lay claim to having lived, until something of this had come into her own life" (327). Later, the extravagant dinner at Sherry's effects the same emotions in Carrie, as she takes in all of the opulence and concludes in her heart, "It must be glow and shine everywhere, with coaches waiting, and footmen attending, and she was out of it all" (336). She is allured by the great magnetic draw of the "walled city,"

desiring to be inside of it and feeling she is meant to be a part of it, but, for the biggest portion of the novel, she feels that she is firmly situated outside of its walls.

During her dinner at Sherry's, Carrie is introduced to an alternate ideal to her goal of pursuing the "walled city," yet even here she proves that she is more interested in defining herself by social status than by any seemingly virtuous ideal. Dreiser introduces Carrie to Bob Ames and, through him, the idea that money is not the means to satisfaction, that people do not need wealth and status in order to be happy in life. Carrie finds these statements confusing, however, and is drawn to Ames because, while being rich, he is also smart and intriguing in her eyes as well, a different kind of man than those in her previous acquaintance. According to Dreiser, Ames' fresh attitude toward the world temporarily brings about new and conflicting thoughts within Carrie, and yet for all of his sentiments and arguments, Carrie shows in this episode that she is more interested in gaining the approval of Ames and of men like him than of changing her life according to the precepts he espouses. When at the theater following dinner, Carrie asks Ames what he thinks of the profession of acting, and he responds affirmatively, claiming that he thinks it a fine thing to be a good actor. Of Carrie's reaction to this, Dreiser writes, "Just this little approval set Carrie's heart bounding. Ah, if she could only be an actress—a good one! This man was wise—he knew—and he approved of it. If she were a fine actress, such men as he would approve of her" (*Sister Carrie*, 340). Carrie has the same desire for Ames' approval in their next meeting after Carrie has become a successful actress. Dreiser comments, "Success had given her the momentary feeling that she was now blessed with much of which he would approve" (505), showing Carrie's continuing desire for Ames' acceptance. In a later meeting, Ames explains to her that her natural

look expresses others' desires in a way they cannot do themselves, and he advises her to use her look to "make [her] powers endure" (508). Clare Eby points out, "Ames' advice reinforces Carrie's pecuniary, emulative, and comparative methods of reckoning. He recommends that she make herself 'valuable to others' as a way to 'make your powers endure:' seek happiness, he counsels, by relying on others to validate your worth" (n.p.). Dreiser shows that Carrie has been defining herself in this way all along when he shows her basking in Ames' praise and approval: "This was what her heart craved" (*Sister Carrie*, 507). The social status and reputability that Ames represents, rather than his advice, has been Carrie's ideal, as Dreiser makes clear that throughout the novel she has been seeking the approval of those that she believes to be superior to her socially. Ames also ironically voices his ideals from a seat of wealth; if anything, he only represents a more philosophical portion of the "walled city" class, a portion Carrie has not encountered until she meets him.

Dreiser's portrayal of Carrie's desire to gain entrance to the "walled city" in the novel highlights a significant shift in notions of identity that was occurring in American culture during the industrial era and demonstrates the considerable devaluation of people that resulted from this shift. Carrie's story reflects the way in which people at this time increasingly began to connect their personal significance to their socioeconomic class. Gerber states that Dreiser was "the first to portray the dismal depersonalization of the individual which results from urbanization and intensifying societal pressure to conform, the first to draw us frankly and grimly as a nation of status-seekers" (173-4). Just as Carrie connects her personal value to her social position and therefore seeks wealth and status to establish her worth, people in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

America fought to gain more and more wealth in order to enjoy the social status and reputability they believed it conferred to them. The way in which Carrie seeks to define herself by social status demonstrates the devaluation of people during the industrial era in that, as social rank begins to determine an individual's worth, identity is reduced to assortments of material objects and club memberships, and people are valued for what they own instead of for who they are.

Additionally, the means by which Carrie eventually gains entrance to the "walled city" further reveals the devaluation of people during this time. Carrie first enters the city with very little to her name; while living with Hanson and Minnie, she works at a tedious job for a paltry sum of money and has nothing to spend on the pleasures for which she longs. Drouet offers her a taste of the life she desires and proposes to set her up in an apartment where she can continue to live this life, and Dreiser observes of Carrie, "She followed whither her craving led" (*Sister Carrie*, 80), ultimately trading her life with the Hansons for life with Drouet and his offers of wealth. This passive choice—following where her desire leads her—epitomizes the way in which Carrie lives in the city and progresses in social status: she allows her desire to control her choices and ends up using the people in her life in the process of pursuing what she wants. Dreiser, for instance, makes clear in Carrie's first meetings with both Drouet and Hurstwood that she is drawn to them because of what their possessions and status represent to her; Charles Lewis comments that she values both men "in terms of their relative positions" (25). Although both meetings happen out of chance, Dreiser shows that she uses them fully to her advantage in her pursuit of breaching the "walled city." He makes clear in the novel that Carrie does not love either man; she values each relationship only for the standard of life

and status she can potentially access from it, and when she sees a higher ideal that appears to greater advantage to her than the relationship she currently inhabits, she discards both men as they decrease in value to her.

Dreiser additionally uses two vivid images in the chapter titles of the book to highlight the reality that Carrie uses Drouet and Hurstwood to get ahead socially. He introduces the image of an “ambassador” in the titles of Chapters VIII, X, XII and XXVI, and each of these chapters has to do with Carrie’s involvement with either Drouet or Hurstwood. Dreiser's use of the image of “ambassador” connected with Carrie’s affairs with these men implies the functional aspects of these relationships for Carrie, as she uses both men as ambassadors in order to access the social realms with which they are connected. As Paul Orlov states, “...Drouet and Hurstwood represent the experiential worlds Carrie wishes to enter. But her way of seeing them makes them not only symbols, but also instruments of power—her means to access the realm which (as the title of Chapter XXXIII puts it) seems to be ‘the walled city’ of ‘success’” (146). The second image is that of a ladder, and though it only appears in the heading of Chapter XXIII, implied in the phrase “One Rung Put Behind,” this image is largely connected with the previous image of “ambassador.” This title heads the chapter in which Carrie fights with Drouet and marks the last time she will ever have any kind of intimate relationship with him. The phrase “One Rung Put Behind” signifies that Carrie has used Drouet in order to access a higher social class than the one she inhabited before she met him and has cast him aside now that she has met Hurstwood, who is ambassador to a higher social class than Drouet. Regarding this image, Donald Pizer writes:

Carrie's response to Drouet, Hurstwood, and Ames is conditioned by two overlapping criteria—the relation of each figure to that in the city which she covets, and his relation to that which she has dismissed as wanting. The three men are therefore like rungs in a ladder, an image which Dreiser himself used. They are in hierarchal relationship to the quality of life which they represent and to Carrie's progress upward in understanding and values. (59)

Both of these images of "ambassador" and "ladder" underscore the reality that Carrie uses both men in order to access social worlds that would be closed to her otherwise.

Carrie ultimately uses both Drouet and Hurstwood as one would use commodities, reflecting the highly consumer mentality that permeated American culture in the industrial era and that devalued people as a result. Trachtenberg observes that, at this time, "city dwellers became more and more enmeshed in the market, more and more dependent on buying and selling," and due to this, "the network of personal relations, of family, friends, neighbors, comes to count for less in the maintenance of life than the impersonal transactions and abstract structures of the marketplace" (121). In this kind of atmosphere, where people were absorbed with the buying of new goods and the discarding of old ones that ceased to benefit them, relationships with people tended to be treated in the same consumer-oriented manner. Philip Fisher explains, "The life history of a shirt is one of continual decline. All goods are used up and replaced. Within *Sister Carrie* relationships, houses, cities and especially living situations are discarded in the way clothing might be" (274). People became easily objectified in this culture of consumption, seen as valuable only in what benefits they offered to their user and easily

abandoned once their usefulness was expended. For Carrie, Drouet and Hurstwood are like once-beautiful dresses that have gone out of season, and her use of them as ambassadors, as ladder rungs and, ultimately, as commodities exemplifies the way in which people during the industrial era objectified their relationships with others and devalued people as a result.²⁴

At the end of the novel, Carrie is unhappy. Her stage career enables her to access the powerful and glamorous "walled city" of the novel, but she finds the acquisition of her desire to be less than the dream she maintained of it for so long. Dreiser declares that Carrie's tragic story shows the way in which an innocent and naïve seeker of beauty can be led by "devious ways" into emptiness and unhappiness in the city (*Sister Carrie*, 527), but his novel tells a much different story. The city, with its "cunning wiles," tempts her with its displays of power, light and wealth and whispers to her that these are the things she needs in order to find significance and to be satisfied in life. Yet Carrie is the one who chooses to be led by her desires and allows her pursuit of the "walled city" to define her identity. The whole while she hardens herself to others, objectifying them and using them to get what she wants, reflecting the devaluation of people in the consumer-oriented culture of the industrial era. In the end, she finds herself alone. Dreiser shows her at the end of the novel in a state of discontent, fittingly at a window sitting in her rocking chair, the place she occupies throughout the novel whenever she is dissatisfied with her place in life. Dreiser's outlook for Carrie's future is not promising: "In your rocking chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (527).

Chapter Three

"The Stones Have No Color": Confusion and Displacement of City and Self in

Anderson's Poor White

Sherwood Anderson, in his novel *Poor White*, traces the fictional progression of the small, mid-west town of Bidwell, Ohio, as it grows from a rural and mostly agrarian town into one of the booming manufacturing centers of the industrial era at the turn of the twentieth century. Anderson intended for the town itself to be the central character of the novel, as he points out in his introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Poor White*: “There was a town in the state of Ohio. The town was really the hero of the book.... What happened to the town was, I thought, more important than what happened to the people” (qtd. in Gelfant, 59). Yet Anderson tells the tale of Bidwell becoming a city largely through the lives and experiences of his characters, and this makes the importance of what happens to the town inseparable from the importance of what happens in the lives of *Poor White*’s characters—especially the main characters, Hugh and Clara. What happens to Bidwell the town likewise happens to the people within Bidwell and significantly shapes not only the landscape of the small Ohio town of the Central West but also the landscape of identity for those who inhabit the town as it is made into a city. In telling the story of Bidwell through the experiences of its residents, Anderson uses striking contrasts to show what Bidwell was in the past and what Bidwell is becoming in the present in order to present the themes of awakening and loss, sentiments that accompanied the rise of industrialism at the turn of the century. Through these themes, Anderson underscores the sense of confusion and displacement experienced by people in

the industrial era and reveals the way in which the abandonment of past identity led to the devaluation of people at this time.

Anderson's style of writing in *Poor White* seems somewhat haphazard throughout the novel, as he evades a conventional, linear plot common in so many of the realist and naturalist novels of his time in exchange for a more non-linear style of storytelling.

Anderson many times begins narrating a story about the town or about the characters within it, only to jump forward or backward in time or to a different location in order to begin telling another story or to continue a story previously started. Of this style, Walcutt writes, "[Anderson] makes a virtue of beginning a story at the end and ending it at the middle. He gives away information which would create suspense of the conventional sort and yet contrives to produce a surprise and a satisfaction at the end of his story by a psychological revelation or a sharing of experience that suddenly becomes coherent out of the chaos of the narrator's apparently objectless rambling" (40). Chaotic as it sometimes may seem, this style, in addition to Anderson's steady and even tone throughout the novel, suggests a sense of oral storytelling, as if the narrator of the book is some old man telling the story of Bidwell's growth to his grandchildren. David Stouck claims, "In all of Anderson's writing one is aware of the author in the process of telling a story" (314). Much of Bidwell's growth in *Poor White*, in fact, is told in this mellow, storytelling manner, with the point-of-view of the narration coming from a future place in time distant from when most of the action of the novel takes place.

The novel, for instance, tells the story of the growth of Bidwell from a small town into an industrial city, yet the book's first description of Bidwell shows it as an already booming manufacturing center: "Bidwell, Ohio, was an old town as the ages of towns go

in the Central West, long before Hugh McVey ... went there to live and to try to work out his problem. It is a busy manufacturing town now and has a population of nearly a hundred thousand people..." (S. Anderson 31). The narration of the novel tells the story of Bidwell's growth looking back on the past from this point in time.²⁵ Another example of the text revealing the point in time at which the story of Bidwell is being told comes at a time in the novel in which Anderson is describing Bidwell in the first stages of industrialization. He briefly jumps forward in time to inform the reader of the train tracks and factories that eventually occupy Bidwell:

It was in the year 1892 that Steve Hunter organized the first industrial enterprise that came to Bidwell. It was called the Bidwell Plant-Setting Machine Company, and in the end it turned out to be a failure. A large factory was built on the river bank facing the New York Central tracks. It is now occupied by an enterprise called the Hunter Bicycle Company and is what in industrial parlance is called a live, going concern. (82)

Before Anderson ever describes how the plant-setting machine company fails, he has already informed the reader of the outcome of this factory that, to this point in the telling, has yet to be built. Perhaps the most vivid instance of the narration describing what eventually occurs with industrialization is found at the beginning of Book Six, where, in the middle of setting the scene for stirring things that were about to befall Bidwell on a summer night, Anderson interrupts his depiction of that calm evening:

Not yet had the motor cars come to tear along the roads, their flashing lights ... had not yet made the roads an extension of the cities. Akron, the terrible town, had not yet begun to roll forth its countless millions of

rubber hoops.... Detroit and Toledo had not begun to send forth their hundreds of thousands of motor cars to shriek and scream the nights away on country roads. Willis was still a mechanic in an Indiana town, and Ford still worked in a bicycle shop in Detroit. (208)

These quick glimpses of the point in time from which the narration is being told give a fragmentary picture of what Bidwell the industrial city looks like; the majority of the narration looks back on the past at the point at which Bidwell begins to change into this city. In providing brief glimpses of what Bidwell eventually looks like as a city, Anderson shifts the focus of the narration off of where Bidwell is going and shifts it onto how Bidwell gets there and what it experiences through this process.

As part of his storytelling style, Anderson largely narrates Bidwell's growth process by using embedded short stories in the novel that tell of the experiences of Bidwell's residents. Within these stories throughout the book, Anderson provides short descriptions of the town and its growth into a city as seen through the eyes of these characters. After describing, for instance, the past routines of the berry-picking season in the pre-industrial town, he narrates the stories of several Bidwell residents, such as Allie Mulberry, Jane Orange and Judge Hanby. Along with descriptions of these characters and some of their experiences, Anderson mentions locations in the town, such as Hunter's Jewelry Store, Birdy Spink's drug store and the scene along Main Street, and his mentioning of these places gives the reader an idea of the look and make-up of the town prior to its growth. Later in the novel, he uses the story of Ben Peeler, the carpenter, to illustrate the beginning stages of change in the town; he mentions that, in the three years that Clara was gone to school, Ben's business grew so much that he not only

had obtained an office by the railroad tracks but had also gone into the lumber business with Gordon Hart. Anderson explains, “The two men figured on jobs to be built, rows of workingmen’s houses, sheds alongside one of the new factories, large frame houses for the superintendents and other substantial men of the town’s new enterprises” (S. Anderson 132). In this explanation, he gives an idea of how the town physically grows in the wake of the industrial boom. The colorful story of Smoky Pete, Bidwell’s blacksmith and boisterous decrier of fellow town members’ indiscretions, portrays the town's growth as well. In Pete's story, Anderson writes about the corn-cutting machine factory that is successful and already employs several workmen, and he shows how far industrial growth in Bidwell had spread, as he states that the blacksmith’s home at the edge of town, along with the adjacent field, had been bought with the intention of cutting it into building lots.

Anderson also uses the everyday lives of his main characters throughout the novel to show the physical changes Bidwell endures as it grows into an industrial city. When Tom, for instance, picks up Clara from the railroad station after her three years at school, she finds that “Main Street was torn up for the purpose of laying a brick pavement and digging a new sewer” (S. Anderson 126). During the same ride home, her father draws her attention to the wall of a new factory being built and informs her of the plans for housing a bicycle manufacturing company in an already-built factory. Perhaps one of Anderson’s most vivid and pointed depictions of the growing Bidwell comes as Joe Wainsworth, the harness-maker, is looking out his front door during his lunch break. Anderson describes Joe’s viewpoint:

The quiet Main Street ... which had always been such a sleepy place at the noon hour in the summer, was now like a battle-field from which an army had retreated. A great gash had been cut in the street where the new sewer was to be laid. Swarms of workingmen, most of them strangers, had come into Main Street from the factories by the railroad tracks. They stood in large groups in lower Main Street by Wymer's tobacco store. ...The men who were digging the sewer, foreign men, Italians he had heard, sat on the banks of dry earth in the middle of the street. Their dinner pails were held between their legs and as they ate they talked in a strange language. (136)

Anderson similarly shows much of Bidwell's change through the outdoor walks of Hugh McVey, the proclaimed instigator of these changes. From the outset of his inventions' successes, the town grows up all around him as he walks to and fro in the novel.

Regarding the path upon which Hugh walks to work every day, for example, Anderson writes, "New houses were constantly being built along Turner's Pike that led down to his workshop at Pickleville. ...A dozen new houses had been built in Pickleville itself" (148). Later, as he walks through the streets of Bidwell thinking of Clara, he walks by the corn-cutter factory: "The factory was working day and night, and the new plant ... was almost completed. Behind the new plant was a field Tom Butterfield and Steve Hunter had bought and laid out in streets of workingmen's houses. The houses were cheaply constructed and ugly, and in all directions there was a vast disorder..." (167).

By way of another walk Hugh takes after his marriage to Clara, Anderson shows more of Bidwell's growth: "On the bluff and back of it on a sloping hillside many of the more pretentious new houses of the prosperous Bidwell citizens had been built. Facing the

river were the largest houses. . . less and less pretentious as they receded from the river, were other houses built and being built, long rows of houses, long streets of houses" (203). These passages show the way in which Anderson uses the lives and experiences of Bidwell's inhabitants to depict much of the town's physical changes in its process of becoming an industrial city. By doing so, Anderson reveals that the life of Bidwell is inseparable from the lives of its people—that the significance of what happens to the town cannot be separated from the significance of what happens to its residents.

The discussion so far has been centered on how Anderson, by way of his storytelling style, depicts Bidwell's physical appearance and how it changes due to industrialization, yet to regard only the town's appearance as it grows into a city falls short of what Anderson attempts to show of Bidwell in *Poor White*. Regarding Anderson's writing, David Anderson points out, "For Anderson, essence, not appearance, was reality..." (120), and the essence of Bidwell the town and how this essence changes as it becomes a city is the most significant aspect of Bidwell that Anderson attempts to express. For this reason, the way in which Anderson intertwines the experiences of the town's inhabitants with the experience of the town itself is important, for the essence of the town is found in the lives of Bidwell's residents. In his attempt to capture the way in which this essence changes due to industrialization, Anderson highlights great contrasts that exist in Bidwell's growth that help portray the more abstract idea of the changing essence of the town. The contrasts of an idealized past with a murky and uncertain industrial present, of the beauty and art in nature with the ugliness of industrial creation, and of reputations earned through accomplishments with those created by publicity and

advertising come out in his writing to convey what Bidwell and its citizens experience during industrial change.

All throughout *Poor White*, Anderson writes of the pre-industrial life of rural towns with idyllic, sometimes bordering on utopian, depictions. When describing the towns in which Hugh worked in between his jobs at Mudcat Landing and Bidwell, Anderson writes, “In even the smallest of the towns, inhabited only by farm laborers, a quaint interesting civilization was being developed. Men worked hard but were much in the open air and had time to think. Their minds reached out toward the solution of the mystery of existence. . . . Long drawn out discussions of religious beliefs and the political destiny of America were carried on” (S. Anderson 29). In the next few pages, he describes Bidwell as something of a rural paradise, where contented citizens march into the berry-picking fields by day and parade down or lounge happily along Main Street in the evenings. He explains that all of these rural Mississippi Valley towns were each like “a great family” that lived under a type of “invisible roof” which covered the whole town (34). Regarding this great roof, he says, “Within the invisible circle and under the great roof every one knew his neighbor and was known to him. Strangers did not come and go swiftly and mysteriously and there was no constant and confusing roar of machinery and of new projects afoot” (34).²⁶ In language that implies idyllic happiness and harmony, Anderson writes throughout the novel of the desirable simplicity of these towns’ pasts and the serenity that surrounded them.

Many of the descriptions Anderson uses to depict the rise of the industrial city in the novel, however, conversely involve language that conveys images of darkness and confusion. In the passage in which he likens the pre-industrial sense of community to a

"great roof" covering a town, for instance, Anderson also describes the roar of the coming industrial machinery as "constant and confusing" (S. Anderson 34). When Hugh spends a couple of hours in the great industrial city of Chicago at the beginning of the novel, Anderson similarly describes the multitude of people at the train station as "disturbed insects," "distraught cattle" and "a whirling churning mass of humanity" (25). As Hugh briefly leaves the train station and stands on a nearby bridge, Anderson says, "A pall of black smoke covered the sky. From all sides of him and even in the air above his head a great clatter and roar of bells and whistles went on" (25). This brief portrayal of Chicago depicts the industrial city as murky and cacophonous. Anderson later writes of the onset of industrialization as if it was a frenetic disease that was caught and spread from person to person: "A vast energy seemed to come out the breast of earth and infect the people. Thousands of the most energetic men of the middle States wore themselves out in forming companies, and when the companies failed, immediately formed others" (87). When Anderson shows the clash of his idealized, small-town past with the industrial present time, the rise of the industrial city additionally takes on a darker and more sinister aspect. The best example of this comes toward the end of the novel when, on the evening of Joe Wainsworth's violent spree, the first motorized automobile, an emblem of the new age, careens along the streets in and surrounding Bidwell. On a summer night that Anderson depicts as peaceful and beautiful, reminiscent of the idyllic past, with only the clatter of horses' hoofs to break the silence of country roads, he compares the intrusion of the new vehicle on this night to "a hungry wolf" that "[encircles] silently and swiftly the fire-lit camp of a hunter" (210). He elaborates: "Its great nose pushed through the troubled air of the quiet roads, frightening horses, breaking the silence with its persistent

purring, drowning the song of insects” (210). Earlier in the novel, Anderson, in sweeping and definite terms, similarly portrays industry as a fearsome beast: “A new force that was being born into American life and into life everywhere all over the world was feeding on the old dying individualistic life” (44). He writes that “the roar and clatter of the breathing of the terrible new thing, half hideous, half beautiful in its possibilities, that was for so long to drown the voices and confuse the thinking of men, was heard not only in the towns but even in lonely farm houses...” (44). By using such graphic imagery to describe the industrial present, Anderson makes clear in *Poor White* that the sights, sounds and feelings ushered in by industrialization sharply contrast the simplicity and harmony that marked the American rural past.²⁷

Along with these descriptions in the novel that reflect the contrast of past with present, Anderson also uses character pairs that are juxtaposed with each other in the novel to reinforce this contrast. One of the clearest portrayals of this contrast is reflected in the relationship between Tom Butterworth and Jim Priest and in their relationships with Tom’s daughter, Clara. The old farmhand Jim represents a slow and tranquil past way of life, an illustration of the former routines of labor and farm work and of thoughtful respect for people and nature. In his relationship with Clara, he becomes a kind of surrogate father; he possesses toward her the tenderness and affection that one might expect a father to have toward a daughter, and he shows her the thoughtfulness and attention that she ultimately desires from a man. Anderson characterizes Tom Butterworth, however, in an almost opposite manner than he does Jim. Tom is portrayed as a prideful, paranoid man who is all business and is always on the lookout for a way to make a profit and a name for himself, and in this way, he represents many of the

industrial captains of the new age. By way of, first, his paranoia and, ultimately, his pride, he irrevocably ruins his relationship with Clara by the time she is seventeen, and each time he has an opportunity to speak with her and mend the rift, he instead remains self-absorbed and boasts to her of his pecuniary accomplishments. Anderson further highlights the contrast between the two men and what they represent through the story of their disagreement over racehorse jockeys. Tom prefers a jockey named Bud Doble, who Anderson describes as “debonair,” “dramatic” and “handsome” and who drives his horse hard through an entire race, shouting at and fussing with the animal the whole time (S. Anderson 180). Jim, on the other hand, prefers Pop Geers, described by Anderson as “shrewd and silent” and who drives his horse calmly and with patience (180). Jim uses the comparison of the two jockeys to explain the difference in the manners with which he and Tom relate to Clara (Tom always fusses with Clara, whereas Jim is calm and patient with her), but the personalities of the jockeys also parallel the personalities of Tom and Jim and are reflective of the opposing attitudes toward life and business that Tom and Jim represent. By the end of the novel, Anderson equates Tom’s “shrill tone of voice” with that of “the new age” (219), whereas the “loud snoring” of Jim Priest is heard “as though coming out of the past” (234), and this reinforces further the contrast of past and present that the two men represent.

The relationship between the characters of Joe Wainsworth and Jim Gibson further parallels the contrast found within the novel between past and present. Anderson describes Joe, the harness maker, as “a tradesman of the old school” (S. Anderson 38), a craftsman representative of the past who is deeply invested in his craft and unhappy about the new age that is ushering in factory-made goods. Early in the novel, he explains to his

apprentice, “The man who knows his trade is a man. He can tell every one to go to the devil” (39-40). Rather than being completely opposed to industry,²⁸ Joe appears to be more confused by and fearful of it: “Being a sensitive man, Joe felt like a pigmy, a tiny thing walking always in the presence of a giant that might at any moment and by a whim destroy him” (90). Even before meeting Jim Gibson, Joe displays a tendency toward striking out violently at that which represents his fear of the new age, and Anderson illustrates this reality at one point when Joe encounters the inventor Hugh and momentarily desires to throw a stone at him. Anderson also gives Joe a softer side, though, and connects him to the idyllic past by relating the way in which Joe and his wife would make near weekly trips to have lunch at the farm of one of his customers and to spend time in a nearby beech forest. Anderson conversely portrays Gibson, the journeyman harness maker hired by Joe, as a drunk and a blowhard who uses deception to get ahead in business and is eager to become part of the new age. More interested in power than in wealth, he quickly takes advantage of Joe’s fear, seizes control of the store from Joe and orders sets of factory-made harnesses to be sold in the shop. Anderson also relates Jim to the present age of industrialism by connecting him with Tom, a captain of industry in Bidwell, who, having heard the story of the factory-made harness order, declares that he is going to get in touch with Jim because Jim is a man that can handle workers. Eventually Joe’s fears get the best of him, and he strikes out at Jim as well as at Hugh, men who, to him, represent the new age, and through Joe's actions, Anderson underscores the great contrast in past and present values brought out by industrialization.

At some points, the relationship between Hugh and Clara also highlights the contrast between past and present, though not as directly as do the previous two pairings.

Anderson many times connects Clara with the idealized past, shown by the way in which she dwells over warm childhood memories of her mother and a younger version of her father, as well as in her close relationship with Jim Priest, a man representative of a past time. Her connection with the past is also expressed in her initial sympathy toward Joe Wainsworth toward the end of the novel, although this sympathy is short-lived. Hugh, on the other hand, is never completely representative of the industrial present, although Anderson frequently identifies him as the instrument that ushers it into Bidwell. Until their wedding night, in fact, Clara idealizes Hugh as a hero and ironically compares him to Jim Priest: “‘The farm hand works,’ she thought, ‘and the corn grows. This man sticks to his task in his shop and makes a town grow’” (S. Anderson 172). The contrast between past and present comes out more subtly in their relationship than in the other pairings; it is seen mainly in their inability to effectively communicate with one another as husband and wife. Clara eventually connects this breakdown of communication to the “thinking of machinery and the making of machines” on Hugh’s part (210), and she therefore begins to connect Hugh with the modern age against which her heart revolts. Regarding her feelings at this point, Anderson explains, “She had been hating Hugh and sympathizing with the dead past he and other men like him were destroying...” (232). Her antipathy lasts only briefly, and her view of Hugh forever changes at the point at which he is physically threatened by Joe, a representative of the “dead past” (232). From this point on, Clara views Hugh not as a hero but as a victim of the new age, and Anderson writes, “The thing for which Joe Wainsworth stood and that she had thought was so precious to herself no longer existed in her consciousness” (233). At this same time, Hugh becomes more self-reflective of the new age and more disillusioned by his

role in making Bidwell into an industrial city, and as both Hugh and Clara begin to somewhat change their feelings about the past and the present, their communication problems with each other begin to fade.

Similar to the contrast seen throughout the novel between an idealized past and a chaotic present, Anderson also highlights a contrast between the beauty and art in nature and the ugliness of industrial creation.²⁹ Whenever he describes the nature surrounding the town of Bidwell, he mostly portrays this nature with bright, pleasing colors and language suggestive of the arts, such as music, poetry and dancing. When Clara, for instance, sits out in the woods after she returns home from Columbus, Anderson writes of her surroundings:

Over her father's farm brooded the passionate fulfillment of summer. Before her. . . lay yellow wheat fields, ripe for the cutting; insects sang and danced in the air about her head; a soft wind blew and made a gentle singing noise in the tops of the trees; at her back among the trees a squirrel chattered; and two calves came along a woodland path and stood for a long time staring at her with their large gentle eyes. (S. Anderson 130)

In one of the most picturesque depictions of nature in the novel, Anderson similarly describes the corn and cabbage fields of the Midwest as if he is a painter brushing the landscape onto a canvas: "In the cabbage fields the broad outer leaves fall down to make a background for the shifting, delicate colors of soils. The leaves are themselves riotous with color. As the season advances they change from light to dark greens, a thousand shades of purples, blues and reds appear and disappear" (207-8). Prior to this colorful description, he mentions that the scenes of these fields throughout Middle America prove

worthy inspiration for poetry and music. In fact, all throughout the novel, Anderson presents the reader with natural displays of mesmerizing beauty and color, displays that evoke images of music and poetry in such a way as to make the natural world of the novel a place of art and culture and serenity.

Anderson portrays the industrial city in *Poor White*, on the other hand, as the opposite of beauty and art, shown in his comment that the time “for art and beauty to awake in the land” was instead interrupted by industry’s awakening (S. Anderson 89). He claims that the new age was a time of “hideous architecture” (87), where carpenters who used to take time with their craft were frenetically about the new business of building “cheaply constructed and ugly” workingmen’s track houses that created “disorder” in the landscape (167). Every time, in fact, that Anderson writes of the new track houses that were quickly popping up all over the town of Bidwell, he rarely fails to mention their unattractiveness; even the “pretentious new houses of the prosperous Bidwell citizens” are described as ugly in appearance (203-4). The industrial landscape of Bidwell additionally lacks the harmonious musical qualities that are depicted in the novel’s natural world; Anderson instead characterizes the sounds of industry as dissonant and “shrill” (219, 235). In places in the novel, the sounds of the industrial city drown out the music of nature, as when Anderson writes, “The trees were cut and the song of the grasshopper choked beneath piles of boards. There was a great shouting and rattling of hammers. A whole street of houses, all alike, universally ugly, had been added to the vast number of new houses already built” (184). He describes the entire age as artless: “Without music, without poetry, without beauty in their lives or impulses, a whole people, full of the native energy and strength of lives lived in a new land, rushed pell-

mell into a new age” (87), a great contrast to the beauty and art of nature Anderson portrays throughout the novel.

Frequently throughout *Poor White*, Anderson also compares great national leaders of the past with the new leaders of the industrial age. Through this comparison, he creates a striking contrast between reputations of greatness that were built on accomplishments and integrity with reputations that were built by the prolific publicity and advertising of the industrial era.³⁰ Anderson highlights the contrast between the two when he writes:

Boys, who in the schools had read of Lincoln, walking for miles through the forest to borrow his first book, and of Garfield, the towpath lad who became president, began to read in the newspapers and magazines of men who by developing their faculty for getting and keeping money had become suddenly and overwhelmingly rich. Hired writers called these men great, and there was no maturity of mind in the people with which to combat the force of the statement, often repeated. Like children the people believed what they were told. (S. Anderson 89)

Anderson implies that the great leaders of the past, such as Lincoln and Garfield, were men of substance and character, who came from nothing and established their greatness through hard work and heroic achievements. The greatness attributed to the leaders of the new age, however, Anderson attributes to publicity—reputations built completely on accumulated wealth and the words of hired men. Earlier in the novel, Anderson explains this phenomenon in more detail when he claims that writers who “might have become artists” instead were hired out to write legends of greatness concerning their employers

(65). He comes to the conclusion that “most modern great men are mere illusions sprung out of a national hunger for greatness” (65). With this statement, he also implies that the so-called greatness of the new industrial age is itself empty and illusory, built by advertising and public relations teams.

Against the backdrop of this contrast in reputations, Anderson additionally presents characters that, in their positions in Bidwell, highlight this contrast. Although, for instance, Hugh’s reputation of greatness in Bidwell is partly fictional, built on the speculation or misinformation of town residents, Hugh rises in prominence in the town mainly due to hard work—namely the inventions of his mind and his hands. The people of Bidwell believe he is a great man, at least initially, by what he has been able to accomplish. Steve Hunter, on the other hand, began his business in Bidwell with an empty promise and an outright lie when he tells Tom Butterworth and John Clark that Hugh is his man and has already made an invention worth millions. The bluff pays off, but not through any great accomplishment of Steve’s. Throughout the building of his first company, in fact, he gains his reputation largely through his bold and confident words to others. So shaky is the foundation of his supposed greatness that he can never feel great in the presence of Hugh, upon whose accomplishments his success is built, and he must use his own words to convince himself that he is a great man. Anderson, for example, relates that, after his meeting at the bank to organize his first company, he wishes to feel like “the one great man of the community,” yet as he makes his way toward the pickle factory, he abruptly turns back “because he realized suddenly that in the presence of the silent, intent inventor he had never been able to feel big” (S. Anderson 76). Later, he stops in the road: “At a place where there were no houses he stopped for a

moment and lifted his tiny hands to the skies. 'I'm a man. I tell you what, I'm a man. Whatever any one says, I tell you what, I'm a man,' he shouted into the void" (76). Tom Butterworth uses his words in a similar fashion when driving Clara home upon her return from Columbus. He says to her, "'You might as well know it, I'm the big man in this town. It comes pretty near being my town when you come right down to it'" (128). Where Anderson in some ways connects Hugh with the leaders of the past who earned greatness through their accomplishments, he similarly connects Steve and Tom, the two main representatives of industry in Bidwell, with the men of the modern age whose greatness is found only in words.

The contrasts between past and present, beauty and ugliness, accomplishment and publicity, that come out as Anderson renders the experience of Bidwell's growth underscore two main themes that run throughout the whole of *Poor White*—the themes of awakening and loss. In much of the novel, Anderson describes the first experiences of the town as it approaches the new age as a great time of awakening. At the outset of the novel, for example, Anderson portrays the town of Bidwell and other small towns like it to be in a time of waiting and anticipation. Through his descriptions of these rural towns and the conversations held by many of their residents, he shows this time of waiting to be a time of expectant optimism. He writes, "In all the towns of mid-western America it was a time of waiting. The country having been cleared and the Indians driven away..., the Civil War having been fought and won, and there being no great national problems that touched closely their lives, the minds of men were turned in upon themselves. The soul and its destiny was spoken of openly on the streets" (S. Anderson 33). Earlier in the novel, Anderson notes, "There was a feeling, ill expressed, that America had something

real and spiritual to offer to the rest of the world” (29). This thing, of course, is not a deep growth of art or philosophy that awakens in the land: “Instead, the giant, Industry, awoke” (89). Yet this awakening of industry initially does not stifle the optimism of these towns, as Anderson writes, “The youth and optimistic spirit of the country led it to take hold of the hand of the giant, industrialism, and lead him laughing into the land” (38).³¹ Hugh’s inventions, in fact, prompted this kind of optimism at first, as many of Bidwell’s citizens invested their savings in the plant-setting machine company with hopes of a good return on their money. Anderson points out as well that the time a farmer saved in labor by using Hugh’s corn-cutting machine could be used in thinking and pondering over the “mystery of the wide open places” (147). Stephen Enniss asserts, “At times Anderson describes the machine not as a destructive thing but as a thing of beauty” (93), and the people of Bidwell share in the hope that Hugh’s inventions will usher in good things: “‘If the machine works, the town’ll wake up,’ some one declared. ‘It means factories, new people coming in, houses to be built, goods to be bought.’ Visions of suddenly acquired wealth began to float in their minds” (S. Anderson 79). By these sentiments, Anderson shows that a hope of greatness and happiness accompanied the awakening of industry, a hope that the new and exciting age of industrialization will make everyone’s lives better and more beautiful.

Anderson parallels Bidwell's awakening with personal awakenings experienced by Hugh and Clara, and both of these awakenings initially prompt optimism in each of these characters as well. Hugh’s first awakening comes early in the novel,³² before he steps foot in Bidwell, as he strives to be the man that his surrogate mother, Sarah Shepard, had always pushed him to be. After the departure of the Shepards from Mudcat

Landing, Hugh labors ceaselessly to keep his mind from degenerating into the dreaminess toward which his nature tended and that which Sarah Shepard had always demeaned. Through these efforts, “his mind began suddenly to work with feverish eagerness,” and the thoughts that were previously “indefinite, ill-defined things” became more definite in his mind (S. Anderson 18). This awakening leads Hugh away from Mudcat Landing with the hope of one day becoming a part of a community in which he loses his fearful uncommunicativeness and freely associates with others: “He wanted to become acquainted with and be the friend of people whose lives were beautifully lived and who were themselves beautiful and full of significance” (20). Clara’s abrupt awakening, a bit more personal than Hugh’s, is sexual in nature, marking her transition from girlhood to womanhood and expressed by Anderson through the repeated words of Jim Priest: ““The sap has begun to run up the tree”” (96). As in the other awakenings of the book, optimism and hope accompanies Clara’s awakening as well, as her thinking becomes more sensual and she longs for deeper intimacy with another person. Anderson writes, “Although she did not know what the old man meant by the words about the sap and the tree, she did, in a detached subconscious way, understand something of the import of the words.... A greater hunger for understanding, love, and friendliness took possession of her” (96-7). As Clara awakens into the new world of womanhood, she carries with her optimistic hopes of gaining love and intimacy and a deeper understanding of life and the world about her.

The contrasts Anderson highlights in *Poor White* unfortunately indicate that the optimistic hopes that accompany these awakenings ultimately will not be realized. The opposite of the idealized past in the novel is not a better and more beautiful new age but

one that is chaotic and uncertain. The converse of the beauty and art found in nature expressed in the novel manifests itself in the ugliness and artlessness of the modern age, in which the substance of integrity is replaced by the hollowness of publicity. All of these contrasts in the novel foreshadow the reality that the optimistic awakening of the new age will lead ultimately to loss and unrealized hopes. The theme of awakening in *Poor White* invariably leads to a theme of loss, and the losses that come after the awakenings in the lives of Clara and Hugh are paralleled by the losses endured in the town. Clara's awakening into womanhood and her new sexuality, for instance, prompts her to reach out to a man in hopes of greater understanding and intimacy, but the young farm hand to whom she reaches out does not have the same goal in mind. Believing Clara's playfulness to be an open invitation for sexual intimacy, John May catches her in her father's shed and begins to kiss and grope her, and although she is able to escape his advances, the experience, made worse by the resulting quarrel with her father that ruins their relationship, forever shatters the trusting innocence Clara has with men. She discovers that she has the power to manipulate men, and her loss of innocence leads her to decide that she will not be ruled by them: "She knew a thousand things she had not known a month before and began to take her revenge upon men for their betrayal of her" (S. Anderson 103). In this way, Clara's awakening leads to a loss of innocence in her life, a loss that distances and separates her from others instead of bringing the intimacy and love for which she had hoped.

Anderson parallels Clara's loss of innocence in the loss of innocence experienced by the town of Bidwell, shown in many of the experiences of Bidwell's citizens after industrialization takes hold of the town. The town carpenter, Ben Peeler, for example, a

man who, prior to industrialization, could be seen happily conversing with customers and townspeople as he went through the labors of his day, loses the innocence of his trustful nature and becomes obsessed by thoughts of guarding his lumberyard from others in town. His obsessive paranoia leads to a dream in which he, while keeping guard over his lumberyard, blows part of a man's head off with a shot gun, only to find that the face of the man he shoots is his brother's face. Another instance of lost innocence comes when Steve Hunter explains to the other four founders of his first company that Hugh's plant-setting machine is a failure. He presents to the men a devious plan that would enable them to keep the factory to themselves while cutting off the townspeople who had invested in the company. Their capacity for deception and selfishness grows as they think over the plan, as seen in the thoughts of John Clark: "The banker's mind began to secrete the poison of his age. 'After all, it's men like Steve Hunter, Tom Butterworth, Gordon Hart, and myself that have to take care of things, and to be in shape to do it we have to look out for ourselves'" (84). He later says to himself, "The fellow who thinks of individual men, little fellows with their savings invested, who may be hurt by an industrial failure, is just a weakling" (85). These men, previously townsmen of some integrity, exemplify the loss of innocence the town suffers, as their corrupted leadership leads many in the town to lose the hard-earned money they had invested based on the word of these men. The ultimate example of the loss of innocence in Bidwell, however, is manifested in a vicious crime committed by a man once so sensitive as to cry over the death of a squirrel—overtaken by his fears and anger toward the awakening age, Joe Wainworth becomes a killer.

At the dawn of Hugh's first awakening, as he fixes his mind more and more on definite things, he hopes to find lasting companionship and to be accepted into a community of people. His awakening, instead, leads him to greater alienation from others. Saddened that he still is unable to break through his shyness and that the people of Bidwell have not offered him the friendship he craves, his hope of being accepted into the lives of others begins to fade. Anderson writes, "When the citizens of Bidwell would not take him into their town life but left him standing to one side, as the tiny dwelling place for men called Pickleville where he lived stood aside out from under the invisible roof of the town, he decided to try to forget men and to express himself wholly in work" (S. Anderson 49-50). Even after his inventions become huge successes in the town and people begin to "[reach] out their hands to him" (145), Hugh continues to distance himself from the people of Bidwell. He remains unable to overcome his awkward uncommunicativeness with others, and the people of the town eventually become intimidated by his quiet disposition and his position in industry. His industrial success, in fact, seems to alienate him further from others in Bidwell, as Gelfant writes that "his isolation is not broken by his success with the machine. Rather it is consolidated, for the place he makes for himself is in the shop, in the midst of machinery parts, and not in the community among friends and family" (60). By throwing himself into his work in an attempt to forget the rejection he feels from the town, he immerses himself in a world out of which he is even more unable to relate with others. Due to his feelings of rejection, Hugh additionally convinces himself that he is unworthy to enjoy a life of community and companionship with others, which appears to be part of the problem Hugh has in being physically intimate with women. When he and Rose McCoy begin to flirt with

each other, for example, he eventually attempts to shut out any sensual thoughts of her, deciding that “women were for other men but not for him” (S. Anderson 151), and later in the novel, he believes his own wife to be unattainable even after they are married. The awakening in Hugh that he hoped would lead to companionship and intimacy instead results in greater alienation from others.

Anderson parallels the alienation and loss of the hope of companionship that Hugh goes through in the experiences of the town of Bidwell brought about by the industrial awakening. Early in the novel, Anderson graphically portrays what the coming of industry ultimately did to the family-like community of the small town: “Millions of voices arose. The clamor became terrible, and confused the minds of all men. In making way for the newer, broader brotherhood into which men are some day to emerge, in extending the invisible roofs of the towns and cities to cover the world, men cut and crushed their way through the bodies of men” (S. Anderson 45). A great example of this occurs when Ed Hall tells his subordinates at the factory that he is going to do their work with them in order to prove that he can do more work than they can do. Out of pride, the workmen labor furiously to outwork Ed, only to discover that Ed has tricked them. Anderson writes, “At night when the amount of work done was calculated, they laughed at Ed. Then they heard that the piece-work plan was to be installed in the factory, and were afraid they would be paid by a scale calculated on the amount of work done during the two weeks of furious effort” (168). This trick not only further alienates Ed from the workmen with whom he used to be friends; it also leads the workers to distrust one another. After discovering Ed’s trick, the workmen begin to quarrel with each other and make accusations against one another, and this leads to a fight in which one of them

begins to throw heavy stones at the others. Anderson shows throughout the novel that, in their quest for success in the new age, people became increasingly more competitive with each other, an alienating reality that can be summed up in the words of Steve Hunter to Tom Butterworth: “‘It’s necessary for the good of the community,’ he said. ‘A few fairly strong men are a good thing for a town, but if they are fewer and relatively stronger it’s better’” (119). The awakening new age had brought with it increased alienation between people instead of the greater sense of brotherhood they had anticipated.

The alienation and loss of innocence found in the wake of industry’s entry into Bidwell fall under the umbrella of an overall loss of beauty and peace that is seen throughout the novel in the town’s physical descriptions. In the first half of the novel, Anderson describes the pre-industrial town of Bidwell by depicting the beauty of the numerous fields surrounding the town, the serenity of forest scenes filled with wild color and musical wildlife, and the poetry of the rhythms of work and leisure. At the end of the novel, Anderson gives the sense that all of this has been irrevocably lost:

His way led through the new city that had grown up since his coming to Bidwell. Turner’s Pike that had been a country road along which on summer evening lovers strolled to the Wheeling station and Pickleville was now a street. All that section of the new city was given over to workers’ homes and here and there a store had been built. The Widow McCoy’s place was gone and in its place was a warehouse, black and silent under the night sky. How grim the street in the late night! The berry pickers who once went along the road at evening were now gone forever. Like Ezra French’s sons they had perhaps become factory hands.

Apple and cherry trees once grew along the road. They had dropped their blossoms on the heads of strolling lovers. They also were gone. (S. Anderson 228)

Industrialization seems to have sucked the color out of the town of Bidwell, just as Hugh, on his train from Pittsburgh to Bidwell, muses, "The gods have thrown the towns like stones over the flat country, but the stones have no color" (231). The majority of the people in Bidwell ultimately find that their optimistic hopes for the new industrial age are unrealized and that much of the beauty that once filled the town is now irretrievably lost.

All of this together—the contrasts Anderson highlights and the themes of awakening and loss in the novel—creates an overall sense that a state of confusion and displacement exists in the town and its people by the end of the novel. *Poor White* culminates with the overarching feeling that things are not the way they are supposed to be, not for the town or for its people. The awakening of industry in the town of Bidwell carried with it an optimism of coming success; the people welcomed the new age with hopes that it would bring with it a happiness and contentment that was exponentially greater than what had ever been experienced, taking for granted what they might be giving up in light of their dreams of future greatness. When industrialization does not bring that for which they had hoped and also destroys much of the beauty and peace they had once known, the town seems caught in a state of confusion and displacement. Industry brings them a life they do not expect and do not see as very good. Jon Lawry writes, "Only when we have departed Winesburg or even Bidwell do we ask what we left behind, and wonder whether we can go home again" (54), and this same sense of regret seems to permeate Bidwell by the end of the novel. In an allegory of the industrial city,

Anderson captures this feeling of regret as he compares the men and women of modern industrial cities to mice that have come in from the country fields “to live in houses that do not belong to them” (S. Anderson 77). The mice find that their new lives are miserable in the houses, and they begin to long for the past: “Their minds go back to the time when they lived in the fields, but they do not go out of the walls of the houses, because long living in droves has made them afraid of the silence of long nights and the emptiness of skies” (77). One of the sons of Ezra French, the cabbage farmer, echoes this same sentiment as he bemoans the circumstances in which he finds himself in the new age. Speaking to his fellow workers, he says, “I wish the old days were back. I don’t see how that inventor or his inventions ever helped us workers. Dad was right about him. He said an inventor wouldn’t do nothing for workers” (168). Through these sentiments of regret in the novel, Anderson implies that industrialization has taken from Bidwell more than it has given to it, and through this, he shows the way in which the giant of industry left many hopes unrealized and, instead, left confusion and chaos in its wake during the industrial era.

Anderson additionally shows how these same feelings of confusion and displacement come to define many people during the time of industrialization by the way in which he reflects these feelings in the identities of Clara and Hugh. Clara’s abrupt awakening into womanhood is accompanied initially by a loss of innocence in her life, but the awakening of industry additionally disillusiones her regarding relationships between men and women. When she is in Columbus, for instance, she observes the lives of her aunt and uncle. He is a successful man of business who spends most of his time pouring over accounting figures, and she is a housewife who is forever knitting socks for

the children they will never have. Toward the end of her stay, she concludes that this couple is merely “finding a substitute for living” in their “eternal figuring and knitting,” and she sees the life led by her aunt in the industrial world as similar to being in prison (S. Anderson 114, 124). Clara surprisingly still desires to be married, possibly because she romanticizes the past figure of her mother (even while she feels like her mother’s life had been like that of a slave), but her marriage to Hugh, instead of bringing clarity to her disillusionment, only adds to her sense of disappointment. On her wedding night, Clara feels the same sense of confusion and displacement that is sensed in the town, as Anderson writes, “Everything in life that she had thought might in some way lead toward beauty now seemed to Clara to lead to ugliness” (197). She, like the town, is left in uncertainty, wondering how to forge ahead in this new world.

The seeds of the feelings of displacement that ultimately grow in Hugh are planted when he overhears the son of Ezra French, along with some workers, complaining that his inventions have brought them misery instead of happiness. Not until a few years later, though, do these and other words begin to gnaw at Hugh as he, for possibly the first time, attempts to make sense of his place in the industrial age. When new to Bidwell, he determines in himself to set his mind completely on his work and on accomplishing the tasks at hand, with little thought as to how his work affects the people in the town around him. Years later, however, setting his mind completely on his work means trying to figure out a way to get around the patent for a machine another man has invented, something he is unwilling to do, and this causes Hugh to stop and reevaluate his role in the new industrial age. Anderson writes, “Ever since that night when he had been attacked in the motor, the sense of some indefinable, inner struggle had been going on in

Hugh. . . . He had been an unconscious worker, a doer and was now becoming something else. . . .He fought to accept himself, to understand himself, to relate himself with the life about him” (S. Anderson 230). As Hugh enters this time of self-reflection on his place in the industrial world, he begins to realize that all that he had unthinkingly accepted as good—industry, the machine age and the resulting growth in Bidwell—had a dark side to it that was upsetting the harmonious balance of the town around him. This is a second awakening for Hugh, and just as his first awakening brings with it the loss of the intimate companionship he desires, this second awakening brings with it the loss of the security of knowing his place in the world. He had believed his inventions were helping the workmen and bringing happiness to the town; now, as he realizes this has not been the case, he is unsure of what to think about his work and the new age it has brought to Bidwell. In realizing that things are not what he had believed them to be, Hugh finds his identity displaced; like Clara on their wedding night, his self-reflection leaves him uncertain as to the way in which he should proceed in life.

Through the contrasts and themes Anderson highlights throughout *Poor White*, he ultimately shows that the sense of confusion and displacement that existed in the industrial era was a result of an abandonment of past identity by America as a whole and by people individually. Anderson indicates that the nation as a whole so highly valued what it hoped to gain in the industrial age that it forsook the values of the past and suppressed any self-reflection as it plunged ahead into industry. Spencer claims, “The snake which had crept into the agrarian Eden and its village culture was, in Anderson’s reiterated view, a new reliance on the external benefits supposedly conferred by technological progress rather than on the inner resources conferred by Nature and the

Soul on the Emersonian and Thoreauvian and Whitmanian self” (7). Throughout the novel, Anderson portrays this abandonment of past identity through the contrasts he underscores; these contrasts suggest that the nation as a whole abandoned the goodness of past values and the beauty of nature and ignored the history of its greatness seen in the strong leaders of its past, all to pursue material benefits during industrialization. He conveys this very idea when he writes, “Their fathers had walked and talked and thoughts had grown up in them. The impulse had reached back to their father’s fathers on moonlit roads. . . ; but the serious-minded sons of these men in the new land were swept away from thinking and dreaming. From all sides the voice of the new age that was to do definite things shouted to them” (S. Anderson 45). Anderson shows all throughout the novel that the nation's abandonment of its past identity, an abandonment of the foundations of its greatness, leads to the confusion and despair that inevitably accompanies the unrealized hopes of industrialization.

Anderson portrays the abandonment of past identity at an individual level through several characters in the book, such as Ben Peeler and Gordon Hart, but he shows it mostly in the character of Hugh. Early on, for instance, Sarah Shepard instills in Hugh a disgust for the lifestyle of his father and the majority of the people of Mudcat Landing, a lifestyle she views as slothful. By way of her teaching, Hugh eventually begins to detest his natural tendency to dream, and he forces his mind to be actively set on definite things to keep it from dangerously wandering. This appears on the surface to be positive for Hugh, as it leads him to become an inventor and to experience several industrial successes. Yet throughout the novel, Anderson subtly implies that Hugh’s denial of his natural tendency to dream and to use his imagination ultimately indicates an

abandonment of his natural identity, and this abandonment eventually leads to his sense of displacement and identity confusion toward the end of the novel.³³ Anderson writes, "He had lived but little in the life of the imagination, had been afraid to live that life, had been warned and re-warned against living it" (227). When he finally allows himself to think and reflect over the life he is living, he comes to a troubling realization: "He was unfulfilled by the life he led" (234). Through this, just as he does in the themes of awakening and loss, Anderson implies that Hugh's abandonment of his natural identity leads to unfulfilled hopes and, ultimately, to a sense of confusion and displacement in his life, seen in the way Hugh questions all of his industrial accomplishments. Anderson also shows that Hugh's experience is representative of the experience of most individuals in the industrial era; he writes, "The struggle [Hugh] was making was the struggle his fellows of another generation would one and all have to make" (230).

Anderson implies through much of the novel that the denial of past identity in the industrial era led to the devaluation of people in two ways. First, the denial of past identity in the quest for industrial wealth led to a skewed value system that valued material gain over the lives of others. Anderson shows this in the example of John Clark, who justifies scamming the people of Bidwell who invested in the failed plant-setting machine by thinking, "Men have to face the duties life brings. The few men who see clearly have to think first of themselves. They have to save themselves in order that they may save others" (S. Anderson 85). In his greed to control the factory in light of the coming industrialization of Bidwell, the banker abandons his integrity and character, and his obsession for wealth shows that money and power mean more to him than do the people of the town who have been his customers for decades. Anderson also uses Ben

Peeler as another example when he clearly describes Ben's abandonment of past identity in order to gain wealth:

In the old days Ben had been glad to go occasionally into the country on a barn-building job. He had liked the country food, the gossip with the farmer and his men at the noon hour and the drive back and forth to town, mornings and evenings. . . . Now he had no time to think of such things. When a farmer came to see him he shook his head. 'Get some one else to figure on your job,' he advised. 'You'll save money by getting a barn-building carpenter. I can't bother. I have too many houses to build.'"
(133)

Ben's paranoid dream of shooting an intruder to his lumberyard ultimately underscores how his pursuit of wealth in the new age of industrialism leads him to value possessions over other people. Second, Anderson implies in the novel that the abandonment of past identity in the quest for material gain during the industrial era devalued America as a whole by making it less than what it was in the past. Anderson portrays the nation's past identity in the novel as beautiful and full of art; it is an identity of great brotherhood and generosity, one built on the accomplishments of great men of integrity and character. Anderson shows in *Poor White* that, in abandoning this past identity to pursue the material "greatness" of industrialism, America has lost some of its beauty and art and greatness; it has become like the towns that Hugh likens to colorless stones that "do not burn and change in the light" (231). In abandoning its past, Anderson implies that the nation itself has been devalued, for it is in this past identity that, for Anderson, the nation's greatness rests.

Although Anderson claims that Bidwell is "the hero of the book" and that what happened to Bidwell was more significant in his eyes than what happened to the people of Bidwell, *Poor White* shows otherwise. In connecting Hugh's character so intimately with the denial of past identity in America that led to a sense of confusion and displacement during the industrial era, Anderson shows that *Poor White* is not only the story of Bidwell *and* the story of the people of Bidwell; it is also the story of a nation. And this story ends with a note of hope. Although the light could not "play" over the colorless stones of the industrial towns Hugh passes on the train, Anderson notes that the poetic phrase Hugh turns over in his mind "was a good phrase and lights could play over it as they played over the colored stones" (233). The use of his imagination and thoughtfulness, long suppressed by his determination to think definite thoughts, creates something beautiful and artistic, and this self-reflective act shows that Hugh's past identity, though once abandoned, is not irrevocable. Through the story of Hugh's colored stones, Anderson seems to say that the new age of industry does not have to be one of loss and that past values are not irretrievable; as long as people do not allow industrialization to take the color and beauty out of life by changing who they are as individuals and as a nation, the new age can still be one of hope.

Chapter Four

"We Were in a Trap You See": Confronting Conformity and Death in the City in Dos

Passos' Manhattan Transfer

In the first lines of *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos features vivid sensory descriptions of the arrival of a ferry into Manhattan: the gulls circling the air above, the garbage and food that clutter the water in the bay, the rattle of the chains as the ferry arrives and the fetid smell of the tunnel crossing. All of these depictions allow the reader to picture the scene, but they also help the reader to hear it, smell it, even taste it, as they nearly transport the reader into the book and onto the ferry itself. In his review of the novel, Sinclair Lewis notes, "In 'Manhattan Transfer,' Mr. Dos Passos does, really does, what all of us have frequently proved could not be done: he has given the panorama, the sense, the smell, the sound, the soul, of New York" (5), and these first several lines that depict the ferry crossing begin Dos Passos' unrolling of this panorama. This first epigraph that opens the novel, in fact, foreshadows the kind of sensory descriptions Dos Passos offers of the industrial-era city of Manhattan throughout the entire book. These descriptions invite the reader to come off of the ferry with the other men and women and to experience the city through the senses of its residents. Although these descriptions are numerous and are scattered in large doses throughout the novel, Dos Passos uses various formal arrangements—such as literary montage and arrangements that create cycles—and recurrent images to organize and give deeper meaning to these depictions. Through these means, he illustrates the way in which the experience of living in the industrial city affected individuals in the early twentieth century. In his portrayal of Manhattan, Dos

Passos likens the industrial city to a relentless machine, the symbol of the new age, and, in connecting this machine to industrialism itself, he shows the way in which the industrialist system devalued people at this time by demanding conformity to the system and robbing individuals of their identities.

One of the most noticeable formal characteristics of *Manhattan Transfer* is Dos Passos' use of literary montage—the juxtaposition of brief snapshots of narration and action that are separated by a space on the page—to portray the city throughout the novel. He utilizes montage, a technique that, at the point of his writing the novel, had mainly been used in filmmaking³⁴, to depict the experience of city life in Manhattan through quick glimpses of numerous characters' lives and activities. He juxtaposes these glimpses with few apparent narrative transitions or connections, and, in so doing, he makes the text similar to what one might see in a movie. As several critics have pointed out, in using montage, Dos Passos produces a quick, almost frenetic, pace to the novel, a pace that ultimately mirrors the frenzied tempo of the industrial city itself. Sam See points out, “Dos Passos’ Manhattan is a conglomeration of snapshots, disparate matter fused, localities and moments joined (however incongruously) into an impressionistic sensation of life ever-accelerating and discombobulating” (348). Gelfant agrees with this; she claims that “the rapid transition from one impression to another accelerates the novel’s pace to suggest the incessant restless movement within the city itself” (45). Some of the scenes that Dos Passos includes to make up his montage additionally contain mainly selective imagery of the city, and this also adds to the quick pace of the novel. He does not, in other words, catalogue every detail of these scenes to describe them; instead, he uses quick, rapid-fire details to depict these scenes largely as people within them

might experience their surroundings. As Ellen, for instance, walks on a warm, sunny day to meet George Baldwin, Dos Passos uses selective details to describe the scene: "In the heavy heat streets, stores, people in Sunday clothes, strawhats, sunshades, surfacecars, taxis, broke and crinkled brightly about her grazing her with sharp cutting glints as if she were walking through piles of metalshavings" (Dos Passos 115).³⁵ In this scene and others like it, he mentions a few specific details associated with the city experience, given in quick succession, and, while not a complete cataloguing of every aspect of the scene, these details still provide the reader with a distinct impression of the experience. Leaving out exhaustive description in these scenes and allowing a few vivid details to illustrate the city not only adds to the quickened pace of the novel but also gives these depictions of the city a subjective feel, even when they are not being portrayed directly through the eyes of any of the characters.

In addition to reflecting the quick pace of industrial Manhattan, Dos Passos' use of montage in *Manhattan Transfer* additionally creates a cluttered or crowded feeling to the book, in that montage allows him to include numerous scenes of the city and of its residents without having to use a lot of literary space for detailed descriptions and connective transitions. The book, then, offers the reader an abundance of depictions of city life in Manhattan that portray the multitudes of people inhabiting the city, and the resulting picture, in both form and content, ultimately mirrors the crowded feeling of the dense population of the city at the turn of the century. In Chapter IV of the third section, Dutch Robertson claims, "There's nowhere you can go in the whole crummy city without people watchin you" (Dos Passos 301), and the montage form of the book creates this very same impression. In just the first two chapters of the first section, for

instance, over twenty named characters have significant roles in nine different story lines, and only three of these story lines continue throughout the rest of the book, with only three of the named characters ever meeting each other. Factoring in the other various unnamed characters within these first two chapters, even this short portion of the book gives the impression of not only a fast-paced city experience but also a very crowded one.

Dos Passos' montage form in the novel additionally mirrors the alienating effect that the over-crowded city has on its inhabitants. The lack of expository transitions that connect scenes to one another in this montage form results in a fragmented reading experience, in that many of the scenes that are juxtaposed throughout the book are connected only in the sense that they happen somewhere in Manhattan and, at times, within the same timeframe. The fact that many people within the novel never come into contact with each other and that many individuals' paths and purposes never cross further fragments the text and shows the alienation of people that resulted in the big industrial city, in which multitudes of people lived lives separate from others around them. Colley calls this the "atomisation of the individual—the recognition that New York, apparently a single community of millions, separates and fragments the experience of the men and women who inhabit it" (60). One of the many great examples of this is the experience of Bud Korpenning, which Dos Passos outlines in the first section of the book. Bud's story spans the entire first section, which ends with his suicide, and yet he never comes into contact with any of the other recurring characters of the book, such as Ellen or Jimmy, whose stories span throughout the entire novel. The only person Bud spends any significant time talking to in the novel is a bum in the shelter he stays in the night prior to his death. His story stands apart from the others in the book as, among other things, a

testament to the alienating effect of the big city,³⁶ and his is but one story among many like this in the novel. Dos Passos additionally allows some characters' stories to intersect without these characters ever meeting one another in the book, and this is another way in which he highlights the alienating big city experience. Dos Passos, for instance, introduces the character of Anna Cohen in Chapter I of the third section and then extends her story throughout the rest of the book until, in the very last pages, a fire at her workplace leaves her seriously injured. Ellen, whose story spans the entire novel, witnesses this fire and Anna's disfigured body, and these characters' lives intersect briefly for the first and only time in this scene. Yet these women never meet one another, and Ellen, only momentarily moved by this horrific event, quickly forgets her brief encounter with Anna as she speeds on to her next meeting. The encounter between these two women, in which no interaction takes place, reflects the alienating experience of those living in the industrial city in the early twentieth century, in which few meaningful connections were made between the thousands of lives that lived there.

Just as the montage form of the novel produces effects that mirror major aspects of industrial Manhattan, such as its accelerated and frenzied pace, its over-populated feel and its alienating effect on its residents, another formal characteristic—an over-arching progression throughout the book—additionally organizes Dos Passos' snapshot depictions and reflects the industrial city experience as well. Dos Passos creates this progression by separating the novel into three different sections, and each section is of fairly similar length and contains scenes that collectively suggest overall prominent themes for their sections. The first section of the book, for instance, features scenes of the beginnings of people's lives in the city, such as the birth of Ellen Thatcher; the arrivals of Bud

Korpenning, Emile and Congo to Manhattan; a couple looking to buy a new apartment in a prosperous neighborhood; a start-up business for the attorney George Baldwin and the return from abroad of the young Jimmy Herf and his mother. With the exception of a few scenes, such as Bud's decline and suicide in the city, the overall mood set by the scenes of the first section of the book encompasses the feelings that accompany new beginnings, as some of the people look with hope and others with trepidation at the path into the heart of city life that lies before them.

The scenes in the second section focus more on the particular circles of people centered around four chief characters in the novel—Ellen Thatcher-Oglethorpe, Jimmy Herf, George Baldwin and Joe Harland—with all of these circles overlapping at times throughout the section. The majority of the scenes within this section tend toward a mood of disillusionment, as people begin to realize that life in the big city is not what they had hoped it would be. Within this section, for instance, Jimmy expresses frustration with his life as a reporter and longs to go somewhere else and to be free of Manhattan. Ellen begins divorce proceedings to separate herself from her miserable marriage to Oglethorpe while she carries on open affairs with other men and one semi-secret affair with Stan. Throughout the section, she frequently expresses feelings of being trapped within her own life. George struggles with his unrequited feelings for Ellen while he attempts to appease his spurned wife, and Joe jumps from job to job as he attempts to survive the city while dealing with his fall from pecuniary glory. Toward the end of the section, Dos Passos additionally shows the way in which the impending war in Europe affects many of the section's characters and stirs further a growing disillusionment in them at this time. Stories of the struggles of others in these characters'

circles weave through these scenes as well, such as Stan's bouts with extreme alcoholism and Tony Hunters's attempt to come to terms with his homosexuality, adding to the mood of disillusionment that exists in the second section of the book.

In the third section of the book, most of the scenes of the section predominately create a mood something akin to defeat. As the section opens, the end of the world's first great war finds soldiers returning to a city that has difficulty making room for them, seen in Joe O'Keefe's words to his fellow soldiers: "'We fought for em didnt we, we cleaned up the squareheads, didnt we? And now when we come home we get the dirty end of the stick. No jobs'" (Dos Passos 242). Jimmy and Ellen return from overseas as well, married and with a child, but their marriage falls apart quickly after their return, as Ellen asks Jimmy to find his own apartment and deals with their separation in a detached and casual way. The focus of many of the scenes in this section also widens to include characters outside of the circles previously mentioned, characters such as Dutch and Francie, the struggling young couple that turns to robbery as the solution to their impoverishment; at the end of the section, they are caught by the police and imprisoned for their crimes. Jake and Rosie, another couple in the section, have a relationship that shows some promise, but eventually they break apart as well, as Jake gets carted off by the police for charges of fraud. Added to these stories, the impressive business of Blackhead and Densch crashes mightily with a ten million dollar loss; at the end of the section, Mr. Densch leaves the country with his wife and Mr. Blackhead ultimately dies from the stress of the failure. Overall, the scenes of the section give a disposition of defeat to the end of the novel. Foster agrees: "The final section opens and closes on an even more insistent note of doom, with chapter titles no longer from songs and stories but

from the Bible. . . .If we were in doubt about where the power in Part I was tending, Part III confirms that it is toward tinkling triviality, aimless revolutions, and overweening aspirations” (187). By collecting the scenes of his montage into these three sections and placing them in the order that he does, Dos Passos ultimately creates a kind of formal arc in the book, an arc that progresses from beginnings in the city to disillusionment with the city to defeat in the city.³⁷ He uses this arc to characterize the industrial city experience in the modern era, showing that, with few exceptions, people came to the city in hopes of finding prosperity, quickly became disillusioned when these hopes went unfulfilled and ultimately were defeated by the modern city in which they had placed their hopes.

The progression from beginnings to disillusionment to defeat marked by the sections of *Manhattan Transfer* endows the book with a somewhat cyclical movement. Dos Passos additionally uses several images throughout the book to create other kinds of cycles in the novel that formally organize the text, and these various cycles provide the book with the feel of cyclical movement as well. Images of ferries and boats, for example, coming into the city at the beginning of the book and going out of the city at the end create a large cycle in the novel. The first epigraph in Chapter One of the first section, in fact, describes a ferry coming into its slip and leaving off its riders to enter into the city. In other places in this section, Jimmy returns from abroad by ship, and other immigrants make their way to Manhattan by ferry. The third section of the book, with the exception at its beginning of ships coming into the city carrying soldiers and others returning from the war overseas, features people leaving the city by boat and ferry. This section shows immigrants being deported by ship, a fallen businessman escaping by boat to an overseas refuge and, at the very end of the novel, Jimmy Herf leaving on a

ferry and ultimately walking away from Manhattan. This cycle of coming and going created by boats and ferries in the book produces the feeling that the text is narrating one big trip into and then out of the city, as the book returns at the end to the point at which it first began.

Births and deaths within the novel also give the book a cyclical form. The novel, for instance, opens with infant Ellen Thatcher being carried in her basket by an apathetic nurse and being placed in a nursery at the hospital. Later in the first section, Dos Passos additionally describes a young Ellen lying in bed, left by her mother and crying for fear of the dark. The third section of the book similarly opens with the first glimpse of Jimmy and Ellen's baby, Martin, and this shows the cycle of a full generation that occurs in the novel. By the last chapter, in fact, Martin is seen lying in his crib crying in the dark, having been left by his mother, Ellen, as she had been left by her mother in the dark so many years before this. Deaths also create cycles within the novel in a couple of different ways. First, although there are various deaths mentioned throughout the whole book, some kind of death appears at the end of each of the novel's three sections: Bud commits suicide at the end of the first section, Ellen aborts her baby at the end of the second and, at the end of the novel, Jimmy hears a story about a man who was bludgeoned to death for wearing a straw hat out of season. Each of these deaths makes the section in which each occurs feel like a cycle in itself, in that the death provides a feeling of something ending in each section. Second, Jimmy marks the span of his life, which also spans the entire book, in terms of the deaths of different stages within his life. Toward the end of the first section, for example, Jimmy's mother passes away, and this leads Jimmy to comment many years later that he buried his boyhood in Yonkers with his

mother. At the end of the novel, where this comment occurs, he then asks the question, “Where in New York shall I bury my twenties?” (Dos Passos 300), a question he figuratively answers by ultimately leaving Manhattan in the end. Just as both of these stage-of-life “deaths” that Jimmy endures signal an end to a cycle of his life, they also interestingly take place in the spring in the month of May, a time of year known for new beginnings, which indicates the beginning of yet another cycle in his life.

Several critics also discuss the cyclical form of *Manhattan Transfer*, noting the way in which Dos Passos uses the cyclical movement of the book to present a picture of the purposelessness of the modern industrial city. See points out, for instance, that, for all of the activity we see in the city and in the characters’ lives, the novel’s “recursive motion” results in making the characters appear “static” and produces something he calls “static circularity” in the novel, a term he uses to explain the way in which the cyclical nature of the book makes characters appear as if they are never achieving anything meaningful in all of their activity (359). Gelfant similarly claims that these cycles produce “the ironic pattern of action without progress” (50), while Lewis comments that these cycles produce “a sense of the repetitiousness of life” (21), or in Colley's words, an “aimlessness of life” (64). To sum up these views, the cycles in the book create the feel of movement but not of advancement; people in the book are always frenetically moving and yet never seem to progress from where they are in their lives. While all of these assertions are appropriate in describing the way in which the cycles of the book characterize the purposelessness of life in the industrial city, these cycles also give a picture of an industrial reality that permeated modern city life in the industrial era and that lies at the root of this “repetitiousness” and “aimlessness.” The feeling of ebb and

flow created by all of the cycles within the book fittingly mirrors the boom and bust cycle of capitalism—a cycle of extreme prosperity and crushing losses—that became very pronounced in the early twentieth century. These cycles, in fact, are not the only features in the novel that Dos Passos uses to highlight the boom and bust cycle of capitalism; he also presents an actual instance of this cycle occurring in the novel, seen in the story of the booming prosperity of the Blackhead and Densch corporation that eventually ends in a ten million dollar monumental collapse.³⁸ The feeling of movement with no progression created by the cycles in the book, including the boom and bust cycle, implies the notion that the same lack of progression applies to the industrial capitalist system of the early twentieth century.

In addition to the formal aspects of the novel that characterize the city and life within it, Dos Passos additionally uses vivid imagery in his abundant descriptions of Manhattan. As these descriptions are so numerous and varied, it is helpful to discuss Dos Passos' imagery in terms of the recurring images that he uses throughout the book, for his use of these recurring images is a significant means by which he produces an overall concept in the mind of the reader of the temperament of the city and its influence on those who inhabit it. The novel contains several recurring images, but four main types stand out among the rest, with many of the usages of each type of image attached to notions of death. First, Dos Passos generously litters the novel with several forms of early twentieth-century popular culture, from newspaper headlines to lines of songs to advertising slogans, such as those of King Gillette and the Danderine Girl. Through these many instances of popular culture, Dos Passos creates a kind of noise to the novel and reflects the way in which the industrial city constantly bombarded its residents with

words. An example of this bombardment is seen in Chapter IV of the third section, when Jimmy, after he quits his reporting job, walks "through the city of shiny windows, through the city of scrambled alphabets, through the city of gilt letter signs" (Dos Passos 298). As Jimmy's mind reels with a mixture of headlines, songs and advertisements jumbled together, Dos Passos records this result: "And as I sit here, thought Jimmy Herf, print itches like a rash inside me. I sit here pockmarked with print" (301). The fact that Jimmy later confesses that he has lost faith in words at a point at which he is disillusioned with his life in the city implies that the words that made up the popular culture of this time were ultimately empty and valueless. Many of these images of popular culture are also connected to notions of death, as seen in several of the newspaper headlines and lines to songs in the novel. In Chapter II of the first section, for instance, Bud reads a headline regarding a fourteen-year-old who confesses to killing his mother, and later, in Chapter V of the second section, Jimmy replays in his mind the headline of a man who murders his daughter and then kills himself with a shotgun. The lines from a song about "longlegged Jack of the Isthmus" additionally contain notions of death, as the stanza of the song that is repeated throughout the novel talks about a flood that is survived by only one man. Through the many instances of these images of popular culture, Dos Passos ultimately portrays the experience of the industrial city as one of emptiness and darkness.

Second, just as Dos Passos uses cycles within the form of the novel to mimic the boom-bust cycle of industrial capitalism and to characterize the purposelessness of life in the city, he additionally employs circular language and imagery to produce the same results. One instance of this kind of imagery that stands out significantly in the novel appears in Chapter V of the first section as Jimmy is leaving his uncle's club after they

have shared dinner together. At dinner, his uncle explains his plans for Jimmy's life, which mainly entail Jimmy becoming a part of his business after graduating from college. As Jimmy stands at the club's exit after dinner, pondering this proposition while watching endless lines of people go in and out of the building through "the perpetually revolving doors," he has a vision of his future life as a company man: "Jimmy fed in a tape in and out the revolving doors, noon and night and morning, the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat. All of a sudden his muscles stiffen. Uncle Jeff and his office can go plumb to hell" (Dos Passos 101). Arrington describes the mood of this scene as he notes that the image of the revolving doors suggests "a numbing redundancy of endings and beginnings, history as interminable transition" (441). The vivid image in Jimmy's vision prefigures the monotony that will inevitably come from a life in his uncle's business. The word "grinding" used in the description of Jimmy's vision additionally implies the kind of slow death that Jimmy discerns he will endure if he gets caught up in the endlessly circular motion of the business world. Another instance of circular imagery comes as Jimmy makes his way home from a crazy night at a roadhouse, and the lines of two different songs run through his mind and mix with various newspaper headlines and thoughts from his recent conversations. The first song line is given in French, "*J'ai fait trois fois le tour du monde*" (Dos Passos 200), which translates roughly into English as, *I've made three trips around the world*, and is repeated just a few sentences later. In between the two instances of this song line appear the lines of another song, given in English and intermixed with Jimmy's own thoughts: "*And three times round went our gallant ship, and three times round went . . . goddam it between that and money . . . and she sank to the bottom of the sea . . . we're in a treadmill*"

for fair” (200, Dos Passos’ ellipses). Newspaper headlines and stories about the impending war and a murder-suicide in the neighborhood of the roadhouse likewise swirl around in Jimmy’s mind following the song lines previously mentioned. All of these circular images—the trips around the world, the turns of the “gallant ship,” the treadmill and the swirling headlines—combine together to reflect the frustrating redundancy of city life as well as to prefigure a kind of death in the city: the circling “gallant ship” eventually sinks, and the swirling headlines declare war and convict Santa Claus of murdering his daughter. A third powerful image of circularity appears in Chapter IV of the third section; without a job and without a wife, Jimmy obsesses over a dream in which Ellen, decked in a gold dress, occupies a skyscraper to which he cannot find an entrance: “And he walks round blocks and blocks looking for the door of the humming tinselwindowed skyscraper, round blocks and blocks and still no door” (310). As the skyscraper has become to Jimmy an image of the big city itself, his ceaseless search for the skyscraper’s door that takes him endlessly around the city’s blocks portrays life in the big city as aimless and futile, similar to the incessant running of a hamster on a wheel, seeking a reward that will never be reached.

Third, Dos Passos’ frequent descriptions of scenes in which he uses language that portrays pressing, crushing or squeezing produces another predominant recurring image within the novel: the image of the city as a press. One glaring instance of this imagery appears within the epigraph to Chapter One of the first section, as the ferry glides into its slip: “Handwinches whirl with jingle of chains. Gates fold upwards, feet step out across the crack, men and women press through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferryhouse, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press” (Dos Passos

3). With this description, Dos Passos creates a graphic picture of the crowded scene of the “crushed and jostling” people coming off of the ferry and into Manhattan, and, in likening the ferry house to a “chute” and the city to a “press,” he additionally insinuates that Manhattan is like a factory machine into which people are fed and then methodically pressed and molded into desired shapes. Dos Passos again uses such imagery to describe the effect of night on the city in perhaps one of the most impressive descriptions contained in the book—the epigraph to Chapter Five of the first section:

Dusk gently smooths crispangled streets. Dark presses tight the steaming asphalt city, crushes the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and chimneys and watertanks and ventilators and fire-escapes and moldings and patterns and corrugations and eyes and hands and neckties into blue chunks, into black enormous blocks. Under the rolling heavier heavier pressure windows blurt light. Night crushes bright milk out of arclights, squeezes the sullen blocks until they drip red, yellow, green into streets resounding with feet. All the asphalt oozes light. Light spurts from lettering on roofs, mills dizzily among wheels, stains rolling tons of sky.
(94)

Phrases like “presses tight,” “crushes” and “squeezes” express the effects of nightfall on the industrial city, and words like “blurt,” “drip,” “oozes” and “spurts” express the reaction of the city to the pressure of night. These descriptive words and phrases come together to create a picture of the city that represents it as similar to a pressure cooker, one that might blow apart at any second. These images also suggest a kind of death, in that the blurring and oozing light and the dripping colors onto the streets suggest the

corresponding figure of a bug being crushed under pressure and its insides spurting out at the impact. Much later in the novel, the darkness of night again applies pressure as Jimmy and Ellen's baby lies crying in his crib: "Outside dark, and beyond walls and outside again the horrible great dark of grownup people, rumbling, jiggling, creeping in chunks through the windows, putting fingers through the crack in the door. From outside above the roar of wheels comes a strangling wail clutching his throat. Pyramids of dark piled above him fall crumpling on top of him" (316). In this scene, Dos Passos portrays the dark of the city as a sneaking nighttime intruder that slowly creeps up on the baby and wraps suffocating fingers around his throat. Martin's "strangling wail" and the darkness that "fall[s] crumpling on top of him" again prefigures death and portrays the city as an attacker that chokes its victims. All of these images and numerous others in the book create an overall picture of the city as a relentless machine that either presses and molds people into desired shapes or crushes people under the great weight of its pressure.

Fourth, the imagery of fire pervades the text of *Manhattan Transfer*; Dos Passos chronicles several actual fires within the book as well as uses imagery associated with fire to depict several scenes, making it one of the most significant recurring images in the novel. All of the fires in the book interestingly draw crowds of onlookers, many of whom are captivated and intrigued by the power and the spectacle of these fires more than they are concerned for the welfare of the fires' victims. At the beginning of Chapter II in the first section of the book, for example, new father Ed Thatcher abandons going to bed simply to catch a glimpse of a tenement fire burning a block down from his apartment, and when he arrives, a crowd, which he joins, has already formed to watch. Later, in Chapter V of the first section, Emile approaches the store owned by his lady-

friend, Madame Rigaud, and as he does, he must make his way through a huge crowd that has congregated to watch a fire blazing in a house across the street. In Chapter VII of the second section of the book, as Pearlina returns home from the store, she sees people's heads hanging out of the windows of buildings and a crowd gathering, and she smells the "singed air:" "It gave her gooseflesh; she loved seeing fires. She hurried" (Dos Passos 215). As she gets closer to the fire, though, she finds that it is coming from her own apartment and that her husband Stan is the victim being carried from the building. She begins to shriek as the reality of the fire's murderous capacity hits home. In the last chapter of the novel, Ellen similarly witnesses a fire in the clothing store of Madame Soubrine, and as the crowds gather on the street outside of the store, Ellen cannot pull herself away. She instead lingers to watch the ambulance attendants carry Anna's disfigured body out of the store on a stretcher. Ellen thinks to herself, "Why should I be so excited? . . . Just somebody's bad luck, the sort of thing that happens every day" (338), but the power of the fire to maim and kill lingers with her, if only for a few brief moments. In all of these scenes, Dos Passos highlights the ability of fire to draw people to itself and to mesmerize onlookers with its power and brilliancy, yet he also reminds the reader of the inevitable destructiveness of fire and its capability to destroy people's lives.

In addition to the actual fires that appear in the text, Dos Passos also uses fire imagery to creatively describe scenes within the book. One occurrence of this appears in Chapter IV of the first section when Bud goes barhopping with his new acquaintance, Laplander Matty:

Bars yawned bright to them at the corners of rainseething streets. Yellow light off mirrors and brass rails and gilt frames round pictures of pink

naked women was looped and slopped into whisky-glasses guzzled fiery with tipped back head, oozed bright through the blood, popped bubbly out of ears and eyes, dripped sputtering off fingertips. The raindark houses heaved on either side, streetlamps swayed like lanterns carried in a parade. . . . (Dos Passos 79)

The “yellow light” that “looped and slopped,” the whiskey “guzzled fiery” that “oozed” and “popped” and “dripped sputtering,” the houses that “heaved on either side” of the street and the lantern-like streetlamps—all of these descriptions are reminiscent of the color, movement and sound of fire and connect the mesmerizing spectacle of fire with the city and what it offers. Another example of descriptive fire imagery appears in Chapter III in the second section of the book, as Jimmy lies in bed listening to the sounds of the city outside: “There came on the air through the window a sourness of garbage, a smell of burnt gasoline and traffic and dusty pavements, a huddled stuffiness of pigeonhole rooms where men and women’s bodies writhed alone tortured by the night and the young summer. He lay with seared eyeballs staring at the ceiling, his body glowed in a brittle shivering agony like redhot metal” (164). Similar to the previous depiction of Bud’s barhopping experience, the descriptive imagery of this scene likens the summer city to a fire creeping all around Jimmy; while others “writhed alone tortured” in this fire of the city, Jimmy is the “redhot metal” that is caught in the midst of its flames, possibly signaling the city’s desire to mold Jimmy into its image.

Even when Dos Passos is not portraying actual fires in the novel or using this kind of imagery in his portrayal of the city, the idea of fire is still present in the book; in fact, Vanderwerken points out that “fire engines race through the streets of New York twenty-

seven times in *Manhattan Transfer*” (253). In saturating the novel with the image of fire, Dos Passos portrays physical realities that were present in the modern industrial city—fires happened frequently, of course, and were of great concern. Yet he also uses the image of fire to allude to the idea that the modern industrial city itself is like a fire—people are drawn to its power and spectacle even in light of its dangers. And by connecting the effects of actual fire to the effects of the industrial city, Dos Passos demonstrates the dehumanizing effect that the modern industrial city has on its residents in the early twentieth century. Dos Passos, for instance, highlights the dehumanizing effect of actual fire in the scene near Ed Thatcher’s home when he writes, “Something black had dropped from a window and lay on the pavement shrieking” (Dos Passos 13). He does this as well as in the scene in which Ellen witnesses the fire at Madame Soubrine’s: “They were picking something moaning out of the charred goods. Out of the corner of her eye she sees an arm in shreds, a seared black red face, a horrible naked head” (337). In both of these instances, Dos Passos labels the charred victims of these fires not in human terms but as “somethings;” the reader knows them to be human by the contexts of the scenes, but the fires have disfigured these victims so much that their appearances have been dehumanized. By likening the industrial city to a fire, Dos Passos figuratively connects the dehumanizing effect of fire to the dehumanizing effect that the alluring city has on its inhabitants. This can be seen in the ways in which he many times describes the crowds of people that inhabit the city throughout the book. In the epigraph to Chapter VIII of the second section, for example, he portrays the patrons of the Cosmopolitan Café as fish in a tank: “Through the plate glass the Cosmopolitan Café full of blue and green opal rifts of smoke looks like a muddy aquarium; faces blob whitely

round the tables like illassorted fishes” (216). In Chapter II of the third section, he describes the passengers that share a subway car with Ruth Pryn as “green faces in the dingy light, under the sourcolored advertisements” and as a “trainload of jiggling corpses, nodding and swaying as the express roared shrilly towards Ninetysixth Street” (250). Many times Dos Passos even deconstructs the people in his descriptions of crowds in the city and simply mentions parts of their bodies, clothes and accessories as representative of their presence: “Elbows, packages, shoulders, buttocks, jiggled closer with every lurch of the screeching express” (125).³⁹ In many of his images and descriptions, Dos Passos portrays the crowds of people in the industrial city as having very little humanness, showing them to be void of any kind of identity that would make them individual human persons.

All of the means by which Dos Passos portrays the city in *Manhattan Transfer*—the form of montage, the cyclical movement and the various recurring images—fully demonstrates the identity-robbing influence that the modern industrial city had on its people. E. D. Lowry echoes this when he writes about the way in which the “symbolism of aridity and impotence” in the novel “is reducible to the conviction that modern man has died an emotional death, his potentialities for true affective response drained away by a dehumanized social order” (55). And the way in which Dos Passos’ accomplishes this demonstration of the city's dehumanizing influence is by using his portrayal of the city to ultimately characterize it as an emotionless and relentless machine, mesmerizing but dangerous, that, as people are fed into it, either molds people into the shapes it desires or crushes and consumes them.⁴⁰ Throughout the novel, for instance, Dos Passos makes clear that people have only two options with regard to surviving the modern industrial

city: they can either stay in the city-machine, allow it to press them and mold them into whatever it wants and abandon any individual identity; or they can refuse to conform, in which case they can avoid being crushed by the machine only by leaving the city altogether. These options are given to Jimmy very clearly in his vision of the skyscraper in Chapter IV of the third section: “Young man to save your sanity you’ve got to do one of two things. . . . one of two unalienable alternatives: go away in a dirty soft shirt or stay in a clean Arrow collar” (Dos Passos 310, Dos Passos’ ellipses). The book contains examples of characters that try to skirt these options, but it does not contain any examples of characters that are successful in such endeavors. Those in the novel who stay in the city and attempt to hold on to individual identity eventually find that a kind of death ultimately finds them—either a quick death by suicide or the slow death of individual identity, as the unrelenting frustration of the city’s pressure eventually forms them to the shape it wants. The best examples of the choices made regarding these two options play out in the novel in the lives of Ellen, Stan, Congo and Jimmy.

In the character of Ellen, whose life is traced throughout the entire novel, Dos Passos gives an example of one who chooses to conform to the city and give up individual identity. He introduces Ellen directly after the first epigraph of the novel as a squirming newborn in a basket, and he traces her childhood into young adulthood in the first section of the novel. In this section, Dos Passos characterizes her as an independent little girl who learns very quickly the benefits of putting up pretenses, as seen in Chapter III of the first section in which she insists that her friend call her “Elaine the lily maid of Astalot” and then lies to a separate friend about why she runs through Central Park (Dos Passos 45-6). Dos Passos additionally illustrates in this first section how Ellen’s

penchant for money and comfort begins early in her life. As she and her father are sitting in the Battery looking out into the bay, she begins to compare her family's financial situation to those of her friends, and she subsequently asks, "'Daddy why aren't we rich?'" (52). When he responds by asking her if she would like him more if he had more money, her answer is, "Oh yes I would daddy" (52). These two scenes are essential in the characterization of Ellen, as her affinity for the material comforts of life stays with her throughout the rest of the novel and seems to be the motivating factor for the majority of her choices, while her natural ability to pretend provides her with the means for getting the comforts that she desires. She utilizes this ability in her career as a stage actress, but she also more significantly uses it to align herself with wealthier men throughout the novel, men such as Harry Goldweiser and George Baldwin who are all but too willing to give her what she wants but for whom she has no true affection. In order to get the material comforts she so desires from these men, she allows them to make romantic advances toward her and pretends not to be completely disgusted by them. Dos Passos uses this area in Ellen's life—these hollow relationships with "successful" men—as a means by which to portray the way in which the city molds her to its image, as she eventually abandons her individual identity in pursuit of the material comforts she desires.

Ellen's conformity to the industrial city's ways and her loss of individual identity comes as a progression throughout the novel, a progression that is largely connected to the affectionless relationships she has with Goldweiser and Baldwin. This progression characterizes Ellen, firstly, as someone who is being pressed and choked by the circumstances in which she has placed herself in pursuit of the city's material comforts.

In Chapter VI of the second section, for example, in a scene in which Ellen is riding with Goldweiser to an event at the Astor, Dos Passos writes, “In the taxi Goldweiser’s broad short knees pressed against hers; his eyes were full of furtive spiderlike industry weaving a warm sweet choking net about her face and neck” (207). Later, in Chapter VII of the same section, right before Goldweiser telephones her, Dos Passos characterizes the suffocating scene of Ellen’s apartment: “Under the skin of her temples iron clamps tighten till her head will mash like an egg; she begins to walk with long strides up and down the room that bristles with itching stuffiness; spotty colors of pictures, carpets, chairs wrap about her like a choking hot blanket” (219). In a scene in the last chapter of the novel in which Ellen is at dinner with Baldwin and finally makes up her mind to marry him, Dos Passos writes that, at the moment she makes this choice, she feels as though an “invisible silk band was tightening round her throat, strangling” (318). In the progression of these scenes, the images of choking increasingly worsen; in the first scene, it is the choking of a delicate spider web, irritating but not deadly, but by the last scene, it is the choking of an uncontrollable band that is strangling her to death. Not incidentally do all of these images of choking and suffocation come when she is with these men; her relationships with them are representative of her resignation to the industrial city itself, as its crushing pressure and the pressing of her pecuniary desires slowly strangle the identity out of her.

Secondly, and perhaps most vividly, Dos Passos shows the progression of Ellen's conformity to the city by the way in which she gradually abandons her identity. This process of abandonment transforms her into an empty and hollow shell as she gives in more and more throughout the novel to her relationships with Goldweiser and Baldwin.

Geyh points out the significance of Ellen's changing first names throughout the book that signal this process: "Throughout, Ellen's identity is in flux, as her frequent changes of name indicate. She is first Ellie, then Ellen, then Elaine (the lily maid of Astalot), then Helena—each new name signaling a shift in her private or public persona and in the systems of signification she enters and responds to" (n.p.). In addition to this, Ellen's changing names also indicate the progression of her abandonment of identity, as her names throughout the novel get progressively more impersonal. "Ellie," for instance, is her most personal name, used by those to whom she is closest, such as her father, Stan, and Jimmy, and seen mainly in the first part of the novel. "Ellen," of course, is her given name; it is a more sophisticated name than "Ellie" and is the name by which her mother calls her, implying a more impersonal relationship between them. Yet this is still not the name by which she is known by the majority of the other characters in the book, most of whom call her "Elaine," an even more formal name than Ellen, or "Helena," the most formal name by which she is known and seen only in the last section of the book. As each new name grows more sophisticated and formal and becomes increasingly detached from her most personal name, so Ellen becomes increasingly detached from her individual identity throughout the book. In addition to her changing names, Dos Passos traces Ellen's loss of identity through several scenes in the book in which she is likened to things that have impressive exteriors but possess interiors that are empty and hollow. In these scenes, Dos Passos likens Ellen to a lighthouse on which "hands crawl like bugs on the unbreakable glass" (154), to a "castiron figure in her metalgreen evening dress" (221), to a "wooden Indian, painted, with a hand raised at the streetcorner" (227) and to "a porcelain figure under her clothes" as everything about her grows "hard and

enameled” (318). Each of these scenes shows Ellen becoming more and more hollow, and all of them, save one, involve either Goldweiser or Baldwin and show that, as Ellen, in order to get what she wants, allows these men to become more deeply attached to her, she must give over a portion of her identity in exchange. At the end of the novel, she ultimately becomes the Effenbee doll that she angrily accuses Baldwin of presenting her as—“all dressed up like a Christmas tree” but with nothing inside (338). In the scene of her taxi ride to meet Baldwin at the Algonquin, Dos Passos illustrates her emptiness in two ways: one, by the way in which she casually dismisses the agony of Anna’s disfigurement that she witnesses prior to this ride—“Probably she can get a lot of money out of old Soubrine, the beginning of a new career” (339)—and two, by the way in which she quickly dismisses any thoughts of living in a manner other than what is prescribed by the city: “There are lives to be lived if only you didn’t care. Care for what, for what; the opinion of mankind, money, success, hotel lobbies, health, umbrellas, Uneeda biscuits . . . ? It’s like a busted mechanical toy the way my mind goes brrr all the time. I hope they havent ordered dinner” (339). As Ellen subsequently walks through the revolving doors of the Algonquin in her last scene of the book, she suddenly feels as if she has forgotten something in the taxi. As she makes her way “towards the two gray men in black with white shirtfronts getting to their feet” (339), she never realizes that what she has been gradually leaving behind throughout the whole book is her identity.

Vanderwerken writes that “to remain in the city is to risk the loss of one’s humanity, to risk metamorphosing, like Ellen Thatcher Herf, into a porcelain doll—hollow, rigid, artificial, and cold” (256), and while this is true in the novel, Dos Passos uses the character of Stan Emery to illustrate what the city does to those who refuse to

conform but choose not to leave. Stan's philosophy of city life appears in Chapter III of the second section, the only section of the novel in which Dos Passos features him, when he says to Jimmy, "Why the hell does everybody want to succeed? I'd like to meet somebody who wanted to fail. That's the only sublime thing" (Dos Passos 148). Instead of allowing the city to press and mold him, Stan chooses to buck the system by attempting to maintain his individual identity in the midst of the machine-like city. He does so by going completely against the philosophy of the industrial city that points to success as the optimal prize in life. He maintains no ambitions to follow in the family business or to finish college; even as his eventual wife Pearline boasts that he has ambitions to become an architect, Stan appears to have only the ambitions to drink and to carouse wherever he can find a good time. Stan appears to put up a good fight, but he half implies at one point that his excessive drinking habits are due to the pressure that he feels to conform, as he tells Ellen, "The only thing an incomplete organism can do is drink" (178). Indeed, there is hardly a time in the novel in which Stan is seen sober. Dos Passos provides the most vivid illustration of the pressure Stan feels to conform to the city's ways in the chapter that contains his suicide. Drunk out of his mind at a dance for the Louis Expresso Association, he is found talking to himself in a mirror, trying ardently through his drunken stupor to establish his identity to himself: "No I'm not bejases I'm a married man. . . . Fight any man who says I'm not a married man and a citizen of City of New York, County of New York, State of New York" (212). Once he is kicked out of the dance, he finds himself doing the same thing—talking to himself, trying desperately to cling to his individual identity. Immediately after this, he goes home and sets fire to his apartment and to himself. Dos Passos, in Stan's fiery character, seems to be saying

that to remain in the city and to refuse to conform to its ways is to risk not simply the loss of one's humanity but the loss of one's sanity and one's life as well.

Dos Passos uses the colorful character of Congo, who is featured in snippets throughout the entire novel, as an example of the only type of person who can survive and also be content within the industrial city. Congo is able to accomplish this feat for two very significant but basic reasons. Linda Wagner points out the first reason when she writes, "Interested mostly in women, Congo moves to the top by luck and opportunism—and by never caring too much" (59). When Dos Passos first introduces Congo to the reader, he is lying on his belly on the deck of a ship, talking with his friend Emile who is planning to abandon his French military career in order to become an American citizen. When Emile asks Congo why he cannot think of anything other than women, Congo's response is, "'What's the use? Why not?'" (Dos Passos 18), a sentiment he will repeat three times only pages later in a conversation between him, Emile and Emile's coworker, Marco (31-4). These phrases, in fact, epitomize the overall attitude that Congo maintains throughout the book regarding anything in the city, illustrated most vividly in his attitude at the end of the novel regarding being tried for conspiracy: "'Tomorrow maybe I go to jail . . . six mont' . . . but maybe not.'" Congo laughed in his throat and straightened carefully his artificial leg" (324, Dos Passos' ellipses). By maintaining this attitude throughout his life and by "never caring too much," as Wagner asserts, Congo maintains his contentment in the city regardless of what happens to him; because he does not care, he cannot be disappointed. The second reason Congo can remain in the city and still be successful and content is that Congo never has any individual identity that the city can squeeze out of him. John Wrenn claims, "With no memory of a family, without a

country, having quit France with her military service for the sea, and without even a name, he is the only free person in the book” (125). Whereas Ellen’s four different names throughout the book are plays on her given name and show the progressive abandonment of her identity, Dos Passos employs Congo’s four different names to highlight the fact that Congo never has any personal identity throughout the whole book; none of the names by which he is known are his given name. Since he is not attached to any individual identity that he must abandon and because he does not care who he has to become in order to get ahead, Congo appears to be the only character mentioned in the novel capable of being successful and simultaneously content within the city.

Dos Passos introduces Jimmy Herf as the only main character in *Manhattan Transfer* who takes the second of the two options, the option to leave the city. In Chapter III of the first section, young Jimmy arrives in Manhattan aboard a ship with his mother, having been abroad for four years only to return to the city in which he was born. Early in the novel, Dos Passos characterizes the young Jimmy as a dreamer, as seen in Chapter IV of the first section in which he makes his way to a candy store:

“I’ll hurry; on rollerskates it’d take less time, you could escape from bandits, thugs, holdupmen, on rollerskates, shooting over your shoulder with a long automatic, bing . . . one of em down! that’s the worst of em, bing . . . there’s another; the rollerskates are magic rollerskates, whee . . . up the brick walls of the houses, over the roofs, vaulting chimneys, up the Flatiron Building, scooting across the cables of Brooklyn Bridge” (Dos Passos 70, Dos Passos’ ellipses).

Later in the same chapter, while he is getting ready for bed, Jimmy pretends he is escaping a dungeon on an Arab stallion and sailing abroad on the schooner *Mary Stuart*. While describing Jimmy's childhood in the first section, Dos Passos additionally shows the difficulty Jimmy has fitting in with other children. Again in Chapter IV of the first section, in flashbacks to a time Jimmy was bullied at school, Dos Passos shows Jimmy's fear of returning to his boarding school, and subsequent to this, he describes a scene in which Jimmy awkwardly interacts with his cousins and eventually runs away from them. As with the early characterization of Ellen, Dos Passos' descriptions of Jimmy's childhood personality are essential to his characterization of Jimmy later in life; Jimmy's dreaminess as a child translates to a restlessness to find significance as he gets older, and his social awkwardness later translates to an unwillingness to conform for others.

Whereas Dos Passos traces a progression in Ellen's life that portrays her eventual abandonment of identity, the sense of absolutely no progression marks Jimmy's life until he finally chooses to leave the city. Much of the novel's imagery having to do with repetitive circular motion appears in significant scenes that Jimmy occupies (such as his moment of decision at the revolving doors and his trips around the skyscraper in search of the door), connecting the notions of redundancy and aimlessness to his life. Regarding the imagery that is associated with Jimmy in the novel, Michael Clark writes, "All of these images reflect feverish activity without redeeming results" (104), and Jimmy even reflects this sentiment himself when he tells Stan, "The trouble with me is I can't decide what I want most, so my motion is circular, helpless and confoundedly discouraging" (Dos Passos 148). Jimmy appears to begin his adult life by heading in a clear direction away from conformity, as he chooses not to follow in the footsteps of his uncle in the

banking business but chooses instead to light out on his own path. The second section of the book, however, shows him as a discontented newspaperman who relies on his successful uncle to get him new jobs when he gets fired from his old ones. He constantly complains about his journalistic career, and yet he never takes steps to do anything else; even when he goes overseas during the war, he does so as a war correspondent for a newspaper. He also frequently claims that he is tired of Manhattan and wants to travel and see the world, but other than travelling overseas for his war correspondent job, Jimmy never leaves Manhattan until the end of the novel. He even shows awareness of the aimlessness and lack of progression that plagues his life when, in Chapter IV of the third section, he talks to himself in a bathroom mirror at a restaurant: “‘Dont talk,’ he whispered. ‘What you talk about you never do’” (306). Throughout the majority of the book, in fact, Jimmy remains stuck in a life-sucking cycle of non-progression, leaving him dissatisfied and restless but still in the city.

What ultimately leads Jimmy to choose the second option of leaving the city is found in his desire for significance and his essential unwillingness to conform, the traits with which Dos Passos characterizes him early in the book. These traits finally surface when he is drinking with Congo, now known as Armand Duval, and he says, “‘If I thought it’d be any good to me I swear I’ve got the energy to sit up and make a million dollars. But I get no organic sensation out of that stuff any more. I’ve got to have something new, different.But here I am . . . almost thirty years old and very anxious to live” (Dos Passos 325). The vision of the skyscraper and the man in the vision’s words about his “two unalienable alternatives” in the city (310) have taught Jimmy that life in the modern industrial city is antithetical to his desires—that in order to

remain in the city, he must either conform to it and give up his desire for individual significance or relegate himself to walking around in circles in a futile pursuit of purpose and meaning. Through Dos Passos' other examples in the novel, if Jimmy chooses to remain in the city but not to conform, the city will either crush him into conformity or simply just crush him. In coming to an understanding of what he does not want, Jimmy finally summons the courage to walk the path he appeared to be headed toward many years before this, standing at the revolving door of his uncle's club. The end of the novel finds Jimmy riding the ferry out of Manhattan and walking away from conformity and the industrial city.

Dos Passos' depiction of the city as a machine and the effect this machine has on identity ultimately shows, in a couple of ways, the devaluation of people during industrialization in the early twentieth century. First, the frenetic pace to the novel, created by the numerous scenes in montage form that depict the rise and the fall, the hope and the disillusionment, the doom and the death of its multitudes of inhabitants, shows that the machine of the city grinds on regardless of the choices people make to either conform or be crushed.⁴¹ Throughout the book, scenes of death are juxtaposed in rapid succession with scenes of everyday life, and scenes of romance and passion are juxtaposed with scenes of disaster by fire. All of this shows that, regardless of who one is and what one does, the industrial city has little to no value for individual people; the city keeps going, no matter what. Second, Dos Passos shows the most significant way in which the novel portrays the devaluation of people in the early twentieth century through his representation of the industrial city's pressing and shaping power. He shows the way in which the machine-like city of the industrial era, in pressuring its residents to conform

to its ways, basically transformed an individual person in the city into just another piece of the city machine, a piece that looked like every other piece.⁴² By conforming to the city, an individual became another nameless, faceless part among the millions of other nameless and faceless parts, easily replaceable and, therefore, not very valuable. This conformity to the city that robbed people of individual identity and likened them to disposable parts of a machine also, by these means, robbed people of feeling individually valuable and significant.

The way in which *Manhattan Transfer* portrays the lives of people living in Manhattan in the early twentieth century evokes the sentiments encompassed by the words of Clarence from Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*: "We were in a trap you see" (qtd. in Trachtenberg 51). Twain's book portrays the way in which the fictional mechanization of an ancient society eventually traps a portion of this society while laying waste to the lives of everyone else (Trachtenberg 51). Dos Passos' representation of the industrial city as a machine and his outlining of only two options by which to survive this machine is eerily similar to Twain's fiction, as Dos Passos shows that a person living in the modern industrial city is either trapped by the city or crushed by it. Dos Passos similarly uses a story at the end of the novel to underscore these two outcomes of city life, as he presents the story of a man from Philadelphia who is bludgeoned to death for defending his right to wear his straw hat out of season. This story of a man's apparent martyrdom for the cause of nonconformity significantly appears in the text just as Jimmy is about to perform his own act of nonconformity and becomes emblematic of the only two outcomes of life within the city that Dos Passos offers in the novel. The straw hat man's example is similar to that of Stan's in that he did

not conform and he did not leave and so he perished. As Jimmy rides the ferry to exit Manhattan, he muses over the story of the straw hat man, both of them testaments to the ways of the modern industrial city.

Notes

¹ Sean Cashman states, "Between 1860 and 1900 the urban population rose four times, whereas the rural population only doubled. For every town dweller who went to live on the farm, there were twenty countryfolk who moved to the city" (110).

² Regarding industrial activities in these swelling cities, Alan Trachtenberg writes that "by 1900, about nine tenths of all manufacturing took place within cities..." (114).

³ Trachtenberg writes, "About 45 percent of the industrial laborers barely held on above the \$500-per-year poverty line; about 40 percent lived below the line of tolerable existence.... About a fourth of those below the poverty line lived in actual destitution" (90). He goes on to cite the following statistics calculated by Charles Spahr based on the census of 1890 that show the great gulf that existed between the rich and the poor: "Out of 12 million families, 11 million lived on incomes below \$1,200 a year. The average income of this group was \$380, far below the accepted poverty line. In the population as a whole, the richest one percent earned more than the total income of the poorest 50 percent, and commanded more wealth than the remaining 99 percent" (99).

⁴ Trachtenberg claims, "Exploration of forbidden and menacing spaces emerged in the 1890's as a leading mode of the dailies, making spectacles of 'the nether side of New York' or 'the other half,'" and he subsequently writes that Crane's job during his newspaper days in New York was to do such explorations (*Incorporation*, 126). Crane, therefore, had extensive, first-hand knowledge of the Bowery environment about which he writes in *Maggie*.

⁵ Impressionism as an artistic movement began in France in the 1860's and made its way to America in the mid-1880's, flourishing in America by the 1890's. The movement

arose in repudiation of large, formal works of art in favor of those that "expressed the artist's personality and response to the world" ("Impressionism," n.p.). Nagel recounts that, according to R. W. Stallman, Crane composed *Maggie* while living in the Art Students' League with a group of young painters with whom he frequently discussed impressionism (17).

⁶ For an extensive discussion of the significance and possible symbolism of color, light and shadow found in *Maggie*, see Simoneaux.

⁷ All citations from *Maggie* have been taken from the Norton Critical Edition of the novel, which reproduces the 1893 edition of the book.

⁸ Some ministers of this era, such as Charles Loring Brace and Thomas DeWitt Talmage, linked dirtiness with wickedness, seen in Talmage's writings: "There always has been an intimate connection between iniquity and dirt" (71). He goes on to claim, "A filthy city always has been and always will be a wicked city" (Talmage 71), implying that the filthiness of the slums signifies the wickedness of the slums.

⁹ Crane's juxtaposition of violence and indifference is not merely a literary technique but also accurately portrays the normative violence found in the slums of New York. Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* documents the violence of this environment, especially in Chapter XIX, "The Harvest of Tares," which is about the proliferation of gangs that terrorize the slums. Of these gangs Riis writes, "They reflect exactly the conditions of the tenements from which they sprang. Murder is as congenial to Cherry Street or to Battle Row, as quiet and order to Murray Hill" (82).

¹⁰ As the structures in this scene are rows of houses, Maggie is likely walking through a middle to upper class area of the city. With the attitude of judgment these houses project

at Maggie, Crane seems to be illustrating the way in which common middle class morality in the late-nineteenth century offhandedly condemned the street girls of the slums without regard to circumstances. Pizer argues that, in *Maggie*, Crane "was less concerned with dramatizing a deterministic philosophy than in assailing those who apply a middle class morality to victims of amoral, uncontrollable forces in man and society" ("American Naturalism," 192).

¹¹ In an article in *The Arena* during the time in which Crane wrote, Arthur Dudley Vinton argues that environment determines the way in which a person will think and act. He writes, "Must not the environment of the man—the things he hears and sees; the atmosphere of vice or virtue in which he lives—so control, govern, or direct his thought as to gradually shape his brain, till the brain-product is in harmony with his surroundings?" (Vinton 571).

¹² Regarding this social survival of the fittest attitude toward the poor, Andrew Carnegie, one of the wealthy industrialists of the era, voiced what many upper class captains of industry felt when he said that "while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department" (qtd. in *Incorporation*, 81).

¹³ Jimmie and Pete exemplify typical Bowery "toughs," described extensively in Chapter XIX of Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*. He describes the gangs of toughs as being "endowed with a heritage of instinctive hostility to restraint" (Riis 82) and having "an intense love of show and applause, that carries [them] to any length of bravado" (83). He claims, "New York's tough represents the essence of reaction against the old and the new oppression, nursed in the rank soil of its slums" (82).

¹⁴ This double-standard of placing the disgrace of sexual sin at the woman's feet is communicated by reformer Charles Loring Brace, who writes, "For there is no reality in the sentimental assertion that the sexual sins of the lad are as degrading as those of the girl. The instinct of the female is more toward the preservation of purity, and therefore her fall is deeper" (66).

¹⁵ See more about the exaggerated piety of Bowery residents in Pizer's "*Crane's Maggie and American Naturalism*."

¹⁶ Gullason compares Maggie to the nineteenth-century novel readers about whom Crane's father, Jonathan Crane, writes this: "But as things are, novel-readers spend many a precious hour in dreaming out clumsy little romances of their own, in which they themselves are the beautiful ladies and the gallant gentlemen who achieve impossibilities, suffer unutterable woe for a season, and at last anchor in a boundless ocean of connubial bliss" (105).

¹⁷ All citations from *Sister Carrie* have been taken from the Bantam Classic Edition of the novel, which reproduces the 1900 Doubleday, Page edition of the book with Dreiser's emendations from the 1907 B. W. Dodge reprinting. There also exists a "Pennsylvania edition" of the novel that was put out in 1981 by the University of Pennsylvania Press. This edition provides a text based on Dreiser's handwritten manuscript of *Sister Carrie* that he cut extensively prior to the novel being published by Doubleday Page.

¹⁸ Trachtenberg writes about the way in which the "sheer intensity of growth" in cities at this time intensified the sense of mystery that historically surrounded cities, prompting attitudes of both fear and excitement from their inhabitants (104). Den Tandt echoes this when he argues that authors at this time tended "to describe the metropolis as a site of

terror and wonder" (x). Dreiser incorporates both of these emotions in Carrie's reactions to the power of the city in the first chapters of the book.

¹⁹ Years prior to this article in *Ev'ry Month*, Dreiser described his coming to the industrial city with excitement, saying that the city "was compound of hope and joy in existence, intense hope and intense joy" (*Dawn*, 407). His tone regarding the city in his column "Reflections" in October 1896 shows how his view changed dramatically; he writes, "Like a sinful Magdalen the city decks herself gayly, fascinating all by her garments of scarlet and silk, awing by her jewels and perfumes, when in truth there lies hid beneath these a torn and miserable heart" (411).

²⁰ Fisher goes on to argue that much of *Sister Carrie* is written in absolutes like the inside and outside of the walled city. He writes, "The second half of the novel is an absolute world, not a portrayal of a society of layers and alternative values. All that remains are inside and outside, rising and falling, fame and death" (Fisher 271).

²¹ Veblen explains that often items that are expensive are automatically believed to be beautiful because of the social status that can be gained by possessing them. He writes, "Our higher appreciation of the superior article is an appreciation of its superior honorific character, much more frequently than it is an unsophisticated appreciation of its beauty," arguing that "the utility of these things to the possessor is commonly due less to their intrinsic beauty than to the honour which their possession and consumption offers, or to the obloquy which it wards off" (Veblen 51-2). Dreiser characterizes Carrie as a seeker of beauty when, in actuality, she seeks social status; her "sense of costliness [is] masquerading under the name of beauty" (Veblen 51).

²² Veblen asserts, "That is to say, in other words, our standard of decency in expenditure, as in other ends of emulation, is set by the usage of those next above us in reputability; until, in this way, . . . all canons of reputability and decency, and all standards of consumption, are traced back by insensible gradations to the usages and habits of those of the highest social and pecuniary class—the wealthy leisure class" (42).

²³ Veblen's argument in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is that beneath an individual's desire for ownership of property and commodities is the root desire to be honored by others: "The possession of wealth confers honour; it is an invidious distinction. . . . Ownership began and grew into a human institution on grounds unrelated to the subsistence minimum. The dominant incentive was from the outset the invidious distinction attaching to wealth" (11-12). He subsequently writes, "The basis on which good repute in any highly organised industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods" (35). For an extensive discussion of how Veblen's ideas relate to *Sister Carrie*, see Eby's "The Psychology of Desire."

²⁴ It must also be pointed out that Drouet and Hurstwood use Carrie as well: "In both cases the novel focuses on the functional aspects of the relationships: Drouet buys Carrie clothes, Hurstwood provides social and geographic mobility, whereas Carrie adorns their respective apartments and adds to their public appearance by being seen with them" (Corkin 609-10). Pizer argues that "all three figures live by a code of selfish amoralism, a code shaped by the drive to fulfill desire without thought of the consequences to others"

(42). Drouet and Hurstwood, therefore, also reflect the culture of consumption during industrialization.

²⁵ Lawry likens this style to Anderson's use of roads in his writings, which lend a sense of circular motion to his works, for they are used neither solely for going nor solely for coming (54). Similarly, Anderson's style of telling the story of Bidwell has a circular feel to it; in providing glimpses of Bidwell the city's present while telling of Bidwell the town's past, he creates a sense of circularity in the novel and shows how the two points in time connect to one another and explain one another.

²⁶ Spencer discusses Anderson's belief in the "largeness and generosity" that "marked the ante-bellum national character" (5), a belief that can be seen in his idyllic descriptions of the pre-industrial Bidwell and his depictions of the sense of community that existed in these rural towns.

²⁷ It is important to point out that Anderson's view of industrialization was not completely negative. Enniss discusses Anderson's ambivalent view of mechanization, seen in his descriptions in *Poor White* of machines not only as cacophonous but also as beneficial in easing manual labor. Enniss argues that "Anderson remained torn between these two conceptions of the machine and the two conflicting roles that such views suggest for Hugh" (94).

²⁸ Anderson shows that Joe is not completely against industrialization in that he gives his savings of \$1,200 to buy stock in the Bidwell Plant-Setting Machine Company.

²⁹ Spencer asserts that it was Anderson's belief that "the soil. . . gave the 'power' to life and literature;" he claims that Anderson likened industrialism to "a cold and damp winter beneath whose lifeless surface something was 'trying to break through'" (10-11).

³⁰ For a discussion on the way in which publicity and popular literature bolstered the reputations of the wealthy leaders in the industrial era, see Trachtenberg 80-1.

³¹ Trachtenberg discusses the tension between feelings of optimism and feelings of fear that people had regarding the rise of industrialization. Of their optimism, he states that "celebrations of machinery and fervently optimistic prophecies of abundance continued throughout the Gilded Age," yet he also writes that industrialization "also provoked dismay, often arousing hope and gloom in the same minds" (38).

³² Toward the end of the novel, Hugh experiences another more significant awakening that will be discussed later in the essay.

³³ Walcutt claims, "Anderson assumes that this inner man exists and is good and 'should' be permitted to fulfil [sic] himself through love and experience. The need is alive and eager" (36).

³⁴ Foster points out that D. W. Griffith pioneered film montage around 1915 and that Dos Passos was an admirer of Griffith's work. She writes that Dos Passos "recalled that at the time he wrote *Manhattan Transfer* he had been impressed by Griffith's montage in *The Birth of a Nation*" (186). She argues that Dos Passos' interest in film montage, as well as Cubism and Futurism, "lead him to experiment in a way no other novelist in the 1920s attempted" (186).

³⁵ In his writing in *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos frequently leaves out certain forms of punctuation, such as hyphens to connect compound words and apostrophes in contractions or in showing possession. As this occurs throughout the whole book and appears to be part of his style, no indications that these occurrences are errors are included in any of the citations of the book throughout this chapter.

³⁶ Bud's story of killing the man others claimed to be his father while working on the farm at which he spent his adolescence additionally hints at the alienating effect of rural family life.

³⁷ See points out that the three sections of the book can also be categorized as a "progression from pre- to active to post-war states" (347).

³⁸ Trachtenberg implies that the tension of Americans between being optimistic about the new age and being fearful of it is a consequence of the "recurrent cycles of expansion and contraction, inflation and deflation, confidence and depression" of the boom and bust of capitalism (52). The failure of Blackhead and Densch at the end of the novel additionally becomes prophetic of the biggest economic bust ever, as Dos Passos published *Manhattan Transfer* just four years shy of the beginning of the Great Depression.

³⁹ These kinds of descriptions reflect the influence of cubism on Dos Passos' work. Cubism is a form of painting or sculpture in which the subject of the work is created through the "fragmentation and rearrangement of form" in order for "many different aspects of an object [to be] simultaneously depicted" ("Cubism," n.p.). Wagner cites Dos Passos as he describes his experience with modern artistic innovation during World War I: "I had managed to get myself inducted into what was known as the Sorbonne detachment. An early form of the GI bill of rights. . . . This was the Paris of so-called modern painting which was really modern in those days: Modigliani, Juan Gris, Picasso. . . .I went home with my interest in experimentation. . . enormously stimulated" (49).

⁴⁰ In discussing the polarizing views of optimism and fear that people had of machinery in the industrial era, Trachtenberg writes, "The very extremes of effect lent to the machine an aura of supreme power, as if it were an autonomous force that held human

society in its grip" (41). In likening the industrial city to a machine, Dos Passos characterizes the city in a very similar way.

⁴¹ Dos Passos once said that his conception of New York was that of "a great lonely man-killer, indifferent to the humanity she devours" (58).

⁴² Dos Passos' several Cubist-like descriptions of the crowds in the novel, which represent masses of people by general items, such as body parts or pieces of clothing, further underscores the way in which conformity in the industrial city devalues an individual.

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