



UNIVERSITY OF
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“Here You Are Again. All Messed up and Nowhere to Go”:

Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* as a Contemporary Urban Novel

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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma analysoi Jay McInerney'n *Bright Lights, Big City* romaania (1984) osana kaupunkikirjallisuuden genreä tutkimalla romaanin sisältämiä teemoja ja piirteitä, jotka ovat tyypillisiä nykykaupunkiromaaneille. Analysoidessani kyseistä romaania olen tutkinut, miten New Yorkin kaupunki on luotu romaaniin, millainen se on kaupunkina ja mikä on sen rooli romaanin kokonaisuudessa. Vertaan *Bright Lights, Big City* romaania myös muihin kaupunkiromaaneihin ja tutkin, onko tämä romaani tyypillinen kaupunkiromaani vai eroaako se jotenkin muista genrensä edustajista.

Koska tutkimuskohteeni on kaupunkikirjallisuus, olen valinnut käyttämäni metodologian muodostajiksi kirjallisen maantieteen ja kirjallisen kaupunkitutkimuksen tutkimussuunnat, jotka molemmat yhdistävät kirjallisuuden tutkimukseen maantieteellisen tilan ja paikan aspektin. Kirjallinen maantiede yhdistää kirjallisuuden maantieteeseen tutkiessaan kuinka nämä teemat ovat yhteydessä ja miten ne vaikuttavat toinen toisiinsa. Kirjallinen kaupunkitutkimus puolestaan keskittyy kaupunkeihin ja yhdistää 'materiaalisen' ja 'kirjallisen' kaupungin konseptit. Se tutkii kuinka kirjallinen kaupunki voi olla malli, jonka

mukaan materiaalinen kaupunki muotoutuu, ja toisaalta kuinka materiaaliset kaupungit vaikuttavat kirjallisten kaupunkien olomuotoihin.

Kaupunki ei ole käsitteenä yksinkertainen ja siksi tämän tutkielman teoriaosuus yrittää määritellä sitä ja sen vaikutuksia kaupunkikirjallisuudessa. Teoriakirjallisuuteen nojaten todetaan, ettei ole mahdollista muodostaa yhtä täydellisen tarkkarajaista määritelmää kaupungille, vaan kokemukset ovat henkilökohtaisia ja siksi kaupungeista on olemassa lukemattomia erilaisia representaatioita. Näiden representaatioiden syntyyn vaikuttavat monenlaiset seikat, kuten yksilön kokemukset ja asema sekä median antama kuva tietystä kaupungista.

Kaupunki on luotu McInerney'n romaaniin käyttämällä niin konkreettisia kuin abstraktejakin elementtejä ja teemoja. Tapa, jolla urbaania ympäristöä ja sen ilmiöitä kuvaillaan, luo negatiivisen kuvan kaupungista. Kuvailemalla romaanin kaupunkiympäristöä ja kertojan kokemuksia aistihavaintojen, urbaanien aktiviteettien ja ilmiöiden avulla McInerney luo romaaniinsa tietynlaisen kaupungin. Tässä tapauksessa kaupunki on yksinäisyyden kokemuksia syytävä, sekava ympäristö, joka lupaa paljon, mutta monet näistä lupauksista jäävät tyhjiksi. Lisäksi kaupungeille ja kaupunkikirjallisuudelle tyypilliset ajatukset vastakohtaisuudesta ja monimutkaisuudesta tulevat vahvasti esiin analyysissä ja ne vaikuttavat myös romaanin luomaan kuvaan New Yorkista. *Bright Lights, Big City* sisältää samanlaisia teemoja kuin monet muutkin kaupunkiromaanit genren laidasta laitaan. Sen kuvaama kaupungin luoma yksinäisyys on esimerkiksi samankaltaista kuin *The Great Gatsbyssa* ja *American Psychossa* kuvattu yksinäisyys.

Analyysini tuloksena selviää, että New Yorkilla on merkittävä rooli romaanissa ja kertojan ristiriitainen suhde kotikaupunkiinsa on selkeästi nähtävissä. Kaupungin ennalta-arvaamattomuus ja sen luomat yksinäisyyden ja ulkopuolisuuden tunteet luovat osaltaan negatiivista kuvaa New Yorkista. Romaanin päähenkilön kokemus on, että kaupunki säätelee sen asukkaiden elämää kuitenkin välittämättä heidän kohtaloistaan.

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This thesis reads Jay McInerney's novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) as a contemporary urban novel and analyzes the themes and elements that make it a part of the genre of urban fiction. The analysis concentrates on discussing how New York is created to the novel, what kind of a city it is, and what kind of a role it has in the novel. *Bright Lights, Big City* is also compared with other urban novels to find out whether it is a typical urban novel or if it differs from other novels of the genre.

Because the topic of this thesis is urban fiction, the methodology it follows is a combination of literary geography and literary urban studies, both fields that connect literary studies with the study of geography, of places and space. Literary geography combines literature with geography and studies the ways in which they are connected and how they impact one another. Literary urban studies concentrates on the relationship of literature and the city. It combines the material city with literary city and researches how, on one hand, a literary city can be a model for the material city and on the other hand, how it can be a model of the material city.

Since the city is not a simple concept, this thesis attempts to define it and its impact on urban fiction. With the help of theories of cities, this thesis concludes that it is not possible to form a perfect and precise definition of the city. Rather, the experiences are personal and thus there are countless different representations of a single city. Many aspects impact these representations, including the individual's own experiences and position in the city and the media's representation of a particular city.

The city is created in the novel by the use of both concrete and abstract elements and themes. The way the urban environment and its phenomena are described create a negative image of the city. By describing the city and the protagonist's experiences through sense perceptions, urban activities, and phenomena, McInerney creates a certain type of city to his novel. It is a complicated environment which creates feelings of loneliness and outsidership and makes great promises, but many of those are left unfulfilled. In addition, contradictions and complexities, both typical to urban fiction, are prominent in the analysis and strongly impact the representation of New York. When compared to other urban novels *Bright Lights*, *Big City* contains similar themes as other novels of the genre. The loneliness so prominent in this novel is very similar to that in *The Great Gatsby* and *American Psycho*, for example.

As a conclusion, it is stated that New York has a large role in the novel and the protagonist's contradictory relationship with his hometown is clearly present. The unpredictable nature of the city and the feelings of loneliness and outsidership it generates are creating a negative representation of New York. According to the protagonist's experiences, the city regulates the lives of its inhabitants, but it does not seem to care about their fates.

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1. Introduction

This thesis analyzes Jay McInerney's novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) as a contemporary urban novel by searching it for elements of urban fiction. In order to achieve this, the thesis asks the following questions: "how is the city created in the novel?", "what kind of a city is present in the novel?", "what kind of a role does the city have in the novel?" and "how does this novel compare to other urban and/or New York novels?" To begin the search for the city in the novel, an attempt at defining the city is made in the next chapter. This is quite the task, as is shown for example in the introduction to *Key Concepts in Urban Geography*, in which the authors of the book are considering the question of what a city is by listing things that appear to be part of cities and adjectives that describe them. However, they note that "all these words convey something about how cities are experienced, and how cities are understood. But it is hard to define what makes a city a city, and what makes life urban" (Latham, McCormack, McNamara & McNeill 1). Since the task of creating a solid definition of 'the city' has proven difficult for academics familiar with different aspects of urban studies, this thesis also settles for an imperfect definition formed on the basis of typical characteristics of cities. These characteristics are presented and discussed in the theory section. In addition, questions about cities and their essence are considered and attempted to answer in order to understand urban fiction, and the answers found are applied in the analysis of the novel in question in this thesis, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*.

Urban fiction is a wide genre of literature with a long history which is no wonder considering the important role cities have played and continue to play in human societies around the world. Desmond Harding crystallizes the idea of how important cities are to begin with, and furthermore, in the context of literature: he emphasizes the importance of cities in the development of civilizations by stating that the city has contributed "the critical mass which produces civilization" (Harding 5). Understanding the crucial position

the city has in all of civilization it comes as no surprise that it is “a sub-topic” in various fields of culture (literature and painting for example) and in research of topics like history and sociology (Harding 7). Furthermore, the city and its phenomena have “become a focused concern in the multidisciplinary field of urban studies” (Harding 7).

The city has had many different roles in literature over the centuries depending on how it has been regarded in the society at large. For example, in the context of North American urban culture and the literatures it has created, during the previous century

the social and cultural conditions in American cities have altered [...] from the widespread visions of progress and success as embodied in the urban version of the American dream early in the [20th] century, to the isolation and frenzied desperation in consumption and violence in the crime-ridden metropolis of the 1970s and 1980s. (Hurm 15)

The latter direction of development is clearly visible in the novel analyzed in this thesis, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, which was written in the 1980s. The city in the novel is the way it is at least partly because it represents New York in the 1980s: time and place are central aspects that contribute to the creation of a certain kind of representation of urbanity and hence they are discussed in this thesis as well.

It needs to be noted that the city of *Bright Lights, Big City* is not just any city, but New York specifically (let it be mentioned here that ‘New York’ refers in this thesis to New York City, not to the whole state of New York). This is crucial since New York as a globally famous and influential metropolis has its own role in urban culture and “it has engaged the literary and artistic imagination to an extraordinary degree” (Ickstadt 17). Hence, New York has a special role in culture on account of its extraordinary position among cities. New York is often seen as a city of capital: finance, insurance, and real estate industries as the basis on which the city's economy is built on. However, “for the better part of the twentieth century and well before, New York City has been considered the world's authority of art and culture” (Currid 3). Its geographical location has enabled it to

export and import culture to and from all parts of the globe and this has made it home for all kinds of cultural modes: the bohemian scene, beat writers, and abstract expressionists and later, to new wave and folk music, hip-hop DJs, and Bryant Park's Fashion Week. (Currid 3)

All in all, it can be stated that be it "high-brow, low-brow, high culture, [or] street culture, New York City's creative scene has always been the global center of artistic and cultural production" (Currid 3) which is why it is prominent in literature as well.

The city itself has a large presence in the novel, starting already from the title of the novel and continuing throughout the whole plot of the novel. It is important to notice that in *Bright Lights, Big City* the reader sees New York from the perspective of the protagonist, and the city shown would surely be quite different would it be seen through the eyes of another character. This is because every person has their own perspective and hence, their interpretations of their surroundings differ from each other (von der Thüsen 10). This personal dimension of defining the city is also an aspect which contributes to the difficulties in attempts to create an all-encompassing definition of the city, as shall be seen later in this thesis.

Jay McInerney's debut novel *Bright Lights, Big City* follows the adventures of its nameless protagonist around New York. The protagonist is a 24-year-old man, who is trying to balance his life between his job and relationships and his nightly parties and drug addiction. Since the novel does not mention the name of the man who acts as both the main character and narrator of the novel, this thesis addresses him as 'the protagonist'. In addition to his failing attempts at balancing his life in the city, the protagonist is struggling with unprocessed grief resulting from his mother's death and his recent divorce from his wife Amanda. As a prediction of the contents of the novel, the title of it can be connected with a blues song by Jimmy Reed which has the same title. In the lyrics of Reed's song "the bright lights, big city / they've gone to my baby's head" ("Bright Lights, Big City"). These lyrics outline quite well the problem at large in the novel: the city plays a central role in

the difficulties the protagonist faces, be it directly or indirectly and this is a theme that strongly affects the representation this novel creates of New York.

Bright Lights, Big City is important to the entire genre of contemporary urban fiction because it can be claimed to have started a literary trend in the 1980s United States, a trend “which was characterized by a certain metropolitan brittleness, sexual cynicism, and a concern with the conspicuous consumerism of the Reagan years” (Stringer 418). More specifically, McInerney’s novel can be seen as part of the fiction of 1980s whose satirical take “aimed at pricking the consciences of the big-city power-dressers creaming the profits of a Wall Street boom while the streets became more dangerous” (Rennison & Wood xxi). Other novels following this trend and dealing with similar themes include Brett Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, Tom Wolfe’s *Bonfire of Vanities* and Joel Rose’s *Kill the Poor* to mention but a few.

Bright Lights, Big City has a second-person narrator which is an unusual narrative tool, and it gives the narration of the novel a unique perspective. Already from the title of the first chapter “IT’S SIX A.M. DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE? (*Bright Lights, Big City*¹ 1; spelling original) the second-person perspective stirs interest in the reader: it feels like the question is aimed at *you*, the reader of the novel. This technique blends the perspectives of the reader and the narrator (Beville 614), and it seems to bring the experiences of the narrator closer to the reader. This viewpoint influences the reading experience in interesting ways, and according to Maria Beville it feels like

from the moment we begin reading we possess [the protagonist] and engage with his experiences spectrally, further experiencing his very spectrality and becoming aware of our own through metafictional comments in the novel which remind us of the textuality and subjective nature of this particular version of New York. (Beville 614-615)

¹ All further references to *Bright Lights, Big City* are abbreviated as *BLBC*.

Therefore, through the second person narration we are again reminded of the subjectivity of defining cities and how it affects the representations created.

Even though this novel has been praised to be a central piece of American contemporary (urban) fiction, there is not much academic research to be found about it from the resources available in this time and place. Naturally, it is possible from the perspective of the early 21st century, that the novel falls in that portion of literature that is not recent enough to gather widespread interest and not yet old enough to be viewed as 'a classic' worth to be studied for the portrayal of the period alone. The novel was a success in its own time however, gathering praising reviews and good sales. Despite, and even thanks to, the small number of papers or articles written about it, *Bright Lights, Big City* lends itself as a 'fresh' and interesting topic for this thesis and its' analysis of contemporary urban fiction.

This thesis will now present its theoretical framework in Chapter 2. The first subchapter 2.1 will shortly introduce the methodology of this thesis. The following two subchapters, 2.2 and 2.3, concentrate on the city and literature and how they connect in urban fiction. Lastly, subchapter 2.4 takes a look into the fiction of New York and the themes central to this particular city that are relevant in the case of McInerney's novel. After the theoretical framework has been introduced, Chapter 3 contains the analysis of *Bright Lights, Big City*. Chapter 3 is divided into two subchapters: 3.1 analyzes the novel as a work of urban fiction in general and 3.2 focuses on themes relevant for New York in particular and analyzes how the city in McInerney's novel is New York specifically. Chapter 4 then concludes the findings the analysis has discovered by providing answers to the questions presented in the beginning of this chapter.

2. Theory: Cities and Urban Fiction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework within which Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* will be analyzed in Chapter 3. Firstly, in subsection 2.1, the methodology applied in this thesis is introduced. Two central approaches in this study are literary geography and literary urban studies and they together create the methodology this thesis follows. Following this, subsection 2.2 provides a look into cities and urban development and the effects they have had on urban fiction, which is then discussed on a general level. Subsection 2.3 then concentrates on the development and characteristics of contemporary urban novel. Finally, the last subsection of this chapter, 2.4, discusses the distinctive features of New York fiction and thus paves the way for Chapter 3, where *Bright Lights, Big City*, a piece of New York fiction, is analyzed.

2.1 Methodology: Literary Geography and Literary Urban Studies

Since this thesis deals with urban fiction, literary geography, which is a "combination of the study of literature and a geographical perspective" (Ridanpää 907), fits as a methodology with which the thematics of this thesis is approached and the texts and spaces read. Combining a geographical viewpoint with literary studies is quite natural, "given the inherent spatiality of the novel as a cultural form, and the position of the novelist as simultaneous witness/interpreter and shaper of social worlds real and imagined" (Stainer 103-104). The formerly concrete understanding of spaces in literature as "container frames and representations of knowable real world locations" (Hones 685) has developed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to include "a wider range of narrative spatialities" and "a more complex appreciation of the ways in which text and space, fiction and location, might be understood as inseparable and co-productive" (Hones 686). Bianca Brinkmann and Marcel Thoene view the literary co-production between fiction

and location to be important and describe the process and its' effects on representations and their interpretations in more detail:

The city, or for that matter, its literary construction, must be considered as an active agency working in a reciprocal relationship with the characters that it shapes and represents – characters who themselves shape and construe the city and through whom it is eventually presented to the reader. In taking this view, the readers are enabled to extract the processes under which cityscape and characters develop, and it is under this premise that they can analyse literature from a truly spatial, or in this case, urban point of view. (Brinkmann & Thoene 63)

This thesis uses this point of view into literature and space: it considers the way they are connected and how they shape each other.

While literary geography is the main methodology applied here, literary urban studies also provides an interesting viewpoint into the topic of this thesis. According to Jens Martin Gurr's recently published book, literary urban studies, in addition to representations of cities, is also "concerned with the real-world city and its challenges" (Gurr 3). What is central in contemporary literary urban studies is that it "must be concerned with conceptualising the relation between the textual and the material city, between 'the city' and 'the text'" (Gurr 3). This aspect is explored in this thesis: the theory section considers the effects the 'material' city has (had) on urban fiction and also takes into account the fact that urban literature affects the 'material' cities as well. This connection is considered in the analysis of *Bright Lights, Big City* in Chapter 3. According to Gurr, (literary) texts can be seen to be either models *of* or models *for* the city (4). While there are multiple ways the city can act as a model of one type or other, the following type of model presents what is central in the frame of this thesis:

literary texts serve as a particular type of qualitative model: By focusing precisely on the representation of specific places, of individual responses and of patterns of sense-making, they are diametrically opposed to quantitative models in their

selection of which elements of complex urban reality to include or to leave out. As an alternative form of 'modelling' urban complexity, literary texts are thus shown to function as a complementary type of 'urban model.' (Gurr 6)

Now that the methodology of this thesis has been shortly introduced, this chapter continues with the exploration of cities and their relationships with fiction. The development of cities and fiction is explored and the influences they have had on each other through different historical eras and art movements are also touched upon.

2.2 City and Fiction

It can be argued that cities play a central role not just in literature, but in culture and its development overall. Moreover, cities can be considered a central phenomenon in the development of humanity and civilization. According to Desmond Harding,

the greatest work of art created by the city is the city itself, for in its totality urban civilization represents the apex of human achievement. Moreover, as an art form in search of its own perfectability, the city also stands for the central foundation upon which the broad range of human experience draws its energy and charts its course. (Harding ix)

Therefore, it is no surprise that the city plays such a central role in culture and literature, too.

Thus, in order to discuss urban novels, it is first necessary to consider the perspective of literary urban studies and take a look into the context and the environment of urban fiction, namely the city itself. Urban fiction is a broad genre of literature, and it encompasses myriads of written pieces from a timespan of thousands of years. Therefore, to be able to discuss urban fiction, it is important to define what a city is: what are its key characteristics and how they affect the fiction written about it. Steve Pile discusses in his

article in *City Worlds* the ways in which the real-world cities – those that exist in our physical world – can be defined and analyzed. However, even though he considers multiple perspectives and weighs different options, he comes to the conclusion that indeed, there are many ways to describe a city as a phenomenon, yet none of them are all-encompassing and the attempt to answer the question ‘what is a city?’ only raises new questions and points to consider (Pile 18). In his own attempt to answer the question of the city, Gerd Hürm ends up with the conclusion that the definition of the city is always incomplete, no matter the approach and “all attempts in urban theory have failed to produce a universally valid concept or a satisfactory ontological definition of the city through either physical categories or psychological archetypes” (Hürm 4). Even though it has not been possible to form definitive definitions, some generally accepted features and characteristics have been found and connected with cities and those are in the scope of interest here.

Of course, legal regulations and definitions that regulate what sort of places are to be treated as cities exist, but there is much more to cities than their legal positions. Cities are places and spaces that exist geographically but there is also a social aspect to their existence, and they are also concepts that exist in culture and in the minds of people. Naturally, cities have similarities and characteristics that unite them, but individual cities differ from each other significantly and therefore, the concept of ‘the city’ is difficult to grasp. Concrete qualities that differentiate one city from another include their size, population, the city’s location, its economic structure, and its cultural history among others. As this shows, there are many features that affect how the city is perceived and how this is reflected in its representations and, more specifically, in the fiction written of it. Thus, to take into account the various factors, this theory section first takes a look in the general genre of urban fiction, but then concentrates specifically on New York fiction, and highlights the decade *Bright Lights, Big City* was written in, the 1980s, and the era’s effects on the urban fiction written at the time.

In research and theory about cities and urban fiction several contradictions and juxtapositions stand out. For example, in the introduction to their book about how social thinkers have approached the city, Regan Koch and Alan Latham describe the city as a place that provides people with opportunities of both freedom and unity in communities, and chances to express themselves freely (1). However, at the same time cities are capable of being “engines of inequality and greed; places where the fact that some people are rich is the result of others being poor. They can be dirty, smelly and polluted. They can segregate and exclude. They are often ugly and inhumane” (Koch & Latham 1). On a similar note, it has been suggested that the phenomenon of “antagonistic sense of duality is central to image of the city in classical and Judeo-Christian culture” (Harding 6). This phenomenon can be found widely in urban fiction overall as well as more specifically in the 1980s novels mentioned in this thesis: the duality between the promise of good and the reality of disappointment, and the presence of ‘evil’ alongside good are ever present.

Similarly, when attempting to define cities, Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Steve Pile start by presenting a contrast between possibilities and problems (1). On the one hand, a city is a place for new innovations and phenomena, for mixing and creating different things, but on the other hand it is a place of conflict, intolerance, violence, and overall mayhem (Massey et al. 1). Examples of this contrast are not hard to find: cities are often the most developed and progressive places, but there the problems are heightened too, as can be seen in higher rates of crime and homelessness for example. Other juxtaposed pairs are also present in cities, including “luxury and poverty, amenity and pollution, and tradition and innovation”, for instance (Pile 5). Since such contrasts exist in the cities of the physical world, and the cities influence the fiction written on them, it is only natural that these contrasts are present in urban fiction as well. There are several of these contrasting pairs visible in *Bright Lights, Big City*, too. Especially the wealth gap between the rich and the poor and whether the city is a place where either one’s wildest dreams or worst nightmares can come true, are present in McInerney’s novel and many others, such as Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991) that shares this idea of urban

contrasts. Like many other novels of the time, *American Psycho* comments on the culture that was typical to the 1980s America and its greedy, shallow, and consumerist core where what is on the surface is the most important: “reflection is useless, the world is senseless. [...] Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in” (Ellis 360).

These contrasts between the rich and poor sections of the urban population are tightly connected with the fact that economics and finances play an important role in cities, because “the city is built on – and is stained by – money” (Pile 8) and the city’s “actual shape [is] subject to alteration by large-scale socioeconomic processes” (Heise 22-23). Here we can see yet another contrast: money must exist for the city to exist, but at the same time the city is contaminated by it. This contamination is apparent in the effects money and capitalism have on the development of ‘underworlds,’ the poor, underdeveloped sections of cities, and this “uneven development is the geographic polarization of capital and labor and wealth and poverty” which produces social and physical degradation (Heise 8). However, it is not just money or the developments of economy that create divisions in the city, but many times they work together with “normative value systems that define and regulate socially acceptable forms of identity and community” and “the result has often been a panic over the putatively libidinal and degenerate underworld in the foul architectures of the city” (Heise 8). Thus, the divisions caused by economic and social factors can be deeply rooted in the image and culture of the city and regulate its functions. This also leads these divisions to in their part impact the representation created of the city, which can be seen in the analysis of *Bright Lights, Big City* later in this thesis.

When trying to define what a city is, Steve Pile uses the metaphor of the city as a body that is “living on its different functions: from manufacturing and assembling, to warehousing and storage, to sheltering and domestic bliss, to personality clashes and political intrigue. These functions of the city have both identifiable geographic locations, and also sets of networks which sustain them” (16). This is a generalization that can be applied to most cities, New York included. This metaphor helps to understand how many different

sides and functions cities have and how many different activities there are going on at the same time, all in connection to the others. This simultaneity is also a characteristic of the city. The different locations where these activities take place play a role when people are creating their own representations of the cities and the areas in question.

Another important issue to notice which makes the city more difficult to define is that since cities are more than just geographically located physical places, everyone has their personal way of defining what kind of a space or an entity a city is. Thus, the defining characteristics can differ vastly depending on what each person thinks to be relevant in forming the definition. The definition is also dependent on the person's own characteristics such as their "own mix of personality, memories, emotions, and intentions which colours [their] image of that place and gives it a distinctive identity for [them]" (Relph 57). Hurm discusses American cities and as an example of differing in conception of the city he states that "different groups possess different images of the American city as their experiences vary within the city. [...] Any view of the city is fragmented since it is grounded in a particular class practice" (Hurm 67). It can be proposed that many personal things, class being one of them, affect the way people view cities. Beville suggests that the postmodern culture has heightened the importance of an individual's view of the city and proposes that "this postmodern mediascape that is the city clearly demonstrates that the city has moved from being a physical space to being effectively an ephemeral personal experience" (Beville 609).

When trying to list things that belong to cities it is easy to start pointing out the physical elements commonly associated with cities, but a city is more than a mere combination of physical things such as skyscrapers, cranes, neon signs, and cars in a traffic jam. It is important to also notice "the intangible qualities" of cities such as human interaction and how the urban environment affects it (Pile 5). Since cities are densely populated areas, people's lives are affected by other people in multiple ways: "the city may be a personal drama, but it is also a social drama. The sheer quantity of possible social interactions means that the city becomes a stage for all kinds of stories" (Pile 17). Because of

this tendency to act as a stage for stories the city is such a versatile topic or a background for fiction too: it provides a wide scale of possibilities for authors to write about in urban fiction. The contrasts and divisions of cities that were discussed earlier also affect the social interactions of people, because “the divided city brings people together in charged terms and in an electric atmosphere” (Heise 16). Additionally, the busy social life the city contains has two sides to it: “it is the sheer density of interactions, and the juxtaposition of so many differences, which generate both the excitements and exhilaration of the city and its potential for cultural innovation, as well as the anxieties and need to withdraw into oneself” (Massey 165). In a nutshell, the vivid social life creates opportunities for fruitful relationships and openings for new cultural developments, but it also creates pressure to maintain one’s own identity as well as cultural background (and future). Thus, the city’s population and its interactions also affect the city and how it is perceived both by its inhabitants and outsiders.

Therefore, it might be more useful to pay attention to “the ambivalent or paradoxical experiences that cities offer” for people depending on their “social and geographical locations of the city” rather than trying to fit all urban life into one definition (Allen 44-45). Additionally, according to the postmodern view the role of the individual in creating a city of contrasts is central:

the city, medieval or modern, is effectively a rhizome. It is often grid-like, with no single path. No beginning point or destination. It is essentially defined by the connections made by each individual street walker. As such it is shape-shifting and constantly in flux. It cannot be pinned down. No objective view is possible. And attempts to map it, to present a grand narrative, cannot represent any truth about the city at all. (Beville 612)

Thus, in observing the city of an individual, the conditions of their life need to be considered from a broad perspective, this point of view making the definition of a city a personal one, and not suitable to base a generalization on. An important point to consider

in the case of urban fiction and people's relationships with places is about the individual's experience of the place, and whether is it that of an insider or an outsider (Relph 45). This division between inside and outside "is fundamental in our experiences of lived-space and one that provides the essence of place" (Relph 49). When one feels that they belong to a certain place and identify with it, they experience insiderness (Relph 49) and on the contrary, when these feelings are missing, one is left on the outside. The latter is a topic of interest here, because the city of *Bright Lights, Big City* causes feelings of outsidership in the protagonist. As there are different relationships between people and places, according to Relph there are also different types of insiderness and outsidership. The type of outsidership that is relevant here Relph calls 'existential outsidership' in which "there is an awareness of meaning withheld and [...] the inability to participate in those meanings" and "from such a perspective places cannot be significant centres of existence, but are at best backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimeras, and at worst are voids" (Relph 51). This kind of feelings of loneliness can be found in *Bright Lights, Big City* and they will be considered in the analysis of the novel.

Even though the highlighting of individuality does not aid the creation of a general definition of the city, it is worth considering, especially in analyzing a piece of contemporary urban fiction where the author's, the characters', and the readers' perspectives all affect the representation created of the city. Since personal points of view alter definitions made of the city so drastically "it may be easier to acknowledge the fact that we cannot grasp the city as a whole, precisely because it is not a singular entity. There is, then, no one thing called 'the city' which we can simply reveal in all its breath-taking fullness" (Allen 54). If this is true in the case of physical cities, it certainly is impossible to make such overarching definitions concerning 'the city' in fiction which is even more abstract and harder to grasp than the physical cities of the world.

Even though a definite definition of the city seems to be nearly impossible to form, there are similarities in fictional cities, some of them already touched upon and some of them discussed next. For example, it is quite natural that the urban novels written in the same

time period have similar features because the same historical events and art movements have affected their authors. On a similar note, the novels written about the same city have similar features because the 'environment' is the same, but they can also differ from each other depending on what perspective the author has looked at the city from and to what aspects of it they have paid attention to, for example the story of *American Psycho* would be very different if told from the perspective of a character with a different socioeconomical position or a more stable mental state.

This subchapter has sought to present the city and the related concept of urban fiction. Although it has not been possible to form a definitive or uniform definition that could capture the city in its entirety, the section has introduced central themes that create and affect urban environments and their representations. The most important theme this subchapter presented is the multitude of contrasts and contradictions that so heavily influence the concept of the city and the representations created. These themes of difference will be considered further already in the following subchapter which deals with the contemporary urban novel. It will also discuss the city's representations in fiction and how they are created, especially in contemporary novels. In order to understand this form of urban novel, its modernist predecessor will also be introduced shortly to provide some background information about the development of the contemporary urban novel. Towards the end of the next subchapter the type of urban novel of the 1980s that *Bright Lights, Big City* also represents will be discussed and its central themes are considered. The themes discussed here and in the next subchapter will be crucial for the analysis of *Bright Lights, Big City* in the third chapter. Whereas these subchapters first deal with the urban novel in general, the final subchapter 2.4 will deal with the concept of the New York novel in particular and in so doing introduce some of the characteristics of New York and its history that have affected and continue to affect the fiction concerning this city.

2.3 The Contemporary Urban Novel

Urban fiction has a long history, and its development goes hand in hand with the development of societies and urban environments. This subchapter concentrates on defining and interpreting the contemporary city and the contemporary urban novel, because, as has been stated, *Bright Lights, Big City* takes place in New York in the 1980s. However, to understand the urban literature of the more recent decades one must look back in time, because an important part of postmodern and contemporary literature is their habit of picking bits and pieces from older styles and movements of art and literature and mixing them up in new, creative ways. The older types of urban fiction to be addressed in this chapter have affected the development of the urban novel, and through this we can see why the contemporary urban novel is the way it is.

Already the term “urban novel” suggests that the novels of this type either take place in an urban setting or deal with it in some other way. However, this is one of the few easily defined characteristics of the urban novel, and much like the city itself, the urban novel is difficult to define in a simple and definite way. Similar problems in creating an all-encompassing definition of an urban novel come to focus as did in the previous subchapter where the city itself was in the focus. Hana Wirth-Nesher discusses in the introduction of *City Codes* the difficulty of defining cities and novels about them. She points out that the definitions can differ greatly from each other, depending on the aspects that are considered when the definition is formed: she states that “the modern urban novel acts as a site for the problem of reading cities” (Wirth-Nesher 10) and this unreadability can be included in the definition of the urban novel. Wirth-Nesher also pays more attention to what is missing or unseen than what is present and seen:

Cities promise plenitude but deliver inaccessibility. As a result, the urbanite, for better or for worse, is faced with a never-ending series of partial visibilities, of gaps. [...] Faced with these and unable or unwilling to ignore them, the city dweller inevitably reconstructs the inaccessible in [their] imagination. (Wirth-Nesher 8-9)

Wirth-Nesher thus highlights the importance of the individual and the ambiguousness concerning representations of cities as well as the power of imagination in creating (representations of mental) cities. From this point of view, it can be questioned whether one individual's view of the city can be seen as better or "truer" than that of someone else if each person fills in the unseen with what they want to fill it in with.

When it comes to the relationship between the physical city and its representations, Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy state that even though the city cannot be duplicated in its cultural representations, it cannot be separated from them either (3). They elaborate further on this idea:

Representation does powerful cultural work in a wide variety of forms to produce and maintain (but also to challenge and question) common notions of urban existence. Literature, film, architecture, painting, tourist guides, postcards, photography, city plans – all provide selective representations of the city and shape the metaphors, narratives and syntax which are widely used to describe the experience of urban living. (Balshaw & Kennedy 4)

This list of different types of material from which representations can be created from gives an idea of how widely and from how different modes of expression the material that forms our ideas of cities comes from. It is interesting to think how even something as mundane as postcards play a role in forming the representations through which people see different cities and make up their own interpretations of them. Even though this thesis concentrates on the representation of the city in fiction, in addition to language and texts "representation also involves material, visual and psychic forms and practices that cannot be reduced to textuality" and thus "the production of urban space is simultaneously real, symbolic and imaginary; what it produces is a material environment, a visual culture and a psychic space" (Balshaw & Kennedy 4). The representations created of cities are thus very complex and varying, and their form is depending on many aspects. It needs to be stated that what is central to this thesis is that "literary and visual

representations of urbanism map the fears and fantasies of urban living" (Balshaw & Kennedy 6). The themes of 'fears and fantasies' have a big presence in *Bright Lights, Big City*, and that is why their role in urban fiction is highlighted in this theory section as well.

Balshaw and Kennedy further accentuate the importance of vision and visual aspects to representations because "urbanism privileges, even as it distorts, vision and the visual" (7). This is especially the case in the 21st century, when the amount of "new visual technologies, forms and texts" has increased significantly, and this process in itself has altered the representations created of urban environments (Balshaw & Kennedy 7). To be more precise:

visual representation may be said to bring the city into focus: it frames recognition of urban forms (architectural syntax, street signage); it offers legibility through the reproduction of what is seen (in maps, plans, guides and images); it unites aesthetic and spatial apprehension of the urban scene (levels, planes, perspectives); it mediates scopophilic and voyeuristic desires (to look, to be seen); it technologises the act of seeing. (Balshaw & Kennedy 7)

These visual points of view are present in fiction as well and the novel analyzed in this thesis also uses vision as a central medium in the representation of New York it creates which is reasonable since "attention to the visual components of urbanism is essential to an understanding of how cities frame and are framed by representation" (Balshaw & Kennedy 8).

As seen here from the way the visual aspects of the city are highlighted, the senses are used to create representations in fiction, which is only natural, since "the senses are the mediation between the mind and the world" (Connor 177). Out of the human senses, sight and hearing have traditionally been held as the superior ones, and taste, smell, and touch have been seen as not as important (Reinarz 5). Especially smell has been avoided in research at least partly for historical reasons: "a venerable intellectual tradition has associated olfaction with the primitive and the childish" (Jenner 337). Of course, this

attitude cannot be claimed to spread across all cultures, but it seems to be the case in the Western world (Reinarz 2). These points can explain why fiction relies heavily on vision and other senses get less recognition.

Even though visual aspects have dominated the field of sense research and the olfactory aspect has been avoided, and this has had its effects on fiction as well, there are still scents used in fiction and it seems that smell even has a special function: most often have authors included in their fiction “the ability of odors to strengthen the memory or encourage almost complete recollection of past events. Those who experience these spontaneous recollections have usually done so when smelling food, opening a cupboard or drawer, or exploring objects in an attic”, and such authors include Charles Baudelaire, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Dickens and Emile Zola (Reinarz 6-7). The connection between smell and memory becomes apparent in *Bright Lights, Big City* as well and it is discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

However, even if all the senses were utilized to create a comprehensive representation, “all representations of cities are partial and provisional – short-sighted, interested, parts (impossibly) standing in for wholes” (Balshaw & Kennedy 19) and this needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with them. As this theory section has noted multiple times, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to create a comprehensive, all-encompassing definition of a city. The same can be said about the representations created of urban environments in fiction: in the light of what Balshaw and Kennedy have stated above, it can be claimed that any literary representation of a city cannot be the absolute truth, but it is just an interpretation made from a specific point of view.

As a more concrete example of representations and their impact, concerning the city of New York, Peter Brooker describes how he knows New York through its representations:

I ‘know’ New York, I mean, as an image and compelling cultural myth. [...] And all thanks to photographs, poems, postcards, films, fictions, memoirs, monographs,

cop shows and comic books. What I 'know' are some of its representations. Perhaps we can expect no more in the way of knowledge in a society of the image. (3)

This raises questions about whether or not it is even possible to know a city in other ways than through its representations. Furthermore, perhaps this is why it seems to be impossible to create one correct definition of a city: each person creates their own idea of the city through varying representations they come across. All the differing ideas are correct in their own way and because the ways they are created are so widely varying, it is not reasonable to compare them to each other in an attempt to decide which is the 'real' one.

In the introduction to *Urban Space and Representation* (2000) Balshaw and Kennedy state that the urban studies of the time "highlight the spatial formations of urban identity and call into question commonplace conceptions of the city as a synthetic totality, pointing to a loss of coherence or legibility in the category of 'the city'" (Balshaw & Kennedy 1). Globalization plays a significant role in this development as does the development of increased diversity of the people who get their voices heard. These phenomena affect the cities in themselves as well as the representations of them and naturally, like stated previously, there exists not just one way or type of representation of the city but

there are myriad vernacular representations of the global city, some resonating with the hegemonic city image, some questioning it. There is a growing body of urban writing and imagery being produced by artists, authors and filmmakers who seek to voice the concerns of migrant communities that have strong local *and* global consciousness of their identities – such work is redefining ideas of territory, place, community and culture in new urban cores. (Balshaw & Kennedy 16)

Thus, now that the world, and the cities in it, are no longer only for the white, male, middle- and upper-class population to write and speak about, but a more diverse array of people get their voices heard, the broader and more multifaceted are the

representations that are created. This phenomenon only enriches the representations created of the city that are available to people.

A great shift in urban literature towards the state it was in the target decade of this thesis, the 1980s, happened in the era of literary modernism. The postmodern city of our times is “characterized by extreme social and geographic fragmentation” (Heise 27), which makes it both a central theme and problem for the writers of urban fiction. While such fragmentation has been present in the history of cities and their culture before, the era of modernism was a turning point in the sense that “the modernist epoch involved a global shift across a range of cultural, social, political, and economic contexts each marked in their own way by struggle and contradiction, ambiguity and anguish, renewal and faith” (Harding xi). Modernist writers also started to question whether or not the city is an entity that allows itself to be precisely described and known in its entirety (Harding 11). This questioning leads the cities in modernism to be “more subjective, impressionistic and internalised” and the city “begins to dissolve and slowly becomes invisible” (Beville 607). Thus, the cities in modernist literature came to be “figured as dynamic and kaleidoscopic environments, radically new and shifting signs of discontinuity that evoked dissociation in the midst of community” (Harding 11). Postmodernism took this idea further in the urban fiction of the last decades of the 20th century, where the city is “a de-centred, labyrinthine, discontinuous urban site that thrives on tension between order and chaos, presence and absence, reason and imagination. [...] It is a site that is constantly shifting and changing, defined by its own otherness” (Beville 604). The contrasts between the different sides of the urban environment discussed earlier continue to surface, causing them to also gain more significance.

As *Bright Lights, Big City* takes place in the 1980s, many references to the era can be found in the novel, including excessive consumerism and the casual use of cocaine. Peter Brooker discusses the urban fictions of the 1980s and mentions a group of writers called the “Blank Generation” in which he includes the author of *Bright Lights, Big City*, Jay McInerney, together with such authors as Mary Gaitskill, Joel Rose, and Brett Easton

Ellis. He describes their work as exhibiting “the fragmented, strung-out or hollowed subjectivities and disjointed mini-narratives that have come to be associated with the effects of visual media and the anonymity of the urban postmodern” (Brooker 142). On a similar note, Nick Rennison and Ed Wood mention the same type of urban novel of the 1980s and early 1990s where “greed, drugs, masculinity in crisis and the pitiless treatment of the little guy” (xxi) were central themes and according to them, these novels were created by authors like Tom Wolfe, Bret Easton Ellis, and Chuck Palahniuk; Jay McInerney is also on their list (xxi). Jenny Stringer adds Tama Janowitz to this list of authors and describes their literature to be “laconic, cynical, and concerned with the decadent values of a materialistic generation” (195). As can be seen from these descriptions, the urban environment, its culture, and atmosphere have affected strongly the fiction written by the authors mentioned above. The attitude towards the city is negative and cynical as can be seen to be the case with *Bright Lights, Big City* in the analysis conducted in Chapter 3.

Naturally, such novels describe only a part of the urban fiction of the 1980s, but it is a central and relevant part, especially in the context of this thesis. The authors of this type of fiction express the central themes of postmodernist writing where “individuality is null and void. Everything original has already been said and done. Totalizing concepts of the real are abandoned and there is a general acceptance of a perpetual present dominated by repetition, simulation and the already experienced” (Beville 609). The ways New York is described by Brett Easton Ellis in *American Psycho* connects strongly with this style of writing. The city comes across as unwelcoming and even hostile at times, it is a place where “you need a tough skin to survive” (Ellis 252). Such qualities can be found in *Bright Lights, Big City*, too, and even though this thesis does not explicitly analyze the ‘post-modernity’ of the novel in question, some of these themes will be discussed later in the analysis section.

As stated earlier on in the previous subchapter, contradictions and dualities are some of the defining features of cities, which comes across in urban fiction as well: “literature has both celebrated the city as the supreme expression of wealth, of energy, of the amalgam

of living styles and, conversely, as representative of modern society's ills, its anonymity, egotism, oppression and anxiety" (von der Thüsen 2). This is clear in many pieces of urban literature of the 1980s, painfully so in *American Psycho* for example, where the inequality and uncertainty of urban living are constantly present. The main characters are clearly very wealthy, and everything is available to them. Despite this, no one is happy, or to be more exact, all the luxury they have does not appear to bring them happiness and they are constantly unsatisfied with life. Additionally, the anonymity of cities, mentioned above by von der Thüsen, is central in the novel and it presents itself in various manners. It is one of the main reasons why the main character, Patrick Bateman, is able to continue killing people and to be excessively careless about it (or at least it seems so, he is an unreliable narrator after all): everyone is concerned only about themselves and because of this no one really knows the people they call their friends. Additionally, everyone is so interested in fashion trends that they all dress the same and have similar haircuts, which leads them to look so similar people confuse people for others constantly, which heightens the feeling of anonymity and loneliness. The city shows its different sides in this novel and in many others, and thus directs attention to the tendency of constant change and confusion created by it.

This subchapter has traced the characteristics of contemporary urban novel in general and the next, and final, subchapter of this theory section concentrates on the special characteristics of New York fiction in particular. It deals with the concrete city of New York and the image that has been formed of it in a more abstract sense.

2.4 New York Fiction

It is only natural that a city as famous as New York with such a large impact in the world and its different realms such as arts, politics, finances, and business has a specific type of fiction written about it with features that make it different from fiction written about

other cities, and make it one distinctively of-New-York. In a book about the complexities of urban representations, Jens Martin Gurr and Wilfried Raussert go as far as to claim that New York is arguably “the epitome of the urban” which leads it to also be “the subject of the largest number of scholarly studies on American cities, and as the most common locale and frequently the protagonist of most ‘urban’ fictions in the Americas” (3). Therefore, it is no surprise that the city of New York has a strong presence in urban fiction.

On a similar note, highlighting the special position of New York, Desmond Harding, among other urban theorists, has stated that New York has always had a special position among the U.S. cities: it has been seen as “the gateway between Europe and the United States as well as the center of the nation’s literary consciousness. [...] The city has offered thematic and formal challenges for generations of American writers” (Harding xi). As general urban fiction has developed alongside the development of urban environments, the roots of New York fiction go to the beginning of New York in itself. According to the chronology presented in *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York*, New York was first established as a trading post by the Dutch settlers in 1625 under the name ‘New Amsterdam’ and during the later decades of the 17th century the Dutch and British settlers fought over the rule of New York (first named that in 1664) until the British finally secured the control of it in 1674 (xiv-xv). The birth of the city was also the birth of its literature, and the circumstances of its birth naturally affected the literature of early New York.

Over the centuries New York has gone through many changes. This ability to change has been important for New York to have at first gained a position as an impactful city and then to continue to keep that position in a world of accelerating globalization. Sabine Sielke highlights some of the big changes New York has gone through and how those changes have affected New York’s role and position in the world. In her view, New York has “mutated from a Dutch settlement into a center of transatlantic cultural exchange – as both the entry port for European immigrants and a metropolis of avant-garde arts –

into a global city with world-wide economic impact" (Sielke 9). All these changes have affected both the city itself and the fiction written of it. Examples of the fiction of the Dutch New York are rarer than the later ones written in English, because for a long time there were no translators capable of translating the Dutch works into English and because fires in the city destroyed a lot of important material (Bradley 29-30). However, some of the New York's Dutch history can be found in Washington Irving's *A History of New-York* which was "the first [book] to invite readers to embark on an archeological dig into New York's past – specifically, its Dutch founding and development. The result of this exploration and education is a city with stories, mysteries, and depth; a city, finally, with historical memory" (Bradley 29).

Regardless of the success of Irving's book, the Dutch past of the city did not become a lasting impact on the fiction written, because as time passed, the continuous development and changing of New York and its population came to play again, and "literature about or by Dutch New Yorkers largely evaporated with the Gilded Age, and the new immigrant populations brought their own myths, and created their own literatures in their adoptive city" (Bradley 39). Even though this constant change and the burial of the older literatures under new ones can seem to be a loss of something, New York's ability to change and to keep up with the development of the world and its literature has allowed it to take and to keep its position as a remarkable literary city through the centuries: a "publishing capital [of United States] since the 1840s" (Harding 29) where by the beginning of 19th literature was "the city's defining cultural form" (Currid 19).

In the 19th and 20th centuries many famous American authors wrote notable works that can be included in the genre of New York fiction, and they represent the different sides or fashions of it. These authors include, for example, Edith Wharton, Langston Hughes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. In the light of this thesis the publication of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in the beginning of the 20th century is crucial, because it can be claimed that "with its treatment of alienation, materialism, mechanization, the breakdown of tradition, sexuality, and the inevitable conflict between the

individual and society, and all set in the vortex of the city, that the modern New York City novel was born" (Harding 28). Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* also "prefigures American modernist fiction's own critique of consumer culture" (Harding 28) and modernist urban fiction has impacted the contemporary urban fiction heavily, as remarked earlier. Dreiser's novel certainly seems to have set the mode for other authors in the 20th century: there are many urban novels that deal with the themes also found in *Sister Carrie*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* for instance, a novel which also deals with themes such as wealth, society, and consumer culture. Furthermore, even though written over eighty years after the publication of Dreiser's novel, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* concerns itself with similar themes, pointing out, once again, the impact of modern literature on contemporary works.

When considering contradictions commonly connected with cities from the point of view of New York, one that seems to apply well to this particular city is how it manages to be, at the same time, both openly diverse *and* divisive. This is such a prominent theme that New York has been "projected in the American cultural imaginary as Promised Land and 'city upon a hill' *and* as Sodom and Gomorrah" (Sielke 9; emphasis original), that is, as complete opposites. The city can either be heaven or hell on Earth, depending on who you are and what your position or attitude is. Peter Brooker uses similar imagery when he describes New York to be "at once beacon of hope and newness and warning nightmare" (2). This description fits quite well together with the New York novels from the 1980s, including Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, because the reader gets to see both of these sides of the city in these two novels. Brooker draws further attention to the fragmentation of New York: "it is indeed the spell and paradox of New York City [...] that amid signs of disintegration, lack of hope and the end of things it retains the promise of an always unrealized potential" (2). This promise of something unbelievable that is constantly present is a major part of the appeal of New York and the fascination people have towards the city in question. Sielke highlights this quality as a crucial part of the city's vitality and charm:

this very divisiveness [...] has also been seen as the motor that keeps the city running – as a geopolitical locale, as an imaginary community, and [...] as a *pars pro toto* for the self-conception of ‘America’ at large, albeit a constantly changing one. New York City has undergone various transformations while always unfolding and reshaping its own transformative force. (9)

The process of constant change and development is part of the reason New York City continues to provide writers inspiration and themes to write about and it is surely part of the fascination people have towards the city itself and the fiction written about it.

A concrete type of division of the city is its division into different neighborhoods. Neighborhoods have distinctive functions in the life of the city, but what they also have, are cultural roles. Cyrus Patell highlights the phenomenon of cosmopolitan change that has already been touched upon earlier in this thesis, but which is also important in the context of neighborhoods and crossing the cultural boundaries. He argues that the neighborhoods and their cultures, and the interactions between them are a central participant in creating cosmopolitanism in New York: “it arises from acts of literal crossing from one neighborhood into another, whether for work or for play, and in zones where neighborhoods abut one another or even overlap” (Patell 4). Nevertheless, while the interactions between cultures might create cosmopolitanism and “mixing” of cultures, thus creating new, positive things, this process is not simple or all positive: “the close proximity in which New York’s different peoples have been forced to live with one another has often had the effect of producing a kind of cultural retrenchment and an insistence on cultural purity” (Patell 4). It seems that most things in cities are about the (im)balance between opposites, and neighborhoods and their roles appear not to be an exception.

The different regions and neighborhoods of New York City can also be read as representing different types of literature, as Ickstadt does when he proposes that the Lower East Side could be connected with Jewish literature, the area between Washington Square and Central Park with the literature of manners and “the old New York,” and

Harlem seen as the home of the Harlem Renaissance and Black American modernism (Ickstadt 18-21). However, he reminds, this kind of division is not all there is:

One might thus conceive of the literary history of New York as a history of urban regionalism, as an ensemble of predominantly realistic narratives about ethnically or class-specifically defined districts or neighborhoods that provide the social and geographic context for innumerable tales of initiation or searches for identity. [...] Yet this would only be half the story. For next to these ethnic or regional narratives (and, at several points of New York's literary history, dominating them) is the literature and art of an "urban sublime" that reaches beyond neighborhood to grasp New York as a whole, the city's essence: its energy and latent spiritual form. (Ickstadt 23)

Thus, if one only pays attention to the neighborhoods individually and ignores the overall picture of New York, the image formed of the city's fiction will be incomplete. Additionally, the 'urban sublime' Ickstadt mentions presents cities "as objects of fascination and terror" (Den Tandt 127) once again bringing forth the idea of cities being places of opposites.

New York's impact on literature overall, and vice versa, literature's impact on New York, is especially important in the context of this thesis. Ickstadt highlights the importance of the connection between geographical New York and New York in literature. He argues that through its history New York has been not just a geographical locale or an economically relevant city, but more significantly it has "engaged the literary and artistic imagination to an extraordinary degree" (Ickstadt 17). Going even further, Ickstadt states that the city and the literature and art it has inspired and created

cannot be separated [...] not only because a substantial part of the history of American literature and art has been inscribed into New York's (especially Manhattan's) geography, but also because New York, as imagined and represented in texts and

images, has continuously entered the experience of place and been present in it as myth and remembered history. (Ickstadt 17)

Thus, New York is not just a city, it is a concept, a phenomenon, a “state of mind” if you will, as Billy Joel suggests in his song “New York State of Mind” (1976). New York has been and continues to be portrayed in various forms of media and popular culture and it also lives in people’s minds and imaginations perhaps more globally than any other city in the world. In addition to novels, there are countless television shows, films, and songs which either take place in New York or in which the city has its own central role in some other way. These include television shows like *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Sex and the City*; all types of films such as *West Side Story* (1961) (which was adapted from a 1957 Broadway musical), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Home Alone: Lost in New York* (1992) and several films by Woody Allen and popular songs such as “Walk on the Wild Side” by Lou Reed, “Shattered” by the Rolling Stones (also quoted in *Bright Lights, Big City*) and “New York, New York” (the theme song from the 1977 film by the same title). In addition, New York landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building and the skyline of the city are familiar to people around the world. All these works of art, popular culture, and media contribute to the creation of representations of New York to their audiences. Like previously stated in this thesis about the New York in fiction, New York in films, too, is not just a limited concept, but “it has a kind of biography, and therefore a kind of heartbeat and even, perhaps, a life-span, so that any filmic treatment of it becomes something of a portrait. [...] New York participates actively in the films that show it. Cinematically, New York is alive” (Pomerance 9). A similar statement can be made about New York in fiction: it can be sensed to have its own significant role and presence in the stories that take place in its streets and neighborhoods.

This chapter has presented and discussed the theoretical framework of this thesis. First, in subchapter 2.1 the methodology this thesis follows was introduced. The difficulty of defining the city and the impacts of this on urban fiction in general were discussed in subchapter 2.2. In subchapter 2.3 the scope of interest was narrowed down to the

contemporary urban novel. Central features of urban novels such as contrasts and the utilization of senses in creating urbanity in literature were discussed. After this, in subchapter 2.4, the focus was moved to New York and the special features of its fiction. The different phases of the city's (literary) history and the contradictory nature of this city were discussed as well. Keeping the themes and details discussed in this chapter in mind and with the help of them, the next chapter will present an analysis of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* as an example of New York fiction.

3. Analysis of *Bright Lights, Big City*

As discussed earlier in the theory section, cities and urban novels have influenced one another in multiple ways in the course of their development. There have been different art movements and historical events that have shaped them together. The course of development discussed in the theory section leads to the moment where the novel under study, Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, was created. The New York of this novel is a contemporary city, and therefore it needs to be analyzed as one. The contemporary city of the late 20th century and early 21st century has been and continues to be a suitable theme for postmodern and contemporary fiction since both the cities and their fiction are complex and constantly changing. This is because "the contemporary city is arguably a postmodern abstraction: ephemeral, unreal, unmappable and uncanny," which is why it matches so well with the style and contents of postmodern literature (Beville 603). The themes, contents, and stylistic choices of *Bright Lights, Big City* make it an example of the contemporary urban novel where the city is present in the way postmodernism understands it: elusive, incomprehensible, and constantly changing.

In this chapter the previously presented theory about cities and urban fiction is utilized to analyze a work of urban fiction, *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney. In the first subchapter 3.1 and its sections, the focus of the analysis is on the general codes of urban fiction, and the discussed topics include sense perceptions, urban activities and phenomena, and the divisive nature of the city. After that, in the subchapter 3.2, the aspects that make the novel in question specifically a New York novel are specified and analyzed: these include, for example, how the atmosphere of New York is created in this novel and what kind of representation of this particular city does this novel produce.

3.1 Aspects of Urban Fiction in *Bright Lights, Big City*

Based on the points presented in the theory section, this chapter analyzes the themes and details that make Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* essentially an urban novel. There is a constant feeling of the city present in the novel, and this chapter attempts to specify and analyze the features of the novel that create that feeling of urbanity to it. Maria Beville captures the essence of McInerney's novel when she states that it creates an "uncanny account of metropolitan identity as spectralised, at once subsumed and defined by the strangeness of the metropolis" (614). This remark summarizes the urban aspect of this novel: the city creates confusion and division all around. The characters can try to resist its effect, but it is not easy. The point made by Maria Beville will become apparent as this chapter discusses the representation of New York created in the novel.

In *Bright Lights, Big City* New York is present in the everyday life of the protagonist in multiple ways: it provides the physical surroundings in which he operates but it also creates a mental environment for him or at least affects it strongly. Concretely, the city affects his life as a place of living: it is present in the building he lives in, the streets he walks, what he sees on his way to work, where he eats and spends his time, what transportation he uses and so on. The city is present everywhere and depending on the specific location it is different and affects its inhabitants in various ways. The city also provides the protagonist with opportunities and difficulties which shape his life. Furthermore, the city as an entity seems to create a certain set of rules for the characters that they must follow in order to at least survive and possibly even thrive in the city. These rules can be seen to affect the lives of the characters in various ways.

The aspects of how the city is present in the novel will be discussed and analyzed next. The chapter 3.1 is divided into sections of which section 3.1.1 discusses the ways in which McInerney has used descriptions of sense perceptions as a means to portray to the reader the city that his characters are experiencing. Section 3.1.2 discusses the urban activities and phenomena included in the novel and the ways in which these impact

the representation of the city the novel conveys to its readers. Section 3.1.3 considers the city as a changing and divisive entity, because both of these features are prominent in urban fiction and strongly influence the way the protagonist experiences the city in *Bright Lights, Big City*.

3.1.1 The Senses and the City

This section discusses how sense perceptions are used in the novel to describe the city and the experiences of the protagonist. Since “sense experience is the vital communication with the world, which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life” (Borer 966), this analysis begins with the acknowledgement of the different senses and how they are utilized to create an urban atmosphere and environment in the novel. The main senses which are used in portraying New York in *Bright Lights, Big City* are vision, smell, and hearing, and thus these senses are discussed in this subchapter.

In general, the inhabitants of cities take in their surroundings through their senses and the perceptions created from these observations impact the whole image of the city the individual has. All in all, senses play a central role in creating perceptions of the surroundings of people in the real world and therefore it is only natural that this phenomenon is present in fiction, too. One of the ways in which authors describe the world of their novels is with the description of different sensory stimuli which “are essential to bring about emotional reactions in places” (Xiao et al 2). Thus, these descriptions are central when creating a feeling of a city in urban fiction.

There are multiple ways of creating the urban atmosphere to a novel, but this thesis begins its analysis from the visual components because out of all the senses its presence is the strongest in this novel. McInerney bases the city of his novel to the real New York and then describes what that city looks like to his characters: what do they see and what sort of environment surrounds them. As already pointed out in the theory section of this

thesis, Balshaw and Kennedy among others highlight the visual aspects of creating representations and thus McInerney's choice of visual aspects as the main creator of urban atmosphere to his novel is a valid one.

Emphasizing vision is only natural since visual perception is such a central part of our sensory world. Naturally, this affects the way we perceive cities as well:

artifacts located throughout the city (e.g. trees, rivers, parks, buildings, street corners and neighborhoods) can all become symbolic markers. Some of these become synonymous with the city itself. These objects and places help groups identify the city and also provide a means for personal identification with the city. [...] As such, the common speech of urbanites is based, first, on vision because the sights (and sites) of the city are so readily and abundantly available. (Borer 970)

Thus, the feeling of an urban environment can be brought to a novel by using recognizable, visual features of real cities and with the usage of these a city that feels 'real' is created in a novel. Jay McInerney does exactly this in *Bright Lights, Big City*: he uses the names of real existing streets, nightclubs, department stores, et cetera, to connect the events of the novel to the city of New York and to give context clues to those familiar with the city. For instance, he describes the protagonist "walk[ing] up Fifth Avenue along the park" (*BLBC* 145), visiting a friend who "lives in a big fifties building on Charlton and Sixth" (*BLBC* 128), looking at mannequins in the windows of Saks department store (*BLBC* 64) and spending his time in famous nightclubs such as Heartbreak and the Odeon (the iconic neon sign of which is printed on the cover of the first edition of *Bright Lights, Big City*). These types of small details brought up in novels bring in the feeling of a 'real' urban environment the readers can recognize and connect with. This being said, the physical features, as Wirth-Nesher puts it, might "constitute a map so familiar to the experienced novel reader (and the city dweller) that we may overlook them. But in these maps of the city are to be found the complex cartography of the modern urban novel" (9-10). Even though these things might be easily taken for granted, they are an important

part of creating the city in an urban novel. Additionally, paying attention to these issues gives the reader information on what is important: why certain things are mentioned or left out and how this affects the novel and its representation of the city.

Like mentioned above, with the emphasis on the visual in (literary) world, the elements that are used to create an urban atmosphere in urban novels are often things that are seen: streets, buildings, and advertisements for example. In *Bright Lights, Big City* these physical details create a vision of New York City in the 1980s and analyzing them provides information on what light the city is presented to the reader. On the surface level they indicate where the events of the novel take place, and furthermore, the tone they are written in indicates the way they affect their environment and the attitude the characters have towards them. The next quotation from McInerney's novel, for example, offers a glimpse into the way in which the built environment is described and how that affects the image created of the city and its architecture:

On Madison you pass a construction site, walled in by acres of plywood [...]. Thirty stories above you, a crane dangles an I-beam over the street beside the skeleton of a new building. [...] You pass the Helmsley Palace – the shell of old New York transparently veiling the hideous erection of a real estate baron. (*BLBC* 142-143)

This sort of descriptions not only shows how the environment looks but also indicates the attitude the protagonist has towards it, quite negative and critical in this case.

Additionally, "the visual aspects of the built environment influence the experience of urban places by giving cues and clues about what types of interactions take place there and between whom. We can note, then, a subtle move from images of places to images of people" (Borer 970). McInerney uses this kind of description of visuals when the protagonist of his novel is describing the Plaza Hotel as "a gargantuan white chateau rising in the middle of the island like a New Money dream of the Old World" where "getting out of the taxi next to the famous fountain, you see[m] to be arriving at the premiere of the movie which [is] to be your life" (*BLBC* 143). This sort of a description does not only

describe the visual exteriors but also indicates further their values and the social life taking place there: in this particular case wealthy people living in excess.

As stated above, there are plenty of visual observations made of New York in *Bright Lights, Big City*. Yet, there is much more to the city than meets the eye, and to get the full picture one needs to use not just sight but the other senses, too. Even though the general city space in this novel is mostly described through what is seen, other senses also play a part in the observations. In the novel the smells and the sounds the protagonist senses are also used as tools to create the feeling of an urban environment and to add depth to it. The visual elements may be more frequently included in the telling of the story, but the smells and sounds are connected more deeply with the life the protagonist lives in the city and how he experiences it. Like the previously discussed observations made through vision, smells and sounds also indicate how the protagonist feels about a specific place or moment and thus give the reader more information on the protagonist and the environment surrounding him, as shown next.

As mentioned earlier in the theory section, the sense of smell has a strong connection with memory. Oliver Wendell Holmes has gone as far in highlighting the importance of smell as to state that: “memory, imagination, old sentiments and associations, are more readily reached through the sense of smell than by almost any other channel” (Holmes 88 in Reinartz 6). The description of scents and odors as a way to enrich experiences can also be found in *Bright Lights, Big City*. The next few paragraphs discuss incidents where the smells of the urban environment are brought into the novel and how they impact the picture created of New York to the reader of the novel.

The different scents included in the novel’s description of the New York ‘smellscape’ affect the representation of the city in various ways. One of the categories of smells included in the description of the smellscape in this novel is food. When walking around the city the protagonist smells food on several occasions, for example the smell of an Italian bakery on Bleecker Street (*BLBC* 8) and later when on a walk in the Village

where “the whole neighborhood smells of Italian food” (*BLBC* 89). These instances are, of course, telling of the physical environments: there are bakeries and restaurants around the protagonist when he smells these scents. But this is not all there is to descriptions of scents. The connection between smell and memory is verbalized when the protagonist visits a bakery: “the fragrance of the interior reminds you of mornings on Cornelia when you woke to the smell of bread from the bakery ovens, Amanda sleeping beside you. It seems a lifetime ago, but you can see her sleeping” (*BLBC* 128). Here one can concretely see how smelling familiar scents can bring vivid memories to mind. These scents are pleasant both in general and to the protagonist, and they give new perspectives into what kind of places are described because “smells can evoke strong emotions and convey social meanings associated with people and places” (Xiao, Tait & Kang 1) and thus pleasant scents such as different foods can create an image of those places as pleasant.

The protagonist’s emotions connected with the smell of bread come almost painfully evident when one morning on his way home he smells fresh bread and narrates: “the smell of bread washes over you like a gentle rain. You inhale deeply, filling your lungs. Tears come to your eyes, and you feel such a rush of tenderness and pity that you stop beside a lamppost and hang on for support” (*BLBC* 173). Therefore, it can be stated that different sense experiences that the city offers can impact its inhabitants strongly. Furthermore, on this instance the smell of bread reminds the protagonist of his dead mother and thus it causes a strong emotional reaction which is only natural since “the emotion-memory bond in smell experiences are critical to one’s perceptions of themselves and the environment” (Xiao et al 3). This event closes the novel with what seems like a helpful realization the protagonist comes to know through the experience: “You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again” (*BLBC* 174). This is perhaps an indication of both the influence smells can have on people and how this incident and realization bring him hope of changing his life in the city, a life which, as is seen later in this thesis, is not exactly ideal.

In discussions concerning the connection between odors and urbanity, it has been stated that “the different odors associated with localities, commercial production, and markets created what has been described as an “olfactory map” and encouraged city inhabitants and visitors to conceptualize the urban environment by way of smell” (Reinarz 22-23). In the context of urban fiction then, the smells authors use in connection to certain places in their novels, give to the reader a wider impression of the place than if it were merely described by what is seen. Even though the incidents in *Bright Lights, Big City* where scents are mentioned are not frequent enough to create a very broad map, the smells included still act as indicators of what types of places the described ones are. Even though the scents and the sites they are connected with are various and plentiful, smells are often thought of “in terms of binaries, most famously the foul and the fragrant” (Reinarz 179; see also Borer 972). This division takes form with the scents present in this novel as well. The scents have certain functions, often defined by whether they are ‘fragrant’ or ‘foul’: “positive smellscapes can bring restorative effects to cities, making inhabitants feel healthier and happier. Conversely, the negative impacts of sewage, traffic and tobacco smells can also significantly decrease people’s experiences in such spaces” (Xiao et al. 2). This positive/negative division and their differing effects are apparent also in the novel discussed here. Examples of scents with positive connotations include the previously discussed scents of food and on the opposite side, the ‘foul’ smells with negative connotations are to be discussed next.

Naturally, unpleasant scents are a part of the smellscape of New York, too: in *Bright Lights, Big City* this is indicated once when the protagonist is waiting for a subway train and “the tunnel smells of wet clothing and urine” (*BLBC* 82) and on another occasion when the train car “reeks of sweat and reefer” (*BLBC* 54). Similarly to the previous case of pleasant scents, these smells characterize the location they are smelled in because smells take part in creating the identities of spaces (Xiao et al 1). These scents may be unpleasant to the protagonist, but they still reflect the city surrounding him: people coming to the subway for shelter from the weather or even homelessness, people smoking

on their way somewhere i.e., certain scents are connected with certain places and at the same time certain groups of people, and therefore smells are “place-based” (Borer 973). Since “smell can enhance the experience of everyday life in the city by drawing upon or connecting to individual and collective memories and imaginations” (Borer 974), these descriptions give depth to the feeling of the urban environment: smells give further hints on which the reader can build the interpretation of the surroundings and the background of the story. These descriptors of smells give the reader a broader sense of the atmosphere the protagonist is in than if it were just described by what he sees around him.

The soundscape of the city is also an important factor in creating urban environments in urban novels. In urban environment most of the soundscape is created by sounds created by human activity (Pijanowski 203) and to be more precise:

the texture of the urban soundscape is comprised of distinctive rhythms and chaotic noise at varying volume levels emanating from automobile traffic, public transportation, industrial parks, music, church bells, and the voices of thousands of unknown strangers. Such sounds are often connected to or associated with particular places or areas within the city. The aggregate of these sounds become both the foreground and the background aural environment of the city. (Borer 971)

There are plenty of sounds described in *Bright Lights, Big City*, and some of them take part in creating an urban atmosphere to the novel, namely sounds that either belong to or continue seamlessly the list started above by Borer: the sound of the traffic, the train, a sidewalk guitarist. Just like the previously discussed sights and scents, the noises and sounds of the city also broaden the picture created of the city in the novel. To be more specific, like scents, they may be connected either with positive or negative things and the interpretation of the sounds affects attitudes towards the urban environment.

This is also apparent in *Bright Lights, Big City*: on one occasion the noise of traffic annoys the protagonist who looks out of a tall building’s window and even though he is so high

up that most details are indistinct, he sees a man who is playing a guitar on the sidewalk. He wants to hear the sidewalk guitarist play and so he “open[s] the window and stick[s his] head out, but the traffic noise covers the music” (*BLBC* 97). Here the noise of the cars on the streets prevents the protagonist from hearing what he wants to hear, which can be interpreted as an indication of the noise problem of cities. In a metropolis such as New York, with the number of people living there, there is bound to be a high level of noise pollution, and observations like this draw the reader’s attention to this aspect of urban environment and its problems.

However, the same sound does not always have the same effect: on another occasion the noise caused by vehicles calms the protagonist down: “You sit down and allow the racket of the train to fill your head. You close your eyes. Soon the noise doesn’t seem like noise and the motion doesn’t feel like motion. You could fall asleep” (*BLBC* 141-142). Based on these observations, it can be stated that it is not just the noise in itself, but the context in which it is heard that affects the way it is perceived by the character in the novel and then further interpreted by the reader. The interpretation of a certain sound is dependent on many things: the context in which it is heard needs to be considered, and additionally, it is important to be “aware of the variability in soundscape preference” because “what is preferred in one place will be different than what is preferred in another. This variability will be between people, and even within one person in one place, at different times of a day, a week, or a season” (Brown et al. 12). Because a person’s attitudes towards sounds and soundscapes can shift easily

the experience of an acoustic environment, the soundscape, can therefore be different even if all physical parameters, acoustical and others, remain constant. For example, a particular acoustic environment may be considered good or relaxing if a person is seeking solitude or quiet, but neutral or uneventful if a person is seeking excitement. (Brown et al. 14)

The protagonist's different stance towards similar noises caused by transport vehicles on different instances can be attributed to this variability in preference towards soundscapes.

On another occasion, the protagonist of the novel does hear the abovementioned sidewalk guitarist play when he leaves the building from where he had spotted the player earlier. However, contrary to what one could expect, it is not a pleasurable experience for him. Nevertheless, this is not to point out that the street music is an annoying or unwanted part of the city's soundscape for most people, but rather that the songs just seem to bring painful memories to his mind: "You go over and listen to the sidewalk guitarist. He's playing blues, and every phrase is aimed directly between your third and fourth ribs" (*BLBC* 102). As mentioned above, reactions to the sounds of urban soundscapes are affected by countless contextual aspects and the same sound can draw different reactions from different people. Thus, the soundscape can have a big impact on the representation of the city in a particular novel. This intricate aspect of the soundscape is further elaborated by Weymann who draws attention to the interpreters of the soundscape:

to experience the rhythms of the city is arguably one of the most intense and intimate encounters with urban space. It is also one of the most elusive, for the music of the city is not only produced with urban sounds, but also with the emotions and memories of urban individuals, who, on exposing themselves to the bustling fabric of the metropolis, transform the sounds into music. (Weymann 77)

This way of thinking highlights the listener as a central actor in the creation of the soundscape. The individual's emotions and memories being part of the soundscape make it a personal experience. From the excerpts of the novel included above, one can see that the soundscape experienced by the protagonist is a complicated one, mirroring his whole attitude towards the city he lives in.

As have been analyzed in this section, the descriptions of sense perception are used in *Bright Lights, Big City* as one way of creating the city to the novel. The inclusion of both positive and negative responses the protagonist has to the different sense perceptions indicates the complicated nature of the city but also gives concrete proof of the city's existence in the novel.

3.1.2 Urban Activities and Phenomena

This section discusses activities and phenomena commonly associated with urbanity that can be found in *Bright Lights, Big City*. In addition to the description of surroundings observed through different senses, another typical way to create an urban atmosphere to a novel is the inclusion of different activities normally connected with urban environments. They play an important role in *Bright Lights, Big City*, too. There are descriptions of scenes created by these 'urban activities' witnessed by the protagonist, for example: "on the corner a fat man in a Yankees cap is selling pretzels from a pushcart. A woman in a fur coat holds her right arm erect, hoping to conjure a taxi. A bus roars past" (*BLBC* 121). Additionally, there are various street artists witnessed to perform around the city in the novel: there is the previously mentioned sidewalk guitarist and an acrobat and a mime. These events create a vivid image of the urban life going on in the novel. The protagonist also takes part in these activities: he is, for instance, described to be waiting on the traffic lights on multiple occasions, once he "stop[s] at the corner for a doughnut and coffee to go" (*BLBC* 12), he waits for a cab (*BLBC* 92) and browses shop windows (*BLBC* 64). These are typical urban activities that add details to the novel's description of the urban lifestyle. In the protagonist's life the most common urban activity is nightclubbing. There are multiple descriptions of nights the protagonist spends in bars and nightclubs, and it is also an indication on what is central to the protagonist's life in the city. Additionally, it also shapes the way the novel represents New York to its readers by emphasizing the importance of nightlife. The urban activities included in urban fiction shape the

representations of the life lived in cities because “cities are not just about who lives within their boundaries, but also all the activities and other entities (companies, workers, factories, and so forth) that populate them. Here we can see the importance of cities as sites of interaction and association, involving new forms of social relationships” (Latham et al. 2). The social interaction is a central feature of urban activities, and its complicated nature will be discussed later in this thesis.

In a more abstract sense, a component that also creates the feeling of urbanity in this novel is the inclusion of more abstract urban phenomena. They are added to either create the feeling of the particular location or timeframe or to comment on the ills of urban environments. Most of the phenomena included in *Bright Lights, Big City* seem to be negative, contributing to the overall negatively lit image of the city the novel creates. When it comes to negative urban phenomena, the novel presents to the reader homeless people with mental health problems in the streets and trains; young men selling drugs and stolen and fake goods in the streets; missing person -posters plastered on lampposts and all sorts of crime reported in the papers. All these draw attention to the problems of the contemporary city: unemployment, homelessness and high crime rate being the most prominent ones. This theme is apparent in the incident the protagonist witnesses with his brother Michael: “At Sheridan Square a ragged figure is tearing posters off the utility poles. He claws at the paper with his fingernails and then stomps it under his feet. ‘What is he, political?’ Michael says. ‘No, just angry’” (*BLBC* 153). Incidents of this nature draw attention to the problems present in the cityscape and they also add to the novel’s representation of the city as a place filled with different struggles.

According to Massey et al., another example of the more abstract side of urban environments is that “cities are characterized by their openness: to new possibilities, and to new interactions between people” (vii), yet it must be remembered that the larger the city, the more anonymous it is (Pile 17). Even though there are more chances for social interaction in urban environments, these interactions tend to be more superficial and shorter in duration (Pile 44). This phenomenon can be caused by the exact reason that there are

so many options for sociality available that it is overwhelming, or because of the heterogeneity of the population the connections do not prove to be as long lasting as in smaller, more homogenic communities:

The urbanite faces both positive and negative possibilities in the new environment. On the one hand, the metropolis offers the chance of accomplishing a higher degree of individual freedom and uniqueness than ever achieved before in the course of human history. On the other hand, urban dwellers are immersed in impersonality. [...] Owing to the size and high degree of differentiation, the individual is confronted with more superficial contacts, faster rhythms, rapidly changing images, and sharper discontinuities in the metropolis. (Hurm 47)

Thus, there is a complicated nature to the social life of cities. This is evident in many other urban novels as well. For example, in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* where the narrator, Nick Carraway, summarizes this all in one single sentence when wondering about urban existence: "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (Fitzgerald 42). This encapsulates the complicated nature of urban social life. Similarly, there are multiple occasions in McInerney's novel where the protagonist is looking for company but seems to be left out: "You go off to buy a drink, keeping both eyes peeled for lonely women. There don't seem to be any at the moment. Everyone knows everyone else" (*BLBC* 46). There are people around him, and he witnesses their social interaction, but he is not a part of it and is thus left 'without'. This sort of occasions in *Bright Lights, Big City* give the impression of urban life as an oddly solitary one and make loneliness a central phenomenon characterizing the city.

Another reason for this phenomenon can be found in the sensory world discussed in the previous section of this chapter. There is a lot going on simultaneously in the city, which provides a constant challenge for the senses of the urbanite who needs to take in all the observations and decipher them. This leads to "the cultural mechanisms for interpreting sensory stimuli [to] shape everyday practices and interactions in public places. They also

shape the connections between individuals and the places and spaces themselves” (Borer 966). The type of interpretations made of sensory stimuli affect the social life of urbanites and so does the sheer amount of them. In the city the pace and number of sensory stimuli can be overwhelming and so it “requires individuals to psychologically adapt to the urban environment. And these adaptations have a profound impact on the ways that people relate to one another in the modern urban world” (Borer 967).

Furthermore, according to Michael Ian Borer, the sociologist George Simmel has proposed “that modern cities generate conditions that predispose individuals [...] to become reserved in their relationships with one another. Reservation is necessary for both individual survival and the maintenance of modern urban social order” (Borer 967). In order to survive in the urban environment and its social world the urbanite develops “a blasé attitude,” term coined by Simmel, meaning “an indifference to others and the cacophony of sights, sounds, and smells that constitute the urban environment” which is essential since it is not possible “to take in, interpret, and respond to all of the stimuli one encounters” (Borer 967). Similar issues were discussed in the theory section: Doreen Massey also notes that the social life of the city raises both “excitements” and “anxieties” (165) in the urbanites. The protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City* is also using this ‘blasé attitude’ as a survival technique: “Just now you want to stay at the surface of things, and Tad is a figure skater who never considers the sharks under the ice. [...] Your soul is as disheveled as your apartment, and until you can clean it up a little you don’t want to invite anyone inside” (*BLBC* 30). The protagonist wants to find social interaction but at the same time he does not feel ready for deeper connections. Keeping everything on a surface level can be a way of protecting oneself from the overwhelming intensity of urban sociality. There are other aspects influencing the protagonist’s evasive attitude, but the chaotic city certainly adds its impact to the mix.

Continuing a similar train of thought, even though a citizen of an urban environment would have a wide variety of opportunities for things like social interaction, in Wirth-Nesher’s view this can also cause feelings of not belonging and being left out:

Cities intensify the human condition of missed opportunities, choices and inaccessibility. [...] The city dweller is constantly aware of life going on without him. [...] The city dweller learns to contend with the sensation of partial exclusion, of being an outsider by mental reconstruction of areas to which he or she no longer has access, and also by inventing worlds to replace those that are inaccessible. [...] And the reconstructions and inventions will depend entirely on the particular perspective of the urbanite, on the particular nature of his or her outsidersness. (Wirth-Nesher 9)

In a metropolis like New York City where millions of people are rushing from one place to another it is easy to get the feeling of drowning in the continuous stream of strange people. In a big city, life goes on without caring about the individual, and this can also cause the individual to feel like they are missing out on life (Wirth-Nesher 9). Furthermore, alienation has been stated to be a central characteristic when defining the urban experience (Wirth-Nesher 6) and the protagonist feels this especially strongly when he has lost his job and he wishes he had company: "you want to go somewhere, do something, talk to someone, but it's only eleven-thirty in the morning and everyone else in the world has a job" (*BLBC* 103). This is of course an exaggeration, but still an accurate representation of the severity of the feeling of alienation from others the city causes him to feel.

Urban fiction provides great amounts of descriptions of the city creating a feeling of 'outsiderness' and alienation in its inhabitants. For example, in *The Great Gatsby* the narrator Nick Carraway describes such feelings towards New York, the city he has moved into:

At the enchanting metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner [...]. Again at eight o'clock, when the dark lanes of the Forties were lined five deep with throbbing taxicabs, bound for the theatre district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they

waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes made unintelligible circles inside. (Fitzgerald 63-64)

Seeing so many people around him but being excluded from the social activity makes Nick feel the loneliness that the city creates. Similarly, Jay McInerney highlights in his novel this feeling of loneliness and not belonging which is symptomatic to the contemporary city. Much like Nick Carraway, the protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City* sees around him opportunities for forming connections and existing connections between other people but since he himself is not part of them he feels like he does not belong: "sometimes you feel like the only man in the city without group affiliation" (*BLBC* 54). This is not to be taken literally, of course, but New York and its millions of inhabitants may intensify such a feeling of loneliness. Naturally, where there is loneliness, there is also the feeling of wanting to belong. The protagonist feels this too: "you have this desire to prove that you can have as good a time as anyone, that you can be one of the crowd" (*BLBC* 49).

Another telling incident of how alone and unnoticed one can feel in the bustle of a metropolis like New York occurs in the novel when: "the lunchtime crowd churns Park Avenue. You expect people to gaze at you, horror-stricken, yet nobody pays any attention. [...] Cautiously, as if you were entering a swimming pool for the first time in years, you ease yourself into the ranks of pedestrians" (*BLBC* 121). There are people around him, but they do not notice him, which makes him feel like an outsider. In the metropolis there are so many strange people around the individual that consequently "nowhere more than in the city in the midst of the crowd is our lack of ability to communicate with others more obvious" (Beville 607). The protagonist truly feels this lack of communication and he is missing the sense of belonging and the security it would bring. He feels lost and alone throughout the novel: "down the street, you clamp your sunglasses to your face and wonder where to go. An old question, it seems to come up more and more frequently" (*BLBC* 101). The search for direction and destination colors the plot throughout the novel. However lost and lonely the protagonist feels, he does not know how to change this, and the blasé attitude that was discussed earlier contradicts with the

longing after connection, and it makes it harder to find one's place in the city. It can be stated that "every urbanite is to some extent an outsider [...] but the effect of inaccessibility differs with each city dweller, according to the nature of his or her 'outsiderness'" (Wirth-Nesher 8-9). The feeling of 'outsiderness' is amplified by the point mentioned above: everyone in the city is different and lonely in their own way. Thus, these feelings are heightened further by the feeling of being misunderstood.

These feelings of being lost and not belonging can also be connected with Relph's concept of existential outsidership, previously mentioned in the theory section. Existential outsidership fits the experiences of the protagonist because it "involves a self-conscious and reflective uninvolvement, and alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging" (Relph 51). The protagonist truly experiences existential outsidership because he experiences all of the mentioned 'symptoms' at least to a degree. All the mentioned aspects of loneliness, alienation, and unreality can be found from the descriptions of his life in the city. He is not homeless in the concrete sense of the word since he has an apartment, but it does not seem to feel like a real home to him. He describes the apartment where he lives to be an unpleasant place to be: he feels a "rising dread" when he "return[s] home at night (*BLBC* 34) and "the sound of the tumblers in the locks of [his] apartment door puts [him] in mind of dungeons (*BLBC* 35). Furthermore, he describes it as "a chamber of horrors" and says that the "place is must-to-avoid" (*BLBC* 76). This further accentuates the feeling of uninvolvement since he does not even feel like he belongs to his home, which often is described as a safe haven in the midst of the turbulent city.

As mentioned above, loneliness and outsidership are common themes in urban fiction. Another example of this can be found in Ellis' novel *American Psycho*. However, in it outsidership is different from *Bright Lights*, *Big City* and *The Great Gatsby*. In *American Psycho* the characters are constantly misidentifying people because they all follow the same fashion trends and because of this look they so similar it is difficult to recognize individuals. For example, the protagonist Patrick Bateman is wrongly identified multiple times by

his colleagues and acquaintances. Therefore, in *American Psycho* the feeling of loneliness comes not from having no social contacts but from not really *knowing* people: fashion trends make people look so similar that they become an urban mass and individuals are lost in it.

In a metropolis one can feel like drowning in a crowd and this affects identity formation too. According to Brinkmann and Thoene, the very process of identity formation is compromised by the complexity of the city space and the amount of other people surrounding an individual in such a complex environment. What adds to the confusion is the “seemingly infinite number of trajectories and biographies [that] clash so often in so many places that it is difficult for an individual to keep track of all the different others around [themselves]” (Brinkmann & Thoene 67). Therefore, it is difficult for the urbanite to keep up with oneself not to mention the countless others around them.

All in all, these descriptions of urban activities and phenomena add layers to the urban atmosphere described in the novel and make it one that induces loneliness and chaos.

3.1.3 Divisive and Changing City

This section discusses two central themes of this urban novel's city. First the divisive and contradictory 'nature' of the city is discussed and then its tendency to change is concentrated on. As discussed in the theory section, cities are places of contradictions. One central contradiction is the chance of either great success or failure: the city offers chances for both, and its inhabitants have to balance between them and fight their way to their destination. The protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City* is doing just this, but during the timeline of the novel the city seems to mostly offer him challenges that lead him to failure. When thinking back to the beginning of his life in New York, he reminisces:

those first months seem now to have been filled with promise. You were convinced of the importance of your job and the inevitability of rising above it. You

met people you had admired half your life. [...] It was only a matter of time before they realized your talents were being wasted in Fact. Something changed. Somewhere along the line you stopped accelerating. (*BLBC* 32)

At first it has seemed to the protagonist that the city has a lot to offer to him but eventually the hardships take over and here the fine line between success and failure becomes visible.

The protagonist is not the only one who has not found his happiness in the city: one day when the protagonist is going down the stairs to the subway he has to “dodg[e] the zombies trudging up the stairs” (*BLBC* 141). The “grim faces” (*BLBC* 82) and the ‘zombies’ he encounters around town indicate that living in the legendary city that never sleeps does not magically turn one’s life into a fairy tale, but even there life can be mundane and disappointing. In the New York portrayed in *Bright Lights, Big City* one is surrounded by people with whom one does not have a connection, and this causes the feeling of loneliness in the crowd as discussed earlier. Despite the misfortunes described in the novel, the protagonist sees ads in the train which are promising hope and success: “TRAIN FOR AN EXCITING NEW CAREER. BE AN INSTANT WINNER WITH WINGO! SOFT AND LOVELY HAIR RELAXER. BE A MODEL – OR JUST LOOK LIKE ONE” (*BLBC* 142; spelling original). Read in the context of the descriptions of ‘zombies’ and other disappointed inhabitants, the advertisements promising excellence show how the novel points out the difference between expectations and the reality of life in the city.

When talking about the city as a place of contradictions, it can even be argued that “the city in postmodernism [is] presented as a decentred, labyrinthine, discontinuous urban site that thrives on tension between order and chaos, presence and absence, reason and imagination” (Beville 604). The tensions and divisions thus become a defining feature of the contemporary city, too. In this novel the city that at first seems to be full of dreams and promises waiting to come true turns out to be the opposite, and even a hostile environment at times, full of failure and negativity. This type of an urban novel is not an

exception, especially when placed in the timeframe it was written and published in. The novel can be interpreted to be a commentary on the age and its form of urban societies; especially since Jay McInerney himself has commented on the novel that with *Bright Lights, Big City* he wanted to present “a modest critique of an age in which an actor is the President, in which fashion models are asked for their opinions, in which getting into a nightclub is seen as a significant human achievement” (Pinsker 109 in Beville 614). In addition, *Bright Lights, Big City* has been described as a novel where the city has “lost its meaning to the main character, and New York becomes like a glitterball: glitzy on the outside but – without people to love – hollow” and the story “evok[es] a sense of loss and nihilism amid a modern world that’s ceased to care” (Rennison & Wood 104). In the light of these descriptions the city of the novel appears as an indifferent environment not concerned with the individuals that inhabit it.

As stated previously, divisiveness and dualities are some of the defining features of cities. This comes across in urban fiction which “has both celebrated the city as the supreme expression of wealth, of energy, of the amalgam of living styles and, conversely, as representative of modern society’s ills, its anonymity, egotism, oppression and anxiety” (von der Thüsen 2). Many of these contradictions are visible in *Bright Lights, Big City*. the city is expected to offer all the finer things in life, but the reality does not live up to the expectations and sometimes, instead of offering dreams, it delivers nightmares.

A crucial point about the city in postmodern and contemporary fiction is that it is not a stable entity that can be defined and known in its entirety but “the city is uncanny, it is a simulacrum made up of simulacras, at once familiar but also strange and unknowable. It is a site that is constantly shifting and changing, defined by its own otherness” (Beville 604). If there ever existed ‘the city’ that could be contained by certain descriptors and be nominated to be the one and only correct representation of the city, it is gone for good and it has been replaced by an understanding of the city as a “home to an infinite number of singularities, styles and versions of otherness. It is open to a diversity of identities and what is properly the city has disappeared and exists only in memory and

imagination. It is an event of the present—based on perception and experience” (Beville 604) which is why it can offer different things and show its different sides depending on countless different factors. This is also why the city in *Bright Lights, Big City* appears as it does, recognizable as New York but also personal to the protagonist since it is constructed of his experiences.

During the course of *Bright Lights, Big City* the reader can see the city changing in the eyes of the protagonist and this change also influences the representation of New York that is created to the reader. In the past the city has been a place for dreams and success for the protagonist and he has felt happiness there. His descriptions of New York around the time he moved there are drastically different from those set in the present. He describes his blissful life with his then-girlfriend Amanda:

You were just starting out. You had the rent covered, you had your favorite restaurant on MacDougal where the waitresses knew your names and you could bring your own bottle of wine. Every morning you woke to the smell of bread from the bakery downstairs. You would go out to buy the paper and maybe pick up a couple of croissants while Amanda made the coffee. (*BLBC* 8-9)

At the time he felt a sense of belonging: he knew people and he liked his regular routines: “after you met Amanda and came to New York, you began to feel that you were no longer on the outside looking in” (*BLBC* 44). Additionally, before moving to New York, the protagonist and Amanda both had dreams and goals they wanted to achieve there: “all your plans were aimed at Gotham. She wanted to live on Central Park and you wished to join the literary life of the city” (*BLBC* 66) and the city showed signs of being the place for the realization for those plans. Then something changes, perhaps the reality of urban living simply replaces the fantasy New York seemed to be before. The city seems to turn against the protagonist and the descriptions of urban life are more negative and cynical than before. Wirth-Nesher describes the trap the city creates with its promises that seems to catch the protagonist as well:

The city is actually experienced, then, as a place dominated by the promise of accessibility as represented by visual access made possible by high density, highrises, and the new fashionable plate-glass windows, transparent walls inviting the outsider to enter and to partake of the interior. The city seduces its dwellers with visual plenitude and mercilessly shuts them out. (Wirth-Nesher 66)

The change in the protagonist's view is apparent when he visits the neighborhood he used to live in and describes to the reader how the city and his attitude towards it has changed: "This was your neighborhood. These shops were your shops. You possessed these streets as securely as if you held a title. Now the vista is skewed slightly, someone has tilted the ground a few degrees, and everything is the same and not the same" (*BLBC* 127). The change seems so drastic that it feels almost physical. This phenomenon of change has been described in a similar manner in Paul Auster's novel *In the Country of Last Things*: "a street you walked down yesterday is no longer there today" (Auster 279). This description shows how a mental change seems to affect the way the physical world is experienced.

At the time of the story's events New York causes mostly negative feelings in the protagonist: "You wish this laughter could lift you out of your heavy body and carry you beyond this place, out through an open window and up over the city until all this ugliness and pain were reduced to a twinkling of faraway lights" (*BLBC* 169). For him, New York is not a dream anymore, it has become a disappointment and a nightmare. This negative attitude towards the city connects this novel to a type of urban fiction of the late 1900s where the urban environment is described to affect its inhabitants negatively: in addition to *Bright Lights, Big City*, for example Tama Janowitz's *Slaves of New York* "depicts the dislocation of New York's gilded and not-so-gilded youth suffering not only from predictable identity crises and unhappiness but from an environment that utterly swamps them" (Steiner 521).

When it comes to the way the city is represented in Paul Auster's urban novel mentioned above, there are similarities between the cities of *In the Country of Last Things* and *Bright Lights, Big City*. The main character of Auster's novel, Blume, has a way of

narration [which] destabilizes the classic American westward movement and the wide spread belief that America is the country of progress, promise and self reinvention. Instead of encountering the 'Shining City upon a Hill' Blume finds herself in the midst of a bleak and destructive city, where the streets are in a state of continual and unpredictable change. (Bay 53)

The changing of the city is brought to the attention of the reader at the very beginning of the novel:

when you live in the city, you learn to take nothing for granted. Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn't waste your time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it. (Auster 279)

Even though experiencing the disappointment of New York and the capabilities the city has in changing itself, the protagonist of *Bright Lights, Big City* has not sunk so deep into desperation as to feel this level of finality with the changing city, but he still seems to hang onto a hope of turning his life around in the city: the novel ends with words "You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again" (*BLBC* 174), giving the novel an open, and to some extent, hopeful ending.

Another contrast in cities is the separation of nature and 'artificial' urban environment. To some standards, the 'cityness' of a city can be ranked by how far it has distanced itself from the course of the sun and the seasons and diminished their effects on the urban environment (Pile 29). As in real world cities, in cities of fiction too, the urban environment often tries its best to distance itself from nature, whereas in the countryside nature and its phenomena still have a greater role in determining the flow of life. Also

following this trend, the urban environment Jay McInerney has created in *Bright Lights, Big City* consists mostly of human-made things. Nature or its phenomena are hardly acknowledged and the environment the protagonist describes is almost exclusively human-made. The Hudson River is the only 'purely' natural element of New York mentioned in the novel. However, even the Hudson seems to be affected by the millions of people living in the city: its "black, fetid water" (*BLBC* 9) flowing underneath the pier the protagonist is walking on, suggesting its pollution most likely to be caused by the population of the city.

However, nature and its phenomena are not completely absent from the novel. Sunshine and rain are mentioned multiple times, but mostly as things bothering the life of the urbanites and not as something crucial to the life on Earth. The season the story mostly takes place in could not be mentioned more indifferently: "it was a warm, humid afternoon. Spring, apparently. Late April or early May" (*BLBC* 80). This suggests that if not the whole city, at least the protagonist is quite blind to the changing of seasons, possibly because the change in seasons does not bring many drastic changes in his life since the urban environment is distancing itself from the nature and its changes. Nevertheless, the division of day and night is a central natural phenomenon even in the city. The city changes according to the time of the day: it shows a different, wilder, and even dangerous, side of itself at night, and tones it down come daylight. Interestingly, the protagonist seems to enjoy the night-time with its artificial lighting more than daytime and sunlight. There are multiple mentions of the daylight being almost destructive to him, and conversely the artificial light of the nighttime seems soothing.

Through the novel, sunlight is described affecting the protagonist negatively. For example: "the harsh, angling light" is turning him "to flesh and bone" and he feels that with the light mortality is "pierc[ing him] through the retina" (*BLBC* 6). To him "the glare [of morning light] is like a mother's reproach" (*BLBC* 8) and "the glare from the sidewalk stuns [him]" (*BLBC* 25). On the contrary, artificial lighting of nightclubs seems to soothe him: the lighting of Odeon, for instance, makes him "feel reasonable at any hour, often

against bad odds" (*BLBC* 42). At another club, Lion's Head, he spends time in "the back room where the lights are low" (*BLBC* 153). Therefore, daylight is not simply a natural phenomenon in the novel, but a metaphor: in the daylight "visibility [is] unlimited" (*BLBC* 8) and it seems to make the reality too real for the protagonist to deal with whereas in the night he can hide: the night is for the protagonist a place where he can escape his reality to. Often in fiction in general, as well as in this novel, the night acts as "a metonym for desire and the unconscious" (Giles 115), highlighting its difference from the revealing features of day and its brighter lighting.

This subchapter has concentrated on the themes creating the urban environment and atmosphere to this novel. First, in section 3.1.1 the chapter considered how senses are utilized in creating an urban environment, and section 3.1.2 discussed how urban activities and phenomena such as loneliness add depth to the city of the novel. Finally in 3.1.3 the focus was on the divisiveness and change of cities. It analyzed how the divisions and contradictions come across in *Bright Lights, Big City* and how the city's ability to change is central in contemporary literature. The next subchapter will consider the representation the novel creates of New York specifically. It considers themes such as New York neighborhoods and the divisions that create and impact them. The timeframe of the novel is also taken into account and so is the role of different forms of media in creating representations of New York.

3.2 The New York of *Bright Lights, Big City*

This subchapter discusses the presence of New York in *Bright Lights, Big City*, which is in essence a New York novel where the city takes its place as an important actor immediately in the first pages of the novel. The first chapter sets the scene by introducing the protagonist of the novel when he is on one of his countless cocaine-powered nightclub excursions. The scene is set in the heart of the city where the protagonist spends his

night at a nightclub and then stumbles home at sunrise. The protagonist's complicated attitude towards the city and his life in it is also introduced in the beginning of the novel: on his way home, he stops to look at the city at sunrise and he thinks to himself: "here you are again. All messed up and nowhere to go" (*BLBC* 9).

As already mentioned in the theory section, New York certainly is one of the most famous cities in the world which is why it is easy to set the stage there. In addition to the protagonist mentioning that he is in New York, the most obvious hints that the novel offers about the stage the story takes place on, are the physical features of New York mentioned in the novel. Furthermore, the mentioned places and elements give most readers hints of where these particular places are in the city and what kind of places they are which is not necessarily the case with most cities. Jay McInerney has made conscious choices when choosing to include famous places and elements of New York in his novel. Here one should consider the position of landmarks: "certain buildings or structures often appear to lock a series of traits – architectural, symbolic, material – into a fixed image so that, for instance, the Eiffel tower is Paris, the Opera House is Sydney, the Petronas Towers are Kuala Lumpur, and so on" (Allen 74). Using this logic, the Statue of Liberty is certainly the landmark to symbolize New York. Accordingly, it makes its appearance in the starting pages of *Bright Lights, Big City*, too. Walking home in the early morning after a night out, the protagonist walks the shore of the Hudson River and "sit[s] down on a piling and look[s] out over the river. Downriver, the Statue of Liberty shimmers in the haze" (*BLBC* 9). Mentioning such an iconic landmark at the beginning of the novel sets the scene in this famous city even for those readers of the novel who have never been to New York but have seen it countless times in television shows, films and photographs and that way become familiar with its urban image.

The city as a place of division has been discussed earlier on in this thesis. In the theory section the forming of these divisions was discussed from multiple points of view: economic factors and geographical locations (Pile 8, 16), socioeconomic factors and as their consequence the underworlds (Heise 8, 22-23, 27) were considered as 'dividers'. In a

concrete sense, cities are divided into different areas and like discussed earlier the division of cities is geographically, economically, and socially constructed and concretely these divisions create different neighborhoods for example. What is meant by this is that areas of the city differ from each other on multiple variables, for example where they are situated on the map, what kind of a position they have in the context of economics and what kind of roles they have in the social structure of the city. Even though these aspects that were discussed earlier can be analyzed separately they are still all connected and can be observed working together, for instance in the way in which “the tensions of the city that are produced by social relations are spatially constituted” (Massey et al. 1). The differences in attitudes toward different areas of cities show that “cities exhibit distinctive geographies of social differences and power relations, where space functions as a modality through which urban identities are formed” (Balshaw & Kennedy 11). Hurm goes even further and states that “space is inert until economic and social forces transform it” (Hurm 20). Therefore, the division of New York into different neighborhoods must be looked at from these points of view.

When considering the time *Bright Lights, Big City* was written in and its economic climate, the 1980s is often seen as a time of prosperity and excessive consumption, but in reality “such prosperity as existed was highly selective” (Brooker 130). In reality, in the economic and political climate of the 1980s the distribution of wealth and wellbeing was extremely polarized: in United States the 1970s and 1980s “yielded a legacy of increased poverty and social inequality [for example] from 1979-1989 the top 1 per cent of families improved their income by almost 75 per cent, the bottom 20 per cent dropped their income by 4.4 per cent” (Brooker 129-130). Naturally, this affected neighborhoods, too: where one afforded to live (if anywhere, the number of homeless people in New York in 1991 has been estimated to have been 90,000 (Brooker 129)). Furthermore, the division of New York is not a recent phenomenon: Thomas Heise reports in his book *Urban Underworlds* how in the beginning of the 1900s a journalist climbed the Flatiron building and “grasped capitalism’s dynamic and polarizing logic of uneven geographical and social

development. On a clear day, high above the world, [he] could discern how the ideology of unequal development had been inscribed into the geography of the city" (Heise 2). The long roots of this phenomenon help to understand how strong the division still is. Thus, space becomes a platform for power, "for space is hierarchical – zoned, segregated, gated – and [it] encodes both freedoms and restrictions – of mobility, of access, of vision – in the city" (Balshaw & Kennedy 11). Hence, differing values are assigned to the different urban spaces in this hierarchy of space.

The economical aspect of this division is central in cities because their existence is based on the circulation of money (Pile 8). This is quite evident in New York where the flow of money is excessive, and so it has an important role in determining the differences born between different areas of the city. The huge influence that money has also takes part in creating social hierarchies in cities and when this "segregation takes a spatial form, the marking of difference takes the form of boundary lines etched in the city space" (Allen 86) like dividing cities into different neighborhoods. For example, in *The Great Gatsby* there is a clear contrast between the wealthy parts of New York (such as Manhattan and the Long Island neighborhoods of West and East Egg) and the poor "valley of ashes". The valley of ashes is described as a place "where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (Fitzgerald 29). This description creates an image of the place as dirty, possibly suffering from pollution, and the habitants of this place are tired and discouraged. Meanwhile in the wealthy Long Island neighborhoods "the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glitte[r] along the water" (Fitzgerald 11) and Manhattan is "rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps" (Fitzgerald 74) when seen from the Queensboro Bridge and there the buildings are like slices of "a long white cake of apartment-houses" (Fitzgerald 34). In a similar fashion, in *Bright Lights, Big City* the move from uptown to downtown New York is described as a move "from the

meticulous to the slime" (*BLBC* 3), thus emphasizing the difference between these parts of the city and how they are valued.

There are myriads of neighborhoods in New York, the precise amount of which is impossible to define, but it has been estimated to be over 400 (Scherzer 886). Being such a famous city, some of the neighborhoods of New York are familiar to a lot of people as well – at least on a surface level. The different roles and reputations these neighborhoods have come to be associated with are also apparent in this urban novel. The neighborhoods and their differing statuses influence the people living in them because "cities exhibit distinctive geographies of social differences and power relations, where space functions as a modality through which urban identities are formed" (Balshaw & Kennedy 11). This is evident in the way the neighborhood one lives in affects the way one is seen and described in this novel. For example, the protagonist describes one of his coworkers as a likely "West Village type" (*BLBC* 22) and the protagonist's wife Amanda, a model, as obsessed about moving to the Upper East Side because that is "where the other models lived" (*BLBC* 35), noting the value of living in the 'appropriate' location. This indicates that people are aware that the location of one's home impacts their status in the city, once again pointing to the way the city and its value systems affect people.

In *Bright Lights, Big City* as well as more generally, Uptown Manhattan is many times presented as the place for the rich and the successful, especially Upper East Side, a neighborhood which has been "synonymous with wealth since the early twentieth century" (Gronowicz 1352). The protagonist of this novel acknowledges this reputation as well, for instance when he describes one of the nights out which "started on the Upper East Side with champagne and unlimited prospects" (*BLBC* 2). Thus, he acknowledges the wealthy lifestyle connected with this part of New York. The feelings towards downtown Manhattan seem to be more complex. On some occasions it is seen as a place of lower quality, for example the rich cousin of the protagonist's friend "would not accompany [them] below Fourteenth Street because, he said, he didn't have a lowlife visa" (*BLBC* 3). Even the protagonist describes his nocturnal adventures downtown as "slumming, visiting [his]

own six a.m. Lower East Side of the soul on a lark" (*BLBC* 4). This slumming is not a recent fashion invented by the yuppies of the 1980s, but it was a habit of wealthy people already in the 19th century: "tenement districts increasingly became foreign territory for wealthy members of society; the term "slumming" came to mean a fashionable pursuit for the affluent, a visit to slum areas for enjoyment or charitable purposes" (Hurm 36). Nevertheless, for most people downtown seems to be a valid place to spend their time in, and there is an occasion in the novel when "all of uptown seems to be headed downtown for Saturday night" (*BLBC* 153). Here one can see how a person's status and their values affect the way they choose where to spend time and how to evaluate the places in question. Furthermore, these different attitudes the characters show towards the different areas of the city influence the representation the novel creates of them to the reader of the novel.

If the neighborhoods on Manhattan are differentiated in the novel, an even starker contrast is created between the whole borough of Manhattan and the 'outer boroughs' situated outside of the island. The novel has been commented on creating a vision of New York in the 1980s as "a place where Manhattan was everything, the 'burbs nothing" (Renison & Wood 104). This setting can be seen quite clearly in the attitudes of the characters. As mentioned above, in the novel, where one lives is an indicator of one's (socio-economic) status. For example, the receptionist at the magazine the novel's protagonist works for, has "a low-rent accent. She's from one of the outer boroughs, comes in via bridge or tunnel" (*BLBC* 14), this indicating that where a person lives in New York is so significant it affects even the way they talk. In addition, the fact that the "outer boroughs" are just grouped together in such an undetailed way indicates the attitude the people living on Manhattan have towards them: these boroughs and their neighborhoods are not as important as Manhattan, so it is not necessary to differentiate them from one another.

According to the protagonist, living outside of Manhattan even affects the way people look: he describes a group of people he encounters on the street to have "a uniform

outer-borough look" (*BLBC* 46) indicating that they stand out from the rest and not in a positive way. The protagonist lives his life strictly on Manhattan, but once at the end of a cocaine-filled night he ends up in a girl's apartment in Queens, one of the 'outer boroughs'. When asking the girl where he is the next morning and being told he is in Queens his answer is "you're kidding" (*BLBC* 147), as if he cannot believe he has spent the night outside of Manhattan. He further distances the two areas in his description of his way home: "by the time you get back to Manhattan it's two o'clock. You feel as if you have come across oceans and mountains" (*BLBC* 147). As seen here, the division of neighborhoods and evaluating people according to the place they live in is one of the ways in which the city affects the daily life of its inhabitants.

When examining New York as a whole, the representation the novel creates of the city is one in which it is a dream that can also ruin anyone: the protagonist's friend Tad hits the nail on the head and summarizes the potential of the city when he describes what he believes Amanda's thought process was when moving from Kansas to New York with the protagonist: "you were her ticket out of Trailer Park Land. Bright lights, big city. If you really wanted to do the happy couple thing you shouldn't have let her model. A week on Seventh Avenue would warp a nun. Where skin-deep is the mode, your traditional domestic values are not going to take root and flourish" (*BLBC* 110). This description gives the impression that the city influences the people in a way it wants to: an individual has no choice but to follow the unwritten rules the city has created. In the novel the reader can see how the order of the city comes to rule even over those who are reluctant to follow its command at first:

you both despised people who thought an invitation to X's birthday bash at Magique was an accomplishment equal to swimming the English Channel. But you went to X's birthday bash anyway, with your tongues in your cheeks [...] Over the months, though, you started eating at better restaurants and Amanda started getting her hair cut on the Upper East Side. (*BLBC* 70)

Here one can see how the characters are gradually beginning to follow the rules they are expected to follow, the rules which have been created by the city and determined by the characters' socioeconomic status in the social life of the city.

Such descriptions give the impression of the city as an entity which regulates the life of its habitants. This idea is even more prominently present in *Manhattan Transfer* where the author John Dos Passos creates a representation of a city which is a machine pushing people through an identical mold, creating a "standardized product" of them (Ickstadt 30). There is a pressure to comply to the order of the city because in the novel "to live in Manhattan mean[s] either to submit to the economic, social, and sensuous pressures of the city or to be discarded as part of its daily garbage" (Ickstadt 30). A similar phenomenon is seen in *Bright Lights, Big City* where the protagonist has a clear idea of what one must do and be in order to be a successful New Yorker: have a nice high-paying job and large social circles, talk and dress the right way, have the right hobbies, enjoy parties, et cetera, and he feels the pressure of this mold which he is trying to fit into.

Since the city affects its habitants so strongly, it can be stated that the city is a character of the urban novels in itself. For example, in Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* the city becomes "a god-like super-structuring element that must be considered the initiator and catalyst of everything that happens in the course of the plot" (Brinkmann & Thoene 67). Whereas in *Bright Lights, Big City* the city does not necessarily take over everything, it does have a significant role in molding the lives of its inhabitants. In the context of *Brooklyn Follies* Brinkmann and Thoene describe the process according to which the city becomes a character of a novel:

Like a swirl, the social space of the city sucks in its objects, leading them down one path among many, providing the subjects with a set of possibilities, and upon decisions instantly comes up with a new set of possibilities, thereby constantly enabling action as well as restricting its scope. [...] Each minute of the day, the city space is in motion, involving the characters, as it were, in various social force

fields. [...] Seen in this way, the city becomes more than just a stage for action; it becomes instead an additional character that grows out of the collective action of each inhabitant. (Brinkmann & Thoene 70-71)

A similar process can be traced in *Bright Lights, Big City* as well: the city is constantly present in the lives of the characters, and it provides choices and possibilities to them but restricts them simultaneously. Viewing the city as an additional character highlights the importance of New York's role in this novel. One can only imagine how differently a similar story would develop in a different city or a smaller town.

When analyzing fiction, the timeframe the work in question was written and published in needs to be taken into consideration. This is because the point in time when a work of art is created in can have a prominent impact on it, pieces of fiction included. Furthermore, when connecting time with place some interesting notions can be made. The 1980s, when *Bright Lights, Big City* was written and published, was an important time in the cultural history of New York. For example:

The shock of AIDS as something far more mysterious than cancer combined with the ravages of crack, cocaine, and heroin [...] severely subdue[d] the sexual liberation and drug experimentation that accompanied New York's artistic scene. But the buildup of dense creativity that fermented from the mid-1970s through the 1980s culminated into the ultimate watershed moment for New York's creative scene in the mid-1980s: New York City became the premier global creative hub of fashion, music, art, design, and these worlds collided in the insomniac, coke-fueled, disco-lit world of nightlife. (Currid 36)

Many of these themes can be found in the New York fiction of this time period, McInerney's novel included. Following a similar understanding of the city in the 1980s, *Bright Lights, Big City* creates a representation of New York "as the epitome of 1980s consumerism and the general sense of anxiety surrounding post-Reagan-era American culture, drugs, parties, MTV and a postmodern blasé attitude as a result of relativism" (Beville

614). The role of economics is also crucial, and it has been stated that in the 1980s New York became “a place where capital from anywhere in the world is instantly at home, while everybody without capital is increasingly out of place” (Berman 21 in Brooker 160).

Maybe even more than *Bright Lights, Big City*, Ellis' novel *American Psycho* underlines and comments on these phenomena of the 1980s New York: the lifestyle of its main characters is one heavily based on wealth, and a central part of their lives is surrounded around their work and how they project their lifestyles to others. Appearances are discussed constantly, and by creating continuous conversations around appearances and money, Ellis draws attention to the shallowness of this lifestyle:

even after [Bateman] tell[s] the table, “Listen, guys, my life is living hell,” they utterly ignore [him], the group assembled [...] continuing to argue about [...] which stocks look best for the upcoming decade, hardbodies, real estate, gold, [...] the spread collar, portfolios, how to use power effectively, new ways to exercise, Stolichnaya Cristall, how best to impress very important people, eternal vigilance, life at its best. (Ellis 333-334)

Contrasting Bateman's wish to talk about serious, personal problems with the table going on about how to get wealthier and look good, the values of the wealthy New Yorkers of the 1980s are questioned. At the same time the problem of feeling lonely in a crowd is again brought to the foreground.

Many urban novels in general, also those addressed in this thesis, represent New York as a place of chaos and unfulfilled dreams, but that is not the only version of the city. For example, the version of New York in Paul Auster's *The Brooklyn Follies* is quite different from the one in *Bright Lights, Big City* even though, as stated above, in both novels the city acts as a character. The ways these 'characters' act are different and therefore it gives us an interesting comparison point:

The Brooklyn Follies engages much more enthusiastically with the social factor of metropolitan dwelling and put its emphasis on the interpersonal relations as a

source of meaning. [...] Thus, our conception of Brooklyn as a god-like superstructure must be thought of in terms of a reciprocal process: the urban superstructure is at once producer and product of social actions – a producer in the sense that it enables social relationships through the relative proximity of its structures, but a product in the sense that this proximity is in fact man-made and only becomes visible as a result of human action. (Brinkmann & Thoene 71)

This remark directs one's attention to the point that in this novel the interpersonal relations and the whole social aspect of urban living are represented as a source of meaning whereas in *Bright Lights, Big City* they are mostly a source of confusion and disappointment.

As discussed in the theory section, New York is a city with worldwide fame and importance, and this means that its representations are distributed widely around the world through countless forms of art, media, and popular culture. The aspects of New York discussed earlier in this chapter create a certain kind of representation of the city to the novel in question. It is only one of the numerous representations created of this legendary city, but these singular representations form our impressions of certain places piece by piece. Consequently, through these different representations we know (about) cities. This role of representations is also present in the novel itself. The protagonist's (ex)wife Amanda, originally from Kansas, knows a great deal about New York and has dreamt about how her life would be if she lived there despite never even visiting the city herself: "She asked about Fifth Avenue, The Carlyle, Studio 54. Obviously, from her magazine reading she knew more about these places than you did. She had visions of the Northeast as a country club rolling out from the glass and steel towers of Manhattan" (*BLBC* 66). Like for many readers of this novel, her vision of New York has been formed through different representations of the city broadcasted through various forms of media. By creating a representation of New York, this novel continues the work of creating an image of how New York was in the beginning of the 1980s.

The different forms of media and popular culture prove crucial to the global impact of New York: “if not for the sophisticated and integrated network of publishing, TV, and radio with the city, New York culture would remain decidedly in New York. Instead, the city’s media sector operates as an effective global distributor of New York -produced creativity, disseminating the city’s ideas into the world marketplace” (Currid 47). Art and culture have always been thriving in New York, and it is also important to note how deeply they do in fact affect the city and its image: “it is apparent that art and culture are not just a part of the city’s economy – they are indeed creating New York” (Currid 53). The media representation also affects those living in the very city. In *Bright Lights, Big City*, for example, the protagonist reads *The New York Post* frequently and it affects the way he perceives his surroundings: once after reading the paper, he states to himself “the *Post* confirms your sense of impending disaster” (*BLBC* 57). The way the newspaper presents mostly sensationalized versions of tragic stories affects the way the readers of it view the city around them: the news topics mentioned in the novel include “Teenage Terrorists, [...] Tough Tots, Sicko Creeps” (*BLBC* 10) and “a Fiery Nightmare” (*BLBC* 54) for instance. In addition to the newspaper headlines, the media are present in the city through the advertisements and signs the protagonist sees around town: the ones mentioned previously and ones like “GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS” and “YOUNG BOYS” (*BLBC* 81) as well as a man advertising his ‘business’ by yelling on the street: “Girls, girls, girls – check ‘em out, check ‘em out. Take a free look” (*BLBC* 12). Furthermore, there is even an instance where the protagonist encounters a filming set where “a camera crew has taken over the sidewalk beside the entrance” (*BLBC* 143). This instance makes New York a stage of fictional stories in this fictional story.

As we have seen in this chapter, New York has many sides to it, and this makes it such an interesting topic for both urban fiction and the analysis of that fiction. As briefly stated in the theory section, the changing nature of New York is a central part of its charm, which Sielke summarizes as follows: with New York “we engage a city that keeps transforming and that in turn transforms our ways of envisioning and imagining it. New

York's urban spaces have always kept shape-shifting, creating novel dreamscapes and newly contested territories to be explored" (Sielke 15). The evolving, lively city holds the interest of the public and thus it holds its position as a topic of intrigue. This changing nature is a characteristic that also makes it difficult to grasp the essence of this city, but perhaps we need to content ourselves with that this changing is part of the essence of New York.

This chapter has analyzed Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* as an urban novel. The first subchapter 3.1 and its sections paid attention first to the aspects of general urban fiction: the city through the senses, urban activities and phenomena, and the contradictory and changing nature of the city. The second subchapter focused on the representation the novel creates of New York, pointing out central themes: the divisions and contradictions of the city, its neighborhoods, and media's importance of creating widely spread and internationally known representations of the city. Like many other contemporary urban novels, *Bright Lights, Big City* creates a city that is multifaceted and changing and which affects its inhabitants strongly in multiple ways. Next, in the final chapter of this thesis the findings of this analysis are summarized, and the conclusions are drawn.

4. Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* as a contemporary urban novel and in doing so it has asked and attempted to answer the questions mentioned in the introduction in the beginning of this thesis: 'How is the city created in the novel?', 'What kind of New York is present in the novel?', 'What kind of a role does the city have in the novel?' and 'How does this novel compare to other urban and/or New York novels?' This final chapter now summarizes the answers this thesis has found to these questions.

The first question was: 'How is the city created in the novel?' Chapter 2, the theory section, discussed cities and their definitions in fiction and concluded that a uniform definition of a city is not possible and therefore it is more useful to concentrate on the central characteristics and the indefinite nature connected with it and how these aspects are creating the city. With the knowledge accumulated from the theoretical framework the ways in which Jay McInerney has created the city in his novel were analyzed in Chapter 3. The city of New York is constantly present in the novel both as a geographical and a mental environment. As discussed in subchapter 3.1, the central aspects which, when included in the narration of the novel create the urban environment in *Bright Lights, Big City* are sense perceptions, urban activities, and urban phenomena. These 'tools' are used to describe and interpret the city.

The perceptions through senses of vision, smell, and hearing were found out to bring in the feeling of New York in this novel; attitudes, feelings, and connections towards the city are indicated through them. Therefore, when used they add depth to the representation of this particular city. Thus, it can be seen how simple and mundane perceptions of our surroundings can be used as a tool to create a city to an urban novel. The way the sensory stimuli are included influence the representation of the city. In *Bright Lights, Big City* it is multifaceted: there are pleasant and unpleasant sights, scents, and sounds to be sensed in the city. Another way of creating the city to the novel that was discussed is the inclusion of varying urban activities (such as waiting on traffic lights and for taxis,

nightclubbing, and window shopping) and the more abstract urban phenomena (homelessness, drug abuse, and crime for instance). These themes also impact the city that the novel creates; in this case one that is full of life, but from the protagonist's perspective it is difficult to feel included in the life of the city.

The contradictions and complexities of urban life are also creating the city in this novel. These aspects describe the life of the urbanites in the New York of McInerney's novel and thus create the city to it and add depth to the representation created. They also indicate what kind of a city it is and the relationship the protagonist has with the city. To be more specific, these aspects are used to narrow the perspective down from a general city to the particular city of New York. Jay McInerney has utilized the famous status of New York and added several real-life locations to his novel to create New York to his novel; places and landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, Fifth Avenue, and the Plaza Hotel, are specifying the environment from a general city to New York specifically. Thus, the city in *Bright Lights, Big City* is created by both concrete and abstract phenomena. The type of aspects included and the tone they are written about influence the image that is created, and in this novel the aspects are alienating and negative and so the feeling towards the city in this novel overall is negative. Of course, positive things about cities exist (for example how many options there are for many things such as social interaction, hobbies, food, et cetera) but they are not included here, and the attention is on the problems cities can create and bring upon their inhabitants.

The second question asks: 'What kind of New York is present in the novel?' The previously mentioned elements create the urban environment and the feeling of New York to the novel and as stated before the way they are included and the tone they are described in indicate what kind of representation of New York the novel creates. In general, as has been stated in this thesis, the contemporary city is a suitable theme for contemporary fiction because both of them are complex and changing phenomena. This can be seen in *Bright Lights, Big City* where New York is elusive, incomprehensible, and constantly changing. New York has a strong presence in the novel, and the city and the

protagonist's complicated relationship with it are apparent right from the start throughout the whole novel. The way the urban environment and its phenomena are described creates mostly a negative image of the city: different contradictions, loneliness, and alienation are central characteristics of the city in the novel, and they have a central role in creating the representation of the city. The city of *Bright Lights, Big City* is also capable and even prone to change which also affects the image created of the city: it is unpredictable, and this creates feelings of loss and being lost.

The third question was: 'What kind of a role does the city have in the novel?' When analyzing the novel, it was discovered that New York is a changing entity, and it seems to change throughout the progression of the plot which means that the representation created of the city slightly varies, too. The city is seen to impact its inhabitants negatively and this naturally affects their experience and their feelings towards the city as well. As discussed, New York in this novel is seen as a dream that can also ruin anyone. The city can be seen to influence the characters of the novel the way it wants to. All in all, in *Bright Lights, Big City*, the city can be seen to create a set of rules to be followed and therefore the city is an entity which regulates its inhabitants' lives. The city was also discussed as a character in itself because it has such an important role in the lives of its inhabitants and the plot of the novel, too. Therefore, the city has an important role in the story, creating the atmosphere that is strong in the novel and a part of its charm.

The final question was: 'How does this novel compare to other urban and/or New York novels?' In general, *Bright Lights, Big City* as an urban novel is similar to the type of urban fiction that has a negative and/or cynical attitude towards the city. More specifically, considering the period when the novel was written and published in, it compares well with other urban fiction from the same decade since these novels deal with similar urban themes that have come to be connected with the 1980s: drugs, consumerism, nightlife, and cynical attitude toward (urban) life. As an example of this, in this thesis Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* has served as a comparison point because it has a lot in common with *Bright Lights, Big City*, concerning their attitude towards New York and life

in it: both novels comment on the problems of loneliness and divisions in the city, and the chaos the city brings to the lives of its inhabitants.

Bright Lights, Big City was also compared with other urban novels. For example, when considering loneliness and outsidership, which were found to be central characteristics of the cities of the novels mentioned in this thesis, many connections were found between *Bright Lights, Big City* and *The Great Gatsby*. Another central urban aspect is also included in both of these novels: the divisions created to the city by wealth and its unequal distribution. *In the Country of Last Things* shares with McInerney's novel a similar cynical attitude towards the city. Both novels also deal with the changing city and a sense of loss created by this change. As in *Bright Lights, Big City*, in *The Brooklyn Follies*, too, the city can be seen to participate in the events of the novel as a character itself, but contrarily its image is positive because in *The Brooklyn Follies* social life is seen as a source of wellness. In contrast, in *Bright Lights, Big City* the image is negative, and it causes loneliness. *Manhattan Transfer* was also discussed based on the similarity in the described pressure to follow the city's rule that connects these two novels.

Naturally there are countless other urban novels that either share common features or differ completely from this type of urban novel and could be discussed and compared with this novel and its themes. This could be a way of continuing the research begun in this thesis. The research and analysis could also concentrate more on the postmodern features of the novel. This thesis did not consider postmodernism's point of view explicitly but researching *Bright Lights, Big City* from that viewpoint would also be interesting and relevant. For example, the protagonist ponders the differences of fact and fiction in the novel, and these are questioned themes in postmodernity. As stated earlier in this thesis, the themes, contents, and stylistic choices of *Bright Lights, Big City* make it an example of the contemporary urban novel where the city is present in the way postmodernism understands it: elusive, incomprehensible, and constantly changing. Therefore, this postmodern viewpoint could also bring forward some interesting analysis from the novel in question.

In *Bright Lights, Big City*, the city as an environment, in theory, promises a possibility of success and happiness, but more than anything, it challenges its inhabitants in many ways. It creates confusion and division all around, and in the light of the descriptions, the city in the novel appears as an indifferent environment not concerned with the fates of the individuals who inhabit it. All in all, the city in *Bright Lights, Big City* has one feeling "all messed up [with] nowhere to go" (*BLBC* 9).

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