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Literary Cities

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“The old battle, old as the world”: Animal imagery as power or dehumanization in Frank Norris’s *McTeague* and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*

1. Introduction
   1. [Hook] (I do these pretty late…I’m not ready to commit to one yet.)
   2. Background about the battle between man and his animal nature as a literary motif. (May I refer to other novels? *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Lord of the Flies*, the Bible)
   3. Background about animals being less than human (“A beast that wants discourse of reason”)
   4. Thesis: In Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, it is his protagonist’s animal instinct—the beast inside—that allows a simple dentist to demonstrate evil. In Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, evil acts on his characters because they are reduced to animalism. A less than human element, can make a man evil or make him vulnerable to the evil whims of others.
2. [Body 1] McTeague’s animal nature and the horror it unleashes
   1. [In description] McTeague is described as “a carnivore,” “a draft horse,” “a brute,” “a beast,” “an elephant.” These usually appear as synonyms or suggestions of power and size.
   2. [Sexual instinct] It is when Trina is first unconscious that McTeague’s inner beast is first mentioned. (“It was the old battle, old as the world, wide as the world—the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted, and the simultaneous arouding of the other man, the better self that cries, “Down, down,” without knowing why; that grips the monster; that fights to strangle it, to thrust it down and back” (24).
   3. [The inverse in *McTeague*, animals as humans] The dogs “with all the dignity of monarchs” highlight that the line separating man from animal is very thin (171). The canary in the gilt cage as a symbol of being trapped by gold also represents this tenuous distinction. Norris uses actual animals to show that his very simple, bull-like McTeague is not so different.
   4. [As violence] “The dentist was brutal to his wife” (242). “Usually the dentist was slow in his movements, but now the alcohol had awakened in him an apelike agility” (294). He becomes an animal to kill Trina.
   5. [Conclusion] Animalism in *McTeague* is used to represent the darkness within humans and to describe acts of baseness and violence.
3. [Body II] The animals of the slaughterhouses: cows, pigs, and workers
   1. [Literal cattle] “One by one they hooked up the hogs, and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats” (44). The entire detailed set up of the slaughterhouses subtly sets up a comparison for how the meat packing industry uses humans. It picks them up, cuts them up, and sends tainted products back out into the world. It pushes them “beyond human endurance” (86).
   2. [Descriptions of Jurgis and the workers] “Savage,” “wild beasts,” “cogs in the machine.” They’re dehumanized and worked like animals in an industry made to slaughter animals.
   3. [Respect for animals outside of the industry] When Jurgis escapes from Chicago for a bit, he notes that the farmer will not get rid of his horse at the end of a season. This juxtaposition highlights that the factories treat their human employees far worse than a farmer would ever think to treat an animal in his employ.
   4. [Conclusion] In *The Jungle*, animalism is used to describe the condition of being without agency, at the mercy of others.
4. Conclusion
   1. In both *McTeague* and *The Jungle*, man as an animal represents a departure from one’s own will—whether it is his own animal nature or the control of others, man loses agency and autonomy as an animal.
   2. Loss of humanity allows characters to act in inhuman ways. McTeague commits murder. The meat packing industry commits many murders when their victims seem less than human.
   3. (I can’t decide whether or not I want to use greed throughout the paper as something that can trigger this kind of dehumanization on both sides—one’s own dehumanization and the dehumanization of others.)
   4. (I also can’t decide whether or not I want to do both of those sides for both novels. I think they both appear in both novels, but one side is much more pronounced in each of the novels and I wonder if including both would cause me to lose focus in the essay.)