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**Social Constraints and the Quest for a Spiritual  
Identity: A Comparative Study between Theodore  
Dreiser's An American Tragedy and Richard Wright's  
Native Son**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Magister in American Literature  
and Civilization**

**Submitted By Mr. GOUFFI Mohammed**

**Supervisor: Dr BOUREGBI Salah**

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## **DECLARATION**

**I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my own investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.**

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of TAYEB Salih,

Who migrated to the non-return without bidding us a fond farewell....

To the author ever inflaming my sensibility....

To his soul, I gratefully dedicate this modest work.

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*“My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favors which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds that will please You, and admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves.” (Surat An-Naml ‘The Ants’ 19)*

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## ABSTRACT

The present research delves into the social constraints, behind the tragedies of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas: protagonists of An American Tragedy and Native Son. The study equally endeavors at shedding light on the protagonist's journey of quest for a religious identity. The dissertation therefore aims at (1) eliciting the various societal constraints (2) identifying the different aspects necessary to the establishment of a spiritual identity (3) disclosing the influence of the social constraints on the establishment of a spiritual identity within the materialistic confines of America's twentieth century society.

In their fictional renditions, Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright denounce society for holding responsibility of the protagonists' acts. For them, Griffiths and Thomas are not culprits, since they do not act out of their free will. Society imposes on them heavy restraints and compulsion. Accordingly, their criminality is the inevitable ramification of society's restrictions. From a naturalistic perspective, societal constraints are to censure, not the weak Thomas and Griffiths, entirely ignorant to the law of social deterministic game. Dreiser and Wright, in other words, view them as blameless products of a disclosed environment, which predetermined their actions. In a sense, the two novels constitute an excruciating testimony to the consequences of the social constraints.

On the other hand, Thomas and Griffiths make a spiritual journey towards a greater understanding of the Christian faith. Yet, attaining an inner spiritual meaning is once more inhibited by an outer struggle against societal strains. Thomas and Griffiths recognize that although belonging to a Christian nation, their spiritual selfhood is a matter of question. For them, religion is a source of pain and suffering as it makes them acknowledge the fact that they are killers without any considerations of their human condition. It is very appalling dilemma; the feeling of the spiritual unbelonging or the pain of assuming the other's faults.

In fact, the nature of this work - two long novels and writers coming from different backgrounds - entails recouring to eclectic approach in which psychoanalysis and biographical criticism play a significant part. Besides, the research will equally employ some other theories such as Historicism, Marxist theory and Race Critical Theory.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAT: An American Tragedy

AATR: An American Tragedy<sup>1</sup>

BMCVRW: Bloom's Modern Critical Views to Richard Wright.

CC TAN: Cambridge Companion to American Naturalism.

NS: Native Son

SCTRW: Student's Companion To Richard Wright

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<sup>1</sup> AATR: Two different editions are used as primary sources one among them is with a critical foreword.

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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Human beings are instinctively inclined to property, aggression and tyranny. These inclinations created conflicts, wars, and bloodshed. Yet, men began seriously thinking to organize themselves into civilized groups or what came to be known as 'society'. Thus, most societies set up mechanisms to make decisions about how to do things and channel the aggressive impulses into productive enterprises. In a sense, the ground was then prepared for social codes, norms, and regulations to originate.

In fiction, there is an ongoing concern with the portrayal of human society. More specifically, American literature is concerned about the nature of relationship between society and its norms, on the one hand, and the presence of characters, on the other. Writers, as artists, work to express society's heritage including values, beliefs, customs, and rituals. Their works, in turn, constitute a mirror to reflect the truth of society. Namely, the literary productions reveal the authors' thoughts, expectations, and disillusionment. They artistically suggest social diagnostic response for social problems.

American authors, as William Hollews Dean, Henry James, and others started a stern delineation of the social reality. They maintained a purposeful and truthful recording of life social scenes. The objective portrayal of society marked a serious beginning with the realist<sup>1</sup> literature. However, laying the foundation for this pivotal period, naturalists such as Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Jack London, and others undertook the task of liberating society from romantic retrospection.

The naturalistic literature demonstrates a rebellious vein against the social order. It offers the readers an opportunity to experience life from beyond their own perspectives. Naturalists depict their characters as being trapped in a web of snags either by their

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<sup>1</sup> Realist refers to a movement appeared as a reaction to romantic literature. 'Realism' will be thoroughly discussed in chapter I.

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deterministic biology or social determinism.<sup>2</sup> Explicitly, the characters are merely higher-order animals, whose character and behavior are entirely based upon environment and heredity.

It was on this platform that Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright express their discontent with the twentieth century American society. In their fictional renditions of society, the two authors openly invite the reader to delve into the worlds of their protagonists Clyde Griffiths in An American Tragedy (1925) and Bigger Thomas in Native Son (1940) in order to experience the social constraints and to take from it new insights regarding the protagonists' endeavors at establishing a spiritual identity within the confines of America's materialistic society.

Clyde and Thomas are executed for being convicted of murder. But from the writer's naturalistic views, society as well is held responsible for the tragedies. Society has erred in so many aspects. Clyde and Thomas just respond to society's fascinating promises of social success. However, they are judged culpable and then victimized by the same social system.

Throughout the two novels, Clyde and Thomas attempt at setting up a spiritual identity. However, fighting societal restrictions, which affected their quest, was paramount. In fact, the concept of 'identity' is fairly complicated, in spite of the fact that everyone knows how to employ the term appropriately in everyday discourse. Yet, conventionally, someone's identity means the "*The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.*" (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/identity>)

The identity can be approached from political, national, gender, class, generational, racial, and linguistic perspectives. Nevertheless, handling the identity regarding all these dimensions appears to be almost impossible, since covering it in few pages is impracticable and the expected results of the research will drift away the attention to general facts rather than tangible, precise and concise cores.

Religion in America contributed especially to the American character, mood, and culture. It is actually the soul of culture, and culture is the form religion. In a sense, religion is so essential that it helps shape both the temperament and society's identity. Martin E. Marty, in his essay "Religion in America", points out that: "*Religion has a privileged place in the morals and morale, moods and motivations that go into character development*" (303)

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<sup>2</sup> Determinism is "*The theory that everything which happens must happen as it does and could not have happened another way.*" ( Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

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Clyde and Thomas belong to a Christian nation. This gives a first impression that they appear to be Christians. They seem to share faith and have a spiritual loyalty. Nonetheless, the traits of their spiritual identity proved ambiguous. They have interior clashes about their religious belonging. Their obscure views stem from the very fact that there has been no right perception of the depth of relationship between society and the establishment of spiritual identity. Founding a spiritual identity, in a society, goes through critical steps. Actually, society plays a significant role in determining the identity's features. However, the identity shapes society giving it an image.

What pushed forward to doing such comparative study was the striking similarities existing between the characterization and plot of An American Tragedy and Native Son. Indeed, the two works of fiction constitute a cornerstone in the American naturalistic heritage and mark themselves in the 'social protest' literature<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, Dreiser inspired Wright in so many ways. Wright read Dreiser's works with enthusiasm. That is not surprising that Harold Bloom,<sup>4</sup> in his introduction to Richard Wright, calls him "*A legitimate son of Theodore Dreiser*" (BMCVRW 04) This enables juxtaposing two novelists coming from different environments; Theodore Dreiser of an ethnic<sup>5</sup> background and an African American Richard Wright. The two writers use naturalism, inviting the reader to ponder the social tragedy of their protagonists. Moreover, the importance of the study lies in its attempt to explore the quest for a spiritual identity of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas and reveal the different features related to their spiritual realm. The search for this mystical selfhood is looked amid allegations leveled against society.

By comparing the human condition of the two protagonists, the study will investigate the social constraints and the extent to which Clyde and Thomas are the products of world of disconcerting circumstances massed against the individuals. It will equally analyze Clyde's and Bigger's challenges at establishing a religious identity within a society of highly

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<sup>3</sup> "Social protest novel" refers to the works of fiction seeking to elucidate social problems like poverty, racism, criminality, the exploitation of labor, and so forth. This kind of novels appeared in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries addressing social problems. Yet, they did not suggest any solutions.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Bloom is an American writer and a literary critic. He produced more than twenty major books of literary and religious criticism, in addition to hundreds of articles, reviews, and editorial introductions. One of his fascinating books The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, published in 1973, explains his theory the "anxiety of influence". Harold Bloom is referred to more than once throughout the research.

<sup>5</sup> Ethnic background: The father of Theodore Dreiser 'Johann Paul Dreiser' had emigrated from Mayen, (Germany), in 1844 to America and his mother 'Sarah Schanab' was from a devout Mennonite family that had come to Ohio from Pennsylvania.

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devastating strains. Then, the question that gave birth to this work is: In the two works of fiction, what are the social constraints leading to dramatic fate of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas and how did they affect the protagonist's quest for a spiritual identity in the twentieth century American society?

The dissertation will also probe into the following questions: To what extent are these societal restraints responsible for the tragic end of the protagonists? Would it be the same, if they were given better chances to withstand them? How is the quest for a spiritual identity? Do they eventually come up with an establishment of it? How is the influence of the social constraints on the success or failure of inserting the spiritual identity?

Scholars of American literature, as a matter of fact, devoted much research to American literary realism and naturalism and a considerable amount of publications has been written on Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright. In other words, abundance in material analyzing each novel exists in different ways (Books, Reviews, Articles, Dissertations...etc). Yet, little of it juxtaposes the two works or shows a careful and detailed examination.

Donald Pizer<sup>6</sup> had much to say about Dreiser and his naturalism. In more than a book, Pizer analyzes works of Dreiser. In his criticism, elements of naturalism are at the heart of his interest. Books like The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism : Selected Essays and Reviews, The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study, and other books as well as reviews analyze An American Tragedy and provide insightful criticism about the fate of Clyde Griffiths. Moreover, Robert Penn Warren, in his book Homage to Theodore Dreiser (1971), gives a valuable analysis to Dreiser's art and a careful examination to the problem of Clyde's identity.

On the other hand, Harold Boom, James Baldwin, Michael Fabre, and Robert Felgar wrote about Richard Wright's life and career. They mainly focused on his literary and intellectual development. They also explored his Native Son's protagonist Bigger Thomas. How he lived and society made him live. These analyses maintain that Bigger Thomas's

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Pizer is one of the critics, who devoted much of their writings to American Literary Naturalism. He received his B.A. (1951) and Ph.D. (1955) from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has taught at Tulane University, where he is Pierce Butler Professor of English, since 1957. In addition to book-length studies of Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos, Pizer has published three volumes of essays on various phases of American realism and naturalism: Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (1966); Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation (1982); and The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism: Selected Essays and Reviews (1993). Throughout the research, Donald Pizer is quoted.

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desires and reactions are somewhat over-determined by social constraints. They also went into Bigger's attempt at asserting a religious identity.

Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is then to delve into the social constraints of Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths and drawing parallels between the human conditions of either of them. Besides, the thesis is to inquire into how these social strains made an impact on the protagonist's quest for a spiritual identity, within the limitations of a materialistic society, where spiritual values do not count.

The novelty that this research brings is how two writers of two distinct backgrounds can delineate social failure, mainly, due to external social forces lying as social hindrances hampering the main characters from securing social success and integration. At the same time, society once more stands as an influencing power in the establishment or disestablishment of a religious faith. In actuality, although the dissertation is character-centered study, it is not a rigid or an old-fashioned analytical comparison between the two protagonists. Indeed, many critics highlight the similarities between Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths. However, the current work analyzes a specific area, i.e., taking into account society's annihilating strains and the liability of the main characters in the criminality in the two novels. Many reviews and articles are still being written about the moral responsibility of Griffiths and Thomas, since the two writers leave reader undecided, whether Griffiths and Thomas are condemned or not for two accidental crimes.

The nature of this work requires a resort to an Eclectic Theoretical Approach. Accordingly, a reference to many theories fitting the study is needed. Psychoanalytical Theory will be dominant. Indeed, the psychology of an author is so necessary that it provides a better understanding of the literary analyzed work. Freud, points out that it is of a paramount significance to "*study the connections that exist between the life of the writer and his works.*" ("Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 09) Consequently, he comes to a conclusion that psychoanalytic literary Criticism must analyze "*both the form and content of art in relation to the author's psychology and biography.*" (qtd in Habib 582)

The theory of the "unconscious" is, then, of great use. Freud thinks that the human behavior is governed by some hidden repressed desires, feelings, memories, and impulsive drives. This theory can provide psychological plausible justifications for Clyde's and Thomas's conducts. It can reveal the social motivations behind the collapse of the two heroes.

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Consistently, Psychoanalytical Theory's stance towards the two writers is of a paramount importance.

Effectively, the biographical background of a writer plays a significant role in the understanding of the literary message. In this context, Mario Klarer maintains that "*Dates, facts, and events in an author's life are juxtaposed with literary elements of his or her works in order to find aspects which connect the biography of the author with the text.*" (90) Consequently, Biographical Criticism is used to account for many things in the two novels. Hence, juxtaposing the authors' biographies with their protagonists will help better grasp the social conditions of Clyde and Thomas as well as the mystical realm.

The work, in addition, compels to recourse to Historicism. Historicism is History serving as a background to literature. The historical background of the text is of a paramount significance, since it mirrors the history of its times. In this vein, Julie Rivkin avers that: "*The literary work might represent or refer to the historical context; the critic would make sense of the literary work by researching the history to which it referred.*" (505)

The literary texts are viewed as integrally informed by their historical setting. In a sense, any attempt at tearing the literary phenomenon from its historical bath would certainly doom to failure. Writers have this reciprocal relationship with history and literary critics need to read a good deal of non-literary works in order to come up with a reliable interpretation. Accordingly, the study is going to assign some facts in the two novels to their historical backdrops. For instance, the oppression of the Negroes and the American Dream are to be read from historical perspectives.

Marxist theory is equally important in the study. In fact, Marxism is so useful to approach the social life in the two works. Hans Bertens writes that: "*Marxism is about how your social circumstances determine much, if not all, of your life*" (81) In other words, the Marxist Theory will be used to account for the socio-economic factors of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas. Marxism will likewise provide criticism to capitalism. That is, Marxist Theory offers a way of explaining the systems and histories that had generated the terrible conditions of the two main character's upbringing. Moreover, Marxism helps understand the ideological predilections of Dreiser and Wright. The two writers had communist ideologies and were, in a time, members in the American Communist Party.

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Race Critical Theory is also practical to the study. It analyzes the way in which white supremacy and racial power are reproduced over time. Thus, it is so convenient to examine the personality of the Negro Bigger Thomas, living in the ghetto, under the white oppression. Furthermore, the black creative writers do not look to the world in the same scope as the white authors do. It must be kept in mind that unlike the whites' writings, the blacks have a literary tradition of their own, because "*Africans, no matter where they lived, were different from whites.*" (Bertens 81)

As regards the plan of this dissertation, the work is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter entitled "Realism, Naturalism, and Psychoanalysis: A Theoretical Background" consists of three sections. This chapter elucidates theories such as realism, naturalism, and Psychoanalysis within theoretical as well as philosophical parameters. It serves as an introduction for the coming two chapters.

The second chapter under the heading: "Twentieth Century American Society and its Constraints in An American Tragedy and Native Son" discusses the different social hindrances preventing the main characters to crystallize their aspirations of social success. This chapter is in turn organized into three sections. Section One: "Racial oppression of the Negro: Educational Constraints, Social Fear, and Violence"; Section Two: "Poverty and Mirage of Social Success: the Contradiction of the American Ambition"; Section Three: "Social Alienation, Capitalistic Exploitation, and Hypocrisy of Social Justice".

The third chapter entitled, "The Quest for a Spiritual Identity", is devoted to analyzing the two character's defiance against the sense of spiritual loss through establishing a spiritual identity. It is organized in two sections. Section One: "Authorial Influences and Mother's Religious Legacy" and Section Two: "Religious Identity and Spiritual Paralysis"

Through this dissertation, I humbly intend to contribute to the current scholarship on these two American writers on the one hand, and putting together the pieces of social reality in two novels, written in different times, on the other. Furthermore, the current study will add to the naturalistic tradition. Namely, many critics argue that compared to other schools such as romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism, naturalism did not enjoy the recognition it deserves. Some underestimate it, for breaking unbreakable taboos such as speakeasies, prostitution, sexuality and homosexuality, while others think it lacks literary aesthetic complexity. However, the movement was a success in American literature and brought many great novelists and authors writing in the modes.

# **CHAPTER I**

**REALISM, NATURALISM, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS:  
A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

## **Introduction**

Throughout its short history<sup>1</sup>, American literature was a fertile field for different ideologies and schools. It witnessed the emergence of various literary movements and resulted in abundance of the literary production. Some of these movements were either responsive reactions to their predecessors or a harmonious continuation to them, co-existing and flourishing side by side.

In point of fact, naturalism came as an extension to the expectations already championed by realism. And since the two novels under study belong to the naturalistic fiction, the first chapter of the study is meant for introducing realism and its historical as well as philosophical roots in Europe, where it appeared for the first time. Then, it deals with realism in America and sheds light on some of its leading figures.

The chapter will also survey naturalism in Europe and America. It attempts at suggesting some definitions, identifying its historical and philosophical characteristics. And a reference to its famous theorists and writers is also included.

On the other hand, Psychoanalysis constitutes a medium of writing, for many authors. Psychoanalytical Criticism, .i.e., the Freudian method<sup>2</sup> treats the characters as living human beings. Therefore, some American realist and naturalist writers were extremely influenced by Psychoanalysis and they used it in their writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to the British Literature, the American Literature is younger, since it traces its origins with the literature of exploration. The story of American Literature begins in the early 1600's. It started with the Englishmen's reports and descriptions of the New World. Figures like Thomas Hariot, Captain John Smith, William Bradford, and others are the founding fathers of that Literature.

<sup>2</sup> In the Freudian method, a literary character is looked as if it is a living human being; whereas in the method of Jacques Lacan literature is seen as a 'symptom' of the writer.

## **Section One: Realism**

### **1- Realism: Making of History**

The term 'Realism' was coined for the first time in 1820. But, it did not get any literary significance until 1830s, when a group of rebellious thinkers started a serious reaction against 'the ideals of romanticism'<sup>3</sup>. In Germany, a radical group called the Young Germans including, Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) and Carl Gutzkow (1811–1878) began to voice: "*Their opposition to the perceived reactionary Romanticism [. . .] This group also rejected the ideal of aesthetic autonomy in favor of a realism that was politically interventional.*" (Habib 472)

However, the general atmosphere in Germany was not fertile and suitable for new ideas of intellectual and social freedom to be introduced. Consequently, leaving a room for a fruitful transition towards liberalism was no longer possible. Many strains were imposed on the liberal movements: universities and colleges were put under the state control and authors were subjected to censorship. Therefore, hopes for change faded away.

On the contrary, in many other European countries, realism was growing in small, yet constant steps. It was efficient in presenting slices of life and securing changes in European societies. France, indeed, was the proper place to give birth for this philosophy.

Painting assumed a significant role in paving the way for realism. In 1850, the French painter Gustave Courbet caused a real controversy, when he exhibited his paintings under the headings of realism. He intended to show an art free from any social, moral constraints or even aesthetic investment. However, Courbet's paintings were rejected five years later by Paris World Fair. This proved that painting took part in setting the first pillars of the realist ideology. In this context, the critic Colette Becker maintains that: "*le mouvement réaliste se développe d'abord en peinture. Courbet (1819-1877) joue un rôle capital dans cette première bataille.*" (57)<sup>4</sup> Through his art, Courbet was canonizing for a new vision of the French society, which suggested subjects from the daily life reality, without any prejudicial distinction of social classes.

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3 Romanticism refers to a school appeared to the literary scene in the eighteenth century. It started in Germany, when some critics like Friedrich Schlegel began using the term to designate a kind of literature more vital and spontaneous than the opposing, 'classical' kind. Romanticism emphasized the dream, or inner, world of the individual and viewed Feelings and emotions as superior to logic and analysis.

<sup>4</sup> « *The realist movement had developed first in painting. Courbet (1819-1877) played a significant role in this first battle* » [ Trans. Mine]

In 1857, Jules-François- Felix Husson, known also as Champfleury, published a collection of essays entitled Le Réalisme. This afforded him a position of being ‘*le porte-parole*’ (59) of the movement that blazed its passage to literature. Champfleury had many writings on art and painting. Moreover, his conception for the new literature was not possibly attained without the mediation of the new realistic paintings and art. He became a staunch defender of Courbet and greatly appreciated his artistic achievements. Therefore, Champfleury was the first to use the term ‘realism’ referring to Courbet’s art.

Champfleury set in motion the theorizing for literary realism. He emphasized the necessity of a simple style in literature. No matter how naïve the literary work might appear, what counted was to be approachable by all people. He thought that the very virtue of simplicity stemmed from the bosom of society and all its components without the eliminations of the lower classes, which were not able to cope with the refined style of the romantic era.

Champfleury enforced his theories in his novel Les Aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette (1853) and later in other works, such as les Souffrances du professeur Delteil (1856) and Les Bourgeois de Molinchart (1865), where he projected his native town Laon and what was really happening in that time. But in spite of his literary predilections, Champfleury was also interested in the development of sciences. He read a good number of publications in medicines by doctors like Lucas and Moreau de Tours. This was indeed a turning point in the general direction of literature, at that time.

Edmond Duranty was also enlightened by ideas of realism characterizing the new school of painting. He published quite a few number of articles based on the same philosophical orientations of Champfleury, yet, rather radicalized. In 1856, Edmond Duranty started a journal called ‘Réalisme’ in collaboration with Jules Assézat and Doctor Henri Thulié. Actually, the three started provoking and challenging romantic figures of the time, like Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, and so forth. Duranty underlined the importance of a simple style, as it was possible to reconcile the exigencies of art, on the one hand, and the analysis of the banal reality, on the other.

The year 1857 was the practical and theoretical affirmation of ‘realism’ as a movement of canons and aspirations. Thanks to Champfleury and Duranty and their immense contribution, the grounds were already prepared for the new generation to write in new modes of realism. This was the way realism came to acquire its literary significance.

## **2- Definition of Realism**

As many philosophical terms, realism is very elusive and difficult to define. It is ambivalent and may be used in different situations to mean and express some other different meanings and situations. As a critical term, it is hard to handle. J. A. Cuddon states that realism is: “*An exceptionally elastic critical term, often ambivalent and equivocal, which has acquired far too many qualifying (but seldom clarifying) adjectives, and is a term which many now feel we could do without*” (728).

Realism, according to literary criticism, has two connotations. First, the word is referring to a literary movement appeared in the nineteenth century that brought new modes, and the novel was one among its strongest arms. Second, it is used to account for the human life and experience in a given point of time. M. H. Abrams claims that: “*Realism is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways: (1) to identify a movement in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century that included Honoré de Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America [ . . . ] (2) To designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature.*” (260)

Realism came as a reaction to romanticism. It sought to change the way people liked life to be, to portraying it as it was. The realist writer insists that life must be filmed as it is, not as it should be. And if a realist responds to a piece of news, he will work to copy it with its details. This, consequently, opened a door for delicate topics, prostitution for instance, to be handled. Social censorship, religious strains, political unspoken and moral restrictions were subverted by a ‘littérature soucieuse’. In similar vein, Yves Chevrel affirms that: “*[Réalisme] Dans son acception usuelle il caractérise une littérature soucieuse de rendre compte du réel de tout le réel, c’est-à-dire s’interdisant d’exclure a priori, pour des raisons morales, religieuses, politiques, tel ou tel élément de la réalité représentée*”<sup>5</sup> (13)

Realism was an inevitable outcome for the romantic accumulations. Romanticism talks only on the smiling and the joyful face of life. It also hides social vices in the image of poverty, prostitution, speakeasies, daily experiences of pain, and the like. For Romantic authors, the harrowing reality must, by no means, be discussed. It is, therefore, concerned with

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<sup>5</sup> “*Realism, in its usual sense, characterizes a literature concerned about the real and all the real. This means that all the elements of the represented reality should, by no means, be excluded for moral, religious or political reasons*” [Trans. Mine]

## **REALISM, NATURALISM, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

idealization. However, Laurie Rozakis argues that *“Realism was a reaction to romanticism. The realists, the 19th century's answer to the 6 p.m. news, told it like it was, focusing on the lives of ordinary people. Rejecting the heroic and adventurous (hallmarks of Romanticism), the realists concentrated on pessimistic views of poverty, prostitution, and pain”*. (6)

Depicting life ‘as it is’ became the preoccupation of the newer realists and novelists. The novel turned into an ultimate expression of peoples’ lives, ordeals, and concerns. Not just rich, noble, and men of social and political status were the subject matter of the realists, but it was the ‘commonplace’ that strongly inserted itself in the literature. In this context, M.A.R. Habib assumes that: *“[Realism will not deal] Merely with rulers and nobility; focusing on the present and choosing topics from contemporary life rather than longing for some idealized past; emphasizing the social rather than the individual (or seeing the individual as a social being)”* (471)

Realism was converted into the creed of those, who asked for a total insurgency against romanticism, in doctrine and tenets. Realists refused the utopian lures of romantic thought calling for a fair presentation of the world in a realistic method. No matter, how shocking or painful the reality was or is. Yet, the description of life without the fantasy, the castles in the sky, or ivory towers that the romantic literature acted to comprise and depict, are now juxtaposed to the truthful painting of life with its fullest scope and smallest details. For realists, reality must speak louder than the bogus language of romanticism. This truthful illustration resulted in a successful succession of the Romantic Movement. The critic, David Baguley, conceives realism as being:

A faithful representation of the real world, a study of contemporary mores, a mirror of reality, a rejection of romanticism and fantasy, a break with previous conventions, a set of mimetic textual strategies, the art of illusion, the art that dispels illusion, referential discourse, ironical discourse, mythical forms in a context of plausibility, a movement succeeding romanticism, a constant of Western literature since Homer. (Naturalist Fiction 47)

Realism altered to become a gigantic power leading forward many fields and literature was amongst. It exerted a profound influence on drama and theatrical productions. However, its tremendous impact on the novel was peerless. The latter led to plentiful realistic publications.

### **3- Realism in Europe**

In Europe, realism was not dogmatic words to be told. It was, conversely, the enforcement of these words into a real application. It was, thus, determinedly growing stronger and the role of literature shifted to providing remedies to societies' problems. It was an innovative ideology, and the realistic novel turned out to be a really powerful political weapon. A new sense in the understanding as well as the interpretation of life was initiated on realistic bases. Realism, in other words, was equated with truthfulness, sincerity, and the modern.

Realistic European literature took on the role of social reformer since realism was able to create an oppositional stance to romanticism. Besides, it founded a frame, where life could be conceived as it was and it is: with its sweetness and bitterness; smiles and tears, aspirations and fears; speculations or cheers. What seemed to be of paramount importance was the objectivity of the process. Realists sought, through presenting their novel with unbiased perspectives, to tell the story with its factual keys.

In Europe, the prominent realists were Flaubert Gustave and Balzac in France, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in Russia, and George Eliot and Charles Dickens in England. They were its first proponents.

Gustave Flaubert is regarded as "*the prime mover of the realist school of French literature.*" (Luebering 199) He is known for his realistic scrupulous devotion to his art and style, since his best writings are said to be written in realistic modes. Notwithstanding, he was a friend of Victor Hugo, Flaubert committed his pen to the depiction of the real image of the French society. His career was not so easy. His first version of his novel The Temptation of Saint Anthony was to throw in fire. He was, by contrast, advised by his friends to center his writing on day-to-day life rather than on fantastic subjects.

The first unsuccessful efforts did not stop him. They would rather incite him to go forward. The upshot was his controversial and triumphant work Madame Bovary (1857). This novel caused a great sensation, and the author was in a delicate situation with the government. It accused him and the publisher of immorality. Nevertheless, the reading public met the book in a warm reception.

Madame Bovary depicts teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, merchants, etc... By contrast to romantic principles, Flaubert made the middle classes subjects of his narratives. In

the same context, Laurence M. Porter writes that: “*Flaubert unlike the romantics begins paying attention to the neglected petite bourgeoisie, people who don't have to work with their hands but who earn a living in the humbler professions and the service trades.*” (xxix)

In Britain, Charles Dickens is credited as “*the greatest novelist of Victorian England.*” (Weigel 02) Dickens’s career as a writer started in 1833 with publishing sketches, short stories and essays, in the ‘Monthly Magazine’ and in the ‘Morning Chronicle’. His first successful The Pickwick Papers (1836) gave him the opportunity to inaugurate a new period of publications. Therefore, His literary production was abundant including: Barnaby Rudge (1814), A Tale of Two Cities (1849), Oliver Twist (1837-1838), A Christmas Carol (1843), etc.

Since the publication of The Pickwick Papers, he became well-known comic novelist. His style fuses humor and values. Consequently, his art was cordially received. However, this art took a new direction. Namely, the social consciousness began firmly to insert itself, attempting to highlight the social life. Ronald Carter claims that: “*A more serious tone enters Dickens works, as he begins to play on his reader’s awareness of social problems and the growing conscience of the age*” (274)

Through his realistic delineations of society and typical characters, Dickens was able to create something of high quality, entertaining the readers and accounting for social phenomena of the time. Realism was indeed one of his best literary modes. Marie Kalil states that “*He [Dickens] infused his realistic depictions of society and memorable characters with enough humor and sensitivity to entertain and satisfy both casual<sup>6</sup> and serious readers.*” (02)

In the course of his literature, Dickens put under a literary realistic microscope many social questions. Practically, he had many shabby people and places to describe in his works. This undoubtedly stemmed from the realistic codes of belief, which consider only the reality of the real and the description of ordinary people lives. In this perspective, G. C. Thornley maintains that “*In his different novels he describes and attacks many kinds of unpleasant people and places – bad schools and schoolmasters, government departments, bad prisons, dirty houses.*” (122)

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<sup>6</sup> By casual readers is meant readers, who seek entertainment and pleasure through reading. That’s why, Dickens was of a professional craft, since he was able to fuse the two aspects in his writings.

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Charles Dickens dedicated much of his writings to realism. Almost all his novels tested the truthfulness or falsehood of life. In fact, he accentuated the importance of the novel to the depiction of ‘what really happens’. In other words, the authenticity of the description was a tenet for this realistic novel. D.A. Miller, in his critical essay “Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and Bleak House”, declares that: “*the practice of various realisms, which, despite their manifold differences, all ensure that the novel is always centrally about the world one has left behind to read it and that the world to which one will be recalled has been reduced to attesting the truth (or falsehood) of the novel.*” (139)

The democratization sweeping the European literature seemed to equally affect the Russian literature impinging upon the romantic era. The beginning of a serious revolutionary movement to portray literature realistically was obviously on course to form. All great writers, like Dostoevsky and Chekhov, took a stance towards its featured fictional heroes. Realism, therefore, was firmly finding its way to the Russian culture.

Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) is another representative for realism in Europe and acknowledged as “*one of the world’s greatest novelists.*” (Orwin 49) He is a Russian author, a novelist, short stories writer, a playwright, and an essayist. His big experience massively contributed in making his literary sensibility reach maturation. He was a child of a prominent family of Russian nobility. He left Russia to Europe, where he met a good number of literary celebrities, such as Victor Hugo. This helped him shape a literary and political persona.

Tolstoy took an attitude from the realistic school. His fiction consistently attempts to realistically convey the reality of the environment in which he lived. Being a “*realistic novelist*” (Mann 24), Tolstoy works upon the sensible examination of social and political issues in the Russian society. His two most famous works, the novels War and Peace (1869) and Anna Karenina (1877) are accredited as two of the best novels and a peak of realist fiction.

Tolstoy’s utmost objective behind realism was the truth. That’s how, his earliest stories about the Caucasus were a radical response of the romantic styles. It was a quest for a truthful interpretation of life. In this context, Susan Layton asserts that: “*His [Tolstoy] first stories about the Caucasus accordingly sought to replace romantic modes with a more hardheaded, fact-oriented outlook.*” (233)

His rejection of the romantic tradition is due to its idealization in the delineation of the human experience. His aspiration resided in finding out the hidden truth already misinterpreted by romantic authors. In similar vein, Caryl Emerson points out that: "*His major challenge in this matter of uncovering life's truth was not competition with earlier worldly writers (Gogol or Pushkin) but the very fact, or indignity, of having to pass human experience through the word at all.*" (149)

This was the definition of realism and some of its leading theorists and novelists in Europe. These influential figures set up the pillars of the realistic tradition and the European realistic ethos inspires other intellectuals outside Europe.

#### **4- Realism in America**

In America, realism witnessed its coming of age. It was, actually, a revolution in literature aiming to liberate it from romantic ties. This new type of realistic literature accentuated the importance as well as the desperate need for subjectivity in the portrayal of the lives of all people, whatsoever the social status or the environmental condition. According to John William De Forest<sup>7</sup>, "*The Great American Novel—the picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence—the American 'Newcomes' or 'Miserables' will, we suppose, be possible earlier. "Is it time?"*" (28)

De Forest emphasizes the objective projection of things avoiding the idealization, historical retrospection, and the imaginary worlds characterizing romanticism. Furthermore, the unexplainable omniscience of authors in the fiction, which gives personal subjectivity at the expense of reality, according to De Forest, might not offer an accurate idea of what really occurs. Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen<sup>8</sup>, in his article, "The Progressive Realism of American

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<sup>7</sup> John William De Forest is an American realistic fiction writer and a soldier in the American army during the American Civil War. In 1867, De Forest published his most significant novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty. Many critics like William Howells Dean praised him as a 'realist' before realism was named so. De forest's essay entitled "The Great American Novel," is credited as a serious beginning of the realist literature. This passage is taken from: < <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/articles/n2ar39at.html> >

<sup>8</sup> Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen (1848-95) emigrated from his native country (Norway) to America in 1869. After several years of newspaper work, he became a professor of Germanic languages, first at Cornell and then for the remainder of his life at Columbia. He published actively in various fields, including literary criticism, Scandinavian studies, and novels with strong social themes, of which The Mammon of Unrighteousness (1891) and The Golden Calf (1892) were the best well received. He was frequently identified during the late 1880s and early 1890s as a strong supporter of Howellsian realism.

Fiction”, maintains that “*Broadly speaking, a realist is a writer, who adheres strictly to the logic of reality, as he sees it; who, aiming to portray the manners of his time, deals by preference with the normal rather than the exceptional phases of life*” (148)

The substantial content of realism refutes the philosophical claims that reality goes beyond human attainment. Without any doubt, the human being can trace the tracks of reality, putting together its threads, and form the final shape or image of the fragmented reality. The distorted picture of the real will be sustained only, when thrusting aside what seems to be abstract, imaginable, untouchable, immeasurable or spiritual. Gary Scharnhorst and Thomas Quirk argue in their jointly published book, Realism and Regionalism, say that:

Realism assumes that sentimentalism and idealism are based on a philosophical idea that “reality” transcends human experience as it is ordinarily lived, and the Realist rejects this notion, maintaining instead that the real is a social, not a spiritual, phenomenon and that it is available to human beings through shared experience. (58)

This Romantic idealization, embellishment, and irrelevant beautification of reality’s face would no longer fortify society or provide it with immunity. Yet, it would make it fragile in confrontation with its difficulties. It would not stand so strong for the reason that the internal social diseases would remove the fake mask of reality. In a sense, the realistic novel played a significant role in social reformation. De Forest attests his support to a realistic American novel: “*The Great American Novel must avoid the ‘subjective’ spirit of Hawthorne’s romances (only a vague consciousness of this life) and the expatriate withdrawal of the writer who” neglected the trial of sketching the American life and fled abroad for his subjects”*” (qtd in Ruland 190)

By 1875, American writers had been massively moving to realism. They managed to change the mode used in literature and resort to the true-to-life embodiment. William Dean Howells was the creator of the ‘*realistic theory*’ (Barrish 17) in America. He was to construct what Phillip Barrish came to call ‘*a realist taste*’ (17). Howells assumed the task of theorizing for the new movement, but in an American scope. He gained many followers like Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and under his contributions realism grew to be the mainstream of American literature. He enjoyed such reputation, simply because, “*Real, realistic, and realism simply offered his best markers for the writing he admired.*” (Goodman 147)

Being aware of an authentic depiction of life in America, William Dean Howells drew attention to the dangers of false views, coming from the Genteel Tradition Literature<sup>9</sup>. And decidedly, the most vocal advocate of anti-romantic realism put into effect his realistic theories.

Michael Anesko stresses that Howells committed his writings to serve the purposes of the new authentic literature. This authenticity made literature avoid the idealistic delineation. Consequently, the incalculable expectations of romanticism were threatened. Anesko argues that: "*Howells deliberately manipulates his narrative point of view to vivify the consequences of romantic misperception.*" (15)

Howells shocked the reading public with his earlier novel A Modern Instance (1882), where he approached divorce, something never anticipated, appreciated, or awaited to be openly talked about. The characters, in this novel, were dull and unromantic. This novel had very profound effects on those, who wanted to write realistically. Roger Lathbury thinks that: "*The first of the novels on which his [Howells] reputation as a writer and American REALIST, someone who tries to imitate the complexities of real life in fiction, depends, A Modern Instance.*" (46)

Howells kept on his realistic career and by 1885, he wrote The Rise of Silas Lapham. In the novel, there is a passage or scene, where romantic literature is qualified as being with old-fashioned heroes and unnecessary sacrifices. Nicolas S. Witschi argued that Howells Dean was the guide of the new emerging writers. Realist novelists, for him, had to be equipped with spirits of simplicity, faith, and honesty. Witschi affirms: "*Armed with this hope for the future of literature, Howells advises writers of realism to heed the now-famous dictum that a good novel should concern itself—indeed, should ‘verify’ itself—only through the selective depiction of what Howells calls ‘the simple, the natural, and the honest’*(66)

Realism, for many critics like William Howells Dean and Henry James, is synonymous to democracy. They emphasized the fact that the arts must become democratic. De Forest vowed that the ‘Great American Poem’ would never be written if democracy did not rule. His assumption gets sharper when he said, "*We may be confident that the Great American Poem*

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<sup>9</sup>Genteel Tradition: A term coined by critic George Santayana to describe the literary practice of certain late nineteenth-century American writers, especially New Englanders. Followers of the Genteel Tradition emphasized conventionality in social, religious, moral, and literary standards. Some of the best-known writers of the Genteel Tradition are R. H. Stoddard and Bayard Taylor.

*will not be written, no matter what genius attempts it, until democracy, the idea of our day and nation and race, has agonized and conquered through centuries, and made its work secure.”*  
(28)

Howells, in one voice with Deforest, fueled the demand of a democratic literary hegemony. In similar context, Phillip Barrish maintains that “*Howells waged a courageous campaign for “literary democracy.”*” (17) As a consequence, realism became a democratic power to depict the daily life of the commonplace people. Politically speaking, America, at that time, was a healthy democratic atmosphere. And literature seized the opportunity to democratize itself. And eventually in Hollesian philosophy, literary democracy was worth achieving through “*The methods of realism [which] could create a democratic universal.*” (Ruland 190)

Realism, therefore, started holding a remarkable democratic power. The latter affords the readers a possibility to determine the extent to which, the literature at hand is good or not. In similar vein, Gary Scharnhorst claims that: “*Realism is democratic in its focus and addresses readers as fully capable of judging and understanding literary works without the aid of lofty critical postulates.*” (58)

In addition to the aforementioned details, the critic George J. Becker set three criteria of the realistic mode to identify realism: The first is verisimilitude of detail derived from observation and documentation. The second, a realist or what Hamlin Garland called in his essay: “Productive Conditions of American Literature”, “*veritist*” (151) must depend on the representative at the expense of the exceptional in plot, setting, and character. Moreover, objectivity is a vital element in the realistic procedure. Consequently, idealistic view of human nature and experience, fantastical images, imaginary realms, impossible or improbable events, and mythical stories were said to be part of the romantic age.

In Becker’s vision realism is the true depiction of details of life with objectivity, without extravagance in coloring scenes of life with superfluous, untrue realities. Besides, the scientific observation of the events is a necessary element in realism.

Realism was introduced as a response and in defiance of the Genteel Tradition Literature. The latter tackles only the smiling aspects of life with a denial of the negative or the sordid sides, which distort the painted face of life. Generally, realists complain that the pink portrayal of the American life and the romantic idealization of the literary production will

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stand in bald contrast with advance and the achievement of society's expectations. Thus, the American literary realism: "*departs from the sentimentality and idealization of life often the characteristic of the romantic novel that preceded it in its conscious desire to represent life in fiction with sincerity and honesty.*" (Skipp 49) And then, the whole romantic apparatus doomed to fall apart. Howells's battle against romanticism was won.

Henry James was another realist. His realism, unlike that of Howells, was related to the human mind. In other words, "*He [James] was an observer of the mind rather than a recorder of the time. His realism was a special kind of psychological realism.*" (High 91) James really introduced quite groundbreaking technique or what came to be called in twentieth century literature as 'Stream of consciousness'.<sup>10</sup>

Leonardo Unger considers Henry James as having an ability to cross from the New World to the Old and was able to take his seat at the table of fiction, beside George Eliot and Turgenev, Flaubert, and other prominent writers. Likewise, he started a hard task of modernizing the novel in English. Unger points out: "*He [Henry James] found the novel in English still the easy undisciplined and relaxed form it had been from its early days, and he refashioned it into a complex work of literary art.* (319) Consequently, many innovations to the novel were introduced. Henry James, in his essay, "The Art of Fiction", asserts that "*The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life.*"(47)

Henry James published plenty of realistic novels. The subject was not social life and economic conditions, but the psychological area. He was named father of the psychological novel, since he was "*more concerned with the psychology of his characters*". (Bode 113) Among his famous works: Roderick Hudson, (1876), The American, (1877); Daisy Mailler (1879), his masterpiece: The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Ambassador (1903), What Maisie Knew (1897), etc

As a prominent theorist for the realistic novel, James stressed a desperate need to implement the 'question of realism' that would enable the reader to go beyond the boundaries of illusion. Thanks to this type of novels, society's complicated problems can be fully

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<sup>10</sup> 'Stream of consciousness' is a method to make the readers interested in the manner the characters' minds respond to the events. James helped a lot in putting together literature and the working of the mind, which had been reinforced with the advance of psychology.

understood, and assimilated. Peter Rawlings, talking about Henry James and his interesting theories, writes:

The novel should be concerned not with fixing an image of society for the reader to condemn, with realism simply, but with the 'question of realism', with probing the limitations of conventional representations and penetrating through to the world beyond surface illusions. The novel, because of that openness James identified and celebrated, is the perfect vehicle for renovating the individual will so that the self compromised by society and dogmatic politics can discover its potentiality. (38)

The American realistic legacy was various and rich. Novels, like Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), turned into stimulation and a background of the modern American literature as noted Ernest Hemingway. The novel came in the post Civil War era, when the general orientations as well as the literary traditions were on course to radical changes. Realism strongly inserted itself in the periodization of American literary history. Twain was among the leading figures to draw the realist destination.

Realism in American literature cannot effectively be summarized in few lines. It was so immense that it is not possible to record all the theorists and the practitioners of the movement in a file of a quite few pages. Figures, similar to Bret Harte, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Edward Bellamy, and others were prominent realistic artists and the realistic inheritance speaks eloquently about them.

In short, unlike the previous movements and ideological literary manifestos, realism had shaken the American soul and revived its social sensibility. It started in Europe, nonetheless, it went to American to happen and express itself. The old romantic spirit died out and had been replaced by what Malcolm Bradbury called '*newspokeness*' (186).

## **Section Two: Naturalism: Historical and Philosophical Background**

### **1- Naturalism: Making of History**

Naturalism, as many other philosophical concepts, is very hard to pin down and difficult to accurately define. Critics agreed upon the idea that naturalism overlaps many fields of knowledge, science, philosophy, politics, and the like. Yet, literary naturalism has typical specifics. The term suffers from a lack of consensus with reference to the definition and vagueness, as far as its usage is concerned.

Naturalism was a complex problem that puzzled theorists and experts of literature making them so cautious to venture to propose some definitions. In this context, David Baguley explains: *“The problem with definitions of literary naturalism is, however, a more fundamental one than that of terminological fluctuations or vagaries, or even of a lack of agreement among the various theorists who have ventured to propose such definitions.”* (Naturalist Fiction 42)

Donald Pizer, an American critic and essayist, admits the fact that the movement in America is actually very intricate to get a neat definition. Yet, he preferred to deal with what he called ‘naturalistic tradition’ in which a changing set of beliefs and tenets about the relationship between man and fiction are brought up. He, furthermore, maintains:

I have, in brief, written a book about naturalism in which a detailed study of potentially naturalistic novels suggests that there is no neat definition applicable to the movement in America but rather a variable and changing and complex set of assumptions about man and fiction that can be called a naturalistic tradition. (The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism 16)

But before attempting to suggest any definitions, it is of paramount importance to examine the conditions within which naturalism came to dominate literature for a period of time. In fact, the circumstances contributed to the emergence of naturalism, mirror, to an extent, the ideology it embraces. For that purpose, it is crucial to read briefly the setting and the background behind the rise and the maturation of naturalism.

The late nineteenth century saw an unprecedented intensification of developments already started with the French Revolution of 1789. Changes in favor of securing hegemony in political, economic, and cultural areas were started by the masses of the middle class, followed

by a wave of revolutions that had shaken Europe in 1848. Religion started to draw back of the political scene with the penetration of science, as a major pillar in the economic and social fronts. These economic and social forces had led to the institutional demise of religious doctrines. Scientific development and broadly scientific attitudes accelerated this process.

It was science to pave the way for the systemization of all of life. And therefore the resignation of the religious institutions and spiritual agencies would be obviously seen. The intellectuals commenced a new thought based on nature, which “*has also been conceived as an ideal to which our lives are to be conformed.*” (Olafson 01) Positive philosophers<sup>11</sup> believing exclusively in materialized thinking began to insist upon empirical verifiability as a key means to tackle subjects. Consequently, ‘*scientism*’ (Craig 50) was finding its way to the canonization of knowledge acquisition. Habib refers to the point assuming that: “*The ‘positive’ philosophers and sociologists rejected all divine or spiritual agency and, in their insistence on ‘nature,’ on experience, observation, and empirical verifiability, sought what they considered to be a more scientific and piecemeal approach to the acquisition of knowledge.*” (470)

The authority imposed by religious and divine institution was, eventually, of no use. Change seekers learned that church was the chief reason behind backwardness in all fields of life. Religion made it abominable to be skeptical towards the sacred teachings. Nevertheless, religion was recently held as intangible and, accordingly, it had to be discarded. Naturalists, principally, eliminated any religious considerations. There was no room in their visions for talk of God or a priori laws of perception or laws of history or any other metaphysical entities that transcended the realm of observational certitude. This was the general course taking by thinkers in philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc. In literature, literary naturalism was following the path.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Positive’ is related to positivism. The latter is a view of scientific methods and a philosophical approach, theory, or system based on the basis that, in the social as well as natural sciences, sensory experiences and their logical and mathematical treatment are together the exclusive source of all worthwhile information. Introspective and intuitional attempts to gain knowledge are rejected. Though the positivist approach has been a recurrent theme in the history of western thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present day, the concept was also developed in the early 19th century by the philosopher and founding sociologist, Auguste Comte. Positivists assert that the only authentic knowledge is that which is based on sense, experience, and positive verification claiming that the purpose of knowledge is merely to describe, not to explain.

Since its emergence, Naturalism tries to put an end to puritanical codes and laws in literature. It aspires to break all what was supposed to be forbidden in society's attitudes. For literary naturalists, religion must stay within space of church and not be the keeper of everything. They wonder how they could handle society, its problems and tribulations and finding solutions, if they were not to allow revealing the vices of the bloated societies racked with internal social diseases. To all intents and purposes, naturalism does not hesitate to bring to public debate the social cruelties. Moreover, it perceives the universe as a blind machine hindering man to do right. It views h/her as a powerless, immobilized, and feeble creature. In other words, Mark Milne argues that *"a person's fate is determined solely by factors and forces beyond an individual's personal control, such as heredity and environment."* (535)

Naturalism flourished in different literary areas mainly prose fiction and drama. Consequently, the naturalistic novel had many new, sensitive, and sensible subjects. Heredity, obsession, sexuality, are disruptive factors, which break up the fragile balance of differences, of structures and codes. This created ambiguity and confusion, on the one hand, rejection, disapproval, and non-acceptance were issued, on the other. David Baguley affirms : *"L'hérédité, la maladie, l'obsession deviennent dans ces textes des facteurs perturbateurs qui rompent l'équilibre fragile des différences, des codes. Le mouvement caractéristique du roman naturaliste pointe vers la désintégration et la confusion."*<sup>12</sup> (Le Naturalisme et ses genres 171)

Many naturalists like Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and others drew upon Darwinist theory of evolutionism and its view to nature, denying any importance for human potential and refuting the free will of intelligent choices. The Darwinian teachings 'survival is for the fittest' held by proponents of naturalism, enabled them to portray their characters as miserable creatures, unable to decide their fates, but compelled to accept them. Moreover, they are usually smashed by circumstances out of their control. They lead a struggle to adapt and continue existing. On the whole, those characters are overwhelmed by accidental circumstances rather than acting rationally, freely, and heroically upon the world. They are merely animals whose behavior is utterly based upon heredity and environment. David Mikics highlights that:

The doctrine of Social Darwinism, which saw life as a brutal struggle for survival, had a strong influence on the

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<sup>12</sup> *"Heredity, illness, and obsession are disruptive factors which break up the fragile balance of differences, of structures, of codes. The characteristic movement of the naturalist novel is in the direction of disintegration and confusion."* [Trans. Mine]

naturalists. For naturalist writers [. . .] when everything required for an action is present, determined characters cannot refrain. Because they always choose to act as their strongest desires dictate, their choices always seem predictable and outside their control (200/1)

Naturalism claims to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. In accordance with a post-Darwinian thesis, naturalistic writers hold that the characters of their naturalistic writings try to present subjects with scientific objectivity. These writings are often frank, crude, and tragic. But, how could Social Darwinism inspire the naturalist's thinking?

Darwin published his major work on social evolution entitled The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex (1871). Diane b. Paul argues that human being in his social experience is just like an animal. His prospects to achieve social advance will, by no means, be realized, if ever, he does not lead a real struggle to maintain his existence. His development will not be accomplished, unless he goes through hard times and serious exams. This is the core belief of Social Darwinism<sup>13</sup> and the focus on the implications of Darwin's theory for human biological and social progress varied from one field to another. In his essay, entitled "Darwin, social Darwinism and eugenics", Diane b. Paul talks about the Darwinist tenet 'survival is the fittest'. He says: "*Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication and warns that the advance will be halted unless he remains subject to severe struggle.*" (221)

Besides the influence of social Darwinism, naturalism in literature came into existing owing to the influence of realism. But, what type of relationship is between realism and naturalism? Is naturalism a continuation or a break up with the realistic literature?

Naturalism can be viewed as a more extreme form of realism, since there is a strong kinship between the two ideologies. Naturalism did not come as an oppositional response to realism. Even the naturalistic principles do not go in paradox with the realistic methods. The two literary movements co-existed and thrived side by side.

Some other critics, such as Clarence Darrow, remark that naturalists convey their philosophical naturalistic messages using realist subject and methods. Naturalism said to look

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<sup>13</sup> Social Darwinism: Several sociologists, critics and, creationist like the American William Jennings Bryan thought a straight line ran from Darwin's theory to beliefs that it is right for the strong to crowd out the weak, and that the only hope for human improvement lay in selective breeding. Socially speaking, the theory was invested and then used to account for the various social phenomena. For more, make reference to Paul Diani's B. "Darwin, social Darwinism and eugenics"

to literature, through the same view as realism. It, moreover, develops the same thematic concerns. Yet, the tone is further pessimistic. Many critics see that naturalism was an extreme outlook taken by some realists, emphasizing a kind of philosophical determinism. The latter deprives the characters of any possible power to freely conduct or respond to the workings of fate. They are considered as helpless, miserable, and poor products of their physiological as well as psychological organisms and victims of their environment. For that reason, we find that the endings of the major naturalistic novels are tragic and the tone is, more often than not, sad and gloomy. By contrast, realism can approach the 'smiling aspects of life'. Donald Pizer affirms that:

Naturalism comes after realism, and since it seems to take literature in the same direction as realism, it is primarily an 'extension' or continuation of realism only a little different. The major distinction between realism and naturalism, most critics agree, is the particular philosophical orientation of the naturalists [. . .] it [Naturalism] is essentially realism infused with a pessimistic determinism. (Realism and Naturalism 09)

In brief, realism and naturalism are two highly attached literary movements. We cannot understand the second with an absolute epistemological ignorance of the former. The two movements embrace common divisors. And so, no one can study naturalism without any reference to realism, since it came out of it. Furthermore, many critics consider naturalism as a continuation to realism. Hitherto, it rather differs from it slightly. In addition, naturalism emphasizes the importance of science. Peter High argues that: "*Naturalism, the idea that art and literature should present the world and people just as science shows they really are*" (87). Naturalism was also seen by a good number of critics as a deterministic realism, .i.e., a portrayal of life with scientific theories of Darwin and deterministic theories of Taine. In this context, J. A. Cuddon maintains that: "*In literature naturalism developed out of realism. The main influences that went to forming a different point of view were Darwin's biological theories, Comte's application of scientific ideas to the study of society, and Taine application of deterministic theories to literature*". (537)

## **2- Definition of Naturalism**

Numerous attempts to define the term doomed to failure and providing an exact ideological significance to the term seemed tough. Nonetheless, some critics got the risks of initiating an approximate conception for what naturalism might refer to. According to Collete Becker, the word ‘naturalism’ is very ancient and acquired a variety of meanings over time. It shifted from a researcher interested in natural sciences to acquire a philosophical import through which, every event is justified by laws of mechanism and causality. He points out that: “*It [Naturalism] first means a scientist working on the natural history, then, natural sciences and biological sciences. In the twentieth century, the term underwent a philosophical significance: the naturalist is the one who provides explanations of <the phenomena by laws of mechanism without any reference to supernatural causes>*” (Becker 74) [Trans. Mine]

Naturalism was an ancient term for the physical sciences or the study of nature. It endeavored at emulating the methods of the physical sciences, drawing heavily on the principles of causality, determinism, explanation, and experimentation. It applies scientific laws, ideas and principles to fiction. The introduction of what would come to be known as ‘literary scientism’. Its aim is to make literature more objective and scientific. The naturalists worked to make a novelist’s labor just the same as a botanist, biologist, or chemist writing reports and treatises after conducting experimentations. Ira Mark Milne assumes that: “*The tone is generally objective and distant, like that of a botanist or biologist taking notes or preparing a treatise. Naturalist writers believe that truth is found in natural law, and because nature operates according to consistent principles, patterns, and laws, truth is consistent.*”(534)

Naturalism also seeks objectivity in the depiction of life. This movement came to highlight and help the commonplace to make apparent their preoccupations, concerns, and problems. In doing so, it casts light on heredity and environment of the characters and the effects they practice on them, producing actions totally irresponsible for them. For that reason, many naturalists do not criticize their characters for wrong doings. However, they put all the blame on society. Besides, Rozakis Laurie calls naturalism ‘determinism’, as man’s condition is determined by interactions with h/her environmental sphere, not to speak about effects of heredity. Rozakis, in this context, maintains that: “*Naturalism was a literary movement that traced the effect of heredity and environment on people who were helpless to change their situations. Naturalism is also called ‘Determinism’ for its belief in the effects of environment,*

*heredity and chance on human fate.* (182) In a word, Mario klarer identifies naturalism as the accurate and truthful projection of the characters and their determining social and environmental conditions. In his An Introduction to Literary Studies, he writes: “*Naturalism [. . .] concentrates on the truthful portrayal of the determining effects of social and environmental influences on characters.* (71)

### **3- Naturalism in Europe**

Hyppolite Taine – a philosopher and a literary critic– contributed to free literature and put it on the path of reality. Influenced by ideas of Spinoza, Hegel, and Aristotle, Taine accentuated the significance of a causal operation to govern the human mind as well as the world. It was a kind of literary determinism, conditioning that for each happening, there is a cause.

Taine published a book entitled Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise in which he talked about a scientific exactness to govern literary criticism. Taine influenced Zola and others and became a source of inspiration for them. Zola was effectively an admirer of Taine’s work and notably his scientific spirit. (Baguley Naturalist Fiction 11) As result, the ground was more prepared than ever for a new type of literature to take the lead and then contribute in introducing profound social changes.

Literary Naturalism emerged first in Europe (France), at the aftermath of a successful revolution of realism in literature. In 1865, Claude Bernard published An Introduction to Experimental Sciences, which had a deep impact on Émile Zola’s knowledge and way of thinking. The French young Zola, according to Becker Colette, was a major theorist of the new blooming movement. Becker writes: “*Since 1865, he [Zola] led a campaign in journalistic articles for a new kind of novels adapted to the contemporary time. He started a struggle that gave birth to Naturalism*” (69) [Trans. Mine]

The period (1865-1866) witnessed the fame of Émile Zola as a writer and theorist of naturalism. With time, his name began to spread and his influence on young generation of writers was increasingly growing, notably after his successful novels L’Assommoir (1877) and Nana (1880). The two books project the social life with fidelity, sincerity, and emotional independence. Zola’s literature was so sensational in the sense that it treats the social material with more extreme form of naturalness. Zola daringly conveyed day-to-day reality notwithstanding to talk about embarrassing social taboos, like women in society, prostitution, alcoholism, sexual desire, and so forth. Thus, the publication of L’Assommoir and Nana

marked the serious starting point of literary naturalism. In this point, David Baguley elucidates that: “Zola’s theorizing about the naturalist ‘method’ occurred precisely during the period between the publication of *L’Assommoir* (1877) and *Nana* (1880), novels of slum life, alcoholism and sexual depravity, as, in part, an attempt to justify their apparent excesses.” (45)

According to Henri Mitterand, there were at least two periods of Zola’s theoretical naturalism. The first was the ‘Experimental Novel’, when he was not able to provide analysis. The second was ‘the Naturalist Novelist’ allowing him to involve aesthetic criticism. (20)

The years between 1876 and 1884 constitute the coming of age of naturalism. Big volumes doubled and the movement very rapidly extended outside France. Zola carried on his theories about the emerging movement. He published many articles in “Le Bien Public” and “Le Voltaire”. The 20th of October 1879 was a hallmark in the naturalistic literature. Zola introduced his definition of the so-called ‘experimental novel’. In Zola’s conception the experimental novel is:

a consequence of the scientific evolution of the century; it continues and completes physiology, which itself leans for support on chemistry and medicine; it substitutes for the study of the abstract and the metaphysical man the study of the natural man, governed by physical or chemical laws, and modified by the influences of his surroundings; it is in one word the literature of our scientific age, as the classical and romantic literature corresponded to a scholastic and theological age. (qtd in Habib 479)

The experimental novel was an extension to the remarkable achievements championed by naturalism. On the other hand, Zola, the foremost spokesman of the movement, rejected the romantic idealism, arguing that above all, fiction should be truthful rather than polite, amusing, or ennobling. And truth was achieved through representing life in accord with scientific laws and methods.

Zola expressed his keen wish to argue for a literature governed by science. William Roscoe Thayer in his essay, “The New Story-Tellers and the Doom of Realism”, avers: “We all know with what vigor and plausibility Zola set forth this doctrine, which had all the more attractiveness in that it seemed to tally with the scientific spirit of the age. Everything was tinctured with science; the very word ‘scientific’ had become a shibboleth: we had ‘scientific’ clothespins, ‘scientific’ liverpads, why not “scientific” novels?” (160) The naturalistic doctrine

inspired many writers to adopt the new discoveries in the field of natural sciences and medicines. Accordingly, “*The naturalists used the discoveries and knowledge of modern science*” (High 88) In the naturalist’s standpoint, fiction must be handled with the same scientific rigor and objectivity, characterizing experimental sciences. They think that literature must be controlled by the scientific method. Hence, literature turns out to be a methodical phenomenon.

These were, generally, the circumstances within which naturalism was born, besides its founding fathers. But, Europe was not the unique place, where naturalism prospered. The philosophy sailed and immigrated to America, where new experience is worth noting.

#### **4- Naturalism in America**

In America, after three decades of its emergence in Europe, naturalism traveled to the United States and it was Americanized. Yet, the problem of definition, mentioned so far, was also raised. And therefore, many critics made an effort to give a general or specific conception of naturalism. Among the interesting definitions was that of Keith Newlin. In fact, his definition seemed to be the most appropriate and relevant to the American context. He elaborated a clear and practical definition to naturalism. Newlin writes:

Naturalism is a late nineteenth- century literary movement that seeks to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detailed observation to the writing of fiction. Emphasizing external forces rather than rational choices as determining factors in human lives, classic naturalism combines objectivity of presentation with a philosophical determinism that challenges or negates the possibility of free will. (272)

Nevertheless, the problem in American literary naturalism does not uniquely reside in defining the concept. Many students, scholars and people interested in American literature confuse between ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’. They, sometimes, use interchangeably the one to refer to the other. This is quite a common problem in drawing clear boundaries between the two terminologies. Many critics look at naturalism as being another face to realism. In his essay, “Zola as a Romantic Writer” Frank Norris writes: “*For most people Naturalism has a vague meaning. It is a sort of inner circle of realism—a kind of diametric opposite of romanticism, a theory of fiction wherein things are represented “as they really are,” inexorably, with the truthfulness of a camera.*” (21)

Donald Pizer described the post-bellum period as the most difficult to write about in American literature. It was the period of realism and naturalism. In fact, the confusion characterizing the two terms stems from twofold difficulties. In one part, there were suspicions in recording the history of literature among critics; especially in realism and naturalism. And a skeptical uncertainty due to a deconstructive<sup>14</sup> attitude was characterizing the interpretation of the newly theories of realism and naturalism. Pizer expounds:

First, there exists a traditional suspicion, often arising from very attempt to write literary history, of [. . .] realism and naturalism. A second problem derives from the recent theorizing of literary study. The attraction, for many theorists, of a deconstructive stance has bred skepticism towards interpretive enterprises that posit such communities of belief and expression as those subsumed under the heading of realism and naturalism (CC TAN 01)

Naturalism in America was more than a literary movement. It was not merely writings of fiction branching their ideologies from law of environmentalism and heredity. It was not simply a reaction to romanticism or a continuation to realistic realizations achieved by the realistic age. It was, actually, a philosophy of depth and profound significance. It was, indeed, *“more than a literary movement, more than just the workings of shared assumptions about heredity and environment, and it becomes inseparable from the historical processes of modernism, which moves us away from the land to the city, away from the world of craft to the world of factories”* (Lehan 179) It is currently alive refusing to die, at the odds of the harsh literary attacks as well as criticism it receives.<sup>15</sup>

Naturalism arrived to America thirty years after it had started in Europe. However, the American naturalism was never quite the same as in Europe. Like European naturalism, it was inspired by Darwin’s theory of evolution and kept repeating the doctrine that men, being part of the animal kingdom, were subject to natural laws and struggles for adaptation. American naturalists also enthusiastically read Thomas Henry Huxley<sup>16</sup> and his strong arguments against

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Pizer hyperbolically uses the adjective deconstructive to mean that post-bellum era witnessed the appearance of different ideologies to approach the American experience. While in fact, the deconstructive criticism was primarily initiated by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s. In his theory, Derrida emphasizes the role of the hidden work of ideology in the daily experience of oneself and our world.

<sup>15</sup> Naturalism was strongly criticized for heavily following the principles of scientism and then lacking literary complexity. Breaking taboos of sexuality and other delicate social topics became a source of criticism.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Henry Huxley was zoologist and advocate of Darwinism. He made several incursions into philosophy. From his youth he had studied its problems. He was a great master of expository and argumentative

Protestantism. Young writers, like Theodore Dreiser and Jack London felt that the churches were part of a vast conspiracy to muzzle them and keep them silent towards sensitive social affairs. In a sense, they targeted censorship, aiming to put an end to it. Their works were often received coldly, since they were regarded as amoral. Yet, the occupation of Theodore Dreiser and his fellows was to incessantly struggle so that literature can overpass the puritanical and moral ties. Elizabeth H. Oakes, in similar context, claims that “*Dreiser became known as a writer whose personal battles against censorship helped pave the way for literary freedom in America.*” (111)

American naturalists got Europe as a destination for them. They studied and learned ideas of Herbert Spencer<sup>17</sup> and borrowed literary methods of Émile Zola as “*The world of M. Zola is a world of big things*”. (Norris 23) They were seemingly making thoughtful upheavals to rebel against the current situation at home. So, what was to be a common divisor with the European naturalism was ‘the rebellious spirit’ of the movement, not the very nature of the help it gave. In this vein, Malcolm Cowley points out: “*What bound them [American and European Naturalists] together into a school or movement was this native rebellion and not the nature of the help that, like rebels in all ages, they summoned from abroad.*” (49)

America had broken the faith with romanticism by moving towards determinism and evolutionism. New realists started appearing in the scene. They launched a literary insurgency against the genteel tradition literature, hoping to break with Puritanism. Timidity and tyranny were said to be the characteristics of the romantic age. And yet, the effort to abolish the various evils and vulgarities in American society, by never speaking about them, drew to a close. Consequently, a darker form of realism was being taken.

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prose. Besides his special work in science, he had an important influence upon English through his numerous addresses and essays on the topics of science, philosophy, religion, and politics. Among the most important of his papers entitled ‘The Physical Basis of Life’ (1868) and ‘On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata’ (1874) Further and more importantly, Huxley is credited with the invention of the term ‘agnosticism’ to describe his philosophical position.

17 Herbert Spencer (1820): British philosopher and sociologist, he was a major figure in the intellectual life of the Victorian era. He was one of the principal proponents of evolutionary theory in the mid nineteenth century, and his reputation at the time rivaled that of Charles Darwin. Spencer was initially best known for developing and applying evolutionary theory to philosophy, psychology and the study of society — what he called his “synthetic philosophy”. Today, however, he is usually remembered in philosophical circles for his political thought, primarily for his defense of natural rights and for criticisms of utilitarian positivism, and his views have been invoked by ‘libertarian’ thinkers such as Robert Nozick. For more information see ([\*Spencer, Herbert \[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy\].htm\*](#))

At that time, works of Herbert Spencer were delightfully read in America. He arrived to make such magical influence on American writers, because his veritable values reside in his sensibility to give them another unified world picture to replace the Christian synthesis. Besides, works of Balzac were translated and widely read.

New men in American literature came to be the first naturalists. Frank Norris (1880-1902), Stephen Crane (1871–1900), Jack London (1876–1916), Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), and others worked on a new fictional Landscape. They commenced gasping life in an incisive manner and invented new literary themes to deal with society. They were incited by their European counterparts to dig in the American nature and explore it.

For them, the American belief in freedom and championship would no longer exist. What effectively existed on earth was the shining reality. Myths of social success became old-fashioned. Men are to be trapped by a network of circumstantial accidents. They are lost in the social landscape. Society was shown in all its sordid sides. Richard Gray says that:

In the fiction of the naturalists, [. . .] the abiding American myths about individual freedom and heroism are overturned. Human characters are dwarfed, transformed into tiny ‘specks’ on a vast natural landscape – the ocean, the desert, the plains, the polar wastes – or into frail victims of social circumstance, rising to success or falling to failure more as a matter of accident and event than of ability or will. (300)

Among the most well-known works were Frank Norris’s McTeague (1899) and notably The Octopus (1902) telling a story of a struggle between speculative Californian wheat ranchers and railroad. The greed of both factions together with the inexorable operations of economic forces brings about the tragic ending of them. The Octopus discusses economic fact and the inclination of twentieth century American society to materialism or what Michaels Walter Benn called "*hysterical delight*" (143)

In addition to the naturalistic pioneers, naturalism flourished in America with other writers like, John Steinbeck, John Doss Passoss, Edith Warathon, Richard Wright and others.

In Europe, naturalism was under an eminent peril of judiciary prosecution and press accusations of having decadence avant-garde and for lacking literary complexity. In America, it had a special appeal as a way of interpreting the material change. It was in a way a vehicle for all the processes, which were altering the American nation in all fields of life.

### **Section Three: Psychoanalysis**

Literature has largely been subject to politics, economy, culture, religion, aesthetic evaluation, and so on. Literature also utilizes psychology to account for some situations or provide intelligible justifications for the ambiguity of some character's conduct or narratives. On the other side, authors make use of some aspects or techniques related to the mind and the psychological life in order to develop their works or authenticate them. Thus, a set of various interfaces between psychoanalysis and literature were established.

Critics and philosophers since Aristotle have elaborated some literary examinations in psychological dimensions. These psychological attempts range from motivations and intentions lying behind the author's literary expression to the effect of the text as well as the performances on the receivers. Nevertheless, the application of psychoanalytic principles to the study of literature is relatively a new recent phenomenon, initiated primarily by Freud and, in other directions, by Alfred Adler and Carl Jung.

#### **1- Freudianism and Literary Concerns:**

Sigmund Freud was openly exposed to classical literature. His literary background was deeply rooted in European literature. This is to say, he read Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, and Schiller. He was very keen to read literary publications and had a life-long passion for books. Freud started reading Goethe and Shakespeare, at a very early age. All this contributed to a good formation and an excellent comprehension of things. Although, he later chose career of a scientist after he had left school, his literary predilections did not vanish or wane. Graham Frankland pronounces: *"He [Freud] was reading Goethe and even Shakespeare well before he went to secondary school, and his veneration of these authors was certainly more intense than that of most of his contemporaries who enjoyed a similar education."* (01)

Freud was asked by a publisher to mention some ten books among the best he ever read. He, without hesitation, chose Goethe's Faust, and Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth. No wonder, the two writers created a powerful influence on Freud. They made him unable to withstand literary delight and pleasure. Many critics, like Adam Phillips, argued that Freud's writings should be read as nothing, but as being with a literary taste. To the point, Sharon Heller maintains that: *"Adam Phillips [. . .] asserts that Freud should be read like "any great*

novelist.” *Take his case of Dora*<sup>18</sup>, which has been compared to the twentieth-century novels of Marcel Proust, Henry James, and James Joyce, and to the plays of Henrik Ibsen.” (139)

In fact, Freud wrote a variety of psychoanalytical works. Many of them were clinical. Some papers were not pathological; they were rather connected to interpretation of dreams and jokes. Freud worked to tackle meta-psychological questions and the structure of the human psyche. Likewise, he wrote several papers addressing cultural phenomena, ranging from religion to works of art and literature.

Freud, however, managed to mix up literary facts with ‘science’. He hankered to marry literary aesthetic sense of beauty with his scientific prospects. Accordingly, the outcome was a newly born science, whose job was to put under an analytical microscope the creative work in reference to his creator. It is literary psychoanalysis. In this context, Frankland again declares: “*Freud managed to reconcile his passion for literature with his scientific ambitions, and the result was a ‘science’ which simply cannot be properly understood or appreciated without reference to its creator’s literary culture.*” (02)

Freud’s intimate acquaintance with classical literature is fundamental to his career as a writer. His literary concerns tremendously grew and critics qualified him as a great “*prose-poet of the Sublime.*” (Ellmann 174) Freud’s literary fondness became clearer than ever and his findings were hidden in the works of the poets and authors. David Mikics concludes that “*The poets and writers were there before him [Freud], anticipating his discoveries.*” (246)

Psychoanalytical theory has many stances towards writers. Effectively, the biographical background of a writer plays a significant role in understanding the literary message conveyed by its creator. Putting it within a Psychoanalytical frame will help scholars and critics grasp the conditions of those writers. This enables them to learn about the thematic trends, the language, and the style used in the literary treatises or productions. Freud thinks that psychoanalytic literary criticism must analyze both the form and content of art in relation to the author’s psychology and biography. Therefore, Freudian criticism “*is concerned with the quest for and discovery of (and the subsequent analysis of) connections between the artists (creators, artificers) themselves and what they actually create (novels, poems, paintings, sculpture, buildings, music, etc.)*” (Cuddon 332)

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<sup>18</sup> Dora was one of Freud’s patients whose real name was Ida Baur. This girl started a therapy with him and opened for him a collection of picklocks. However, she stopped her therapy preventing Freud to uncover the secrets of her mind. Therefore, On October 14, 1900, Freud told his friend Wilhelm Fleiss of a new, fascinating case: Dora. This outstanding story was considered nothing, but a work of art.

Freud had appealed to many literary works to exemplify, illuminate and even to ground his theoretical notions. And we can sense his account for literary criticism in his paper entitled, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming.”, Where he regards that creative authors’ dreams are equated with children’s play. In the course of this idea, Freud argues that: “*The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously - that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion while separating it sharply from reality. Language has preserved this relationship between children’s play and poetic creation.*” (“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” 03) Moreover, He says that characters might give us something about the mental life of the writer. In this situation, Habib writes: “*The modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes.*” (580)

The psychological status and the mental heritage of the writer may facilitate the task of understanding the psychology of the literature. And then, the critical interpretations will be based on a reliable material.

Freudian literary culture went farther thanks to the contribution of subsequent psychologist and literary critics. The latter developed and extended the field of psychoanalysis to encompass: analysis of the motives of an author, of readers and fictional characters, relating a text to features of the author’s biography, such as childhood memories and experiences, relationship to parents; the nature of the creative process; the psychology of reader’s responses to literary texts, interpretation of symbols in a text, to unearth latent meanings, analysis of the connections between various authors in a literary tradition, examination of gender roles and stereotypes, and the functioning of language in the constitution of the conscious and unconscious. As a result, the role of the psychoanalyst is to re-create a fictional narrative.

## **2- Freudianism and the Unconscious**

Freud was aware of the problematic nature of language, its opaqueness, vagueness and materiality, its resistance to clarity, and its refusal to be reduced to any one dimensional “literal” meaning. Throughout his writing career, he alluded many times to literary writings. Moreover, his own writings contain many literary allusions, and some of his major concepts, such as the Oedipus complex, were founded on literary models such as Oedipus Rex and Hamlet. And Freud recognized his wishes in that of Oedipus. In this perspective, Maud

Ellmann writes: “*For Freud confessed that he was 'gripped' by Oedipus because he recognized his own desires in the hero's crimes.*” (27)

Freud did a lot for the sake of psychology, and without any doubt, many areas of knowledge got benefited from his research. Freud's theory the ‘unconscious’ was a cornerstone in the understanding of the twentieth century mind. His contribution was thoughtful to bring to study the unconscious side of the human via suggesting valuable explanation to the way these unconscious impulses express themselves. Habib, in this orbit, praises Freudian contribution to the systemization of unconscious. He argues that: “*Freud's fundamental contribution was to open up the entire realm of the unconscious to systematic study, and to provide a language and terminology in which the operations of the unconscious could be expressed.*” (571)

Freud worked on the basis to apply his models of the unconscious and interpretation of dreams to literary texts. His literary analyses embrace a good number of psychological references.

Freud carried to us the idea of the unconscious. He worked upon it until he formalized a systematic study of the unconscious. This theory stipulates that the human mind is made up of two parts: The conscious side, which contains daily experiences. And the second is unconscious that is difficult to get access to, only by indirect means such as, dreams or neurotic symptoms.

The idea of the unconscious- itself- was not new. According to many philosophers and psychologists, Hegel was the first to set the pillars of the unconscious. Although, he did not allude to it directly or had in a detailed study, his contribution was undeniable. Jon Mills admits that Hegel referred to the unconscious saying: “*For Hegel, the unconscious is merely the immediate determinateness of spirit which manifests itself in two primary modes, namely, as soul and then as the ego of consciousness.*” (The Unconscious Abyss 07)

Freud suggested that we bear a form of “otherness” within ourselves: we cannot claim to fully comprehend or understand even ourselves, .i.e., why do we act as we do? Why do we make certain moral and political decisions? Why do we harbor in our minds given religious dispositions and intellectual orientations? Even if man thinks that he behaves from his own motives, he may be deluding because according to Freud, much of our behaviors are determined by unconscious forces, not by the free will of our consciousness.

In the 'unconscious', there hide repressed desires, feelings, memories as well as impulsive drives. These repressed drives and emotions can find their way to express themselves through dreams and some other means. When Freud ventured to give clarifications, he attributed all this to sexual depravation and violence. He thinks that someone's sexual repression would lead to some ununderstandable and unjustifiable types of behavior. In other words, the unconscious governs the behavior. In the course of the same idea, Julie Rivkin maintains that:

His [Freud] discovery was that the human mind contains a dimension that is only partially accessible to consciousness and then only through indirect means such as dreams or neurotic symptoms. The "unconscious," as he called it, is a repository of repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives, many of which, according to Freud, have to do with sexuality and violence. (389)

Freud confirms that everything temporarily forgotten by a patient must have been somehow distressing. The patients must have gone through alarming, painful or shameful experiences. Therefore, they fear the fact that all what seemed embarrassing might be revealed to others. This is to say, Freud concluded that this was precisely, why it had been expunged and completely blotted out from the conscious memory.

Freud assumed that, in the neurotic, any powerful impulse, sentimental rush or instinct, which are embarrassing, continue to operate in the realm of the unconscious, where it retained its full 'cathexis'<sup>19</sup> or investment of energy. All the expunged experiences are temporarily forgotten or calmed down, but in the unconscious, they are to be restored.

The instinct responds by seeking satisfaction for the repression. The latter will cause the ego to protect itself from the renewal of the repressed desires, by a permanent investment of energy. Freud looked at repression as the chief reason behind the neuroses, and the understanding of repression is the key to the treatment.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Cathexis' is energy stored in the nerve cells and invested in the unconscious. In his article, "Freud's androids", Clark Glymour, argues "*Freud calls the store of energy in a nerve cell 'cathexis.'*"(61)

### **3- Freud and The Interpretation of Dreams**

Freud also formulated a theory called 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. He introduced a new method, whereby psychologists can discover the meaning of dreams. Undeniably, interpreting dreams was as old as ancient civilizations. Yet, psychoanalysis was the first to claim that dreams had to acquire a scientific meaning so as to be methodically interpreted.

Dream, according to Freud, is a product of psychic activity susceptible to analysis. Freud says every dream represents the fulfillment of a repressed wish. The mechanism that prevents the repressed thought from showing itself clearly is called the censor.

In 1900, Freud carried out a study 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. And therefore, the psychological reflections of dream can be drawn. Actually, Freud worked on the collection of the dreams of his patients and sometimes his own and linking them to the motives and memories. In doing so, a person's actions might be explained in terms of his dreams. Jerome Neu maintains:

Freud cast light on dreams and symptoms also by relating them to motives. In this he stressed both the hermeneutic and causal aspects of commonsense thinking. He spoke of the interpretation of dreams, and of finding the sense of dreams and symptoms. Finding the sense of something, however, meant showing that it stood in an intelligible connection with a motive or system of motives, and hence locating it in an order of interpretable psychological causes. And Freud took this to be part of the causal order of nature generally. (87)

During sleep, Freud argued, the ego is focused on withdrawing energy from all the interests of life, and relaxes its expenditure of energy upon repression. The unconscious impulse seizes this opportunity to make its way into consciousness via the dream. But the ego maintains some of its repressive resistance as a kind of censorship of the dream. So to speak, Sigmund Freud, in his book The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), expounds: "*We may speak of a preconscious thought being repressed or driven out and then taken over by the unconscious.*" (605)

The Freudian theory of dreams concludes that a dream expresses fulfillment of repressed wishes or desires. As a consequence, all the dreams, we see in our sleep, are an expression of something we cannot have or attain in real life. Once again, the idea of the unconscious is of prime importance. Namely, the dreams emerge from unconscious impulses of unfulfilled

repressed desires. Freud argues that a good reading of the dreams is the safer way to get access to the unconscious. He says: *“The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.”* (604) Accordingly, these dreams must be effectively assessed in accordance to their real causes. Elizabeth Wright states that: *“They [dreams] cannot be adequately assessed without acknowledging their causes in desire. According to Freud, the energizing force of dreams springs from an unconscious impulse seeking fulfillment, a desire of not fulfilled in waking life [. . .] an unconscious wish meets up with a preconscious thought and strives for an illusory satisfaction* (17)

Freud suggests that the interpretation of dreams gets us access to the unconscious, where many of the repressed desires form a real censorship and a psychological illness. Therefore, these dreams are a firsthand knowledge towards providing cures. In similar vein, Jon Mills maintains: *“For the anti-Cartesian<sup>20</sup> Freud, on the contrary, dreams are not a source of renewed skepticism but rather of a new, different kind of knowledge about the repressed unconscious mind leading in the best situation to a psychoanalytic cure.”* (Rereading Freud 20)

Freud wrote many essays on art and literature. And he relates art to the dream. He made many reflections, by way of his practical experience related to dreams interpretations. He applied his findings and methods in the analysis of works of imagination, and subsequently, in the analysis of their creators including authors and artists themselves. In doing so, psychoanalytical criticism will disclose the writers’ repressed desires, instinctual needs, their aspirations to accomplish success, fame, honor, wealth, love and love of women.

When we read a literary paper encompassing dreams and we endeavor at relating it the real life of its author, we might conclude that it expresses in a way or another, the content of its creator. It is a literary creative fulfillment for his expectations or psychological remedy for his psychic wounds.

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<sup>20</sup> Freud is anti-Cartesian for he maintained that someone’s idea about himself must begin beyond the ego. Consequently, It is not that we think, therefore we know we are – for this gives primacy to subjectivity based alone on the ego, or the consciousness. The French philosopher Descartes introduced his “I think, therefore I am”, which became a spiritual basis for the enlightenment age. However, Freud’s theory of the unconscious came to subvert Descartes’ primacy of the ego; to say that there is thinking happening that is not readily available to the consciousness. It can only reached through specific means, like the Free Association of Ideas.

Paradoxically, to its contribution in psychology, literature, and some other fields, the Interpretation of Dreams theory suffers from weaknesses. One amongst is the contradiction it poses, in so far the dreamer is concerned. Freud sometimes accentuates the importance of dreamer's involvement in the interpretation process and other times neglecting it. Nicholas Rand questions Freud's paradoxical statement: "*Here are two simultaneous and incompatible Freudian positions: dream interpretation requires the dreamer's participation; the interpretation of dreams has no need for the dreamer's contribution.*" (15)

Although psychoanalysis brought about radical changes to literature, Literary Psychoanalytical Criticism must be subject to the gravest dangers. When attempting to display the psychological condition under which, the literary work comes out and to show the inner workings of the artist's mind, the psychoanalyst must be apart from falling in precarious interpretations. The human nature of the author can mislead the psychoanalyst. That's why, I. A. Richards argues that it is difficult that all the speculations in the artist mind are unverifiable. As a consequence, "*Psycho-analysts tend to be peculiarly inept as critics.*", Richards adds. (24)

## **Conclusion**

In short, this chapter serves as a theoretical platform to the study. The work begins with realism, which is the depiction of day-to-day life with objectivity. It is the verisimilitude of the narrative or the verisimilitude of characterization. Its utmost goal is to project life with its smiling aspects and sad facts. This realism developed and took a new direction and contributed to the appearance of a new literary movement known as naturalism. The latter came as a continuation and extension to realistic inheritance. It was viewed, by many critics, as an extreme attitude taken by some realists. Yet, the tone is more pessimistic and the ideology shifted to be deterministic. The endings are often melancholy, dramatic and tragic.

Psychoanalysis is a key means to the understanding of the literary work and its creator, as far as the psychological dimensions are concerned. Psychoanalytical Literary Criticism is of paramount importance. Indeed, it best suits the realistic and the naturalistic discourses. It is widely recognized that many realists used Psychoanalysis to develop their writings. Furthermore, David Mikics makes reference to Freud, when attempting to define realism saying that: “*Realism is allied to what Freud called the reality principle, the acceptance of the hard facts of life.*” (255) Additionally, the two terms were jointly used in one term forming what came up to be called ‘Psychological realism’.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, naturalism is forcefully linked to Psychoanalysis. Namely, many naturalists especially in America were influenced by psychoanalytical theories. And then, they adopted Freudian dogma in their writing<sup>22</sup>. It was, for them a groundbreaking technique to develop the narrative, notably, when talking about the mechanistic and deterministic forces leading the tragic end of the characters. Freud argues that men are controlled by the instinctual forces of their sexuality (unconscious) and so the point for the naturalists. They see their characters as powerless creatures manipulated by the urgent need to satisfy their biological and environmental desires.

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Psychological realism’ is defined as a “*kind of fiction which is for the most part concerned with the spiritual, emotional and mental lives of the characters and with the analysis of character rather than with the plot and the action.*” (Cuddon 709)

<sup>22</sup> Long ignored by psychiatry in Europe, except for his small group of followers, for his ideas were shocking and outrageous. Sigmund Freud was thrilled and surprised in America, and America was the first to pay homage to him, although he criticized the New World for being informal. In the course of the same idea, Sharon Heller points out: “*To Freud, infused with old-world culture, America was a savage land of vulgar commercialism. He hated its informalities, like calling him by his first name. Yet it was America who gave Freud his First honorary recognition.*” (02)

## **CHAPTER II**

**TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN SOCIETY AND  
ITS CONSTRAINTS IN AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY AND  
NATIVE SON**

## Introduction

Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright, among other realists, employ the power of their pens to make social diagnosis of the social accumulations of twentieth century American society. They write with naturalism, because the ideology is worth to tell about the truthful social constraints behind the decline of the twentieth century American society. Writing within naturalistic parameters allowed them to disclose the different social restrictions behind the destruction of Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths; the protagonists in Native Son and An American Tragedy.

Owing to his massive contribution in the American literary scenes, Theodore Dreiser had gained the position as the pioneer of American literary naturalism. He was among the first American intellectuals daring to break puritanical moral codes, opening a door for sexuality and related taboos to be publically discussed. This made him a primary proponent of American naturalism. His interest in the world of circumstances of the individual and his representation of the biological basis for human behavior can be obviously remarked in his fiction. Donald Pizer comments on Dreiser's position in American literature and his career of writing: "*Theodore Dreiser is the author whose work and career most fulfill the received notion of American naturalism [ . . . ], so completely is Dreiser as thinker and writer identified with the movement in America.*" (The Theory and Practice 57)

On the other side, Richard Wright was looked as a novelist of philosophical ideas and emotionally a very powerful creator and artist, writing from his guts. Though Wright's coming of age was, when modernism was flourishing, Wright brings up in his literature deterministic philosophy as well as pessimistic aspects of the naturalistic novel.

Like many naturalists, Wright believes that man's soul is governed by uncontrollable forces that are very dark to subdue, and so, are the overpowering social systems, which stifle and smother any possible advance of individuality. For him, characters are a social accident and Richard Wright never passes judgments on them. He, naturalistically, describes them. Michael Fabre assumes that: "*At times Wright comes close to the naturalistic vision of*

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*determinism, which conceives of man as an accident, or an epiphenomenon caught in a general movement toward universal rest.*" (The world of Richard Wright 57)

### **Section One: Racial Oppression of the Negro: Educational Constraints, Social Fear, and Violence.**

Native Son is the first black novel and a cornerstone to the African American literature. It marked a real birth for the African American culture and prepared the ground for black intellectuals to follow the path of success. It also enables to drop "*the mask that grins and lies [and] allowed the white audience to look behind the minstrel apparel*" (Tuhknen 01). When Native Son appeared to the literary scene, the American culture changed forever and life of Negroes was critically brought to debate. In fact, it tells of several societal constraints.

#### **1- Educational Constraints**

Blacks in America were deprived of all human rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence of 1776, stipulating that "*all men are created equal*" (Fonder 09) This seemed unfounded, as the Negroes were victimized by the white discriminative laws, preventing them from several veins of human life, and education is one among them. Blacks were not allowed to enter schools of the whites. They were not permitted to continue any educational careers and reaching a good level of their own. They did not have the right to dream of a superior formation and getting respectful jobs. The Negro was kept away from vital positions in the country. This was to inhibit any desires to long for better life or protest against the current situations. In his critical essay "How 'Bigger' was born"<sup>1</sup>, Richard Wright says:

The white neighbor decided to limit the amount of education his black neighbor could receive; decided to keep him off the police force and out of the local national guards; to segregate him residentially; to Jim Crow him in public places; restrict his participation in the professions and jobs; and to build up a vast, dense of racial superiority that would justify any act of violence taken against him to defend white dominance; further, to condition him to hope for little and to receive little without rebelling. (14)

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Wright was considered by many critics as Keneth Kinnamon "*His best critic*" (01). He was ready to explain the genesis of Native Son, analyze its personal and political significance, and defend it from racist attack. Within two weeks of its publication, Wright had spoken at Columbia University and at the 135<sup>th</sup> Street Branch of the New York Public Library. In which, Wright explained how the personality of Bigger Thomas crop up in his essay "How 'Bigger' was born".

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White America did not stop to issue racist legislation in order to stop the blacks and keep them illiterate. Furthermore, America's educational restrictions on the bulk of her Negro population were strengthened more and more. It was going to be a serious peril, daring to grant Negroes an opportunity to read a paper. Education, in effect, was seen as a vital mechanism in reinforcing the racial oppression. The white minds were conscious that the true one to constitute an issue and a challenge to the whites were those blacks attempting to education. Consequently, they had to be oppressed, before they could get it. In this context, Leon F. Litwack maintains:

Curtailing the educational opportunities of blacks, along with segregation and disfranchisement, were important mechanisms of racial control [. . .] A story that would make the rounds among blacks [. . .] revealed [...] a marvelous insight into the workings of the white mind. As he was leaving the railroad depot with a northern visitor, a southern white man saw two Negroes, one asleep and the other reading a newspaper. He kicked the Negro reading a newspaper. 'Would you please explain that?' the Northerner asked. 'I don't understand it. I would think that if you were going to kick one you would kick the lazy one who's sleeping.' The white southerner replied, 'That's not the one we're worried about.' (qtd in Warnes 02)

When holding a book became a danger, this means that the increasing segregation reached its ultimate blindness, justifying any susceptible outcomes of racial attacks. In addition, the whites hurt these blacks by making of them verbal segregation, using an arsenal of the white discriminative jargon. And therefore violence is, by no means, forgotten.

The Blacks were equally excluded from libraries. They cannot express their humanity in the world of books. Consequently, the whiteness aimed, moreover, at "*enslaving both the mind and the body*" (Dexter B. 40) Reading and writing were typically a white characteristic and habit. For that reason, they would not, by any means, allow a non Anglo-Saxon race share them all this. It was, indeed, their duty to inhibit any blacks, overstepping the boundaries of the white world. The black Bigger Thomas was wondering; why they were doing all that for his people? What were their sins in that country? What did the Negros do to be treated like that and be hated to that extent? Would the blacks be socially dangerous, if they were to grant a good education? What would the blacks be like if they were, socially speaking, recognized as human beings?

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When anyone reads the novel, he will have the impression that Wright does not give us detailed descriptions of Bigger Thomas's childhood and his educational line. It seems that Wright endeavors, intentionally, at letting the readers imagine Bigger Thomas's educational level, through some scenes. Explicitly, when the hero is asked about the period he spent in school or when longingly talking about his unachieved expectations.

Nonetheless, many critics draw parallels between Richard Wright and Bigger Thomas. James Baldwin announces that "*No American Negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in the skull*" (qtd in Bloom BMCVRW 10) Moreover, others made Thomas an ultimate expression of Wright. To the point, Keneth Kinnamon, in his article "Native Son: The Personal, Social, and Political Background", asserts that: "*Charles I. Glicksberg is speaking hyperbolically when he claims that 'Richard Wright is Bigger Thomas—one part of him anyway,' but adds Nevertheless, there is some truth in the assertion, and not merely in the general sense*" (10)

Then, since a shortage of information in Native Son is observed, it is possible to juxtapose Richard Wright's life with Bigger Thomas's one, as far as education is concerned. In a sense, Dan McCall in his article "An American Life" drew parallels between Richard Wright and Bigger Thomas. He maintains that:

Bigger says he was born in Mississippi, quit school at the eighth grade, had been in Chicago five years, and his father had been killed long ago in a riot in the South. In *Black Boy* we can see Richard Wright's similarity to Bigger: born in Mississippi, a formal schooling that ended at the eighth grade, bereft of his father at an early age, and going north to Chicago at the end of his adolescence. (23)

In Native Son, Bigger Thomas' background is obscure and his early life is a mystery. It appears in no details. However, we learn few about it just through his voice in the novel. First, when Bigger Thomas talks to Mr. Dalton in the meeting of granting him the position of the Dalton's driver, and second, when being questioned by Mrs. Dalton, if he ever had a wish to ameliorate his educational level or when Mary's communist friend Jan asked him some questions regarding his social background, after eating together in a restaurant belonging to black area. In Native Son Jan Erlone asks Bigger:

'Where are born, Bigger?'  
'In the south.'  
'Whereabouts?'

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'Mississippi'.  
'How far did go in school?'  
'To the eighth grade.'  
'Why did you stop?'  
'No money.'  
'Did you go in school in the North or South?'  
'Mostly in the South. I went two years up here.'  
[. . .]  
'You live with your people?'  
'My mother, brother, and sister.'  
'Where's your father?'  
'Dead.' (NS114)<sup>2</sup>

Bigger was obliged to leave school in early times to obtain some cents to support his needy family. For him, it was quite a very easy answer, when queried about the reason of his school leave. He said, "*No money*" (14). This money could possibly have given him a chance to join an aviation school, if he had had this. Nevertheless, with the white instinctual supremacy, it would not go through an easy task for Niggers to dream of this.

It is believed that Bigger Thomas is considered as Wright's spokesman and vehicle of ideas and words, aspirations and ambitions, journeys of pain and fear, trivial adventures and dreams of adolescence, cries the of racism wounds of the oppressed. And here, it is necessary to set the following questions: was deprivation of the right for education and knowledge a societal constraint contributing in stirring up violence in Bigger Thomas's spirit? Was it a psychological repression? Was ignorance a key means to prove his existence and satisfy the repression via modes of blood and violence? Supposedly, he had a chance to educate and work, would he to react in this way?

Bigger Thomas was under an overwhelmingly impressing environmentalism. He did not have an opportunity to accomplish his study. He dreamt, once to be an aviator. Yet, this was faint reality. The harrowing reality was that of the white's oppression. The following passage from Native Son illustrates the extent to which Bigger Thomas feels anguished by his white (countrymen). How bitter are the glimpses of his dreamy life and how harsh are his visions to the oppressor. In this dialogue with his gangster Gus, it is easy to sense how difficult and thorny to live in a community, where you feel you are not free. Richard Wright writes:

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<sup>2</sup> The dialogue is between Jan Erlone; the friend of Mary Dalton, who was smothered by Bigger Thomas. When driving them, the two discussed with Thomas many issues related to the Black Cause. Erlone asks Thomas about his social status. And Thomas says: "No money".

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‘I could fly one of them things if I had a chance’, Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself.  
Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from wall, squared his shoulders, doffed his cap, bowed low, and spoke with mock deference:  
‘Yessuh’.  
‘You go to hell’, Bigger said, smiling.  
‘Yessuh’, Gus said again.  
‘I could fly a plane if I had a chance’, Bigger said.  
‘If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane,’ Gus said.  
For a moment Bigger contemplated all the ‘ifs’ that Gus had mentioned. Then both boys broke into hard laughter, looking at each other, through squinted eyes. When their laughter subsided, Bigger said in a voice that was half-question and half-statement:  
[. . .]  
‘God, I’d like to fly up there in that sky’.  
‘God’ll let you fly when he gives you your wings up in heaven,’ Gus said. (54/55)

Wright himself was enchained by the Jim Crow laws.<sup>3</sup> These laws “*symbolized white supremacy.*” (Klarman 89) This Crowism, in fact, was about to erase the lightening side of Wright’s personality – the quest for knowledge – but for him it was the chance to prove his genius and place to humanity. In his autobiographical novel Black Boy, Wright shows his limited choice to break Jim Crow laws to obtain some books by H. L. Mencken. Mencken<sup>4</sup>. Wright was compelled to forge a note, using the following statement that hurt him from the inside, but only through it, he could have the books. Addressing the white librarian, Richard Wright was to take someone’s identity in order to have these books. He reports: “*Dear Madam: Will you please let this nigger boy – I used the word ‘nigger’ to make the librarian feel that I could not possibly be the author of the note – have some books by H. L. Mencken? I forged the white man’s name.*” (Black Boy 248)

In the novel, Bigger Thomas asks a question: ‘*It’s funny how the white folks treat us, ain’t it?*’ (NS 55) It is worth asking and worth answering as well. Bigger Thomas went on asking questions arising inside of him. They urge him to provide intelligible answers to appease his black curiosity. The questions directed to his friend Gus, who is in turn, astonished, puzzled and seemed paralyzed to reply or react to these big questions. Bigger Thomas amazed:

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Crow law is an American policy to keep the blacks apart from the whites. Blacks, through this law, do not have the right to enter school of the whites, get on buses or trains of whites or stopping at white restaurants and motels.

<sup>4</sup> H. L. Mencken. Mencken<sup>4</sup> is a writer, journalist, literary critic and the founder of *Black Mask* and *American Mercury* magazines. In his writings, he defended the middle classes and Wright read them with pleasure.

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‘Goddammit!’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘They don’t let us do nothing’

‘Who?’

‘The white folks’

‘You talk like you just now find that out’, Gus said.

‘Naw. But I just can’t get used to it’, Bigger said. ‘I swear to God I can’t. I know I oughtn’t think about it, but I can’t help it. Every time I think about it I feel like somebody poking a red hot iron down my throat. Goddammit, I look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. they can do things and we can’t. It just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-whole in the fence...’

‘Aw, ain’t no use feeling that way about it. It don’t help none’, Gus said.  
(NS 58)

Wright, actually, gives his hero a prophetic power to anticipate the upcoming happenings. Bigger senses a forthcoming awful disaster and a question mark is hanging over his fate. Bigger says: *‘Sometimes I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me’*. (58) Saying *“We black and they white”* is obviously an indication of the extent to which, the social and even the human hole between blacks and whites is wide. The Whites do not give the blacks chance to fly plane and run ships. Yet, in return, the blacks will not miss a chance of grinding, bombarding, slaughtering the whites, making them pay high tributes for that social marginalization. Bigger Thomas talks to Gus about speculations and fears from upcoming events. He doubts the fact that they are to be promising. As a consequence, his tone is a mixture of uncertainty, bitterness, grief, and defiance to the whites. These feelings of disillusionment and cynicism stem from the heritage of hatred as well as detestation of the blacks to the whites. The whites make the laws and Black Bigger must familiarize himself with it. Bigger Thomas went on expressing astonishment and asking:

‘Sometimes I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me’, Bigger spoke with a tinge of bitter pride in his voice.

‘What you mean?’, Gus asked, looking at him quickly. There was fear in Gus’s eyes.

‘I don’t know. I just feel that way . every time I get to thinking about me being black and they white, me being here and they being there, feel like something awful’s going to happen to me...’

‘Aw for chrissake! There ain’t nothing you can do about it. How come you want to worry yourself? You black and they make the laws.

‘Why they make us live in one corner of the city? Why don’t they let us fly planes and run ships...’ (58)

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Since his social environment did not give him a good level of schooling and being ignorant to English grammar, Bigger was about to be trapped, when he bought a pen and paper to write a letter to the Daltons asking for a ransom in return of their daughter. He wrote at the end of the letter: “*Do what this letter say*” (NS 216). Consequently, Robert Flegar argues that: “*the faulty grammar could have drawn suspicion to Bigger as a speaker of black English*” (SCTRW 47)

Thomas’s little knowledge – due to leaving school at early stage - is confronted by the underachievement of people of his skin. Segregation exercised by the white community made colored people with very low levels of attainment. Mike Cole maintains that: “*Racism is endemic and deeply ingrained in American life and that the cause of African-American underachievement is ‘institutional and structural racism’.*” (14)

All in all, Bigger Thomas is a product of a brutal culture that took its seeds from the deprivation of an educational environment, which was supposedly to produce another Bigger Thomas. Namely, Bigger is not merely neglected by his educative handicap, he is rather victimized by a cruel culture, making an enormous social constraint. Kimberly W. Benston maintains that: “*One mode of interpretation, what we might term the Boris Max School, views Bigger as the warped product of a hideously cruel culture, his murders the distasteful but inevitable conclusion of a long process of distortion and subjugation.*” (57)

The sociologist Madonna G. Constantine defines education as: “*Means of providing for the inter-generational transmission of values, beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals, and sensibilities along with the knowledge of why these things must be sustained.*” (129) Therefore, education is more important than learning writing and reading. It is in a way, a train to transpose the values, traditions, ritualistic practices as well as the sensibilities of someone’s being. However, does Bigger Thomas have this opportunity to sense his social status and feel that he has roots in the American society? Is he to be blamed for murdering two girls<sup>5</sup> providing that he had gone through good schooling?

Schools are among the most important socializing institutions in society. And Education plays a significant part in social integration process. Thomas, in effect, was socially handicapped. For him, it is almost impossible to achieve equality among the whites. Wright in, “How ‘Bigger’ was born”, laments: “*In Dixie there are two worlds, the white world and*

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas killed two girls: the white Marry Dalton and his black girlfriend Bessie Mears.

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*the black world, and they are physically separated. There are white schools and black schools, white businesses and black businesses, white graveyards and black graveyards, for all I know, a white God and a black God.*" ("How 'Bigger' was born" 13)

This racial separation led to widening the hole between the blacks and the whites. The latter exploited the Negroes and incessantly oppressed them. They prevented them from buying a car, to rent an apartment, to shop in a department store, or trying to get a job. In a number of instances, the African American man was quoted a higher price for the car than his White male counterpart; blacks were told that there were no available apartments for rent, while the Whites were offered an apartment immediately afterward.

James Baldwin argued that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society and both depending on the same reality. For him, the blacks needn't have society of their own. They rather want a society, where colorism does not exist and the equality prevails. He furthermore comments: "*What is meant by a new society is one in which inequalities will disappear, in which vengeance will be exacted; either there will be no oppressed at all, or the oppressed and the oppressor will change places.*" (21)

The 'colorism' produces a great disillusionment among the African American generations. Hence, many psychologists were disappointed with the effects of these racist micro-aggressions on the psychology of African Americans. Psychologically speaking, it leaves deep sentiments pain and sullenness. In a sense, the fruits of anger, hunger, ignorance, and indifference are already ripening to reap. Having the hearts broken, those Negroes would one day revolt to get fear out of them. They would start a revolution to secure social change. A holy philosophy worth to save the oppressed from racial over-exploitation is adopted and decidedly violence is the inevitable arm and harvest.

## 2- Strains of Social Fear and Violence

Being positioned in a dark corner of the world and being completely disclosed intellectually by the society, where he became a grown up, Bigger Thomas found himself in a jail of fear and anxiety. Bigger is not really at the apex of his name's symbolic significance.<sup>6</sup> His bigness vanished, ever since he was born an American native son.

Educational constraints are not the unique impositions of crippling oppressive legacy. Fear is similarly another constraint that American society imposed on Bigger Thomas. Fear was once more a factor, which produced one aspect of Bigger Thomas. The American society that gave birth to him, did not grant him social security and insurance. Bigger Thomas as many other blacks in the Black Belt were vulnerable to manifold practices of white violence. Sometimes, they are justified on Jim Crow grounds and other times, the white force is not compelled to provide justifications, when blacks fell in violence traps. It is, by virtue of their white superiority, possible to punish the blacks to satisfy a sharp white thirsty and a strong desire to hold pleasure. This white sadism stemmed from three hundred years of violence, abuse, and unrepndiness of the Negros.

This dichotomy constituted a social constraint. This to say, violence exercised by the whites led to feelings of fear, dread, and the absence of social confidence among the Negros. This kind of social fear produced new modes of self- expression and Violence once again turned out to be a black arm. This spiral development is to be analyzed, in so far as violence is concerned.

Violence, as a matter of fact, was overwhelmingly used to tame the blacks, since their arrival to new world.<sup>7</sup> They were brought naked, tied and against their will. They were kidnapped or bought not to live in the New World as free, prosperous, and human individuals of the American country. They came to be the objects of the whites' oppression, racism, and torture. Native Son is regarded as a story of three centuries of slavery and colonization. To the point, Babacar M'Baye maintains: "*Native Son belongs in the intellectual tradition in which Richard Wright denounces the impact of slavery and colonization on African Americans.*"(75)

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Wright's diction in Native Son was very powerful. He ironically called his protagonist Big(ger) Thomas. Yet, in fact, Thomas is not big in a white society.

<sup>7</sup> In of fact, slaves brought to the New World against their will. Namely, they were kidnapped by other blacks and then obliged to go to Europe or America. Their owners used even violence to tame them. In their Slavery in America, Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, explain the American experience of slavery. Violence and laws are, mainly, discussed. (193)

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Bigger Thomas is an African American to live the bitterness of the African American ordeal. Felgar Robert states that: *“The central character in ‘Native Son’ is indeed a native son, a product, of the United States, but not one for whom anyone wants to take responsibility. Three centuries of slavery, oppression, and racism have resulted in the creation of a young black man who is intimidated by whites.”* (SCTRW52)

The whites succeeded in creating such a complex of fear through racial oppression. Not allowing any blacks to go beyond the boundaries of the ghetto. Bigger was denied of the right to enjoy the economic, social, cultural, and political core of the American success. Many prospects of his American society passed him by. Wright uses the irony to reinforce the point. Joyce Ann Joyce, in this context, avers that: *“The irony begins with the title of the novel, which underlines what Ellison refers to as the ritualistic social forms that deny Bigger the right to enjoy the fruits of his American heritage. The white world view forbids Bigger, a “native son,” to expand beyond the social, economic, and political limits of his Black community.”* (32)

Throughout his life, Bigger was afraid and since he wanted to fight his fear, he found himself trapped in a maze of violence. He could not understand the nature of this fear and then cannot determine or control his conduct, actions, and reactions. That’s why, he was unable to figure out what poor Mary Dalton -the white girl he murdered- aimed to do for the sake of supporting the Negroes and understand their Cause. His dread was original; however, the mode of its expression was dramatic and painful. Frantz Fanon<sup>8</sup> analyzing Bigger’s fear proclaims that:

It is Bigger Thomas—he is afraid, he is terribly afraid. He is afraid, but of what is he afraid? Of himself. No one knows yet who he is, but he knows that fear will fill the world when the world finds out. And when the world knows, the world always expects something of the Negro. He is afraid lest the world know, he is afraid of the fear that the world would feel if the world knew.” (107)

Wright saw himself a victim of white discrimination and whenever meeting whites, feelings of fear condensed. In his Black Boy, he tells us about the impact of a white face on his psychology: *“His ‘white’ face created a new fear in me. I was remembering the tale of the*

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<sup>8</sup> In his, Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon maintains that violence is so necessary for Bigger Thomas. For him, ‘Violence’ is impelled by consciousness; violence is not a helpless reflex, a gross futility, an insane outburst. But the violent blood baths of Bigger Thomas are at the mercy of the system which engendered them.

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*'white' man who had beaten the 'black' boy*". (30) Wright's life turned out to be a permanent fright: "A dread of white people now came to live permanently in my feelings and imagination" (71)

In his walking to the Dalton family, Bigger crossed big, clean, and beautiful streets of a white region. He was thinking of the white order and civilization; however, his ideas of white folks were cut by a big fear. He had a stressful dread stemming from the possibility that he might be caught and then accused of robbery or raping someone, as long as he was in the white world.

When arriving to the Dalton family and intending to knock on the door, Thomas is stuck with a sentimental rush of fear and paralysis. Is he to carry on or return back as he does not want to venture something and gain nothing? This psychological fear of the whiteness pictures the very dim between white skin and colored people and the complex of inferiority inherited with time. In fact, this is the core element in the racial system. Biologically speaking, the white Americans have a superiority – the whiteness – to give them priority over colored people. Standing on religious grounds for supremacy, they sustained from their European ancestors. Europeans believe that they are given a divine power to enslave the Non-European races. For them, blacks are inferior for the sins of Ham<sup>9</sup>. George M. Fredrickson explains:

When Europeans of the late medieval and early modern periods invoked the will of God to support the view that differences between Christians and Jews or between Europeans and Africans were ineradicable, they were embracing a racist doctrine. The curses on Jews for the killing of Christ and on blacks for the sins of Ham could serve as super naturalist equivalents of biological

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<sup>9</sup> The Curse of Ham also called the curse of Canaan refers to the Biblical incident in Genesis. , Ham's father Noah placed a curse upon Ham's son Canaan, apparently for something abominable, Ham did. Namely, Noah was the first to cultivate the vine and make wine. The drunken Noah fell asleep naked, and his son Ham "saw his father's nakedness. Ham told his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, who then covered Noah with a cloak while averting their eyes. When Noah awoke and "knew what his younger son had done to him", he delivered a curse, not on Ham, but on Ham's son Canaan, who was condemned to be a "servant of servants" to the other sons of Ham, as well as a servant to Shem and Japheth. The objective of the story was to justify the subjection of the Canaanites to the Israelites. Yet, racial interpretations of the "curse of Ham" were used in later times to justify the enslavement of black Africans. In other words, Africans are fairly enslaved, since the whites are blessed.

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determinism for those seeking to deny humanity to a stigmatized group. (51)

Bigger does not want to be judged by the color of his skin, but by the content of his social status, if he has ever had. But, he never enjoys a social identity. He effectively looks for it. This is the social reality that shaped Bigger Thomas. He is a killer due to the white classification. He is looked as a gorilla or a beast of prey and these animals are without a human consciousness. Why then, Bigger Thomas was not given a chance to prove his humanity only via violence and blood. According to the researcher Haney-López, “*Races are not biologically differentiated groupings but rather social constructions. Race exists alongside a multitude of social identities that shape and are themselves shaped by the way in which race is given meaning.*” (XIII)

This whiteness prevents him from shaking hands with Jan and standing very astonished. Native Son’s narrator says: “*Jan smiled broadly, then extended an open palm toward him. Bigger’s entire body tightened with suspense and fear.*” (NS 106) This fear is the psychological heritage of three centuries of subservience and submission to the ‘whiteness’ that oppressed non-white, whatever one’s wealth, knowledge, sex, or religion. What counts is h/her whiteness.

Wright reinforces the idea of the white supremacy and the authority over the ‘Bigger Thomases’ he already listed in his essay “How ‘Bigger’ was born”. He comes to a conclusion that the blacks had never been looked as humans, otherwise, there would be no terrorist Bigger Thomas. Yet, the whites look at themselves the best to any other race. At any rates, blacks are black and since “blacks” up to the whites are synonymous to ‘nothingness’, they are treated out of human norms. They are utterly ignored. Robert Felgar admits that whites looked to blacks through racist glasses. He puts it as follows:

To Wright, whites fail to see blacks as human beings; if they did, there would be no Bigger Thomases. But since, as Wright points out, whites think their color is a legitimate source of authority, most are unwilling to relinquish their prejudices because their sense of superiority depends on seeing blackness as a sign of inferiority: acknowledging Bigger’s humanity, instead of regarding him as subhuman, would exact a price higher than they are willing to pay—namely, his equality and their concomitant demotion from the top of the racial pyramid. (SCTRW 54)

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Thomas fears the whiteness. His fear culminates, when he was helping the white daughter of the Daltons getting to bed, because she is very drunk and very weak to reach her room. He cannot leave her in this miserable situation. Hence, he decides to help her. When he gets Mary to bed, he hears some mumblings of a person coming; it is Mrs. Dalton. The woman is coming to see her daughter. Bigger Thomas now is in a delicate situation. The white Daltons would ask him what he is doing at very late time of the night in their daughter's bed room. He *"Turned and a hysterical terror seized him, as though he were falling from a great height in dream. A white blur was standing by the door, silent, ghostlike. It filled his eyes and gripped his body. It was Mrs. Dalton. He wanted to knock her out of his way and bolt from the room."* (NS 125)

Bigger Thomas is filled with fear and terror. This fear is not less than a societal constraint tying him. And the way to save himself from the accusation of raping the white girl is inevitably a murder. No way to escape the white oppression only, when being violent and brutal. His violence is a violence of dreadfulness, which Wright describes and intensifies by a multitude of naturalistic details both of the crime and of Bigger's emotions. Assisting the drunkenly immobile Mary Dalton to her room is a cause to meet death. Not to speak about the sexual thoughts about her that were forbidden to black men. In other words, it was a black taboo and considered more perilous than the killing itself. For that purpose and during the trial, the States attorney is repeatedly saying that poor Virgin Mary had been laid before she died.

In Mary's room, it first comes to Thomas's mind knocking down the blind woman and escape. Nevertheless, he attempts to silence Mary so that she could not indicate his presence in her bedroom to her blind mother. In that time in America, blacks did not have any chance to keep alive, when having sex with white women. It is simply a white law and a black taboo imposed on the blacks. His fear is transformed to a black damaging machine, subverting the white strength. No matter what will happen, what counts for the moment is to cover his existence in Mary's room. He does not mean to smother the girl. Yet, she suffocated. Her mother is in away responsible for her death. Bigger Thomas kills her for the reason that he is afraid and his violence erupts as his wrath, rage, and irritation reach their apogee. Accordingly, his inclination to violence is justifiable. Jerry H. Bryant maintains: *"He is the violent outlet for anger and frustration, an example of fearlessness and autonomy. But he is a threat to communal stability and achievement. The uneducated folk are inclined to accept the*

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*bad man in all his disorderliness and to grasp the tragic implications of his impulsive violence.” (04)*

Thomas used the pillow to appease the drunken girl, but accidentally he smothered her resulting in a violent murder. The cards were stacked against him and his fear of the whiteness would unmercifully lead him to electric chair, despite the fact that he did not mean to kill her, he did. Violence now is no longer a white means to terrify the blacks. It becomes a repercussion and the effect of racism could then be sensed on both; the oppressor and the oppressed. He did not perpetuate the crime deliberately, save for the matter went worse. In Bigger's inside, there were feelings a great pride and euphoria. He killed a white woman; now the myth of white supremacy faded away.

Thomas is a stereotype or a 'bad nigger'<sup>10</sup>, who represents his oppressed black community. Negroes are born to find all social promises dead, all human faiths shaken, and society puts them in a very remote margin of the American social scene. It seemed to exclude them from playing any active roles or scenes in the social play, but melodramatic ones. They are deprived of a good education and if any, it does not seem to openly enable them to fully integrate the American social pot. Further and more importantly, society practices ferocious acts against them. Violence causes them physical and psychological harm and fills them with fear and fright. Indeed, society cannot grant them social security and mutual understanding. Society actually oppresses them. Nevertheless, this society inversely enables the Bigger Thomases, who lack social consciousness, express themselves and in violent tones. The victim suddenly becomes the killer. Though, the consequences according to Richard Wright are harsh. The yield of wounds and tears is so great to be borne, not merely by the blacks. The whites also cry and bleed. They need a social security. And social remedy is to proceed. Wright writes: *“Eventually, the whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price. There were shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or their spirits broken.”* (“How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” 13)

Violence, for Thomas, becomes a sense of freedom. In order to provide a social healing to his broken hurt, it is compulsory to make use of violence to discard his social fears. The latter stands a constraint in his road to be a good person, to dream like the whites to fly a plane, get a good and vital position in his society, etc... To live the way the whites want him

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<sup>10</sup> “Bad nigger”: According to Jerry H. Bryant *“Bigger Thomas, is doubtless the best-known instance of the “bad nigger” literary type”* (04)

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to live is impossible. He kills Mary Dalton and his girl friend Bessie Mears so that he can survive. Bigger Thomas is a representative of his community's fellows. Native sons of American society turn out to be killers. White racism makes America to reproduce maniacs and criminals. Felgar, again, asserts: "*What Bigger Thomas signifies on this level is that the United States is producing homicidal maniacs in its ghettos and that its worst nightmares about some young black males are true, but also that American society itself is responsible for its Bigger Thomases.*" (SCTRW 53)

In a word, killing is the consequence of psychological repression. In the back unconscious side of the American psychology, there lay psychological subjugation and inhibition. Some black wills want to find their way to realization. Yet, criminality was the only medium and its ultimate expression.

### **Section Two: Poverty and Mirage of Social Success: The Contradiction of the American Ambition**

The re-assessment of the American Dream in its social dimension was seemingly to characterize the twentieth century American literature. An American Tragedy sheds light on the dream of social success in the industrialized American society. It provides also a description for enthusiastic feelings to realize this dream. James F. Smith in article, "Tom Wolfe's Bonfire of the Vanities: A Dreiser Novel for the 1980s", maintains that: "*[Dreiser's works] explore the pleasures and perils of the American Dream set against the backdrop of their respective contemporary urban scenes.*" (136)

And so, a plenty of literary works handling the idea came. An American Tragedy coincided with the Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece The Great Gatsby (1925)<sup>11</sup>. By chance, the two works of fiction discuss the failure of an American myth called 'American Dream': "*An American Tragedy offers a haunting critique of the failure of the so-called American Dream of success for a representative, lower-class seeker, a variation on the very different portrayal of that dream's betrayal and bankruptcy given us (through an intriguing coincidence in our literary history) in The Great Gatsby in the same year, 1925.*" (Newlin 22)

Dreiser handled the idea basically with his protagonist Clyde Griffiths. This young American wants to achieve social prosperity, economic success, wealth and many other things

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<sup>11</sup> Many critics noted that Scott Fitzgerald and Theodore Dreiser delineate the idea of the failure of the American Dream in The Great Gatsby and An American Tragedy. The two novels appeared in 1925 and discussing the same topic.

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that might enable any other one to indulge in life of wealth, amorous adventures, and personal freedom. Material success is the core belief of the American Dream and its vivid motif; materialism including very classy clothes, stylish automobiles, top refined dinners, soirees, etc. Martin Bucco, illustrating the point, asserts that:

Dreiser's protagonist-victim lusts after the American Dream of Success. He is disposed to the acquisition of material wealth in order to buy expensive clothes, to be chauffeured around in handsome automobiles, and to dine in luxurious restaurants. He yearns for amorous adventures, both erotic and romantic. He trusts in adventurous companions, pleasure seekers like himself who indulge in parties, brightly lit and full of music. (33)

The social failure of Clyde Griffiths, his frustration, feelings of disillusionment and black fate were unbearable harvest of decline and bitterness. None assuaged his pain and sorrow, but the electric chair. Clyde is a young American seeking successful adventurous of social success and a man of promising expectations. He follows the illusory traces of social success. He has great expectations to achieve and dreams to come true in the wondrous land of the American Dream. His dreams are greater than the misery of his poor evangelical parents. His hopes are as full of life as the American energetic city. He dreams of being rich and hankering for a better life of hope and pursuit of happiness.

In fact, the dream is as old as America itself. It sailed with Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic and landed on the new world, grounding itself into the soil of that land. So, later it was strongly taken by the settlers. Critics claim that this dream was gently fondled by sons of the country, who adopted the ideology of the dream and enforced it. They, generation after generation, worked hard so as to keep it vivid and save it from different perils. Clyde was intently listening to Adam's soft word calling:

American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it. (Cullen 04)

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The American dream is highly rooted in the history of American civilization, from John Winthrop's "*City upon a hill*"<sup>12</sup> to current times America. The pilgrims aspired that the new land constituted a cornerstone of a bright future country, where they could live, breathe, dream, prosper, and succeed without the constraints of old Europe. It was actually the land of chances and sensation to all immigrants, whatever their social standing or racial backgrounds. Indeed, America was very promising and stories of the successful American experience were told here, there, and all over the world. America promises its new comers a vast range of material and spiritual ambitions. It is this side of paradise, where the sun of prosperity also rises sending eminent rays of hope and life. America, for them is a land of no political supervision and tyranny, existed before. It is the wind of freedom and humanity blowing. Vernon Louis Parrington argues that: "*From the very beginning this new land was a symbol for man's aspirations America was a new continent where was neither tradition nor authority to make men conform to any set rules. The new world made men dream and some of them put their dreams on paper*" (03)

The American Dream, by definition, is: "*the values and social standards that people traditionally try to achieve in the US, such as DEMOCRACY, equal rights and wealth*" (Oxford dictionary<sup>46</sup>) This ideology traces its origins from the very ancient and prominent tenets of an American farmer John De Crevecoeur,<sup>13</sup> in his letter entitled, "What is an American?" In other words, De Crevecoeur was among the first to set the pillars of the American Dream. He once wrote: "*here individuals of all nations are melted in a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.*" (Lemay 120)

Harold Bloom in his book, Bloom's Literary Themes the American Dream, points out that it is possible for a nation, namely the American to secure happiness, prosperity, and personal achievement, by means of personal freedom. He claims that, "*It must be possible to have a nation in which all of us are free to develop our singularities into health, prosperity, and some measure of happiness in self-development and personal achievement.*" (XV)

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<sup>12</sup> John Winthrop was among the first pilgrims to reach America. Winthrop had been elected governor of Massachusetts. As early as 1622, Winthrop had called England 'this sinfull land' (Gray 35) But in the New World, the newcomers must build "city upon a hill" or a city of utopia. He maintains that they shall be a city upon a hill, since the eyes of the world are upon them.

<sup>13</sup> John De Crevecoeur is a French intellectual, who immigrated to the England in 1750 and then to Canada. Crevecoeur left Canada and went to New York in 1759, where he settled to work in farming. He married and got three children. Within a period of nine years, he composed his Letters from an American Farmer (published in 1778).

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The American Dream is great to be reduced into few pages. It is, in fact, the philosophy that hugely helped shaping the identity of America as a whole. Its first roots struck in the Declaration of Independence. All men are created equal and they naturally have right to social success and pursuit of happiness. The second paragraph of the Independence Declaration inspires people and blazes their minds, crystallizing the philosophy of what would be known as the 'American Dream'. America committed herself to: "*We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.*" (Lemay 689)

This dream shone first with a puritan sun, even though they did not allude directly to it. Yet, they spoke eloquently of the excellent chance that this American Dream seemed to give to its newcomers, who expressed the idea with sweat and labor of their own. The illiterate immigrants coming to America from all over the world got a good interpretation of it via hard working and sweating, without any linguistic barriers. Jim Cullen claims that:

Pilgrims may not have actually talked about the American Dream, but they would have understood the idea: after all, they lived it as people who imagined a destiny for themselves. So did the Founding Fathers. So did illiterate immigrants who could not speak English but intuitively expressed rhythms of the Dream with their hands and their hearts. (05)

A dream of better life, equality, ownership and wealth, a dream for a promising tomorrow full of hope and significance are under the umbrella of a tremendous ideology. In order to achieve all these, any one must work alone depending on himself. He must start with 'self-reliance'. In his essay, "self-reliance", Ralph Waldo Emerson points out: "*There's a time in everyman's education when he arrives to the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as he took his portion; though that the universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till*" (100)

### 1- The American Dream: Poverty and Mirage of Success.

Desperate of his situation and his parent's shabby job of evangelical missions, the protagonist of An American Tragedy, Clyde Griffiths decides to start a journey seeking success. His parents seemed never to enjoy or put their four children in the right path of achieving self-improvement. In spite of his ignorant and careless parents, Clyde makes clear that life is a vast and tough and social success compels labor. Thus, no alternative left for him only to start a journey the sooner the better, relying on his sweat to reach it.

Clyde runs after the mirage of success. His efforts to realize the fabulous prospects of the American Dream are tremendous. However, the great despair of this illusory utopian dream produces a large rift of sadness and depression, not possible to fill in just with death. Clyde's dream proved amorphous and precarious. He grew up to climb ladder of poverty and reach pinnacle of misery.

Clyde is not satisfied with his life. He has great expectations of independence, expensive clothes, worldly friends, and good times. He wanted to follow the example of his uncle Samuel Griffiths personifying the success of the American Dream. His uncle owns a collar and shirt company. Samuel is wealthy, a man of value and of a great social position. This man grasped the right meaning of the American Dream myth: 'Self-dependence' and 'working hard' are the key steps for developing character. By contrast to his miserable father, Clyde is completely proud of his uncle and therefore wished to follow his example. He loathes his family's poverty and dependency on evangelical mission to obtain some money to keep alive. New clothes, good food, and some social rituals such as parties and ceremonies are forbidden to schedule. Clyde puts all the blame of his pain on his socially handicapped family that causes him shame and embarrassment through religion. Throughout his life: "*Clyde has seen his family's narrow reliance on prayer and precept bring no success, only trouble. His resigned father, unlike his rich uncle, is a failure. Clyde loathes his family's poverty and ignorance, their inability to help him and to give him the things he craves. He resents his parents' embarrassing religious labors in dreary mission houses and on city streets.* (Bucco 33)

For Clyde, to dress fine and make liaisons is the achievement of his lifetime. Succeeding to attract some beautiful girls entails him to start an iconoclasm, breaking puritanical and moral codes of his parents. He decided to challenge all his parental traditions, which made him look poor in eyes of girls appreciating his handsome look. He is determined, more

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importantly, to experience society with its amazing lights of success and failure. Clyde wishes to live a life absolutely different from the one he leads.

At the age of thirteen, he starts asking questions buried in his deep disillusionment and poverty. At the same time, his body begins sending instinctual messages to feminine beauty. He wants to prove his existence and in a good shape. Yet, his social calamity of poverty and deprivation compelled him to be “*rebellious and hence lethargic at times.*” (AAT 29) Clyde grows aware of his appearance. It is very hurting for him to not look as handsome and elegant as youths around his age. He asks himself some questions and ending with cursing of his luck. Why was he not born rich? What would feel like if he ever were rich? He was born to see no sign of good life. He is no longer able to bear the others’ feelings of mercy and compassion towards him. In the direction of the same idea, the An American Tragedy narrator tells about Clyde’s life:

Incidentally by that time the sex lure or appeal had begun to manifest itself and he was already intensely interested and troubled by the beauty of the opposite sex, its attractions for him and his attraction for it. And, naturally and coincidentally, the matter of his clothes and his physical appearance had begun to trouble him not a little—how he looked and how other boys looked. It was painful to him now to think that his clothes were not right; that he was not as handsome as he might be, not as interesting. What a wretched thing it was to be born poor and not to have any one to do anything for you and not to be able to do so very much for yourself! (14)

At the odds of his romantic expectations, Clyde is very poor and cannot attain what he aspires, especially remaining under the authority of his ridiculous parents. Even when his sister Esta<sup>14</sup> left the home, Clyde is deeply convinced that he and his brother and two sisters are at the edge of this world of luxury. They just immerse in a sharp poverty. They do not even have sum of money to meet the basic needs of life. He thinks that his sister made a decision bidding farewell to misery. Esta thought it was high time she started materialistic pleasure. Dreiser writes: “*She was to have new and better clothes than she had ever known, delicious adventures, love. She would travel with him and see the great world. She would never need to trouble more about anything save him.*” (16)

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<sup>14</sup> Clyde’s sister (Esta Griffiths) elopes with an actor at the beginning of the novel. The religious parents grow ashamed and anxious about their daughter’s deed. Later, Esta was abandoned pregnant.

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Writing within naturalistic parameters, Dreiser had the opportunity to appropriately approach the social constraints of the American society. Linda L. Stein, to this point, asserts: “*Criticizing American social order with less subtlety than the realists, naturalistic writers such as Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane focused on society’s fallen, depicting the poor and diseased as the unwitting victims of their environment.*” (X)

Naturalistically speaking, the family’s poverty does not allow Clyde to have a good education, which was bitterly neglected. For him, it is a real handicap and a serious social defect and hard to repair. Unlike boys and girls of his age, his poor education is an obstruction for getting a good job. His education is a constraint due to his parent’s carelessness as well as to their unstable residence, owing to their multiple travels. Consequently, assuming a good job in his society is almost impossible. It is a grave problem to solve or to catch up. Moreover, achieving success and social accomplishment require the minimum of a good level but Clyde in the whole is out. Dreiser maintains:

For at fifteen, and even a little earlier, Clyde began to understand that his education, as well as his sisters’ and brother’s, had been sadly neglected. And it would be rather hard for him to overcome this handicap, seeing that other boys and girls with more money and better homes were being trained for special kinds of work. How was one to get a start under such circumstances? (AAT 13)

Because of his complex of inferiority, he is not willing to bring peers to his home in Kansas. That’s why, he always avoids friends and prefers all the time playing alone. Thus, accumulations of unconfidence and frustration are rooted in his childhood. As if it were huge damaging forces standing a barrier, preventing him to understand his social environment. Clyde left school at fifteen and sought job. The latter could provide him with money and the pleasure that gives meaning to his life. In similar context, Keith Newlin argues: “*Having had his schooling disrupted many times by his parents’ multiple moves and yearning to begin his movement into the material world they so shun, Clyde quits school at age fifteen to seek jobs that will give him the more meaningful, worldly education of paramount value to all major characters.*” (19)

Clyde, moreover, is ready to lie, saying that he had studied mathematics at the university in a case is asked about the level of education, (by beautiful girls or by men) who

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frequent the Green Davidson Hotel. He is an American Dream seeker and American Dream seekers might fall in self-deception. The latter makes all the paces go wrong.

As mentioned earlier, the Griffiths family is trapped in poverty and material deprivation. But, what lightens the family's social hardships is religion. Yet, Clyde regards it as the source of the family's desolation. Because of their religious interests, Clyde's parents grew unconscious about the future of their children. They did not think of a serious professional training or a respectful job to save their children from the other's compassion. In this sense, training and parental supervision constitute another social severe constraint more or less taking necessary part in shaping Clyde's agonizing fate. Dreiser again writes: "*They did not understand the importance or the essential necessity for some form of practical or professional training for each and every one of their young ones. Instead, being wrapped up in the notion of evangelizing the world, they had neglected to keep their children in school in any one place.*" (AAT 22)

In a country like the United States, the miserable Griffiths family desperately needs everything. They are left without necessities of life varying from food to clothes, not to speak of some pleasures other Americans acquainted with. *An American Tragedy's* narrator describes the social and material condition of the poor family: "*the family was always 'hard up,' never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures which seemed common enough to others. And his father and mother were constantly proclaiming the love and mercy and care of God for him and for all.*" (14)

Clyde is highly absorbed by life of luxurious features. Therefore, his movement to working in soda fountain grants him chance to have an ice-cream. In his childhood, he longed for an ice cream. Yet, society kept him away. This made him live with a Freudian repression. Yet, his way to achieve striking prospects can be possible, after having the new job.

Clyde's new experience was not as fruitful as he expected. Consequently, he changed the destination to the Green Davidson hotel. There, he explores a new life and arrives to grasp: what does it mean to be rich? He senses the grandeur of rich people: "*Such grandeur. This, then, most certainly was what it meant to be rich, to be a person of consequence in the world—to have money. It meant that you did what you pleased. That other people, like himself, waited upon you. That you possessed all of these luxuries. That you went how, where and when you pleased.*" (AAT 33)

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This new work opens a window to earthly paradise of grace and beauty. Glamorous girls will like his gentle look and appreciate his well refined appearance. This first materialistic conquest makes him rediscover the exact significance of being wealthy. Through this work, Clyde would: *“Be able to wear such a suit with such ease and air! To be able to talk to a girl after the manner and with the sang-froid of some of these gallants! What a true measure of achievement! No good-looking girl, as it then appeared to him, would have anything to do with him if he did not possess this standard of equipment.”* (21)

Clyde gains personal freedom and put the first pace of the one thousand miles journey. He sets his agenda, seeking success, at the odds of the social heavy strains hindering him. He hides everything for his parents, who were not able to gather the full import of the new environment of their son, because they never stopped at a hotel of such luxury or ate at a restaurant of high price. They are simply needy, poor, and miserable characters of their difficult environmental setting.

Clyde eventually began achieving prosperity. But, society where he lives imposes on him constraints hindering him to evolve socially and financially. He took part in an accident of a stolen car resulting in a death of a girl. And later, he murdered the poor mill girl Roberta Alden. It is, in fact, the contradiction of the American ambition. As it might be rosy, it can be mortal. In this sense, rising up in American society of the time is a far-reached dream. It is a mirage of success or untrue, as though might be true.

This is the very paradoxical contradiction of American ambition. It turned out to be a deadly reason just like a consequence. Dreiser has stated repeatedly that the desire to rise up socially and financially in modern America often holds the very seeds by which such desires are wholly denied. This holds especially true for the poors of America, who are most desperate to accomplish higher status and least equipped to properly do so. In pursuing a better life for himself, Clyde is doing exactly what is expected of him by the American society. However, in murdering Roberta, he overstepped the boundaries of the society in which he wanted to excel. Is murder a necessary part of his actions and thus, an acceptable part of the American Dream? Is society to acknowledge its responsibility for that crime? More importantly, what is wrong with Clyde and his dreams? Is it wrongness in the social standards or social norms or not well grasped by its practitioners? Is Clyde in this case a prey or a victim of the American Dream?

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Clyde is victimized by the somber, reflective, and destructive mood of his society. All this contributed to the destruction and downfall of this American Dream seeker. Clyde is killed twice. The first one, when his social equipment was not as serious as the challenges and perils of twentieth century American society. And the second one is when he was electrocuted. His family plays a significant role in drawing of last sad scenes of the novel. It is true that Clyde is naïve just like his poor and needy family. His parents do not know that they send him to a mortal environmentalism and game of chance, without any necessary weapon to face the lethal social machine. His poverty and his expectations of luxury, his poor education and his prospects for professional success, his rootlessness and his aspirations to illusory horizons of high status and contradiction of the American ambition are really the social constraints to bring up Clyde to his tragic end. Youthful Clyde trapped in the bald contradiction of the American success and paid the high tribune of his life. Social inhibitions of his unconscious wishes, finally, led him face his tragic end.

### **2- Sexual Constraints and Lustful Death**

The new world Clyde is about to explore is full of problems. It entails a careful movement and a slow intent paces. However, being poor, deprived of pleasures and being away from world of beauty as well as feminine realm, Clyde feels as if it were a heavenly paradise opened to him. It is the first time in his lifetime to come in direct touch with beautiful ladies and glamorous flappers. He wins a chance and he has to seize it. However, sexual deprivation proves to be some a further social constraint.

Clyde feels great frustration with stylish, attractive, and modern women. He all the time dreams of having sex with them and passing fabulous times. He desires for them. And consequently, his largest dream is sustaining a successful social marriage from a lady of wealth and affluence. When it seemed impossible for a boy descended from a rootless, poor and penniless family, he constructs a dream of acquiring wealth and spending it on bar girls in order to gain their approbation and sense of satisfaction. On the contrary, society has something else to powerfully impose, it is social ignorance. Donald Pizer, in this context, argues: *“The novel [An American Tragedy] is not merely a story of crime and punishment but of how a young man's life is frozen by his nature and experience into an inflexible pattern and how society ignores this reality in judging him.* (The Novels of Theodore Dreiser 233)

But like most of Dreiser's characters, Clyde Griffiths falls down because of the American pursuit of material comfort and wealth. The latter turned out to be often the source of agony

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and pain. The young Griffiths was expecting to chase the American Dream. Conversely, he has been chased by the mirage of the American Dream (Money, sex, success, and so forth). In the end, they could hardly assume the dramatic fate – the price of their dreams. In similar vein, Richard Gray avers:

All Dreiser's major protagonists suffer from a need that their lives should assume dramatic form; and they suffer not so much because they cannot fulfill this need as because they do not really understand it. Wealth, worldly success, sexual gratification are the only aims they can know or name, but none of these reassures them or curbs their restlessness. They grapple for money, they wound themselves trying to climb to fame and fortune, yet they remain outcasts, existential orphans, sullen and bewildered: always hopeful for some sign that will release them from their craving for a state of grace or, at least, illumination. (364/5)

Theodore Dreiser himself had sexual yearnings and sentimental longings for girls. He was just like his protagonist Clyde, a daydreamer of sex- fulfillment and pleasure. Pizer qualified him as a dreamy, moody youth full of romantic ideals and the biting pull of sex. Both of them (Theodore and Clyde) could not sustain the chemist attractions and rapidly involved in love affairs. Their sexual Freudian repression is unbearable and out of their free will, they act.

Clyde's social journey becomes that of illusory dreams related to social success in building good social relationships with women. His hunger for feminine tenderness and deep thirst for sex are his spring of dynamism and zealness in life. He is, all the time, daydreaming. Martin Bucco noted that Clyde is a daydreamer. He claims that: "*He [Clyde] dreams of the future and, growing nostalgic, feels that he could manage even Hortense now. [. . .] After the evening with the Griffithses, Clyde daydreams of a love affair with a society girl like Sondra Finchley. Again, his promotion triggers daydreams; he sees himself as reserved, able, energetic.*" (15)

Dreiser makes use of Freudianism to develop the naturalistic tone of his novel. Furthermore, Dreiser evolved as an intellectual and an author after he had read Freudian different psychological theories. Namely, he made reference to the theory of 'infantile sexuality' and to 'unconscious theory'. Dreiser's justifications of his characters' actions are

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based on psychological grounds. Desires are the key motive for what they want. Miriam Gogol argues:

Freud and Dreiser share a model of human behavior based on conflict. They show in different ways the myriad implications and essential difficulties lying behind the phrase, "I want." Put simply, Dreiser's protagonists do not know what they want or why they want it. Desires assert themselves on the consciousness of Dreiser's characters, shaping and directing it. (112)

Clyde's daydreaming denotes that there are some repressed sexual desires that prevented the repressed thought from showing itself clearly. In course of that assumption Freud avers that the daydreamer conceals his embarrassing dreams from other people because he feels he has reasons for being ashamed of them. Accordingly, "*They [day-dreams] have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious.*" ("Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 06)

Dreiser's attempt at using Freudian theories is to maintain the deterministic philosophy that men are jailed by some uncontrollable conditions. Therefore, Clyde is condemned by the morality of his environment. His censorship is increasingly suppressing him. And when he finds a small way to express his unconscious censored wishes, he is demolished. Compatibly with Freudian beliefs, human impulses towards sexual fulfillment is typically natural and cannot be suppressed, otherwise there will be a chemical explosion. Louis Zanine assumes that:

Dreiser believed that "the impulses we are trying to suppress are, this side of excess, perfectly normal, while the thing we think we want is an infantile conception of life and its processes, unsuited to thinking men and women." The sex impulse was a "chemical force" within human beings that could not be totally suppressed. "It is a fire, a chemical explosion, really." The result of the moralists' attempt to suppress this internal chemical force was that "this country, taken as a whole, is as much a victim of deep-seated neurosis relating to this impulse as any. (94)

Clyde does not merely lead romantic and sexual adventures, but responding the subconscious calls of his embattled ego. He is not able to withstand his instinctual desires or resist the unsupportable attraction of beautiful ladies. He absolutely surrenders to the very power of his body. Miriam Gogol declares that: "*Clyde Griffiths [. . .] is powerless, caught*

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*between status and sex, a “pitiful victim” whose destiny ultimately results from the undomesticated power of his id.” (114)*

In the novel, Clyde Griffiths is portrayed as a miserable daydreamer. No matter his very saddening conditions, his mind is full of dreams. Not necessarily dreams come, when sleeping. However, he spent all his life dreaming. The following passage projects the bitterness of Clyde’s daydreaming and his polluted mind of poisoned ideas, when he beholds some young boys and girls indulging in gleeful moments at different points of a lake:

At any rate, the sight of any other youth thus romantically engaged with his girl was sufficient to set dissonantly jangling the repressed and protesting libido of his nature. And this would cause his mind to paint another picture in which, had fortune favored him in the first place by birth, he would now be in some canoe on Schroon or Racquette or Champlain Lake with Sondra Finchley or some such girl, paddling and looking at the shores of a scene more distingue than this. [...]He felt so out of it, so lonely and restless and tortured by all that he saw here, for everywhere that he looked he seemed to see love, romance, contentment. What to do? Where to go? He could not go on alone like this forever. He was too miserable.” (AAT 175)

Eventually, powerless Clyde surrenders to his lust, making it possible for his dreams to come true. He has sex with the poor mill girl Roberta Alden. Clyde found it inescapable to meet his inflamed sexual desires. He is seen as *“little more than a blend of id-inspired dreams of sexual bliss and culture-inspired dreams of material success by the time he is working in Lycurgus”* (Gogol 114)

Clyde’s dreams do not end with his sexual satisfaction. His greatest dream is to marry a woman of fabulous beauty, wealth, style, and high social rank. Here, there lies another repressed social desire. In fact, his secret sexual adventures with Roberta Alden would distort his dream of a successful social marriage. His movement to the city is actually of a crucial importance. When Clyde was motivated to join the city as an immigrant, he acquired a tendency to act criminally. Like many other naturalists, Dreiser conceptualizes his characters as being associated with aggression. Gina M. Rossetti comments that: *“Norris and Dreiser offer, to varying degrees, ways of conceptualizing immigrant characters as sites of disease, simplicity, or even criminal behavior—all, in other words, as regressive types.”* (91)

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An American Tragedy gives us a darker vision that dramatizes the tawdriness of the American Dream. Clyde's dissimilar dreams take him through the contradictions of the American social ambitions. Consequently, the electric chair is waiting for him. Is Clyde really a victim of chance and environmentalism?

Clyde constructs a dream of a successful marriage with a lady at her emblematic centre. On the other hand, Sondra Finchely begins loving him and everything is going in accordance with the prepared plan. However, this struggle to achieve that dream turned out to be against the American Dream seeker. Malcolm Bradbury points out that:

Clyde is made a representative figure for whom life is struggle. Ironically, his rewards come to him just too late; when chance comes to make a wealthy marriage, he had already made a poor-mill girl pregnant. He takes her to a photographic expedition in a boat and naturalistic fate strikes. The boat rocks, the camera strikes her, she drowns. (248)

Clyde decides to kill Roberta Alden, but eventually, he makes his mind up not to do so. Nonetheless, the camera accidentally smashes her head resulting in her drowning. He planned, but supernatural powers did this for him. In effect, the bulk of the book endeavors at explaining the naturalistic implications. Since Clyde is the product of circumstantial conditions as well as accident, is he then blamed for her death or is it the workings of fate? Does he actually deserve punishment? Or this should be regarded within the social responsibility.

Freud affirms that our dreams are manipulated by unconscious motives and they need satisfaction. Clyde sees in his dreams that he killed Roberta. It is a repression expressing itself in the unconscious. Letting the girl drown is an expression for this repression.

He let Roberta drown because she stood a big constraint in his face, preventing him from fulfilling his plan of social wealthy marriage. She constitutes a social obstruction in face of his ambition. He is compelled to save his dream from social corruption. And yet, innocent Roberta is his bill to success. What is more, she constitutes what is described in the novel as a 'mountain' : *"She [Roberta] was, as he saw it in connection with his very vital dream of Sondra, making a mountain—an immense terror—out of a state that when all was said and done, was not so different from Esta's. And Esta had not compelled any one to marry her."* (AAT 315)

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Clyde went through the gaudiest social overtones. He wanted to indulge in moments of wild fun and he immersed in somber laments. He was not acquainted with psychological and moral stamina to face vulgarity and brutality of the capitalistic American society. His aim was to succeed and he worked on this eagerly awaited direction. Halas, Clyde left without return. He became a victim of norms, rules and conventions of his society. Those rules, which he did not take part in their making process, were a social constraint. Conversely, he rebelled against society, which prevented him to marry a woman, superior to his social state. He made the rules of his own especially those of blood and death. Clyde was unable to assert his will against the social constraints, the natural and economic forces. And then, he paid for it very expensive. Like Dreiser's other characters, Clyde is not tragic, but pathetic, as he is powerless to escape this black fate. Namely, he is as the object of the reader's compassion. Yet, sometimes some readers do not feel grief for his execution. Carl Bode writes: "*He [Dreiser] describes them and their actions in massive details. As Dreiser sees them, human beings are not tragic but pathetic in their inability to escape their petty fates.*" (150)

In short, Clyde is destroyed by society, where he was born, grew up and experienced life. He is a dramatic seeker of pleasure and his fate is tragedy. And tragedy speaks louder than compassion. His lusts led him to horror of the electric chair as his road to achieve the pleasure of the American Dream was not easy. Donald Pizer elucidates: "*The tragedy of Clyde Griffiths, crudely put, is that of a seeker of sex and beauty who is destroyed by weaknesses within himself and his society as he attempts to fulfill his quest.*" (The Novels of Theodore Dreiser 24) Clyde's religious society repressed him and material environment seduced him to death. Social naturalistic constraints proved stronger than Clyde's wish to life. Peter High points out that: "*Dreiser believes that Clyde is not really guilty. Society and its moral code are far more guilty. Dreiser calls his novel a tragedy, and in certain ways it is similar to Greek tragedy.*" (115) In a sense, Clyde acted out of his unconscious. He did what he did not do what he meant. Yet, the social naturalistic forces did what he meant.

### Section Three: Social Alienation, Capitalistic Exploitation, and Hypocrisy of Social Justice

Section one and two explored some social constraints lying behind the non- success and obliteration of Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths. Racial oppression, educational constraints, poverty and the counterfeit success of the American Dream are apparently social annihilators thwarting and inhibiting the lives of the two heroes, causing disillusionment, sadness, and a sense of senseless life. The two young individuals of American twentieth century society drew the lethal map of their own, because the resistance to the constraints was limited in scope. This outcome is by, no means, avoidable as sentiments of social alienation and hypocrisy of social justice are some other factors helping obtain the bloody closure of the two novels.

#### 1- Social Alienation

Alienation is another social constraint getting in the way of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas to accomplish a social integration and co-existence at the bosom of the American society. According to Harold Bloom, “*Alienation originally meant estrangement. [...] But alienation in the Age of Kafka<sup>15</sup> took on the meaning of existential dread.*” (Bloom’s Literary Themes Alienation XV)

Socially speaking, Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas are alienated. They are seen as strangers in their homeland. The two sense their existential fear. The titles of the two novels indicate that clearly. An American Tragedy proves to be American. Clyde is a representative for his fellow Americans. He is an American and seeks to prove it. Meanwhile, Bigger Thomas is an African American and a native son. His nativity stems from the very suffering of the blacks in America.

The two writers were actually regarded as outsiders. And the two proved their alienation in writing. For them, it was lightening of pain. Theodore Dreiser descended from German origins. He was born for two immigrants coming to America with hopes to fulfill the prospects of the American Dream of success. His father Johann had emigrated from Mayen (Germany), in 1844, and Sarah was from a devout Mennonite family that had come to Ohio from Pennsylvania. Accordingly, Dreiser grew aware of his alien origins and usually reflected

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<sup>15</sup> Frantz Kafka is a short stories writer and a novelist. He is known for using his own experience in depicting a world of absurdity.

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his alienation in his literature. In this context, Paul Giles writes: *“Dreiser was always aware of himself as a cultural outsider, and his texts consciously incorporate various aspects of ethnic difference which serve to position his narratives in an oblique relation to the nationalistic imperatives of American life.”* (55)

On the other hand, Richard Wright was alienated for the color of his skin. He left America as felt no need to stay. He joined Europe, where he enjoyed warmth never granted in his native country, in spite the fact that, he was a native son. Manthia Diawara describing the plight of Richard Wright saying: *“He [Richard Wright] was well aware of the price to be paid, which included alienation, loneliness, and despair.”* (72)

In Native Son, Bigger Thomas feels very pessimistic, when he notices how lucky the whites are. While, he and his family living in one room, the whites have vast villas and castles. The Daltons for whom he is supposed to work are the holders of the south real estate that hires homes to the blacks. They impose social inequality and exploitation. They are in fact the cause of the melancholia and sadness of the blacks, who are not able to look farther the boundaries of their ghetto. To the point, Craig Werner,<sup>16</sup> asserts that: *“Wright his treatment of fragmentation, alienation, and sense making on his most resonant figure of exclusion: Bigger Thomas”* (119)

Bigger is, in a way or another, a product of the alienation that his environment produced. He hopes to find hope and a land of his own. He wants to work, but he cannot. He feels his failure and in his hungry eyes, there is a growing anger. When escaping, his conditions are unbearable, especially when feelings of social alienation intensify. Sam Bluefarb writes: *“And the one word to describe the condition of the escape-murderer is alienation, as battered and worn a verbal catchall as that word has become”* (151)

In An American Tragedy, Clyde yearns for a better life and works upon achieving it. Nevertheless, his rootless parents, inferior position, and his rich uncle’s indifference make him a stranger, who fetches recognition, before searching to realize his aspirations and dreams.

Bigger Thomas has been alienated from the world of humanity twice. The first one by people of his world and color; when Jack told him that the rich whites would think that a

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<sup>16</sup> Craig Werner published an article entitled “Bigger’s Blues: Native Son and the articulation of the Afro-American Modernism.”, in which Native Son is considered from modernist perspectives.

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gorilla broke loose from the zoo and put on a tuxedo, if he ever were to think of attending a party of whites. In this sense, Bigger is seen inhuman by the whites, however, this is through a black point of view. This alienation from world of humanity is in a way due to the blacks themselves. Farah Griffin points out: "*Bigger mark[s] the negative and positive consequences of stranger status, respectively. Bigger is devoid of any human connection and does not fill that void with a critical consciousness until he has already become an outlaw.*" (08)

In other words, when Negroes do not promote their culture and self-image, their image will be formed in a white perspective. They, according to Richard Wright, contribute in the depiction of the distorted image of the blacks, through the absence of a good presentation of the black folklore to the white audiences. It is self-alienation. The black society is effectively responsible for that.

The second time of Thomas's alienation is during the trial. The coroner asks Jan Erlone very ruthless questions, which absolutely exclude Thomas from his human sense. He asks him about the nature of the pamphlets given to Thomas and if they advocate the equality and unity of whites and blacks. He even asks whether it is possible for a black to have sex with white women. What is more, he asks if Jan likes Negroes and Jan astonishingly answering: "*My God! The man is human! Why don't you ask me?*" (NS 358)

Clyde is as well alienated first by his family, when left without efficient psychological and material equipment. When he comes out to explore life, he recognizes how foreign he is among his family and among people of his community, especially when he reaches Lurgus. There, he comes to grasp his value. Comparing to his aristocratic uncle Samuel Griffiths, he is an alien. Samuel Griffiths underpins the inferiority of his nephew. He reminds him of the sin of his parents, who chose to be street preachers, while his uncle made decision of his own and became rich. Poor Clyde knows very well what it meant to be rich. Once more, Clyde puts the blame on his family for: "*Their rootlessness has contributed to his irregular education and to his sense of feeling always an outsider.*" (Bucco 33)

Clyde is a real outsider, who cannot integrate the class he wants to belong. His alienation grows stronger than ever, when he is invited by his uncle for dinner at their home. He enters the iron gates almost like a trespasser and seats himself at a respectful distance from his aristocratic aunt. Clyde senses very early that the other employees pay him homage simply because, he is a Griffiths. However, his aunt seems to consider him inferior to them and to her

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son Gilbert, in spite of the fact that Clyde is a Griffith. In other words, when she writes a letter to invite him, she talks in an arrogant tone. Inviting Clyde, Elizabeth Griffiths writes:

He [Samuel Griffiths] is freer now and we will be very glad if you can find it convenient to come to supper with us at six o'clock next Sunday. We dine very informally—just ourselves—so in case you can or cannot come, you need not bother to write or telephone. And you need not dress for this occasion either. But come if you can. (AAT 146)

Conversely, his aunt seizes the opportunity to reinforce the idea that no matter Clyde is one of their very relatives; it is their generosity to bring him there. Martin Bucco attests to this fact, arguing: “*Elizabeth Griffiths adroitly reinforces Clyde’s role as a social outsider when she informs Bertine and Sondra that her husband’s generosity alone brings his poor relative here. From Sondra, Clyde feels destined to win not even a glance.*” (15/6)

Preparing us to understand his protagonist's alienation from his family and their unworldly values, Dreiser envisages Gilbert with cold eyes toward his cousin Clyde. Using an interior monologue, Dreiser sheds light on Clyde’s consciousness and the way he thinks about humiliation and cold treatment of his cousin. Dreiser writes: “*He [Gilbert] might be there, and then he would probably assume that superior attitude, to make him feel his inferior position, if he could—and Clyde had the weakness at times of admitting to himself that he could.*” (AAT 146)

In a word, Clyde and Bigger find themselves at the edge of the social world. They feel estranged and therefore they accepted it. Bigger is not of an Anglo-Saxon root. He is merely a black African, and he must assume responsibility of being there. However, Clyde is an American, but he does not have recognition for that. He is an inferior to his fellow American, as he doesn’t have money and fame. Indeed, social alienation is a strain and a social barrier.

### **2- Capitalistic Exploitation and Hypocrisy of Social Justice**

In the view of many authors and critics, capitalistic America is over-exploitive, unfair, and excessive. The economic system throws in the misery many Americans like Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths. This social injustice creates feelings of bitterness, rejection and deception. Feelings of hatred among the exploited rise and harvest of violence is seemingly to dramatize. But, to what extent is the economic exploitation a factor to worsen the American condition? How do the rich victimize the poor and fall victims of their richness?

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Social injustice takes part in the pain of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas. They are indeed trapped in the twentieth century American capitalistic society and its modern bourgeois<sup>17</sup>. Capitalist institutions and ethics proved responsible for the social system deficiencies and their heavy consequences on society as a whole, including the employer and the employee, aristocrats and the poor, and the exploiter and the exploited. In addition, the pretensions usually held by the capitalists of helping the poor, achieving prosperity, and advance in societies, and providing jobs to the miserable youth suffering idleness has become old-fashioned. Although, it contributed, in a way or another, in the advance and progress of societies, capitalism is not without sad truths of destroying the human body and breaking the human soul, letting man drown, in realm of melancholia and resentment. And so, how capitalism is portrayed in the two novels? Does it actually lead to social injustice? How does social injustice turn out to be a mortal social constraint?

The American system is seen by many as capitalistic structure proceeding exploitation and degradation. Many authors respond to it, suggesting social evaluation to the situation. In realistic parameters, Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright depict the reality of capitalism, and hypocrisy of social injustice in An American Tragedy and Native Son.

Dreiser more than once treated capitalism in his writings. Nonetheless, his attitudes are said to be ambivalent and obscure. This led many critics to inquire: Is Dreiser an opponent or supporter of capitalism?

Dreiser sometimes appears to be entrenched in the camp of capitalism's critics, and some other times, he seems to be categorized as one of capitalism's advocates and ardent supporters. He now and then attacks capitalism and appeals for reforms so to cope with problems related to shortcomings as well as crippling outcomes of capitalism. And yet, Dreiser participates in the capitalistic sphere and justifies the capitalistic actions and orientations. Thus, a contradiction can be noticeably noted in the writer and his fiction. It is, in a way, a literary hypocrisy to side the two and condemn the two, at once. However, Dreiser acknowledges that capitalism is an influential power that can help some to proliferate and subvert others to starve. Keith Newlin, in similar context, maintains that:

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, in the The Communist Manifesto, argue that: “*The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society, has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones*” (09)

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In his writing Dreiser attacks the excesses of capitalism and calls for reform, but he also participates in, and justifies, capitalism. This is the contradiction of Dreiser, but it is also the contradiction of all who try to criticize a structure of which they are a part. In Dreiser's novels, capitalism is a powerful economic force that can help some and hurt others. Dreiser does not necessarily lament the injustices of a market economy; rather, he exposes and condemns individuals who are unwilling to express openly the values inherent in a capitalist society. Dreiser attributes the greatest harm done by capitalism, or the oligarchy of the wealthy, not to the marketplace but to silence and to absent power. (50)

Dreiser, among other intellectuals, denounces the capitalist system and suggests a communist manifesto instead. Jerome Loving admits this fact saying that, "*Dreiser wasn't alone in seeing capitalism in the Depression as a corrupt and worn-out system. Other artists and intellectuals who supported the communist view of American society included Sherwood*" (355)

Nevertheless, Dreiser was unable to separate himself from capitalism; he explores the extent to which capitalism has entered all aspects of the American life. Namely, Dreiser realistically portrays capitalism and its effects on both the rich and the poor. He explained that he was neither an absolute Marxist nor a neat capitalist. He has no problem with doctrines but sometimes, it is the conditions, which determine the situations. Dreiser writes to the novelist Evelyn Scott: "*I am not an exact Marxian by any means, and while I was in Russia, I was constantly threatened with being thrown out for my bourgeois, capitalistic point of view. My quarrel is not so much with doctrines as conditions. Just now, conditions are extremely badly balanced.*" (Dreiser's Russian Diary 06)

In other part, Richard Wright highlighted the dark side of capitalism and its effects on society. He himself was a victim of this exploitive system. His mother worked as cock for a rich white family in return of some dollars a week to raise her children in absence of their father. This depressed mother was left alone, whilst she was very ill and her children were suffering hunger. Wright asking himself innocent questions of a black boy: "*Watching the white people eat would make my empty stomach churn and would grow vaguely angry. Why could I not eat when I was hungry? Why did I always have to wait until others were through? I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not.*" (Black Boy 17/8)

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Bigger Thomas knows well that all his life and the lives of his family are between the hands of the rich whites. Then, what would happen if they threatened to cut off their food. They would certainly starve. Bigger hates his family, as he knows they are suffering, but he cannot help them. He is actually powerless and his crimes are merely the yield of social injustice. The critic Mohamed Khsiba remarks that: “*The merciless Bigger was a native son of American society, and his atrocious crimes were the product, the outcome of its injustice, prejudice and oppression.*” (100)

His mother all the time sings the blues. She swallows bitterness and senses how difficult life is. She, many times, wishes she had left this life, for the fact that she could not support a family living in one room, in the ghetto of South Black Belt. In order to buy a magazine and go to the movies, Bigger Thomas would have to have twenty cents more, but he does not. Conversely, he is jobless and unable to help his family or take charge of himself. He is, in other words, broken.

In *An American Tragedy*, Clyde Griffiths is attracted to the world of aristocratic life and lives in an agonizing experience, in following the falsehood of success. Simultaneously, he is tortured by the capitalists despite the “*unusual dignity*” he pretends to hold (AAT 147) His uncle Samuel Griffiths owns a big collar factory, but his kinship does not prevent the uncle to exploit the nephew. He gives him a modest job at his factory and he no more cares. Samuel Griffiths addressing Clyde during the latter’s visit: “*I hear you’re working down in the shrinking room at present. Not exactly a pleasant place, but not such a bad place to begin, either—at the bottom. The best people start there sometimes.*” He smiled and added: “*I was out of the city when you came on or I would have seen you.*” (148) Namely, the uncle as a bourgeois, exploits the cousin in a struggle class. Carl Marx avers: “*Two great classes directly facing each other bourgeoisie and -proletariat.*” (11)

Clyde, regardless of merit for being a relative of the Griffiths, is looked as someone to exploit and squeeze wealth. The narrator says: “*In connection with all those who worked for them, that the nearer the beginner in this factory was to the clear mark of necessity and compulsion, the better. Neither could tolerate the socialistic theory relative to capitalistic exploitation.*” (121)

Clyde falls in love with a girl of high position. Sondra Finchley; a well known, wealthy and her capitalistic father owns the Finchley Electric Sweeper Company. Clyde decides to

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work hard to reduce the materialistic gap and then have a successful marriage with her. However, this proved untrue and Clyde pays his life as a price for his capitalistic expectations. Consequently, capitalism is converted into lethal machine, damaging any one daring to challenge.

In Native Son, Thomas hopes once to attend a party of rich white to see how things work. He asks Jack: *"I'd like to be invited to a place like that just to find out what it feels like"*, *Bigger mused.* (NS 70) But, Jack ironically answered him that they would run. He says: *"They'd think a gorilla broke loose from the zoo and put on a tuxedo."* (70) For the rich capitalist whites, the blacks are just like animals to exploit. It does not matter, whether they have money to pay rent or not. The rent of eight dollars a week for one room (where the one, who wants to get dressed has to ask the others to turn away so that he could) is to be paid to the capitalist squeezing his wealth from poverty of the fed up. And so is the saddest truth; some blacks have sex in the room, under the sights of their children, who well understand what is going on. This is what Bigger Thomas sees during one episodes of his flight.

Capitalism, in fact, does not take into account either of them. They believe only in money and in the way to get them. They live in a world utterly different from that of the poor. Therefore, why do they care about human of their skin and blood living with rats, cutting their veins one day?

In An American Tragedy, during dinner – At Griffiths' home- Clyde is startled with questions about his family, his parent's job, etc... Questions put him in a delicate situation of shame and embarrassment. He wished they would refrain from asking such shameful questions. He enjoys himself and the grace of his rich uncle, but soon after, he would remember that the day after he has to be working in the basement and get the picture of his miserable parents. The narrator goes on: *"And in the morning he would be working in the basement again, while these girls were rising to more pleasure. And out in Denver were his parents with their small lodging house and mission, which he dared not even describe accurately here."* (AAT 153)

In Native Son, Mary usually calls her father a capitalist, since he makes a lot of money out of a real estate. His real-estate business creates poverty. In fact, he owns the rat-infested apartment rented by Bigger and his family. In this way, Mr. Dalton fairly represents the socio-economic system under which the fortune is squeezed out of the ghetto.

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The ghetto is a strong sign of capitalism. The latter was a dominant theme in the twentieth century American literature. Andrew Warnes states that capitalism is a source of no equality as the capitalists no longer care about the payment or the exploited condition. He maintains that *“The ghetto as capitalism’s offspring, the sign of its addiction to underpaid labor and dependence on inequality, convinced Wright, as they did many members of these often hard-to-impress audiences.”* (08)

Mr. Dalton grants Thomas the job of family’s driver. He will receive payment of twenty five dollars a week instead of twenty dollars. Mr. Dalton suggested that the five dollars are for Thomas. Besides, some privileges, such as the meals and clothes he needs, are guaranteed. Perhaps, Mr. Dalton forgets that money alone could not give the required valid remedy for the Negro wound. The latter seems to be deeper and more dangerous than the exploiters think it to be. Bigger senses that he and his family belong to this millionaire (Mr. Dalton). In this perspective, Harold Bloom asserts:

Bigger notices a sign for the South Side Real Estate Company, which causes him to think of the property that Mr. Dalton owns and the segregation and poverty that he imposes upon Chicago's blacks, despite his philanthropy, by enforcing the boundaries of the Black Belt through real estate. Mr. Dalton is the landlord of Bigger's family: It is to him, this millionaire and philanthropist, that they pay eight dollars a week for ‘one rat-infested room’.” (Richard Wright's Native Son Bloom's Notes 16/7)

Thomas is a fatality of injustice and product of the justice hypocrisy, if this justice exists in reality. David Peck maintains that: *“Bigger is a victim of injustice. There is no injustice, because that would presume a world in which Bigger could hope for justice, and such a world does not exist”* (1174)

Thomas also has a conversation with Peggy the Dalton’s servant. She told him that *“Mr. Dalton is a fine man [. . .] you know, he does a lot for your people”*. (NS 96) Thomas is tremendously astonished; how could all this happen? However, Peggy appeases his curiosity saying that Mr. Dalton donates over five million dollars to colored schools. Here, Bigger’s surprise becomes bigger than ever. It is in fact, the zenith of hypocrisy. This man (Mr. Dalton) makes his wealth from the miserable poor blacks and now he acts as if it were his obligation and compassion to look at the Black’s tragedy with an eye of mercy.

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This hypocrisy of social justice destroys the innocent Mary. Indeed, she criticizes the capitalists. She hankers to give the blacks chance in this world. She told bigger: “*After all, I’m on your side*” (NS 104) Thomas is amazed at the girl’s behavior. She and her friend Jan are reds or communists, who strongly believe in the Negro Cause and the necessity for equality. Bigger could never understand the tone of Mary and her friend. He is rather conscious of his black skin. Thomas asks himself some interesting questions: why are they doing that? What could they get out of this? are they despising him?

Karl Marx thinks that life is a class struggle between the powerful and the weak, the oppressor and the oppressed, and exploiter and the exploited. Ever since, the first tribal society was established the collective ownership of the land and wealth was a characteristic. Frederick Engels, in his preface to the The Communist Manifesto, argues: “*Political[ly] and intellectual[ly], whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive human tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been history of class struggle, contests between the exploiter and exploited; ruling and oppressed classes*” (06)

Communists fight to achieve equality among people without any cast of race, color or social status. To all intents and purposes, Jan and Mary anticipate a change, where they build a unique world. They aspire to start a radical change via a revolution using even force. This is of course the ideological tenet of Marxism. Richard W. Miller, in similar context, accounts on the Marxist ideology: “*Because the basic social relation is one of conflict, Marx thinks that the most accurate understanding of the structure of a stable capitalist society will reveal internal sources of change that will inevitably destroy and transform it.*” (56) Jan and Mary with the help of all the Bigger Thomases will end up capitalism. Addressing Bigger Jan says “*Look at that skyline*”. [He adds] “*We’ll own all that someday*”. “*After the revolution it’ll be ours. But we’ll have to fight for it. What a world to win, Bigger! And when that day comes, things will be different. There will be no white and no black; there will be no rich and no poor.*” (NS 108)

Bigger Thomas’s lawyer Mark Boris Max, regarded as “*one of the more misunderstood supporting characters in American fiction.*” (Decker 175), thinks that there would be no rich and no poor. There would be no distinctions between people of a society. There would be an equality of the collective sense of ownership. That’s why, he uses the pronoun ‘we’. Talking about Jan Erlone’s Marxist ideology, Harold Bloom avers that “*He [Jan] believes that all*

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*men are equal regardless of race and forces Bigger to socialize with him and Mary.”*  
(Bloom’s Guides: Native Son 17)

Max, a member of the communist party, defends Thomas arguing that the circumstances of racial hatred and oppression as well as class created the killer in Bigger. Accordingly, Thomas is the product of the class and social injustice. Ma(r)x<sup>18</sup> wants to help the miserable and this causes great feelings of abhorrence. He becomes the object of hatred by the angry mob of white people, screaming for the death of Bigger.

The injustice is equally the cause of Clyde’s tragedy and pain. It started with his father Asa, who was the first prey of the unjust system. Joseph Griffiths- his grandfather- made his elder two sons inherit the bulky part of his moderate property at the expense of his younger son Asa, who had been regarded as “*not having proved very practical or intelligent*” (AAT 119) Asa was utterly ignored. In this context, Dreiser writes: “*Samuel Griffiths, who along with his elder brother Allen had inherited the bulk of his father’s moderate property, and this because of Joseph Griffiths’ prejudice against his youngest son, had always felt that perhaps an injustice had been done Asa.*” (119)

In An American Tragedy, Clyde thinks that obtaining as much money as possible can probably make him enjoy a social recognition like his cousin Gilbert. His position makes him believe that only through money he can get misery and the monotonous life. His cousins were born rich and money can create such a big gap. In fact, “*Clyde lives in drab lodgings, works at a monotonous job, watches his young cousins and their friends from a distance, and learns how wide a gap money can create. He is desperately lonely, but determined to win acceptance.*” (Frohock 34)

According to the philosophy of the twentieth century American materialistic society, the human relations are of no value. For the capitalists, business is business and family kinship must be out of any immaterial considerations. What important is the amount of money that someone has. The bourgeoisie plays a most principal role in tearing the significance of the family relations. In course of that idea, Carl Marx proclaims that “*The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation*” (11)

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<sup>18</sup> Ma(r)x: many critics maintain that Wright used this name to mean Karl Marx.

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Capitalism is plainly the guilty criminal, who threatens the whites as well as Negroes. From Max's whole conduct, the first business of the Communist Party is to achieve social justice, where everyone could enjoy the pleasure of being equal in terms of humanity and economic chances of success.

Even when Mrs. Thomas meets Mrs. Dalton and begging her to save her son; the answer is that she only could do nothing, but a promise that she will try not to make the Thomas family leave the apartment. It is so clear that poetics of capitalism are more forcibly considered than the human stipulation.

In book I of Native Son, Bigger and his gangster Gus ironically play white. They pretend being white and have high responsibility of presidency of the United States or generals in the American army. This can be read in terms of a political alienation played by the white. Herman Beavers states that: "*Playing the roles of "movers and shakers" like J.P. Morgan or the President of the United States or an Army general, Bigger and Gus put forward a political critique where they link the spoils of capitalism to their plight.* (102)

### Conclusion

In sum, Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths are the weak fatalities of a society that ignores them. They are victimized by the social circumstances and the human condition manipulating their actions and reactions. Effectively, as killing machines, they are the untrue seeds in the untrue land growing untruly in the untrue environment facing big looming constraints.

The poor education they got is a powerful constraint to guide them to the path of crime and punishment. Clyde left school and his educative career was perturbed by the different moving of his parents from town to town in order to conduct religious missions. Meanwhile, Bigger Thomas left school at eight grades for not having money. The two grow angry about the harrowing reality of the education they received. Clyde is ready to lie to his aristocratic friends, saying he studied mathematics at the university and Bigger could no longer fly a plane or join the army. The two felt their failure.

Racial oppression, fear and violence were heavy constraints hindering Bigger Thomas to live naturally in a community governed by the white supremacy. Bigger Thomas permanently lived feelings of social fear and violence. The latter became an arm to terrorize

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the white in a natural occurring reaction of defending himself and proving his existence. Robert Bone asserts, “*Bigger murders in order to become real, to make the white world acknowledge his existence. The whites conspire to ignore his human presence.*” (21) When he accidentally killed Mary Dalton, it was a partial removal of this fear that society imposed on him, since his birth. It is actually a weighty burden and a hindering constraint.

Clyde was dramatically seduced to follow the American Dream of social success, or what Jim Steinmeyer called “*social- climbing*” (240) He looked forward to achieve and reap the sweet fruits of that ideology. However, all his expectations ended dramatically his life in the electric chair. He plans to have a successful social marriage with a wealthy, beautiful woman of high social class. Nonetheless, his poverty, on the one hand, and the poor mill girl Roberta Alden, on the other, threaten to break his dream. He then decided to kill her and remove this constraint. She accidentally died, but his moral responsibility is huge. His social dream failed and his life was gone. Society takes part in this failure as it did not provide Clyde with a moral immunity he needs. Frederick J. Balling sums it up: “*Not only Clyde Griffiths, the man who is convicted for the murder of his pregnant mistress, but society as well is held responsible for the tragedy. The society has erred in fascinating Griffiths with its glitter and wealth without providing him with a background of moral restraint.*” (08)

The American Dream flew away and was down in the rough American society. Clyde is an innocent victim of a literally materialistic society. The latter excessively smashes him without any reliable reasons. However, Clyde does not well grasp the inconsistency of the American ambition. Society chooses whom to offer prosperity or destitution. Elizabeth Oakes proclaims that “*An American Tragedy, is a powerful murder story about a weak-willed young man who destroys himself with a little help from the materialistic society in which he lives. The book explores the flipside of the American dream and remains one of Dreiser’s most impressive works.*” (113)

The two protagonists were also alienated in their country. They were regarded as strangers and therefore were deprived of any chance of proving themselves in the society, which was supposed to be their safe home. Clyde was alienated by his family. He was considered as a stranger with his uncle and gained no dignity. Richard Gray states: “*In his passivity [Clyde], rootlessness and alienation even from himself, he is no more, and no less, than another man, and, in particular, another American.*” (367/68) And Thomas was

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estranged from world of humanity and then he has been regarded as a Gorilla. Hence, social alienation is a social constraint that hampered the two characters to behave in the right way.

Capitalism concentrates property in a few hands and the many must roll up their sleeves to get it so good. Clyde got the wrong way to achieve success and Bigger turned to a killing capitalist; after killing Mary, he asked millions of dollars in a ransom note. Bigger was inside the prison of injustice, through the barred windows of that Bastille of racial oppression and Clyde was in an unjust world of dreams, where he anticipated the future with tears and fears. Capitalism turned into a killing system of disastrous consequences. Keith Newlin points out: *“Money is a medium for social change, but for poor characters, such as Clyde Griffiths, capitalism is deadly, and in these contrasts Dreiser reveals the power and excesses of a capitalist economy”* (51)

The social injustice came up with time of fear and anger, when Americans began to hate one another. Thus, it was possible for an American to kill his countrymen the Americans. In fact, songs of grief were chanted telling of the troubles of a country, where its people felt that they were not free. Then, the yield of hatred and anger, of wrath and rage may destroy the country’s way of life. In the very souls of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas the fruit of their patience and endurance to withstand life was all ripening. America, Americans, and people of America were ready now for the terrible harvest for a time of capitalist exploitation and destruction.

All the social constraints mentioned above contributed in determining the black fate of the protagonists. Bigger Thomas had feeling of powerlessness caused by the family's living conditions over the actual physical suffering that those conditions imposed on the family. Bigger's status of deprivation was the real significance of economic and social oppression of the blacks. Richard Wright puts it: *“He [Bigger] hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them. He knew that the moment he allowed himself to feel to its fullness how they lived, the shame and misery of their lives, he would be swept out of himself with fear and despair.”* (NS 301)

It was through these constraints that Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths became the objects of ‘otherness’. Bigger is ‘another’ in a community, where the white authority dominated. John M. Reilly maintains: *“In civilization, history, family patterns, language, art and psychology, the white is always the norm; the black is forever the “other” ”* (36). Besides,

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Clyde is another American, because of his rootless origins, alienation, and position of an American Dream seeker. Richard Gray assumes that: *“In his passivity [Clyde], rootlessness and alienation even from himself, he is no more, and no less, than another man, and, in particular, another American.”* (367/68)

To sum up, Clyde and Thomas are victims of the violence produced by their society. As a consequence, the crimes they perpetuated are an anti-violence medium used to maintain their lives. In similar vein, Bradbury maintains that: *“Like Clyde Griffiths in Dreiser’s An American Tragedy, Bigger Thomas is a victim of the violence of his culture and the shameful limitations of his environment. Yet he is more than this, he is also a modern identityless man, an exile who insistently feels that he lives on the outside of the world peeping in through a hole in the fence.”* (336) The identityless protagonists constrained by the social strains begin a mystical journey to search for their religious selfhood.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **THE QUEST FOR A SPIRITUAL IDENTITY**

## Introduction

In An American Tragedy and Native Son Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas fight the social forces to destroy their strife. But amid this social battle, they seek to put together the threads of their spiritual identity. In other words, they make a social tiresome journey, and simultaneously; a metaphysical trip of a paramount importance is made. It is a quest for a spiritual identity.

Theodore Dreiser and Richard Wright delineate the quest of young Americans in the image of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas for something they desperately need. These two characters that people the two novels fight the Oblivion and the emptiness of their spiritual worlds. Their bodies quiver to find the way for them to recognize who are they? How can they sustain a spiritual space in the (homeland)? Do they really have a home and land? Are not they native sons of an American mother country? Where does the spiritual Identity lay? Could they actually catch it one day?

The identity is the “who” or the “what” of somebody. In other words, it is “*The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.*” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/identity>). It can be approached from political, national, gender, class, generational, racial, and linguistic viewpoints. Yet, this chapter will handle the identity regarding the religious dimension.

Religion in America is of a peerless value. The American nation was founded on theology and its people long before lived in spiritual tranquility. Scott A. Merriman, in similar context, points out: “*Religion played a formative role in many of the colonies at the time of their founding. Several, including Massachusetts and Virginia, established official state-supported churches*” (68) Moreover, it is important to realize that a majority of the American people would never have endorsed a colonial separation from the mother country, thinking that they would have God's sanction. That is how, the writers of the Declaration of Independence were anxious to assure

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that the new nation would be ruled under God's faith.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the historical document was based on religious dogma. In this vein, Derek H. Davis maintains that "*The Continental Congress's formal act of separation, the Declaration of Independence, was theologically grounded and therefore deserving, from the colonists' perspective, of the widespread support it enjoyed.*" (95)

As Americans, Clyde and Thomas lead a mystical journey to discover whether they are numinous or irreligious are their spiritual identities. Amid this spiritual quest for the 'self' and its position, they hanker to trace the meaning of the concept 'religious identity'. Throughout the novel, the two characters acquire different and myriad spiritual shapes. When they try to construct a spiritual identity, the 'spiritual selfhood' witnesses quite a few upheavals and shifts.

Analyzing the formation of Clyde and Thomas' religious identities involves numerous factors. To begin with, the authors' biographical background constitutes a worth reference for the protagonists. This means, Dreiser and Wright's spiritual stances are juxtaposed with that of Clyde and Thomas. Accordingly, the authorial influences on two characters are of a paramount necessity. Second, the mother in the two novels is of a pivotal value. Through their condense reliance on Christianity as spring of spiritual serenity, Clyde and Thomas' mothers have a heavy religious legacy. The mystical faith enables them to cope with life social constraints. In a sense, maternal brunt is highly significant in determining the extent to which, societal strains have an impact on Clyde and Thomas establishments or disestablishments of a spiritual identity.

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<sup>1</sup> The continental Congress met on 7 June 1776 to discuss the situation of the colonies with the mother country. A committee was appointed to draw up a declaration to accompany the resolution of independence. This committee, selected 11 on June 1776, was composed of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. Those men who made the history of America were very religious. Although, "*they were not all specifically Christian.*" (Derek H. Davis), they were all genuinely religious.

## Section One: Authorial Influences and Mother's Religious Legacy

Naturalism denies any importance to the religious institutions. Some naturalists, moreover, contentedly declared the demise of the church role in the social life. As naturalists, how were Dreiser and Wrights' attitudes towards Christian teachings? Do these stances draw any impacts on the characters? Psychologically speaking, Freud maintains that many writers give their characters something of their own real personality. Does the two author's social suffering make any impact on the approval or refusal of religion?

### 1- Authorial Religious Influences

Richard Wright had moments of fear and doubt towards religion. His life was full of actions and reactions to Christian teachings, which created an ambivalent stance towards himself and people around him. His circumstances pushed him forward to accept something against his will and thought. Then, his religious identity was based on negative responses.

Richard Wright's religious identity is not well-formed, since his childhood. He was suppressed by his grand-mother and was all the time obliged to do some rituals so that to appease her. In fact, his grand-mother set her heart on the spiritual state of their souls. What is more, she was not hence tolerant with her religious routine. For instance, the family could not start eating, unless they sermonize some Christian supplications. Wright believed that niggers were born to preach the Bible. Michel Fabre, the critic who devoted many studies to Richard Wright, says: *"A few years under the care of his religious grandmother left Richard Wright steeped in the language of the Bible he says that he has never known a Negro who didn't read the Bible."* (Richard Wright: Books and Writers 13)

This tyrannical plan led Wright's poor mother to return back to West Helena, as no one was allowed to work on days of her lord. Besides, the invocations repeatedly chanted, when having meals. The situation was indeed very moving and produced despair to the family members. In this context, Richard Wright writes:

She [Wright's mother] had grown tired of the strict religious routine of Granny's home; of the half-dozen or more daily prayers that Granny insisted upon; her fiat that the day began at the sunrise and that night commenced at

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sundown; the long, rambling readings; the individual invocations muttered at each meal; and her declaration that no one who lived in her house could work upon that day. (Black boy 57)

Richard acknowledges that his violent disputes in his grand-mother's deeply religious home are bigger than quarrels taking place among gangster. He metaphorically confesses no divine peace ever dwelt with him. His heart is just like a block of ice determined to endure not to melt nevertheless the heat trying to fight it. His handicapped religious receptive soul, in other words, is by no means ready to take delivery of the God's blessings. For him, the thought should be based on logic rather than bigotry. Robert Felgar argues: "*Richard Wright demonstrates repeatedly that authority should be based on truth rather than on tradition or power.*" (Understanding Richard Wright's Black Boy 01)

More than once, Wright is reminded that he is in danger, and he has to join the church, as it is his duty. He is in an immense peril to face his God, who expects his prayers and repentance. Yet, Wright is consciously blaming the same God for being the major cause, behind his hunger, anger and suffering. His torrential spiritual dismissal proves that his religious resignation stemmed from his conviction that religion is a drug to momentarily forget the injustices within which, he lived the bitterness. Wright remembers that society, which imposed on him crippling confines, is giving him spiritual tranquility now.

A careful analysis of Wright's rebellious tendencies shows that this religious antagonism is reinforced by an early exposure to Seventh-Day Adventism. His grandmother's household, where he spent a crucial portion of his childhood, was pervaded by a stern evangelism. Richard was compelled to act as if he were truthfully catching the spiritual teachings of her church. In actuality, he sees no requirement to believe in the religious teachings as he felt no need to do so. Wright once more narrates: "*GRANNY was an ardent member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and I was compelled to make a pretense of worshiping her God, which was her exaction for my keep*" (Black Boy 100)

Wright comes up with a total repudiation for whatever religious staff he encounters. He announces his refusal to religion of any type and makes it the choice of his mind. He alters to lead his life as it comes, not like the one shaped by religion.

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Charles T. Davis, in his essay "From Experience to Eloquence: Richard Wright's Black Boy as Art" claims: "*Richard says more soberly that he rejects religion because it ignores immediate reality. His faith, predictably, must be wedded to common realities of life*" (65)

Boyish recreations, such as baseball and marbles, were always forbidden. Books on nonreligious subjects were proscribed by Granny as "the Devil's work." Thus, Wright was in many occasions deprived of reading such kind of books, which created in him feelings of hatred and abhorrence towards religion. Indeed, this pious woman tried incessantly by every stratagem to save her grandson from the world. On the contrary, Keneth Kinnamon maintains that religion was no longer welcomed by the little boy. In this vein, he writes: "*Religion is also rejected, whether the peripheral Seventh-Day Adventism of his grandmother or the mainstream black Methodism of his mother.*" (103)

Granny is sincere in her efforts to Christianize the family. She conceives their salvation exclusively via Jesus Christ path. Nonetheless, her conception of Wright's welfare does not take into account his current happiness as an essential issue. Consequently, much of his rebellious spirit seems to develop from his struggle against Granny's rules.

For Wright, church is not a place, where he learns of God or his ways. But, it is a place where to meet his school friends and continue their long, rambling talks. He unwillingly preaches the Bible and reads some of its stories. These stories sometimes seem interesting, but Wright is not reluctant in twisting them or secularizing them to the level of his street life, discarding all the heavenly connotations that do not best fit his environment. He does the same to the beautiful hymns he listens to during the Sabbath. The outstanding stories of the Bible make a magical literary inspiration on his sensibility. Yet, the spiritual impact is too limited.

When Wright grew up, he could not satisfy even the gloomy broodings of his religious identity. His grand-mother and aunt were sturdily giving him religious impressions bringing his childhood piously in the dissenting way. However, Richard was not positively responding. He clumsily countered them and sometimes he began to doubt of Revelation itself or even the existence of God. In other words, Richard's clumsiness is rooted in a strong belief that religion works on the imposition of truth

rather than giving the opportunity to the mind to differentiate between reality and faith. Thus, Robert Felgar stipulates that “*Wright’s condemnation of religion as an institution that bases truth on authority rather than on evidence, or, to put it another way, as an institution that does not distinguish between truth and belief, a distinction Wright thought crucial*”. (SCTRW 64)

Although some religious stories and imagery are appealing, Richard sees religion as meaningless at best and oppressive at worst. Religion in his life is more or less a spasm of uncertainty and spiritual qualm. He no longer feels at ease, when talking about God or his susceptible punishment in the afterlife. The reinforcement of his atheistic stances would be recognized as his tendency or attraction to communism and its tenet of the material thought. Richard Wright once wrote: “*Whenever I found religion in my life I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of god. The naked will to power seemed always to walk in the wake of a hymn*” (Black Boy 135)

On the other hand, Dreiser Theodore was also at the beginning of his life and career tentative to have any religious ideas or wisdom. He rather lingered to his mechanistic philosophy. His deterministic religion marked a clear refusal to the spiritual institutions and its effect on the overall social components. Furthermore, he led a dissolute life of drinking and sexual liaisons. The literary critic, Jackson Lears, in his essay, “Dreiser and the history of American longing” clearly talked of Dreiser’s tendency to rid of the so-called ‘religious morality’. He writes, “*His [Dreiser] mounting contempt for his father’s rigid Catholicism, indeed for all forms of religious morality; his determination to cast off the constraints of provincial Christianity and embrace a “pagan” life of sexual fulfillment and sensuous ease.*” (64)

Since his Sister Carrie (1900), Dreiser attacked the puritanical codes in his writings. He does not criticize the characters for breaking them. He just highlights the spiritual dilemma and the vanishing of all the aspects of the religious identity. Consequently, we can talk of paradoxical attitudes ranging from adopting religion to disapproving the religious authority. In one of his stances, Dreiser vowed never to get back to the church as it is a point to impose quarrels and disagreement between people. Dreiser, in his Russian Dairies expresses his viewpoint: “*To think, as I well enough knew, that the church (its dogmas) could slip in between a man and his girl, a husband*

*and his wife, fathers and children, and drive them into bickering and disquiet, or dictate the exact rules of their lives.” (389)*

In his writings, Dreiser deeply depends on scientism. He is a naturalist, but his naturalism is fused with an exposure to the faith of God. He thinks that some worldly issues can only be solved through a religious introspection. Bill Brown, in his critical essay, “The Matter of Dreiser’s Modernity” maintains that “*Though Dreiser himself was genuinely interested in Christian Science (and in Quakerism), its passing role in the novel should be read as a measure of his inability to imagine a resolution to worldly problems within the confines of materialism.*” (96) In fact, many critics met Dreiser’s ambivalence with astonishment for the groundbreaking affirmations, since their effort to prove that Dreiser’s early life has little to show, in so far his spiritual predilections are concerned.

Dreiser’s mind was always crammed with the thought of God. He late ascertained the light of God. His early spiritual concerns vanished, owing to the religious milieu of his childhood. The crashing poverty he lived at early time of his life, made him lose confidence in religion. Society imposed misery, injustice, and poverty. These social impositions left no room for worshiping God. What enforced a non-religious persona was an unprecedented passion for science and the impact of the latter in restraining Dreiser’s spiritual thought.

Dreiser’s upbringing was rigorously religious. His catholic father was fanatic devotee to the divine faith and persuaded him that he could have the full view of God in the ritualistic ceremonies only if he truthfully believed in supernatural beings. In his literary article “Evolution of Spiritual Thought in the Novels of Theodore Dreiser”, the Indian critic and professor S. Subramanian<sup>2</sup>, announces that: “*Dreiser was driven to hate the dogmatic principles of institutionalized religion, even early in his life. Dreiser's father, John Dreiser, a blind adherent to the Catholic faith and its rituals, who believed that God would reveal Himself through the ceremonies of the Church, was the first to affect Dreiser strongly*” (<http://www.pdf.search-engine.com>)

As mentioned above and like his Clyde Griffiths, Dreiser suffers from the religious dogma of his parents. He and his brothers fled their parents Catholicism or

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<sup>2</sup> S. Subramanian: is an Indian critic and a professor at Madras Institute of Development Studies.

what Lears qualified as a spiritual clash. He says that *“Father and son got along now because Dreiser no longer openly fought his father’s cloying Catholicism. He simply lied when asked whether he had kept up the Church sacraments.”* (68) However, Dreiser’s last writings witnessed a radical reassessment. Namely, his denial for the divine authority turned out to be a serious and strong belief in God. He embraced a new type of transcendentalism and a new conversion to the spiritual realm can obviously be seen. In this vein, Jay Parini points out: *“Dreiser the determinist became a latter-day transcendentalist, or one who believes that God acts through nature in a manner in which apparent evil is found to be ultimately good in the larger context of life. One of the catalysts for his transition may have been his study of the works of the transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau in the late 1930s”* (96)

Dreiser justifies this unusual twist by the absence of reliable answers for some questions that determinism and naturalism can account for. He is anxious that life has a purpose and science is not ready to provide intelligible and plausible answers to these purposes. In his view point, science believes only in the tangible, touchable, measurable and material object. All Dreiser’s last works of fiction marked a radical reassessment and a retrieval to adopt and promote religion as a key means for self-assurance. He thinks that only mysticism is worth taking as it is able to bring spiritual serenity. Subramanian wrote proclaiming the Dreiserian spiritual turning point: *“He began to see order and meaning in all creation and had come to understand the limitations of science. He became tolerant even of organized religions. He saw the presence of God in each and everything. He was even ready to prove the existence of God. Dreiser’s deep faith in God and his advocacy of universal love are reflected in his novels *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic*.”* Along similar lines, the American critic Zanine Louis points out:

He [Theodore] was becoming more impatient in seeking answers about the purpose of life. As his mind turned more in the direction of metaphysical and spiritual problems, he began to recognize that because its method relied on empirical observation and because its subject was therefore limited to the observable, material universe of substance, science was frustratingly inadequate as a means to probe the unknowable, immaterial realm of the mystery, wonder, and terror of life. (146)

Many critics remark that Dreiser's love and approbation for religion turned out to be an opposition to the creeds and doctrines of religion. His abhorrence and disenchantment are merely against the customs of the Church and its priests when especially they refused to do the ritualistic performances of his mother's funeral.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Dreiser's belief in God was growing up and down. Not to speak about his creed and belief in spiritual beauty. Jerome Loving, in this context, claims: *"He may have spent his life denying his father's Catholicism, but he never dismissed the Emersonian conviction that nature's beauty had a spiritual element.* (326)

In brief, both Dreiser and Wright have long standing troubles related to religion and the spiritual realm. Since their childhood, they despised religion and shrugged off the importance of the metaphysical motifs in life. Dreiser inveighs against the religious institution and its representatives saying: *"We think of the universe as moral. Our preachers and puritans shut themselves off in small, well-furnished sections of our cities and talk about morality and virtue and saving the world for Christ."* (Russian Dairies 232) Both of them were marginalized by societal constraints and both of them refused religion as motif to lighten their social tribulations. For them, this society deprived them of material success and social recognition, but in return, it afforded them spiritual serenity. The latter was, by no means, needed. That is how, they also lingered to a deterministic scientism, vigorously filled their writings and strappingly motivated the characters of their novels. But, are there some reflections on Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas's spiritual identity?

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Ziane tells about the story: *Dreiser was gradually moving further away from a belief in the Catholic dogma of his father. One incident that greatly embittered him against the Church occurred when his mother died in the autumn of 1890. A local parish priest resisted blessing her body and allowing her to be buried in consecrated ground because she had not made a final confession. The affair deeply angered Dreiser, who began to resent his father's Catholicism as a "narrow, Teutonic, bigoted religion.* (11)

## 2- Maternal Religious Legacy

Mother is of a paramount importance in any nation. The maternal values play a significant part in determining and shaping the identity of that nation. Thus, discussing the religious identity of the two protagonists regarding the maternal legacy in the two novels will provide a good platform for the interpretation of their spiritual identity.

Undeniably, the African Americans are moved by a need for personal affirmation. The mother in the African American folklore<sup>4</sup> is a monumental symbol for the sacred task undertaken by this mother in the upbringing of the youth and the shaping of African American identity. In this context, Valerie Sweeney Prince says: “[The] African American identity is built upon the construct of the Mother: because the newborn black child followed the “condition of the mother,” the mother reads as the primary symbolic field. (05)

Spiritually speaking, Bigger Thomas does not liken his mother. Mrs. Thomas (the mother) heavily counts on Christianity as a source of power to strengthen her back in confrontation of her social agonies. Thomas is skeptical towards religion and finds himself in a delicate situation. He is compelled, against the odds, to accept praying, when he gives a promise to his mother. This surely does not stem from a deep conviction of his own. It, by no means, gives a harmonious response from a stable religious identity. Thomas is embarrassed by his mother’s insistence, and, consequently, he temporarily gets rid of his stubbornness to regain it afterwards. His stance to Biblical preaching and religious doctrines is obviously portrayed via his violent feedbacks towards the black preacher. Thomas’s refusal of religion can be explained on the basis that religion makes man acknowledge his guilt, and Bigger never wants to do so. David Peck, accounting on Native Son, states:

Bigger’s mother relies on religion [. . .] but toughness is Bigger’s code. He is embarrassed by his mother’s self-abasement, and although he agrees to pray simply to end his discomfort, his attitude toward religion is shown when he throws away a cross a minister has given him and

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<sup>4</sup>In The Politics of (M)Othering Womanhood, identity, and resistance in African literature, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, the paradoxical location of (m)other as both central and marginal and is framed by the idea of “mother”—motherland, mothertongue, motherwit, motherhood, and mothering. The concept of the mother is handled from feminist insights.

throws a cup of coffee in a priest's face. In his view, they want only to avoid the world and to force him to accept guilt without responsibility. (1174)

Clyde's mother, on the other hand, is so cheerful and all the time saying that God would show the way and would give things, which they aspire to have. She is very optimistic and full of hope. Though this pious mother heavily counts on religion as a holy guide of her steps, Clyde's spiritual state is at the odd of his mother's long religious training. He disapproves these religious rituals and sees them very shabby and humiliating. Clyde is in a veritable psychological antagonism. He is, on the one side, compelled to perform some Christian parade, and he longs for freedom of not doing such scruffy performances. He is at pain to accept religion, which binds him and distorts his identity. However, this makes him somewhat determined to get his own freedom. Bucco Martin points out: "*And, finally, he deems personal freedom and independence of utmost importance, as a way to escape pain, responsibility, restraint, and family.*" (33)

Clyde's mother -Elvira Griffiths- thinks her evangelism has drifted her attention away from her growing son. She, furthermore, comprehends how little she helps Clyde prepare for life in this world. Namely, she fails to grasp her son's dream of success the -American Dream- which Dreiser delineates as rude and tragic. Clyde is no longer able to adjust to the social cannibalism<sup>5</sup> around him. Therefore, its fatal consequences are notably of harrowing costs.

When he gains the job of the hotel bellhop, Clyde's mother tries to understand changes characterizing her son's personality. She is pleased for his new social status and sense of assurance; yet, she is concerned about his companion's influence. Because of Clyde's past deprivations, this new romantic mores construct a genuine threat for the little success seeker. Social constraints are so influential that Clyde chooses life of material success. His repression pushes forward to keep away from spirituality.

Though preoccupied with saving souls from the Hell and God's punishment, Elvira Griffiths deeply loves her children, knowing well that they carry within, the weaknesses and sins of all mankind. Life in America is absorbing, but also rough,

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<sup>5</sup> Social cannibalism: is the domination of the socially powerful individuals over the weak and miserable one. It is mainly due to social Darwinism.

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harsh, and often nasty. Accordingly, Mrs. Griffiths stands powerless to help her children. The narrator of *An American Tragedy* voices: “*Clyde’s mother believes in a merciful God Almighty. She believes also that through her faith and good works she has been called upon to spread the word of God. Though preoccupied with saving souls, she deeply loves her children, knowing full well that they carry the weaknesses and sins of all mankind.*” (AAT 33) As a consequence, Clyde was attending the church not because of his soul’s spiritual thirst, but as not to break the strict orders of his parents. In other words, “*Clyde attends church for social rather than religious reasons.*” (18)

Clyde’s upbringing was very moral and his first paces towards the world of glees and fantasy were too cautious. Yet, the sooner the better, he could not resist the forceful magnetism of pleasure and murder. From a Christian point of view, Clyde possesses the devil and original sin. In spite of his scruples, murder forces its way into his mind in the same way as the first crime to be committed on earth. His religious training did prevent him from committing the crimes, because social forces worked strongly upon him.

Elvira Griffiths “*had become inoculated with the virus of Evangelism.*” (AATR 26). She questions herself: what is wrong with her daughter? She is sure that her children are raised on a religious background to protect them from all the baits of the modern life. She seems to have set her heart on the religious guidance of her family, but her daughter’s elopement makes Mrs. Griffiths reconsider her calculations. Explicitly, the spiritual training proves unfounded and everything is gone. Esta Griffiths eloped with her lover hoping to leave behind poverty and look for a promising life of freedom. In this context, the literary critic Martin Bucco, comments:

Mrs. Griffiths wonders why the many years of moral instruction and religious training failed her daughter. The answer, according to Dreiser, is that human beings are at the mercy of their biological and environmental determinism--that is, human acts are determined by antecedent causes. As a result of determinism's implying absolute causality, these laws of social Darwinism often tend to make one pessimistic. (07)

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas thinks that the religion of his mother and Bessie's whiskey are sedatives that mollify the black ordeal. And then, they are erroneous ways

in which they handle their oppression. They temporarily escape their black calamity. In a sense, drinking and practicing religion are purely pastimes with no inherent valuable significance. It is merely for the sake of forgetting the social inhibitions of exploitation and alienation. Harold Bloom, in this situation, accounts: *"His mother escapes in religion; Bessie escapes in alcohol. Both give their autonomy over for temporary comfort. Bigger rejects both."* (Bloom's Guides: Native Son 40/1)

Bigger is left without any sense of mystical identity. Nevertheless, he recognizes his selfhood only through his frightening violent crime. James Baldwin maintains that: *"with the sun melting away the differences."He craves a sense of union, identity, a wholeness, which had been denied to him all his life. He wants to live now not escape paying for his crime but live in order to find out, to see if it were true."* (22)

His mother, Mrs. Thomas, is a black widow. Her husband was killed in a violent riot, leaving her lonely overcoming the strife of raising three children. She is shedding tears of regret and melancholia. She is actually a black downhearted woman, who does not spare any effort to help her children. She is an old hard-working mother and merely has her sleeves and her Christian and heartrending melodies:

Lord, I want to be a Christian,  
In my heart, in my heart,  
Lord, I want to be a Christian,  
In my heart, in my heart, (NS 73)

Bigger has never appreciated his mother's Christian songs. Furthermore, these spiritual tunes usually met with irritation. Kathleen Gallagher, in his article, "Bigger's Great Leap", states that: *"One set of images that Bigger has rejected steadily throughout the book is that offered by Christianity. His mother's singing of hymns and spirituals while she works had been a continual source of annoyance to him."* (11)

The penniless Mrs. Griffiths has only her prayers to save her son from the electric chair. She does not have even a sum of money to attend her son's trial. In similar vein, W. M. Frohock writes: *"Pity is the dominant emotion of An American Tragedy, not for Clyde alone, but for the mother who writes sob sister reports of his trial so that she can earn the money to be there and goes on an improvised lecture*

*tour to raise more money for the appeal” (36) What she really has only her spiritual songs and hymns, bringing tranquility to her heart:*

The love of Jesus saves me whole,  
The love of God my steps control, (AATR 13)

Clyde’s mother is extremely keen to be supportive and stood by his side to aid her child, who has continual disputes with his angry father. She is full of affection, but not as fanatic worshiper as his father. In this perspective, Frederick Balling – a teacher at Colorado University- explains that his: *“Mother, in contrast to the stern religious fanaticism of the father, was full of tender sentiment and not subject to his adamant morality. Quiet by nature, sympathetic and gentle, she was nonetheless endowed with endless strength and patience.” (05) However, she could do nothing to save her son. In a sense, she had strong feeling that God was supervising the human destiny. He called them to join his mercy and to rinse their wrongdoings. The critic, PHEME Perkins wrote: “God has once again come into the world of humanity to call forth a people from among the nations.” (256)*

In An American Tragedy, Clyde rebels against the moral values that tied him and constituted hindrances to fulfill his expectations for material success and pleasure. The limits of morality are in due course overstepped in the search for a better social status. In his book, Theodore Dreiser Encyclopedia, Keith Newlin writes: *“[the narratives] convey ideas crucial to the entire characterization of Clyde Griffiths—that his tendency to follow the modern world's "religion" of wealth, status, and pleasure derives from a youthful need to rebel against the restrictive morality of traditional religiousness, a propensity Dreiser knew from his own family experiences. (19)*

In his “Message and Miracles”, the essayist, Graham Stanton believes that Jesus as spokesman of God knows about the unhappiness of the poor. He comes only for the sake of helping them. Through his theology, he grants them spiritual stillness. Consequently, their faith grants them hope for life. He states that: *“Jesus indicates that he is a miracle worker and a proclaimer of God’s good news for the poor, and implies that his message and his miracles are to be seen as fulfilment of God’s promises.” (Stanton 70) The two mothers believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*

The two mothers really believe in the resurrection and want to meet over again their sons in the afterlife. There, they can forget their poverty, social inferiority and indifference. Indeed, their sons Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths are symbolized as emblematic as Jesus. The two heroes sacrificed to let the others voice loud. They died and their death became a seed of life for their countrymen. Nonetheless, maternal insistence upon a religious training is eventually of no use. Society imposes something stronger than maternal tenderness. Religion for Mrs. Griffiths and Mrs. Thomas is a psychological safe haven from social brutalities. However, Bigger and Clyde choose to confront society. Is religion for them a needed spiritual equipment or heavy burden?

## **Section Two: Religious Identity and Spiritual Paralysis**

### **1- The Quest for Religious Faith**

Wright Right, as an African American intellectual, committed himself to the embodiment of the African American culture and folklore as a way of self-expression. He, in more than one occasion, criticized the black culture as being dumb and affectless. Owen Robinson maintains: *“For Wright, black folk culture seemed more an absence than a presence – its cultural emptiness represented all that blacks were deprived of in terms of Western civilization.”* (160)

Suffering from the cultural alienation, which positioned them just at the very edge of the American society, the blacks were combating the feelings of what Ernest Hemingway calls in his fiction “Nada”<sup>6</sup> or the sentiments of nothingness. And that’s how, many of them got religion to appease their melancholic life. They just embraced religious teachings hankering to live the hereafter in peace and happiness. In “How Bigger Was Born”, Richard Wright writes : *“Some of the Negroes living under these conditions got religion, felt that Jesus would redeem the void of living, felt that the more bitter life was in the present the happier would be in the hereafter”* (15)

To Wright, the nigger’s social exclusion is a white duty and alternative. This is to say, it is up to the white norm, the black is to socially integrate the American identity or not. Robert Bone sees that Thomas is without any sense of identity. He argues: *“Assigned by tradition to a demeaning role, he is deprived of possibility, of what he might become. Defined by others, and manipulated by means of these twisted*

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<sup>6</sup> Feelings of Nada: Nada is a Spanish word which means nothing or ‘nothingness’. Ernest Hemingway borrowed this word, after he had passed a period of time in Spain covering the Spanish civil war.

*definitions, he is robbed of personality, identity, a sense of self.*" (14) As an outcome, to the white advantage, the black must take or leave the sense of belonging. In similar vein the Algerian critic, Abdelhamid Zoubir avers:

The inclusion or integration that the "black" man is offered is always proportionate to the white man's options and interests; when the latter are felt to be endangered by real or only symbolic menaces on the part of any other constituents of what the white man has defined as being American identity, inclusion is not all accepted (54)

Wright profoundly employs the Biblical symbolism in his Native Son. Undeniably, he makes use of name to convey some religious hidden messages. He invites the readers to decipher them and get their deep structure. The critic Tara Green supports the idea arguing: "*Wright plays on Mary, the biblical virgin mother, who represents the standard for sexual behavior.*" (36) Native son also describes how isolated is Bigger Thomas from the spiritual realm. In his "Bigger's 'Rebellious Complaint': Biblical Imagery in Native Son", Carme Manuel points out that "*Native Son is firmly rooted in biblical models of narration and theme indicated by the protagonist's spiritual isolation and despair. Bigger's most bitter realization is the breach existing between himself and others (family, friends, society in general) in scenes which recreate his alienation and show the corruption that white America inscribed on blackness.*" (157)

Bigger Thomas is separated from his family and people. And he is equally estranged from the religion and the folklore of his family and people. He is left alone following the new promises of civilization. He tries to know something about his religious identity and its aspects. In this vein, Richard Wright says:

But there were always two factors psychologically dominant in his personality. First, through some quirk of circumstance, he had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of American life. ("How Bigger Was Born" 15/6)

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An American Tragedy equally shows many inconsistent paradoxical aspects in the identity of Clyde Griffiths. On the ground of his questionable social status in the industrial city of the twentieth century American society, he is lost. Despite the fact that physically, he looks like his cousin Gilbert Griffiths. Yet, materially speaking, he was so different. In fact, Clyde is a poor needy and deprived of the least thing, he aspires to have. By contrast, Gilbert is of elegance, fame, and wealth. Keith Newlin assumes that “*Clyde suffers from confusing, conflicted views of his own identity and possibilities for a future, as a result of his ambiguous position in this small city where (fatefully) he "looks like" a "somebody"—his cousin Gilbert Griffiths—even while actually remaining in financial and social terms a "nobody."*” (21)

An American Tragedy also proves to be very Biblical, when inserting religion as an element that dramatizes the unsuccessful mission to the twentieth century Americans. Religion does not succeed in guiding youths in a materialistic perilous society. The latter is able to smash them easily. Religion only comforts them. Martin Bucco expounds that: “*Throughout An American Tragedy, Dreiser has dramatized the failure of religion to guide Clyde over the hazardous terrain of modern American life.*” (33)

Clyde’s miserable family is in a desperate need of everything. However, spiritually speaking, they are very strong. This religious endurance renders them as patient creatures as stern is their situation. The Griffiths parents do not spare any efforts to show their love and heavenly loyalty to their creator. They usually declare that “*God will provide*”, [or] “*God will show the way*” (AATR 15) especially when the family goes through hard times of stress and depression. Unfortunately, for Clyde, he does not. And their misery and poverty go on. Clyde sees religion as aimless and indifferent. An American Tragedy’s narrator describes the social and material condition of the poor family:

The family was always “hard up,” never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures which seemed common enough to others. And his father and mother were constantly proclaiming the love and mercy and care of God for him and for all. [...] Yet apparently, in spite of this, as he and all the other children could see, God did not show any very clear way (14)

Clyde does not wish to take part in this at all. Boys around his age do not do the same. They either go to school instead or go to concerts, clubs, or even cinema. Yet, he is imprisoned in a tight ritualistic Christian circle. Moreover, some boys despise him and his poor parent's religious performances. They make fun of him. Consequently, he develops an identity that opposes religion. The latter takes away from him the opportunity to have an elegant life of pleasure and luxuries. Theodore Dreiser writes: "*He wished that they need not do this anymore, or at least that he need not be a part of it. Other boys did not do such things, and besides, somehow it seemed shabby and even degrading. [. . .] other boys had called to him and made fun of his father* (AATR 8)

Clyde, therefore, escapes from this meaningless religion to what seems to him the vastly more exciting and colorful life. This especially will expose him to an atheistic realm of enjoyment. He is merely what Margaret Drabble called "*Son of unworldly, evangelist parents*" (301) His escapism on deterministic grounds is understood in a way or another. In other words, society's constraints block his way. No alternative is left for him, but only escaping to the world of lust and formality. Yet, people around him would not forgive his sins or consider his social condition.

Clyde is psychologically deteriorated and broken, since his first religious performances. He thought that life is more important than performing religious missions in streets in order to gain some pennies to keep alive. He does not merely consider that this religious show is shabby; it could rather make him and his parents look foolish and less normal. His reactions clearly drawn on his face features and his feeling of shame are the ultimate expression of his resentment. According to the narrator, Clyde eventually decides to revolt and break the family's law even though, he would do it alone. In similar context, Dreiser writes: "*What good did it do them to have him along? His life should not be like this. Other boys did not have to do as he did. He meditated now more determinedly than ever a rebellion by which he would rid himself of the need of going out in this way. Let his elder sister go if she chose; she liked it. His younger sister and brother might be too young to care.* (AATR 19)

Performing this religious show has become Clyde's identity rather than an activity. This is to say, religion has an influential impact on his personality. He is actually lost amid the spiritual ceremonies. He does not know why does he do all that

since his soul is dead and gives nearly no response? Clyde's confidence in theology proved very pathetic. In whole, religion does not correspond with his expectations. Thus, it is about time he made the decision for change. Revolution against this religious theology is on course to break out. Clyde seriously set his spiritual voyage to search his identity. The quest is urgently needed to catch the legitimacy of the spiritual 'selfhood'. Philip Fisher in his essay "The Naturalist Novel and the City: Temporary Worlds", points out: "*Bluntly put, within Dreiser's novel the question of authenticity never exists. Clyde has no self to which he might be "true." Literally, he is not yet anyone at all. For the calm or even frantic possession of himself Clyde substitutes an alertness to the moods of others, to their "take" of him.*" (226/7)

## 2- Spiritual Paralysis

During the period of time he spent in prison, Bigger Thomas was exposed to the religious institution to repent, before leaving to the afterlife. His mother sends the black preacher Reverend Hammond to his cell to bring him back to Christianity, hoping that God will save him. Wright uses her to illustrate the important role of Christianity among some poor African Americans, especially guiding them in the path of Jesus Christ. Harold Bloom points out that: "*He [Reverend Hammond] comes to the jail to convince Bigger to pray for salvation in the next life. Bigger refuses his offer and sees the man as ridiculous—one given the drug of religion to forget the injustices with which he lives.*" (Bloom's Guides: Native Son 16)

When Clyde was taken to his cell, he was visited by a man called Reverend McMillan. McMillan's job is to convert Clyde and make him join his maker as white as snow, i.e., to remove all the sins of killing Roberta Alden. McMillan's comes to restore the hope Clyde misses, since he committed his crime. McMillan aims at cleaning Clyde's sins and guilt. He should be there to encourage him spiritually and talk on about faith and the refuge, which the mercy and wisdom of God provide. Addressing Clyde, Reverend McMillan says:

I bring you, Clyde, the mercy and the salvation of your God. He has called on me and I have come. He has sent me that I may say unto you though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white—like snow. Though they be red, like crimson, they shall be as wool. Come now, let us reason together with the Lord. (AAT 541)

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In Native Son, the black preacher delivers some words to bring good Lord's mercy upon Thomas. Nevertheless, this man for Bigger Thomas is more or less a point to evoke what the papers say on the white behalf. Accordingly, he cannot distinguish the love of his own kind and the hate of the whites. This makes him guilty than ever. Thomas tries not to listen to the words of God's ambassador. Yet, against his will, they install themselves in his consciousness and he gets their deep structure without a clever analysis. He could not resist them, just as they prove him guilty and doom to death. Thomas likes action and hates seeing himself, a weak sufferer, following the path of Jesus Christ. In this sense, his rejection to spiritual submission is a way to endure the weakness within him. Ann Joyce puts it as follows:

They [the blacks] have also internalized the image of themselves as downtrodden, fated sufferers following the life of Christ. Thus Reverend Hammond's mission is to render Bigger submissive. Bigger, however, unlike his mother and the rest of his environment, rejects religion and its concomitant passivity and guilt. He is a man of action and necessity. (57/8)

The Christian tenets, which are supposed to save him from the Hell, condemn him now. Religion, in this sense, stands by side of his enemies, making him assume the entire responsibility for the death of Mary Dalton. Spirituality now denounces him regardless the social, psychological, and racial fiasco, he faces. He, eventually, determines to disbelieve in the words of the God of the whites, who deliberately and completely denies him in much the same way this God favors the whites, who torture the blacks: *"Bigger stared unblinkingly at the white wall before him as the preacher's words registered themselves in his consciousness. He knew without listening what they meant; it was the old voice of his mother telling of suffering, of hope, of love beyond this world. And he loathed it because it made feel as condemned and guilty as the voice of those who hated him"* (NS 320)

Reverend Hammond seems to have forgotten his blackness and his inability to conveniently act in a white community. He comes to the prison to instruct Thomas to forget everything but his soul, to put aside what newspapers say about him, to forget that he is black, since God does not look past to men's skin. Hammond wants to hand a message to Bigger: *"He [God] wants yuh 'n' he loves yuh"* (320) The priest wishes for making Thomas's heart so glad with an eternal divine light. Nonetheless, these

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utterances broaden his agony and grief. They darken what is supposed to be a little ray of hope sparkling in the dark horizon of suffering and melancholia. Thomas “*A metaphysical rebel*” (Margolies 41) loathes him, and within himself, he burns his picture and kills the preacher and denies any religious aspect for his identity. Inside of him, he makes his decision and no way for spiritual healing. It is too late; religion now is of no use.

The preacher’s face was black and sad and earnest and made him feel a sense of guilt deeper than which even his murder of Mary had made him feel. He had killed within himself the preacher’s haunting picture of life even before he had killed Mary; that had been his first murder. And now the preacher made it walk before his eyes like a ghost in the night, creating within him a sense of exclusion that was as cold as a block of ice. (NS 322)

Thomas ultimately disapproves religion suggested by Hammond. This refusal does not spring from the fact that he cannot bear it, but because the white oppression wants to impose a religion modeled from a white scope. Moreover, the Christians themselves alienate him from the Christian faith. In this vein, Lale Demitürk claims: “*He rejects whatever Reverend Hammond, the black preacher, tells him, not because he is incapable of faith in God but because he was pushed outside of the Christian scheme of the universe by the Christians themselves.*” (89)

Reverend Hammond gives Bigger a cross to wear while he is in prison and asks him when being alone to look at it and believe. “*The wooden cross hung next to the skin to Bigger’s chest*” (NS 323) Thomas likens and associates this cross with the crosses that are burned during racist rituals. In making this approach, Richard Wright points that even the moral province of Christianity has been corrupted by white racism in America. Bloom again writes, “*When he looks up, he sees a burning cross atop a building across the street. Though Bigger does not know what it is, the reader recognizes the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan.* (Bloom’s Guides: Native Son 52)

In An American Tragedy, Clyde does not will to bring his peers to his home in Kansas, owing to his complex of inferiority. Hence, he always avoids friends and prefers all the time playing alone. Thus, accumulations of no-confidence and frustration are rooted in his childhood, as if it were huge damaging forces standing a barrier preventing him to understand his social environment. His father Asa Griffiths

is only just a product of a religious theory. Yet, religion does not help to face social constraints. Asa does not have anticipation to the future and was only a product of religion. In the novel, the narrator says: “*Asa Griffiths, the father, was one of those poorly integrated and correlated organisms, the product of an environment and a religious theory, but with no guiding or mental insight of his own*” (AATR11)

When Clyde arrived to his cell, he knew that Pasquale<sup>7</sup> was about to be executed. Pasquale was praying day and night and no option is left for him, only God’s salvation. He was kissing the floor, licking the feet of a brass Christ on a cross given to him. He was allowed to prepare his soul and getting ready to make the journey of meeting his Maker.

After Pasquale's electrocution, Clyde's only reaction is: “*God! God! God! God!*” (AAT 537) Clyde has never experienced such a scene. He is filled with fear and horror. Clyde, at this moment, finds none to resort to. He is absorbed in horror and hysterical terror. His panic doubles, when recognizing how bitter death is. How dim-witted he is when seeing life with rose-tinted spectacles. His religious identity has shaken once again. He wants to catch the light of religion as a thread of rescue. He desires to restore any sign of hope in the dark horizon of his sins.

Clyde wishes if only he could win to spiritual peace through prayer, and he would be relieved to do it. Before committing his crime, his mother was all the time urging him to pray but he did not. He is now so ashamed for not doing his mother’s instructions; otherwise, he would not be in that strange freak. Conversely, Clyde’s social unconsciousness and his parent’s indifference forcingly pushed him to the crime in the same way he was compelled to accept religion. Leonardo Cassuto in his essay “Dreiser and crime”, points out that: “*Dreiser compares Clyde’s yielding to religion to his yielding to murder. Not only do both events involve a “yielding” at the point of decision, but both also result from “all but unconscious” impulses.* (208)

In Native Son, Bigger, in an interior monologue, asking himself some tough questions. What behind raising such religious rituals right after he had smothered Mary? Is it a revenge for his spiritual indifference throughout his life? Or Is it the weakness of his black people to defend him?

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<sup>7</sup> In An American Tragedy, Pasquale is convicted of the slaying of his brother, for attempting to seduce his wife.

At any rates, no plausible answers came to his mind. And yet, his face features were so expressive to tell his white killers or black healers. *Native Son's* narrator: "For those who wanted to kill him he was not human, not included in that picture of creation; and that was why he had killed it. To live, he had created a new world for himself, and for that he was to die" (NS 322/23)

The preacher, once more, defies Bigger Thomas's stubbornness and endeavors to persuade him to pray because Lord can hear prayers of his sinners and "He'd show us a way back t' 'Im. His Son Jesus came down t' earth 'n' put on human flesh 'n' lived 'n' died t' show us the way but his death wuz a victory" (322/3) However, the reverend's speech about the importance of God and faith seems long-winded and meaningless. Bigger Thomas inwardly rejects religious faith.

Bigger Thomas is visited by Jan Erlone and his lawyer Max. The communist Max is comprehensive and helpful. His communism constitutes a support and a compensation for the disappointment resulting in role of religion<sup>8</sup>. He better grasps Thomas' ethnic background and his tragedy as well. William L. Andrews maintains that: "He [Max] understands Bigger's class situation but nothing about how that intersects with race, thus explaining the otherwise enigmatic line at the close of the novel, "Max groped for his hat like a blind man." (448)

Furthermore, Max and Jan's humanistic treatment inserting Bigger in the world of humanity is a practical solution and substitution for Bigger's antagonism to Christian theology. Kathleen Gallagher to the point explains: "Where religion has failed Bigger by its rejection of humanity for another world, humanity itself offers him redemption. That Jan's forgiving nobility is not entirely credible is less important than it might be because of the emphasis Wright places on Bigger's role in the experience." (12) Yet, this does not appease his torment in prison. Later, Mrs. and Mr. Dalton and their lawyer Buckley get into the cell and Bigger receives a blow of questions about the person that helped him in the affair. Meanwhile, Thomas's people come to pay him

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<sup>8</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels explained that Communism abolishes the human past experiences, including religion. They wrote: "But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience." (29)

a visit, he is very embarrassed and wishes to be nowhere there. In an interior dialogue, he is asking himself: Why do all these happen to him now? He has his spirit broken, but what is the sin of his mother and his bothers to be inhumanly treated? Indeed, it is now the turn of his white victim to take revenge.

Mrs. Thomas holds him between her arms tenderly shedding weep tears. She is about to lose Bigger forever and she has nothing to do. Bigger is stiff with dread and astonishment. The miserable mother is filled with psychological sorrow and skepticism. She feels that she did all she could for the sake of her kids, if she left something undone because it was beyond the realm of possibility, or it was not all the knowledge of her. She laments:

I scrubbed and washed and ironed from morning till night, day in and day out, as long as I had strength in my old body. I did all I know how, son, and if I left anything undone, it's just cause that I didn't know. It's just cause that your poor old ma couldn't see, son. When I heard the news of what happened, I got on my knees and turned my eyes to God and asked Him if I had raised you wrong. I asked Him to let me bear you burden if I did wrong by you.  
(NS 336)

In *An American Tragedy*, Clyde's mother wants to catch up her son's religious lateness. She sends him Reverend McMillan to change the spiritual state of his soul. Clyde would find him a helpful and a strong support in these hard moments, when the signal of death is strongly showing itself. In these dark and difficult times, Clyde needs the divine compassion to cleanse his sins of killing Roberta Alden.

The sign of Clyde's leave becomes very soon and his feelings of fear or contrition are seemingly useless. What could really assuage his sharp resentment and fill his heart is religious faith. Clyde begins recalling religious convictions to protect him in the hereafter. He was eventually persuaded to be upon his knees and preach the word of God. Clyde follows his instinctual impulses overstepping all the puritanical code and pursues his sexual passion, which proved bogus. In this context, Abby H. P. Werlock comments: *"Like America, Clyde has roots in Puritanical fundamentalism but craves temporal happiness despite its spurious promise. For a time, Pastor McMillan's prison visits provide Clyde with comfort and a sense of the divine. Still, by forsaking Clyde, the pastor believes he is saving his own soul."* (52)

### CHAPTER THREE: THE QUEST FOR A SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

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The minister of the Christian church, McMillan, considers himself the mouthpiece of God's words spoken directly to the poor sinner Clyde. The priest asks Clyde to "*Turn from the shadow to the light.*" (AAT 542) He begs him to break the bonds of misery, despair and gloom. Accordingly, the Lord can and will forgive his creatures' sin and errors. God will not snub the faith of those who indulge in a white repentance. McMillan fully understands that Clyde is in a desperate need to a sacred support; "*I do know you need spiritual help and He will give you that—oh, fully. 'The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed; a refuge in time of trouble.'*" (542)

Reverend McMillan is sure of one thing that the enlightenment and peace are surely going to come to Clyde. He reassures him that God will never let him alone. He will lighten the pain of that plight and will provide him with light, peace and guidance.

Clyde falls in a tremendous contradiction. The words of the preacher ring a bell of some buried remembrances. It has just brought to his mind the agonizing experience during which, he regards religion as the worst thing to happen in his life. Since his childhood he is compelled to conduct religious missions to get some cents to sustain the livelihood of the penniless family.

Clyde's ambivalent doubt immerses him in a deep sorrow. He cannot understand himself or people around him. Is he to choose God's path, which distorts his life or to persist his antagonism to religion? Effectively, religion represses his wished hindering him from achieving social recognition. Louis Ziane, in this context, points out: "*Clyde is not only driven by his desire to achieve wealth and social position; he is also driven by "chemisms" of the sexual impulse.*" (107)

Clyde needs aid under such crucial circumstances. He has yearnings that mysterious divine power be likely to grant help. Moreover, some other sensible questions assert themselves in Clyde's consciousness: "*Was there a God? Did He interfere in the affairs of men as Mr. McMillan was now contending? Was it possible that one could turn to Him, or at least some creative power, in some such hour as this and when one had always ignored Him before, and ask for aid?*" (AAT 544)

Certainly, the skeptical instances widen the fracture of his religious identity. He seems to have lost the right spiritual direction. In the following passage of An American Tragedy, the narrator delineates how dubious Clyde is in the light of the

preacher's words: *"There was still lingering here in him that old contempt of his for religion and its fruits, —the constant and yet fruitless prayers and exhortations of his father and mother. Was he going to turn to religion now, solely because he was in difficulties and frightened like these others? He hoped not. Not like that, anyway."* (543)

The preacher, as a spiritual emissary of God, again ventures to purge Clyde's soul to make it obedient requesting him to *"Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you."* (545) Conversely, Clyde wonders if any would bother with a person, who is caught in a web of sin and thus seeking salvation. Additionally, Clyde speculates what McMillan would think of him if he knew what he was thinking about the God, who sustains the poor needy creatures imploring him to intervene. The minister does not know that Clyde was guided to crime not just by his instinctual sexuality but by the religious self-denial. Leonardo Cassuto writes: *"Clyde is driven to crime not only by sexual appetite and sexual carelessness, but also by his parents' religious abstemiousness."* (209)

Although Clyde feels pessimistic about his future, McMillan's prayers and invocations guide Clyde's steps and set his mind at rest with his God than any prayers of his own would do. But, he is somehow unable to pray, yet. McMillan is very disappointed with Clyde's spiritual stagnation. Namely, the Biblical preachments have not been greeted with as much warmth as he would have liked. Dreiser writes: *"[McMillan] was beginning to despair of ever affecting him in any way toward his proper contrition and salvation"* (AAT 547)

Clyde knows that he is going wrong with his own spiritual viewpoint. With no little success achieved, Reverend McMillan does not emerge to be able to solve his true responsibility of leading the little guy in the path of Jesus Christ. Consequently, Clyde's wounded soul *"seemed not to be able to find that peace of mind of which McMillan talked so much. Perhaps [...] there must be something wrong with his viewpoint."* (549)

When McMillan is questioned by the new elected governor to add something not mentioned in the trial to save Clyde from death, he goes through moments of paralysis. He is clumsy, dumb, and irresponsive. Thus, it is possible to escape his conviction of

Clyde's guilt saying that he is the spiritual advisor of Clyde and has nothing to do with legal aspect. It is apparent to the others that he is profoundly satisfied with Clyde's responsibility for Roberta's death: "*But not that he was not guilty. And Clyde, feeling how strange it was that the Reverend McMillan could not conscientiously bring himself to do more than that for him. How sad. How hopeless. Would no one ever understand—or give him credit for his human—if all too human and perhaps wrong hungers.*" (AAT 558)

In Native Son, Mrs. Thomas has only to pray for Bigger. She implores her God to accept his repentance and cleanse him from peccadilloes. She asks him to get back to the almighty God awaiting for his spiritual return. The greatest God is eagerly opening his arms to Bigger Thomas. Mrs. Thomas is sure that her son is undoubtedly going to leave to the afterlife. Therefore, he has to ask God for help. "*He'd [God] show us a way back t' 'Im. His Son Jesus came down t' earth 'n' put on human flesh 'n' lived 'n' died t' show us the way [...]*but his death wuz a victory" (NS 322/3)

Bigger's response was "*Forget me, Ma,*" (337). He vows not to surrender, but to endure. He makes his mind up to keep his paganism. He is sure that acknowledging the religious conversion will implement his guilt. The spiritual conversion will condemn him weakening his potential to stand and fight for it. Bigger refuses his mother's offer and sees religion as ridiculous. It looks like giving the drug of religion to forget the injustices with which he lives.

How can he embrace the religion, which dehumanizes the blacks, depriving them of the least best in the country? For him, what can religion produce is only despair and bitterness. Christianity plays a most important role among some poor African Americans making less burdensome their daily hardships. It is almost impossible for him to accept it. Inside of him, there resides a deep metaphysical fracture. Neither communism nor spirituality could come up with healing. It is rather a nihilistic<sup>9</sup> theology. Edward Margolies, similar vein, writes: "*But the metaphysical*

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<sup>9</sup> Nihilism: Invented by Turgenev in his novel Fathers and Sons (1862). It denotes a radical or extreme radical attitude which denies all traditional values and, not infrequently moral values as well. Turgenev invented it to describe the radical elements in the Russian intelligentsia who were profoundly disillusioned by lack of reform and believed that the only way to achieve anything was to destroy more or less completely all prevailing systems. (Cuddon 547) Thomas sees the religion at hand must be subverted as a prevailing system and substituted by a fair one.

*vacuum that has been created does not necessarily lead men like Bigger to Communism, but may just as easily lead to the most murderous kind of nihilism.”* (41)

Although Thomas defies the attempts of his mother and the preacher, to render his soul submissive, the parental insistence of his mother, on the one hand, and the white despising glances, on the other, made him give up. Mrs. Thomas told her son that she liked seeing him over again in the resurrection, where they would meet once more around God’s table. Imploring her son, she pronounces, “*Son, there’s a place where we can be together again in the great bye and bye. God’s done fixed it so we can. He’s fixed a meeting place for us, a place where we can live without fear. No matter what happens to us here, we can be together in God’s heaven.*” (NS 337)

Bigger Thomas, eventually, replies: “*I’ll pray, Ma.*” (337) He promises to pray simply because his mother wants to see him again after the sorrow as well as the suffering of this world. He prays as she hankers to leave them in peace and meet them after the grave. It was a compulsory choice to adopt the Christian faith and pretend religious reliance.

Bigger Thomas considers his mother as another barrier standing on his way. Instead of siding with him, she poses abstractions. Valerie Sweeney, in similar context, maintains, “*Bigger sees her [Mrs. Thomas] as another obstacle to control over his own life. Poverty and anger constrain him and limit his ability to interpret his experiences more productively.*” (16)

Thomas refuses the mysticism that denounces him. However, “*He has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth.*” (Baldwin 23)

The preacher insists upon Bigger to overlook the papers and their offensive and to forget that he is black claiming that God does not see skin color. But, Thomas implies that even the preacher has subconsciously absorbed the racist attitudes surrounding him. Once more, Thomas attempts at finding a spiritual exit. It is not communism that Jan and Max are working to spread among the blacks as a means to achieve social justice. Mikko Tuhkanen remarks: “*According to Wright [. . .] both Christianity and communism function imaginarily: they disable the subject’s mobility,*

*offering imaginary solutions to symbolic ills. Rather than being content with illustrating the stages of dialectical materialism” (86)*

In An American Tragedy, Clyde writes an address to the world, and more particularly to his young countrymen inviting them to learn from his experience. In other words, he confesses his religious failure to live in peace and enlightenment. However, he eventually finds his way to God through repentance. He gives his soul to his maker to purify it from all the sins and make it white. He is, then, at peace. He is wise and righteous joining the eternal glory by Jesus Christ. He is on the right way, the truth and the eternal life of the hereafter. Clyde’s words:

If the young men of this country could only know the joy and pleasure of a Christian life, I know they would do all in their power to become earnest, active Christians, and would strive to live as Christ would have them live. There is not one thing I have left undone which will bar me from facing my God, knowing that my sins are forgiven, for I have been free and frank in my talks with my spiritual adviser, and God knows where I stand. (AAT 560)

The essayist, Martin Marty, considers religion as communal institution to be feared and respected. Likewise, it grants society tranquility and solidity. He writes, “*It was generally assumed that a well-churched community would be marked by stability, liveliness, an ennobled spirit, and a concern for forming the character of the young*” (302/3) Clyde gives his last letter to reinforce the fact that he does not have the social tranquility. He is lost. Thus, Clyde's letter of Christian victory is regarded by many critics as hollow and mechanical as Elvira's last reply from the governor's office to save her son.

On his way to the electric chair, Clyde catches the view of his mother. Her spirit is broken. Clyde packs his courage, telling his mother some words to blunt her gloom. He wants to utter some powerful words to defy her weeping tears and give her even a pale smile. He is clever to address her saying, “*Mama, you must believe that I die resigned and content. It won’t be hard. God has heard my prayers. He has given me strength and peace.*” But to himself adding: “*Had he?*” (AAT 561) Yet, he is not sure of it.

Clyde does not want to be literally responsible for his actions. Society is equally responsible. Religion seems to have promised salvation in the hereafter. Yet, this religion denounces him and prevents any possible rescue from death for the fact that he is judged guilty. Clyde's first religion is the desire, and this desire is responsible for shaping his identity. As Mariam Gogol points out: "*Desire has many faces in the work of Dreiser; ultimately, it is responsible for identity*". (112) Consequently, his search for the religious identity is senseless and the aspects of his identity are unstable.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, analyzing the forming of the spiritual identity of Clyde and Bigger involves many factors. The authors' religious backgrounds constitute a cornerstone in the delineation of spirituality of the two protagonists. Wright Richard was so anxious to embrace the Christian faith, which represses his life. He refused religion and preferred rather logic over religious authority. He altered to live his life with no reference to the God, who isolated the blacks through religious white impositions. Dreiser equally lived moments of religious ambivalence. His parents were so religious that he could not escape their restrictive evangelism. Although his tendencies to scientism and mechanism made his religion fade away, the end of his career witnesses rediscovery of his spiritual identity. He became a devout Christian, and religion granted him some answers that science stood unable to provide.

The mother, in the two novels, is likewise of an appealing influence. Bigger's mother Mrs. Thomas intensely counts on religion in her life. Her mystical dependability lightens her wretchedness. During the hard times of her son's capture, she incessantly prays for her son and staunchly tries to persuade him to pray. She overpoweringly believes in the afterlife, when her God prepares a table to sit around without the constraints of whites fear. Mrs. Elvira Griffiths, just like Mrs. Thomas is a Christian believer. She does not spare to commit her life to God's obedience. Yet, her condense accountancy on religion makes her unconscious about her son Clyde. The latter found out that it had been too late to preach the Bible, especially after committing crime. This pious optimistic woman is full of hope. She works seriously to train spiritually her children. But Clyde thinks of it the shabbiest thing to do in his life. When he was judged guilty, she found her son's fate unquestionable.

Both Bigger and Clyde spiritual identities range from belief to disbelief. They go through moments of paralysis and spiritual clumsiness. They staunchly fight the religious emptiness of their identity. Yet, spiritual ineptness makes an impact on them. They do not know what to do in a time, when religion is thought to be necessary.

Bigger's spiritual identity is reshaped at the aftermath of a saintly religious hurricane pressing him to make the wrong alternative. When doing so, he satisfies an old wish to enjoy a spiritual tranquility that religion grants his mother. The liturgical landscape over the shoulders of skeptics and unbelievers is seemingly making some magical influence. Yet, Bigger's doubts never fade away. Consequently, it is outwardly impossible. Religion imposes on people, of his skin, overwhelming realities. His willful religious doubts and shabby attempts at Christian devotion subverted his spiritual ambivalence.

Clyde, on the other hand, was sure of his death. But how can he face his Creator? Clyde does not like to accept the religion that entitles him to anguish. Even when he assures his mother that he will meet his God with a self-righteous conscience, he questions its authenticity. In spite of the fact that religion grants him mystical tranquility, it condemns him to death rather than giving him a new hope. He wishes if only he could gain a spiritual peace through prayer, and he would be ready to do it. In a word, his spiritual identity is shaken in the same way the electric chair putting an end to his life.

In fact, the social constraints are so influential in the religious sense of loss. These strains leave no opportunity for them to preoccupy themselves with the words of God. Society, through its strains, dangerously hurts them. Yet, the same society suggested the remedies of spiritual healing through a Christian dogma. Religion does not solve the spiritual and psychological dilemma. However, this spiritual salvation condemns the poor Clyde and Thomas without giving them a single cause to live.

# **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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In a world of darkness, where the universe blandly dismisses the human demand for recognition, the central characters of An American Tragedy and Native Son, Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas fall victims of the elemental forces running through society. They seem to be frail fatalities of social situation, rising to success or falling to failure more as a matter of accident and event than of ability, determination or will. They are actually lost in the social landscape and their fate is pre-determined by the trap of circumstance.

Their quest for knowledge is met with curtailment of any educational opportunities. Thomas left school at an early age and his hope of being someone in the future faded away. The white oppression of the Negro is a social condition unceasingly stifling Thomas, dwarfing, and transforming him into a killer. As regards Clyde's educational career, it was purely an unfathomable handicap. Clyde left school and his education was perturbed by the different tours of his parents from town to town, in order to conduct religious missions. Meanwhile, Bigger Thomas left school at eight grades for not having money. The two grow angry about the harrowing reality of the education, they received. Furthermore, Clyde was ready to lie to his aristocratic company saying he had studied mathematics at the university and Bigger could not fly a plane or join the army. The two, bitterly, felt their social breakdown. Consequently, their dreams were depressingly circumscribed. In a word, the two are the products of a brutal culture, and the resultant social marginalization is the inevitable harvest of an overwhelmingly suppressing environmentalism.

The two books show in relentless detail how the trap of circumstance closes more tightly and literally on the protagonists. In the course of their prevailing naturalistic views, Dreiser and Wright delineate Clyde and Bigger overwhelmed by accidental and social powers rather than acting rationally, voluntarily, and heroically upon the world. They have been ruthlessly struggling poverty and parental abuse. Their hearts became strong and hard and their mind grew accustomed to the daily facts of brutality. Namely, racial oppression, fear, and violence were heavy constraints,

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hindering Bigger Thomas to live naturally in a community governed by the white supremacy. Bigger Thomas permanently lived feelings of social fear and violence. The latter became an arm to terrorize the whites in a natural occurring reaction of defending oneself. Then again, Clyde led a dissolute life, drinking, and womanizing in following the mirage of American Dream success. He was, dramatically, seduced by reaping the sweet yield of material success and killed Roberta to keep his dream vivid. And yet, this illusion of prosperity turned out to be a social constraint squashing Clyde Griffiths, closing the last scenes of his fateful destiny. It is, in a sense, the contradiction of the American ambition. Success is for all but Clyde Griffiths is a social outcast.

Admittedly, the two grew up in a society, where a man cannot escape the harsh constraints, since environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shaping lives regardless. As aspirants of the American dream, Clyde and Bigger were slaughtered by poverty and their sexual lusts. They faced the harsh social cruelty against their creeping paralysis by means of murdering individuals of this society. In acknowledging so, their minds were worn out by disillusionment and dejection. Thus, discrepancy between their success and the social reality was obviously and bitterly absorbed.

Clyde and Bigger have also been socially alienated in their country. They were regarded as strangers and hence deprived of any chance of proving themselves in the society, which was supposed to be their safe home. Clyde was alienated by his family. He was considered as a stranger with his uncle and gained no dignity. Bigger was equally estranged from world of humanity, when he was regarded by the whites as a gorilla. Hence, social alienation was a social restraint to frustrate these two youngs. Their cramped conditions and shabby dreams and aspirations forced them to see skepticism and apathy of life via rose-tinted spectacles. With a compelling mixture of sympathy and criticism of all their failures, Clyde and Bigger came up with an understanding that the strange social authoritative powers can flow from the ingrained American belief that survival is for the fittest.

In a mechanistic view of life, Dreiser and Wright think of Clyde and Thomas as victims of the ungovernable forces of society. They tended to focus on the conflict between basic human needs and society's demand for material success and social

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recognition, .i.e., Capitalism is another societal constraint to subvert Clyde and Bigger. For Clyde, the tone is bleak. That is to say, he mistook the way to attain material success. Hence, society makes him swallow the bait and his downfall is dejectedly harvested.

Bigger Thomas turned into a slaughtering capitalistic machine. He killed Mary Dalton and asked thousands of dollars in a ransom note. That is nowhere more clearly illustrated that Bigger was inside the prison of injustice, through the barred windows of racial oppression. Clyde, on the other hand, is in an undue world of dreams to foresee the future with a social naivety. Both Thomas and Griffiths grappled for money; they wounded themselves trying to climb to fame and fortune. Yet, they remained outcasts, existential orphans, sullen and bewildered. They always lived in a hope, which would bring them to life over again. Conversely, their craving for a realm of grace and illumination proved worthless as society refused them. Effectively, the social and capitalistic prejudice conspicuously kept them down and the littleness of life never reassured them or curbs their restlessness, but the electric chair. Hence, Capitalism evidently became a homicidal system of devastating consequences.

The social injustice is an additional constriction to foreshadow the social determinism in the two novels. It is manifested in the representation of a cruel, overmastering fate of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas. In spite of the fact that they are two native sons of America, they are equally two American tragedies. When they felt the hypocrisy of Social justice, they unavoidably began hating their American countrymen. Accordingly, it was likely for an American to kill American. In fact, their execution told about the troubles of a country, where its people feel that they are not free. The yield of hatred and anger, of wrath and rage may seemingly destroy the country's way of life. In the very souls of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas, the fruits of their persistence to withstand life are really ripening. America and Americans are ready now for the terrible harvest for a time of capitalist exploitation and destruction.

The forces of Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas often seemed just as implacable as those of society. The resistance of those constraints is within the realm of the impossibility. Their responses are up to the social dictators and their choices are

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reduced in scale. They face the electric chair simply because; they cannot cope with uncontrollable supernatural determinism leading them to tragic fate.

It was on the basis of these constraints that Bigger Thomas and Clyde Griffiths became the objects of 'otherness'. Bigger was 'another' in a community, where the white authority dominated. In the Western thought, the white is always the norm; the black is forever the 'other'. Besides, Clyde is another American, because of his rootless origins, alienation, and position of another American Dream seeker.

In other part, this thesis also places a mystical quest for an identity. The establishment of the spiritual identity for Clyde and Bigger is analyzed in accordance with some engrossing elements. Namely, the authors' religious backgrounds represent a cornerstone in the delineation of spirituality of the two protagonists. Richard Wright was so concerned to acquire the Christian reliance. Yet, the latter repressed his prospects, making any susceptible hope fade away. In other words, Wright rejected religion and preferred logic over spiritual authority. He chose to live without any reference to the God, who made the blacks out-of-the-way through white religious impositions. For this reason, Richard loathed religion, which excluded him from a sense of humanity. He refused the mysticism that sustained his hunger and poverty, turning the blacks into submissive creatures, accepting all types of degradation. In other part, Dreiser again went through moments of religious ambivalence. His parents were so pious that he could not escape their restrict evangelism. Dreiser was among the first writers to break the puritanical moral codes in the American society. He harshly attacked these religious theologies as a source of pain, repression, and tragedy. Although his tendencies to scientism and mechanism weakened his spiritual faith, the end of his career witnessed a rediscovery and a foundation of his spiritual identity. He grew to be a devout Christian and religious creeds awarded him a spiritual harmony. Besides, it provides him with some metaphysical answers to questions that science stood unable to offer.

In the two novels, the mother was of an appealing influence in so far the religious identity is concerned. Bigger Thomas's mother intensely counted on religion in her life. Her mystical dependability lightened her wretchedness. During depressing times of her son's capture, she incessantly prayed for him and repeatedly struggled to persuade him to pray. She overpoweringly believed in the afterlife, where her God

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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prepared a table to sit around without the white fear. Mrs. Thomas hankered for giving these pious beliefs to her son, but eventually, failed. In a sense, she worked so hard to raise her children. What helped her in this; only a divine patience. Despite her agonies, her saddening and moving situation, she kept her faith strong. Thomas had firm stance towards his mother, who comprised an additional obstruction on his way to accomplish numinous self- recognition.

Mrs. Elvira Griffiths just like Mrs. Thomas was a Christian believer. She did not spare to commit her life to God's obedience. This pious optimistic woman was full of hope. She worked seriously to spiritually train her children. She believed that all men were sinners in the light of the Lord, unless they would repent, unless they would accept Christ, his love and forgiveness of them, they could never know the happiness of being spiritually whole and clean. However, her condense accountancy on religion made her insensible about her son. In a sense, Clyde found it too shabby to preach the Bible. Clyde regarded his mother's religion the worst thing to do in his life. Through her Puritanism she hoped to save her son from Hell. But, combating Clyde's paganism did not go through an easy task.

In short and as a pendulum, Clyde's and Thomas's spiritual identity was swinging between belief and doubt. They were actually in a dilemma for they sometimes lingered to the Christian doctrine as a safe passage to hereafter, on the one hand, and their religious faith was subverted by stormy religious skepticism, on the other. This spiritual cynicism created feelings of disillusionment and confusion. Therefore, they stood undecided and went through depressing moments of spiritual nothingness. This spiritual void was primarily due to the social constraints. They inhibited them from a right achievement of mystical significance.

Clyde every now and then besought his lord to grant him strength to resist any evil thoughts. Nevertheless, his spiritual recognition was shaken by memories of his parents conducting religious performances. And the heavenly submission would doom him guilty making him assume all the erroneous charges of the crimes. For his part, Bigger Thomas left a room for a spiritual belief and divine piety. However, his quest for his religious status doomed to failure, since he was not recognized as a human. And in spite of his promise to his mother that he would believe in God, Bigger did not recognize himself via religion, but only it befell him a crime.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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Both Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas led a religious journey to explore the spiritual realm. The internalized sacred trip aimed at catching the several aspects of the spiritual arena. The quest for the religious identity was long and hard; fruitful at times, aimless and produced uselessness, at other times. The futility of Christianity was the commonest lesson to have learnt by two fictional protagonists, who eventually did not choose to decide their fate, and religion played no role to spare them alive. Namely, religion was more or less another social constraint or imposition. Society erred in so many ways, and a spiritual remedy was provided for social healing. Clyde and Thomas refused this religious remedial treatment, which was only a sedative to tranquilize the victims of social constraints. The metaphysical rebels lived spiritual isolation and despair. They realized most bitterly the breach existing between themselves and others. The metaphysical rebels revolted against the plethora of social inhibitions constraining their lives. Religion is corrupted by the same society, which granted Clyde and Bigger spiritual alienation and mystification instead of a mystical healing.

In a society of decaying puritanical values, Roberta Alden and Mary Dalton were slain by the values of the American myth, which resulted later in the slaughtering of their murderers Clyde Griffiths and Bigger Thomas. The latter were preys of the phony social values. The two girls were victimized by the religion of the new civilization. The modern religion of delights and enjoyments tended to offer a new realm of liberty and freedom. Then, the morality of ancient times seemed to have been old-fashioned.

Griffiths and Thomas saw their quest for spiritual identity as a means of getting out of their existential exile. However, their unfinished quest was overtly distorted by social constraints. Both men are perpetrators of violence, and so are the victims and products of their environments. As a creation of these circumstances, they aspired in an unalterable will to be someone. They possessed of a livid energy, furious potential, a determination to convert to Jesus path. However, the social conditions set them following the trail of tears and blood.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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The identity crisis is one of the most frequently discussed topics in the last or coming centuries. For an individual to practice the identity, or make it as a source of pride, the identity must be established in a healthy and intact social environment. When society affords suitable conditions, the spiritual identity will afford self-esteem, social tranquility, and stability. Consequently, society's members will work to develop and promote the nation. In a sense, there is a reciprocal relationship between society and religious identity. The latter gives society just as society provides creative circumstances.

Societies, which give prime importance to identity, are the better able to overcome any susceptible problems of social integration. Furthermore, the most stable societies are those, which perceive the significance of spiritual identity since the latter knows well how to invest the potential of its individuals in highly productive social enterprises. In one word, no room would be left for violence, crimes, and blood language.

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يُعالج هذا البحث مختلف المعوّقات الاجتماعية التي أدت إلى مأساة البطلين "كلايد قريفثس" (Clyde Griffiths) و"بيقر توماس" (Bigger Thomas) في روايتي "تراجيديا أمريكية" (An American Tragedy) و"ابن البلد" (Native Son) الدراسة تُسلط الضوء على البطلين في رحلة بحثهما عن الهوية الدينيّة، فهي ترمي إلى: الوقوف على حقيقة تكلم وقّات وأولا، إبراز مختلف الجوانب المهمّة في تشكيل الهوية الروحيّة ثانيا، الكشف عن مدى تأثير لمعوق الاجتماعي في تكوين هذه الهوية الروحيّة في مجتمع أمريكيّ ذ حدود مادّيّ لقرن العشرين .

هذا، وإنّ ي "تيودور درايزر" (Theodore Dreiser) "ريتشا رايت" (Richard Wright) ينتقد مجتمع ويؤ لانه مسؤوليّة أفعال البطلين هما يعتقد "قريفثس" "توماس" غيرم ين بوصفهما لا يتصرفان طبقا لإرادتهما الخ فقد فرض عليهما المجتمع إكراهات ومعوّقات ثقيلة، ومن منظور طبيعيّ تكون معوّقات الاجتماعية المّمهم الأول والأخير، وليس "كلايد قريفثس" و"بيقر توماس" الضعيفيّ والجاهليّ كليّة بقواعد اللعبة الاجتماعية "درايزر" "رايت" يعتبران البطلين طبيعيّ لبينتهما سبعا أفعالهما. وايتان تُعدّان شهادة مؤلمة لما ورثته قات الاجتماعية.

ومن جهة ثانيّة، يقوم "قريفثس" "توماس" برحلة صديّ بغيّة فهم أعمق للإيمان المسيحيّ. ولكن معركة خارجيّة ضدّ لمكبلات الاجتماعية تجابه إدراك هذا المعنى "قريفثس" " " " ي وبالرغم من انتمائهما إلى مة مسيحيّة ذاتهما الروحيّة ظلت محلّ الشكّ السؤال، فالدين مصدر ألم ومعاناة ؛ يجعلهما يُقران بأنهما قاتلان دون اتني، إنه الوقوع في مُعضلة الإحساس الكبيرة ل أوزار الآخرين.

في واقع الأمر تطلبت طبيعة بحثنا هذا الاستعانة بمقاربة تكاملية انتقائية ( الطول روايتين هما ل ي متباينين ثقافيّ يّا) حيث ستأخذ نظريّة التحليل النفسيّ نظرية نقد السيرة الذاتيّة النّصيب وما تبقى تنالّه نظريات تاريخية ماركسية ونظرية

## مُلخَص

يُعالج هذا البحث مختلف المعوّقات الاجتماعية التي أدت إلى مأساة البطلين "كلايد قريفثس" (Clyde Griffiths) و "بيقر توماس" (Bigger Thomas) في روايتي "تراجيديا أمريكية" (An American Tragedy) و "ابن البلد" (Native Son) و الدراسة تُسلط الضوء على البطلين في رحلة بحثهما عن الهوية الدينية، فهي ترم إلى: الوقوف على حقيقة تلك المعوّقات أولاً، إبراز مختلف الجوانب المهمة في تشكيل الهوية الروحية ثانياً، الكشف عن مدى تأثير المعوّق الاجتماعي في تكوين هذه الهوية الروحية في مجتمع أمريكي ذي حدود مادية للقرن العشرين ثالثاً.

هذا، وإنّ الكاتبين "تيودور درايزر" (Theodore Dreiser) و "ريتشارد رايت" (Richard Wright) ينتقدان المجتمع و يُحملانه مسؤولية أفعال البطلين، إذ هما يعتقدان أنّ "قريفثس" و "توماس" غير مُذنبين بوصفهما لا يتصرفان طبقاً لإرادتهما الحرّة، فقد فرض عليهما المجتمع إكراهات و معوّقات ثقيلة، ومن منظور طبيعي تكون المعوّقات الاجتماعية المُتهم الأول و الأخير، وليس "كلايد قريفثس" و "بيقر توماس" الضعيفين و الجاهلين كلية بقواعد اللعبة الاجتماعية؛ أي إنّ "درايزر" و "رايت" يعتبران البطلين نتاجاً طبيعياً لبيئتهما، والتي حدّدت مسبقاً أفعالهما. فالروايتان تُعدّان شهادة مؤلمة لما ورثته المعوّقات الاجتماعية.

وَمِنْ جِهَةٍ ثَانِيَةٍ، يَقُومُ "قَرِيفْثَسُ" وَ "تُوماسُ" بِرَحْلَةٍ صُوفِيَّةٍ بَغِيَّةٍ فَهْمٍ أَعْمَقٍ لِلإِيمَانِ الْمَسِيحِيِّ. وَلَكِنْ مَعْرَكَةٌ خَارِجِيَّةٌ ضَدَّ الْمُكَبَّلَاتِ الْجَامِعِيَّةِ تَجَابَهُ إِدْرَاكُ هَذَا الْمَعْنَى الدَّاخِلِيِّ؛ فَـ "قَرِيفْثَسُ" وَ "تُوماسُ" يُدْرِكَانِ تَمَاماً - وَ بِالرَّغْمِ مِنْ انْتِمَانِهِمَا إِلَى أُمَّةٍ مَسِيحِيَّةٍ - أَنَّ ذَاتَهُمَا الرُّوحِيَّةَ ظَلَّتْ مَحَلَّ الشُّكِّ وَالسُّؤَالِ، فَالذِّينِ مَصْدَرُ أَلْمٍ وَ مَعَانَاةٍ، إِذْ يَجْعَلُهُمَا يُقْرَانُ بِأَنَّهُمَا قَاتِلَانِ دُونَ أَدْنَى مَا اعْتَبَارَ لِلظَّرْفِ الْإِنْسَانِيِّ، إِنَّهُ الْوَقُوعُ فِي مُعْضَلَةِ الْإِحْسَاسِ الْكَبِيرَةِ بِاللَّانْتِمَاءِ الرُّوحِيِّ أَوْ أَلْمِ تَحْمَلِ أَوْزَارِ الْآخَرِينَ.

في واقع الأمر تطلبت طبيعة بحثنا هذا الاستعانة بمقاربة تكاملية وانتقائية (نظراً لطول الروايتين و هما لكاتبين متباينين ثقافياً وإثنياً)، حيث ستأخذ نظرية التحليل النفسي و نظرية نقد السيرة الذاتية للنصيب الأكبر، وما تبقى تنالُه نظريات أخرى من تاريخية، وماركسية، ونظرية نقد العرق.