Jessica Smith

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Dr. Van Ness

Naturalistic Literature

The era of naturalism in literature was defined by a pessimistic attitude, primitive nature, and the theory that life was a struggle. Characters could never overcome their destined fate. The gender roles and sexuality define the culture during this era which can be seen in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and *McTeague*.

Gender roles were different during this era, putting an emphasis on the primitive male and innocent girl. In *McTeague*, the main character was characterized by his primitive urges towards Trina. “He was alone with her, and she was absolutely without defense. Suddenly the animal in the man stirred and woke,” is just one example of the gender roles reflecting the culture. In *Maggie*, Pete showed his dominance over the innocent Maggie by asking her for a kiss (meaning sex) just because he took her to a show (24). Also, Trina feared McTeague with the “intuitive feminine fear of the male,” which explains how females viewed males during this era.

Sexuality during this era was not written in scenes, but inferred by readers. For example, Pete took Maggie to a strip club for their first date; however, Maggie saw it as a show with an orchestra (23). The readers see it through her eyes and have to figure out what was the setting of the show, which correlates with the culture. McTeague is more direct about sexuality, “suddenly he leaned over and kissed her, grossly, full on the mouth,” for example. Even though this is more direct, it still correlates with naturalism because of the primitive urges.

The naturalist era can be defined by the gender roles and sexuality present in the literature, especially through literature such as *Maggie* and *McTeague*.

I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code. Jessica Smith