Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is a story of moral struggle induced by her environment. Maggie is born in the slums of New York. She knows no other life except what is displayed to her daily. All around her there is a hardness of character. Her own brother, Jimmie, "hardens into a 'tough' and Maggie weakens into self-doubt" (Gandal, 1993). The struggle to protect their soul and their mental state is real. Crane likens the struggle to that of warfare. The story of Maggie introduces "Crane's vision of life as warfare" (Stephen Townley Crane, 2000). While there is a general battle to just stay alive in the bowery, there is also the battle for a moral and ethical existence.

Jimmie struggles to find his value and self-worth. His existence is one of self-defense, and belligerent behavior. We see in the opening scene that he must stake his claim in the streets or he will be trampled on. Little Jimmie learns at an early age to defend his place in the streets. As he grows older, he still defends his place in the streets by becoming a barbaric driver. Jimmie is always ready to fight. To defend his right to be in the bowery. He even views himself "above Christians and aristocrats; he imagines that his down-trodden position...Had [an}element of grandeur" (Gandal, 1993).

Jimmie struggles with the ethical code that is not existent in the bowery. In the story, Crane debunks the "false values worshipped by society and exposed the part played by collective passivity in the destruction of innocence" (Cazmejou, 1974). The ethical code in the streets is not the same code that can be lived by in other environments. The need to survive in the slums requires that boys and men fight back. If they do not they will be eliminated or struck down. As mentioned earlier, young boys learn to fight for their survival, taking their innocence away and hardening them for life.

Maggie is exemplified as an innocent girl who is untouched by her surroundings. The residents in the bowery think it is odd that she is not touched by the moral decline and bitterness present around her. She is as Crane expressed, "a girl who has blossomed in a mud-puddle" (Baym, 2012). Maggie's innocence is eventually lost. When she discovers love, she sees nothing wrong with sharing herself with Pete. She appears to find no guilt in her actions. The reader is left to determine why Maggie dies in the end. In her moment of awareness, was there guilt that made her take her own life?

In most novels about the poor, there is a struggle with morality and change. The main characters are faced with a moral decision brought on by their environment. If they are morally strong they choose the path that leads to a happy ending, if they are weak they choose the path that leads to destruction. In Maggie: Girl of the Streets, Crane presents this moral dilemma not so much as a choice but as a product of environment. Life in the bowery slowly wears down the characters moral strength. They give in to temptation and sin without even realizing that they are doing something wrong.

Maggie and Jimmie were products of their home-life and their neighborhood. Their drunken, violent mother lends no sympathy, understanding or love. In fact, the only time the reader even remotely considers the possibility of maternal love is in the end when she carries out Maggie's baby shoes and reminisces of when she was young. This leads to the question of whether the mother feels any remorse. Her environment has hardened her to the point that she is calloused and no longer feeling except for a brief twinge of memory.

While this short story focuses on the lack of guilt and the lack of morals, Crane manages to pull the reader in enough to create a compassion for the poor. His description of the squalor and the chaos of the tenement houses and the streets creates a picture of an environment that is ripe for destruction of young souls. He creates a story that is likened according to Howells "in the quality of fatal necessity which dominates Greek tragedy" (Cazmajou, 1974). The story is filled with bitterness and fear. The characters are indifferent to moral struggles. They lack the emotion and feelings that would render any moral change in their lives. There is no hope for moral rescue of people who have hardened their souls and locked them behind iron wills.

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